



When a Client/Patient Has Spent Time in a Residential Treatment or Wilderness Program

Dear Colleague,

We wish to offer important information to mental health and medical professionals providing services to youth who have lived in a residential treatment facility or boarding school for “troubled teens.”

Teens and young adults sent to residential treatment and/or wilderness survival programs may have faced abuse, maltreatment or neglect in the hands of unqualified staff.¹ Many have had challenges in recovering from their experiences due to the trauma they have experienced. **Many professionals have inaccurate or incomplete information about the nature of some of these facilities. This may lead to disbelief when teenagers or adults recount their stories to professionals.** As we know you will understand, it is crucial to take such stories seriously as doubts or disbelief can intensify an individual’s sense of hopelessness and estrangement.

As health professionals ourselves, **we are affiliated with the Alliance for the Safe, Therapeutic and Appropriate use of Residential Treatment, or ASTART (www.astartforteens.org),** so we may protect youth from harm in these programs and be constructive in helping individuals find a healing context to recover from such maltreatment. At the same time, we work to support families in need of resources and guidance. We are concerned about the difficulty many families face in finding the help they need in their communities. We support families before they seek help from the “teen help” industry, or after their son or daughter returns from these programs with new traumas.

Your client/patient may present with issues and symptoms including:

• Post Traumatic Stress Disorder	• Depression Secondary to Trauma
• Other Trauma Reactions	• Suicidal Ideation
• Anxiety Disorders	• School Failure or Disinterest
• Dissociative Disorders	• Peer Relationship Problems
• Learned Helplessness	• Drug Abuse or Dependency
• Estrangement from Parents, Family	• Rejection by Parents, Family

¹ See documentation in three reports from the General Accountability Office, U.S. Congress, 2007-2008, available at astartforteens.org/documented-abuse.)

Your clients/patients may have suffered further from the failure of well meaning professionals to recognize or believe that signs of current emotional disturbance are related to the abuse and/or neglect that they experienced in residential treatment.

We invite you to learn more about this issue by visiting our website at astartforteens.org. Please take a moment to read the warning signs of an abusive program (astartforteens.org/warning-signs), and other guidance for professionals (astartforteens.org/for-professionals).

If you would like be in touch with any questions or concerns, please contact us (astartforteens.org/contact).

Sincerely,

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