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Treating children of siblings diagnosed with cancer: A person centered approach

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The mental health of siblings of children diagnosed with cancer or “well children” tends to be overlooked due to parental attention given to the sick child. Limited research has shown that siblings of children with cancer may be at risk for developing symptoms of anxiety, post-traumatic stress and depression. In addition, studies convey mothers report that their “well children” perform slightly poorer academically and experience less involvement in their well children’s activities. Psychological research on this topic is lacking; more is needed to study effectiveness of using certain psychological interventions when treating the “well children” of siblings diagnosed with cancer. Although limited, research has shown that siblings of children with cancer harbor feelings of sadness, worry, anger and guilt among others. In addition, “well children” may believe their feelings to be invalid or unimportant due to the fragile state of their sick sibling as well as their parents. As a result, they may feel guilt and shame for possessing such feelings. Studies show that “well children” benefit from receiving some type of emotional support- (i.e. through support groups and supportive relationships with adults). Child Person-centered therapy may prove to be an effective treatment as a “well child” may benefit from a warm, supportive relationship with a non-judgmental adult (other than his or her parent) that can provide a safe, nurturing environment in addition to empathy and unconditional positive regard. Child Person-centered therapy might also assist “well children” to become more knowledgeable about their sick siblings’ condition which may lead to more realistic views about treatments and consequences. Few studies exist focusing on the effectiveness of using person-centered therapy to treat well children of siblings diagnosed with cancer. This presentation is intended to warrant why Child Person-centered therapy might be an effective therapy in treating the “well child.” It is also hoped from this presentation that new research will be generated studying the effectiveness of child-person centered therapy with this population of “well children.”

Biography

Michelle Villani served as a School Counselor in the New Jersey public schools for 6 years. Currently, she enrolled for Doctor of Psychology in Counseling Psychology program at the College of Saint Elizabeth in Morristown, New Jersey.

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