

**TEEN SOCIAL HEALTH**

In addition to the important physical and mental development which adolescents experience, there are also an important number of social milestones, during the teen years.  Unfortunately, sometimes mental health and/or substance abuse disorders can disrupt and/or negatively affect these important social developments.  In order to help teens address their social needs and support them in forming healthy social relationships, we’ve designed a Social Health program.

During adolescence, peer relationships are very important and therefore, we work with teens to develop the skills necessary to interact socially and form healthy peer relationships.  To this end, our therapists work with teens to create a healthy, supportive group environment in which teens can practice participating and sharing.  While therapists guide these groups intentionally as to be therapeutic, they also allow for dynamics to play out organically, as teens learn how to communicate in health ways with each other.  By allowing teens the opportunities to “practice” engaging in social situations, such as outings, community activities, group discussions, and other activities, the teens are able to build comfort and confidence in these situations, and no longer need to turn to drugs or alcohol, in order to relate or “connect” with others.

**Circles**

Circles is where teens learn to work on their Social Health. It doesn’t feel like group therapy, so teens are more apt to participate and engage into the program. It’s designed more like a “club” or “youth group”. Teens can apply for positions within the group and become a youth leader or mentor. Teens are taught how to interview for these positions, create resumes, and learn assertiveness skills in order to “get the job”. Self-esteem building, self-development and socialization are the building blocks of this group. Teens develop lifelong friends and support here at Circles.

One aspect of Circles is to reorient and familiarize youth with new, productive, fun sober activities.  Because many teens may have spent recent months in an environment that revolved around drug and/or alcohol use, it’s often very helpful to “remind” teens as to how to enjoy their lives sober.  Some of the specific sober activities we incorporate for teens include things such as: theater outings; movies, sport games; horseback riding; art projects; museum outings; hiking; and Geo Caching.

**Social Skills Training Curriculum**

The Family Institute also offers a social skills curriculum which has been designed specifically for youth, struggling with substance abuse and/or mental health conditions.  Different aspects of this curriculum may be interwoven or focused on in a number of different groups, so that teens continue to practice and progress in their healthy interactions with others.  Just a few of the skills which we focus on within this curriculum include: Practicing New Reactions to Anger; Creating Clear Statements of Goals; How to Solve Arguments; How to Address Embarrassment; How to Share Feelings; How to Refuse Drugs; and different skills revolving around relaxing and decreasing stress.