Mental Health & Down syndrome
Focusing on the Whole Person

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NOA LIMITS
counseling & coaching
Licensed Clinical Social Worker in NC & SC

20 years experience in various direct care roles in the I/DD community… the skills I address with clients and in groups are directly related to common mental health and relationship struggles I’ve observed in the community.

Mental Health Counseling for teens (16+) and adults with Down syndrome.

Relationship Coaching in the form of groups for all I/DD diagnoses.

- Relationships & Boundaries Group
- Dating Workshop
- Sexuality Education
This content is intended to educate and provide ideas for self-help and should not be used as a substitute for therapy or mental health care.
1% Better Everyday

Chris Nikic.
A STORY OF PASSION AND DEDICATION
What we know about Down syndrome

- Highly perceptive of others’ emotions
- Prefer sameness
- Difficulty understanding passage of time
- Strong long term memory
- Sleep apnea, GI issues, thyroid issues
How common characteristics may impact Mental Health

• Perceptive of others’ emotions = concern over family members’ health, observed stress in others, internalize/mimic others’ emotions

• Prefer sameness = maybe in a negative routine/groove = takes time to transition out

• Difficulty recognizing passage of time = every time they think of a negative event = experience strong feelings like it just happened yesterday

• Strong long term memory = remember every detail of past events = negative events may elicit symptoms similar to PTSD

• Rule out medical conditions = sleep disturbances = irritability, thyroid issues = lethargic, GI issues = pain
Target Areas - Focus on the Whole Person

- Cognition
- Self-Advocacy
- Psychoeducation
- Emotional literacy
- Coping skills
- Relationships, Boundaries & Sexuality Education
- Community Connections
Cognitive Exercise

• Brain Games - memory card games, identifying differences in photos, name that tune, crossword puzzle, word search

• Meaningful conversations 5 minutes a day, asking open ended questions

• Socialization

• Eating well

• Physical activity
Self-Advocacy

- Goal Setting
- Knowing their strengths & struggles, likes & dislikes
- Asking for help
- Speaking up for themselves
- Conflict resolution
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MY MIND</th>
<th>ART, PUZZLES, WORD SEARCH, MUSIC, QUIET TIME, SIT OUTSIDE, READ, GAMES, CONNECT WITH A FRIEND OR FAMILY MEMBER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MY BODY</td>
<td>WEIGHTS, WALKING, YOGA, DANCING, HEALTHY EATING, GOOD SLEEP, DRINK WATER</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MY ENVIRONMENT</td>
<td>CLEAN, ORGANIZE, REARRANGE, DECORATE, SORT, CLEAN OUT/DONATE, GARDENING/YARD WORK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MY PEOPLE</td>
<td>SAY THANK YOU, DO A CHORE WITHOUT BEING ASKED, WRITE A LETTER TO SOMEONE, GIVE A COMPLIMENT, BE A HELPER, LISTEN, SHOW YOU CARE</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Psychoeducation**

- Healthy living in general- body, mind, environment, others
- Our thoughts impact our emotions and behavior
- Education about symptoms commonly seen in anxiety, depression etc
Emotional Literacy

• Practice using feelings words

• Recognizing how their body feels when they are having a certain emotion

• Identifying feelings of others in movies, on tv, out in the community

• UNO, Candyland, JENGA
Coping Skills

- Deep breathing - flower/candle
- Muscle relaxation - stress ball
- Grounding
- Gratitude Practice
- Journaling - voice record or text into phone

*Visual aids & YouTube videos

*Practice when not upset, make a part of routine
Relationships, Boundaries & Sexuality Education

Isolation = assist in connecting with community

Few meaningful relationships = help to develop friendship skills

Misunderstanding boundaries with coworkers and peers = Circles Training and role play for different people in their lives

Desire to have a sweetheart = talk to them about how relationships develop…everything from having a crush, flirting, dating, healthy vs unhealthy behaviors, communication, breaking up

Internet safety = only converse with friends and family you know in real life that you have met face to face

Increased risk of sexual abuse = consent, appropriate names for private parts, the right to say no, sexual acts, safety plan
Community Connection... specifically, the disability community.
**Relationships, Boundaries & Sex Ed**
- Adult Down Syndrome Center (videos and visual aid resource library)
- amaze.org
- PEERS Program (role play videos)
- Planet Puberty Website
- Terri Couwenhoven books
- National Council on Independent Living- sex ed videos

**Mental Health**
- Adult Down Syndrome Center (videos and visual aid resource library)
- Mental Wellness in Adults with Down Syndrome, 2nd edition- Dr. Chicoine & Dr. Mcguire
- DSCBA Mental Health Padlet
- downsydromebraintrain.com
- YouTube- mindfulness videos
Thank you! Please reach out with any questions!

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