

**St. Mary's Academy Charter School  
Beeville, Texas**



**TRANSCRIPT: “COUNSELING FOR STUDENTS”**

**MALINDA COWEN, DIRECTOR SPECIAL ED COUNSELING/HEALTH:** A number of the children here are at risk. A large number of them are economically disadvantaged. We have a large number of foster children in the past and present. We have a number of children whose parents are in prison. We have a lot of children who come from single parent families. We have children who have guardians, meaning that they're living with an aunt and uncle, they're living with a brother, sister, grandparent. So counseling was really something that a lot of these children needed.

These children, a lot of them didn't need a school counselor; they needed a licensed professional counselor. We have an unusual number of children who qualify for emotional disturbance under the state of Texas disability laws. We often said to the parents, “Your child really needs counseling, needs counseling outside of school, more than we can provide.” It wasn't happening; the parents could not take off work or they couldn't afford to take their child out of town; there weren't a lot of resources available in town and if they did take them they left school early and were losing school time.

So it was a combination of a lot of things that we decided, you know what; we're just going to provide the therapy ourselves. That's what we've done, and money has always been an issue, but the way we handled it was because this is a contact situation, our LPC [licensed professional counselor] is on contract to us from a psychologist. The psychologist's office will file for Medicaid with our children who do have Medicaid. If the parents have insurance, then they will file insurance and we pay the co-pay. We have children who need an LPC but they are not Medicaid—they don't have insurance; they don't have anything. In my budget we'll pick up the full cost of the counseling for those children. We see wonderful results in the classroom because of counseling. It has made a great difference in their being able to work in the academic, their being able to cope within the day-to-day social and activities.

**DEBRA SUBLETT, PROFESSIONAL COUNSELOR:** I am not an official employee of this school; we have kind of a unique relationship. I work with a psychologist out of Corpus Christi and he does psychological testing here at the school. The counseling that I do is child-centered play therapy. Within the play therapy I also do something that is called sand play, which is a little bit more specialized type of play therapy that I have done quite a bit of training in and it's very successful with the children, especially some of the clientele that we have here.

When it's child-centered and you give them no instructions about what to do, everything that comes out on the paper or through the toys or in the sand tray is completely from within them. And it's completely where they needed to go, and it's not directed by me. And so that's

why the therapy is so much more effective so much more quickly. It goes right in, brings up their issues to the surface and works through them. If it's just a minor issue, or an adjustment issue, getting used to school or moved into the community or something like that then it doesn't take very long, sometimes four or five sessions and we're done.

But with the more severe issues that I spoke of, as far as death in the family, parent incarcerated, very severe health problems of the parent, you know, some of the children I've worked with for two or three years. As I see them initially, I see them once a week or once every two weeks and then as they do show improvement then I maybe see them once a month. I've seen really significant changes in the ones we've got to follow a little bit more long term. The reason I like doing what we do and especially with the play therapy, the younger you get the child to begin to work with it seems to work better. Because if you work with them from kindergarten on, they begin to quickly get rid of any emotional traumas and are able to concentrate on school. Where you wait til they're 10, 12, 14 and that emotional stuff is stuck and they don't want to do the work.

Parents have to come in and sign paperwork; we do usually do an initial interview with them. They give us specific information on the paperwork and then I keep in contact with them. Not at every session, but every few sessions I'll call and give them an update of how they're doing. Parents can call here anytime and ask for, request to, speak with me and that's kind of the unique thing here at the school.

I do know all the teachers here. They give me feedback. If there's a problem happening in the classroom and if I see something that's going on—because in our paperwork we do ask the parents to sign that we can speak to school staff, we get permission for that—and they let me know if there is something happening in the classroom. I let them know if something particular is happening as we go through therapy that they might be a little emotional or volatile or something as they come in the next day.

**STAN SIMONSEN, PRINCIPAL/SUPERINTENT:** I've seen what happens to young people who had things happen, who don't get that taken care of. What I've told Debra and I've told the staff is, we never make a decision about how much counseling a child needs based on the ability to pay; we make the decision by what they need. We'll find the money somewhere.

#### **VOICES OF BOARD MEMBERS:**

Therapy issue that we have, where students are first rated because they don't feel secure as far as their home life is concerned. Through play therapy they can act out some of those frustrations and they can work through those frustrations and they can become a much more-well rounded kind of individual and learn how to deal with issues that are going to serve them well when they leave St. Mary's.

The ability or inability to learn has been compromised by their home environment by certain things that have, emotional or psychological or sexual abuse that's occurred in the home and the child cannot learn unless you address that problem. Unless we treat and address the whole child the educational process cannot go on.