

JASPER MOUNTAIN

Agency Mission, Philosophy Statement & Approach to Treatment



AGENCY ADMINISTRATION

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Agency Mission Statement

Jasper Mountain's mission is to bring hope and healing to traumatized children and their families, and to enhance the physical, emotional and spiritual health of its clients and staff.

Agency Philosophy Statement

The following statement of philosophy directs the treatment programs of Jasper Mountain and is a guide through the agency's seven practice principles:

- 1) *The family is the single most important influence in the shaping of a healthy or dysfunctional person.*
- 2) *Young, abused children heal optimally in a supportive treatment family context rather than in an institution.*
- 3) *For abused children, early family deficiencies can be rehabilitated under the right conditions; the younger the child, the better.*
- 4) *At an early age, human beings develop a fundamental disposition to the world—positive and trusting toward responsive caregivers, or anxious and fearful toward unresponsive caregivers.*
- 5) *A healthy environment breeds healthy interactions from healthy individuals.*
- 6) *Functioning fully is not a natural state for human beings, it must be taught and mastered.*
- 7) *The most fundamental requirement of the whole person is self-understanding.*

Community as Family

There are many definitions of a family, some legal, some psychological. For our purposes, the definition of family is a group of individuals who live together and look to each other for the nourishment and support they need to thrive. Blood relations do not always make a family (as experienced often by abused children), nor do unrelated people living together necessarily constitute a family (as with roommates). Family is a special tie that in some form necessitates a voluntary connection with others.

By this definition, some of the strongest families can be “intentional” families or communities. These are individuals who do not have to be connected, but want to be. Blood ties, which undeniably involve a significant lifelong bond, don’t always exist in communities. However, individuals with a sincere interest in involvement can produce a profound family.

Jasper Mountain Center is the home of this kind of community, an intentional family. This family was originally conceived through experiments in the formation of the traditional extended family unit, with individuals who chose to be involved. It is this community that searched for five years and finally founded the Center on a mountain fifteen miles southeast of Eugene, Oregon. Since that time, many others have joined in the work and the spirit of this healing family atmosphere.



Family as a Vehicle for Growth

For nearly everyone, the principal shaper of our individual personalities is our family—family of origin and also family of circumstance. This family teaches us that the world either responds to our needs or doesn’t, and imparts in us self-worth or self-doubt. The family shapes values and behavior patterns, some of which will be of help, others of hindrance. All in all, there is no social unit in any culture that comes close to the family in its role of socialization and shaping of individuals. This fact has never been more fully comprehended than now. Whenever we experience a breakdown in our culture, discussions on the family unit arise, and rightly so. Unfortunately, we are often quicker and more capable of fixing a problem than preventing one. Family intervention (therapy) has become an in-depth science, yet family enrichment remains in conceptual infancy.

1) The family is the single most important influence in the shaping of a healthy or dysfunctional person.

In 1977, a milestone review of all available research pertaining to human “casualties” (someone society would regard as a failure) was conducted in Washington, DC. The principal investigator, Dr. Steven Glenn, used five hundred research works to identify themes of what produced successful human beings and what produced the casualties. Although the results were impressive

and merit a close look, only one factor will be mentioned here: successful individuals are connected and involved with a supportive group, such as a family. The review observed that the last fifty years has seen a monumental shift in the American lifestyle. The once predominate agrarian, rural-based lifestyle has changed to a predominantly urban existence. Rural ties, known for extended families with family roots and neighborly cooperation, have given way to city life, a breakdown in family stability and society on the move. The social institution most affected has been the family and a great deal of the effect has been debilitating.

The role of children in our society has changed drastically. On the family farm, it took everyone to make it work. Children were key elements and assumed important and very responsible duties. In the city, life is different and with the new streamlined lifestyle the role of children has gone from responsible participants, to marginally involved observers. Where the center of activity was once the family, it is now more likely to be the school. In urban society, the underlying tone for children is to keep them together, keep them busy and keep them out of trouble. This shift produced new problems like the pressure of peer groups, increasing juvenile delinquency, youth alienation, and children giving up, turning to drug abuse or suicide. Children must have a place in society and, therefore, in the family. They must know their role is real and vital to the success of the family. On a farm this comes much more naturally than in cities.

2) Young abused children heal optimally in a supportive treatment family context rather than in an institution.

If the family is so critical, what can be said about the future chance of success for children from ineffectual or even highly destructive family units? If our personality disposition—either positive or antagonistic toward life—is formed by age one, can negative dispositions be changed? At Jasper Mountain, we believe they can.

3) For abused children, early family deficiencies can be rehabilitated under the right conditions; the younger the child the better.

We all learn by behavioral reinforcements. If our environment reinforces distance, we increase distancing behaviors; if it reinforces closeness, then we open ourselves more to others. These changes may be gradual, but they can happen.

4) At an early age, human beings develop a fundamental disposition to the world; positive and trusting toward responsive caregivers or anxious and fearful toward unresponsive caregivers.

The family environment in the agency's residential programs is prepared for children from any kind of past, including ineffective and even the most destructive of family situations. From the first day, the past is certainly a reality, but it is in the past, not the present.

5) A healthy environment breeds healthy interactions from healthy individuals.

Family inclusion is immediate on all levels, without expecting an immediate response from the child. The most negative attitudes and behaviors of a child are never unchangeable—some just take longer than others.

Self-Understanding is the Key

One mistake of the past has been the belief that healthy people somehow just happen. We now know that all important aspects of life need attention and instruction. Healthy human beings don't just grow healthy, they are shaped. We must learn to walk, to care properly for ourselves, to explore the world, to love and to find ourselves. Therefore, a family must have a clear goal in mind in the formation of its members.

6) Functioning fully is not a natural state of human beings, it must be taught and mastered.

The single most important goal at Jasper Mountain is self-understanding. This one aspect of a person makes the difference between a successful human being and one who continually looks everywhere but never finds the answers to life. “Who,” “what,” “where” and “why am I?” are the locks, and self-understanding the key. Physical health, maturity, sense of humor, talent, ambition, intelligence, creativity and a positive outlook on life are all tremendous assets to a person, but any or all of these are not sufficient without going within oneself for the answers to life.

7) The most fundamental requirement of the whole person is self-understanding.

In the programs of Jasper Mountain, success is not simply inclusion, assisting academic improvement, extinguishing negative behaviors, improving attitudes and offering and receiving loving contact. If these were success indicators, then we would produce individuals to whom success would be something external rather than an internal state of being. If success remains exterior, then it will always be illusive. There will always be more money to make, more accomplishments to achieve, more knowledge to obtain. Spiritual masters of thousands of years have taught: “Know yourself and know life, understand yourself and understand the universe.” Mastering anything is a long journey of daily practice, as is mastering oneself. Confronted with a destructive, self-abusive or belligerent child, teaching self-understanding would seem a long arduous road. Nevertheless, all our work at Jasper Mountain is directed toward this goal.

Learning Self-Understanding

How do we learn who we are and what life is about? Ideally, this can be viewed as a progression beginning in the microcosm of a family and gradually expanding the perimeters.

Family: It is in our family we first begin to sense and feel, and in this initial stage, our world consists of things and people no broader than our family. The healthy family provides security, nourishment, inclusion and stability. As we begin to experience ourselves as individuals, the family provides the playing field for self/others, me/you, yours/mine and firm and loving limit-setting.

School: Well into the development of self comes the first independent move to test “you” with a group of strangers who don’t necessarily give you significance because you happen to exist. You must relate with some level of success to be accepted. You learn about “you” through participation, cooperation and competition with these other “selves.” The family and school provide the context for self-learning until the next level.

The Significant Other: What starts as first grade goose bumps when “she” or “he” sits by you at lunch, alters surprisingly little through the first dance, going steady and lifetime partnership. The game plan is to solidify the self into a saleable package and then to test the market. The bumps and bruises of the game begin molding the fine points of this self like few other experiences up to this point. This particular perimeter of the playing field is as far as many people go. There are friends and career, but these are extensions of testing the self, much as in school. But there is still another level to the full sense of self-understanding.

Connection to Mankind and Nature: The discovery of this level has been described in many ways: peak experience, rebirth, spiritual conversion and others. They all refer to the discovery of someone within us who is larger than the self we have worked so long and hard to define and separate. At this level, when it is clear that there is no real limit to the self, the perimeter is vastly



expanded. It is in this area of discovery that real personal power is realized, real freedom perceived. Wisdom can be gained. Self-understanding, which until now was an elusive concept, becomes clear. Within this expanded playing field, answers to the questions, “Who,” “what,” “where,” and “why?” become very different than before.

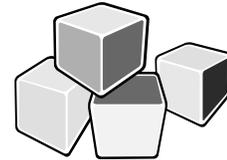
A very important aspect of this expanded view of self is the potential shattering of past and present debilitating experiences, attitudes and behaviors. The larger self turns out to be so much more than the self we have been marketing, possibly for years, that our ability to alter our limits is greatly increased. At this point, the question could be raised: “But what about children with possible organic problems, or low intelligence quotients coming from abusive pasts? Can they be taught to experience something as lofty as self-understanding?” To this we say, “Yes, definitely yes.”

General Approaches

We must all begin from where we are. Every participant in agency programs comes from unique circumstances. Opportunities are available to enter into the discovery of self, at whatever level

possible. Specifically, the following chart “Building Blocks of Treating Emotional Disturbance” shows the agency’s approach to helping very damaged children enter into this process. As the chart suggests, for many abused children the basics of safety must be established for the first time, and respect for these children’s resilience must take the form of a slow process where trust can be built, block by block.

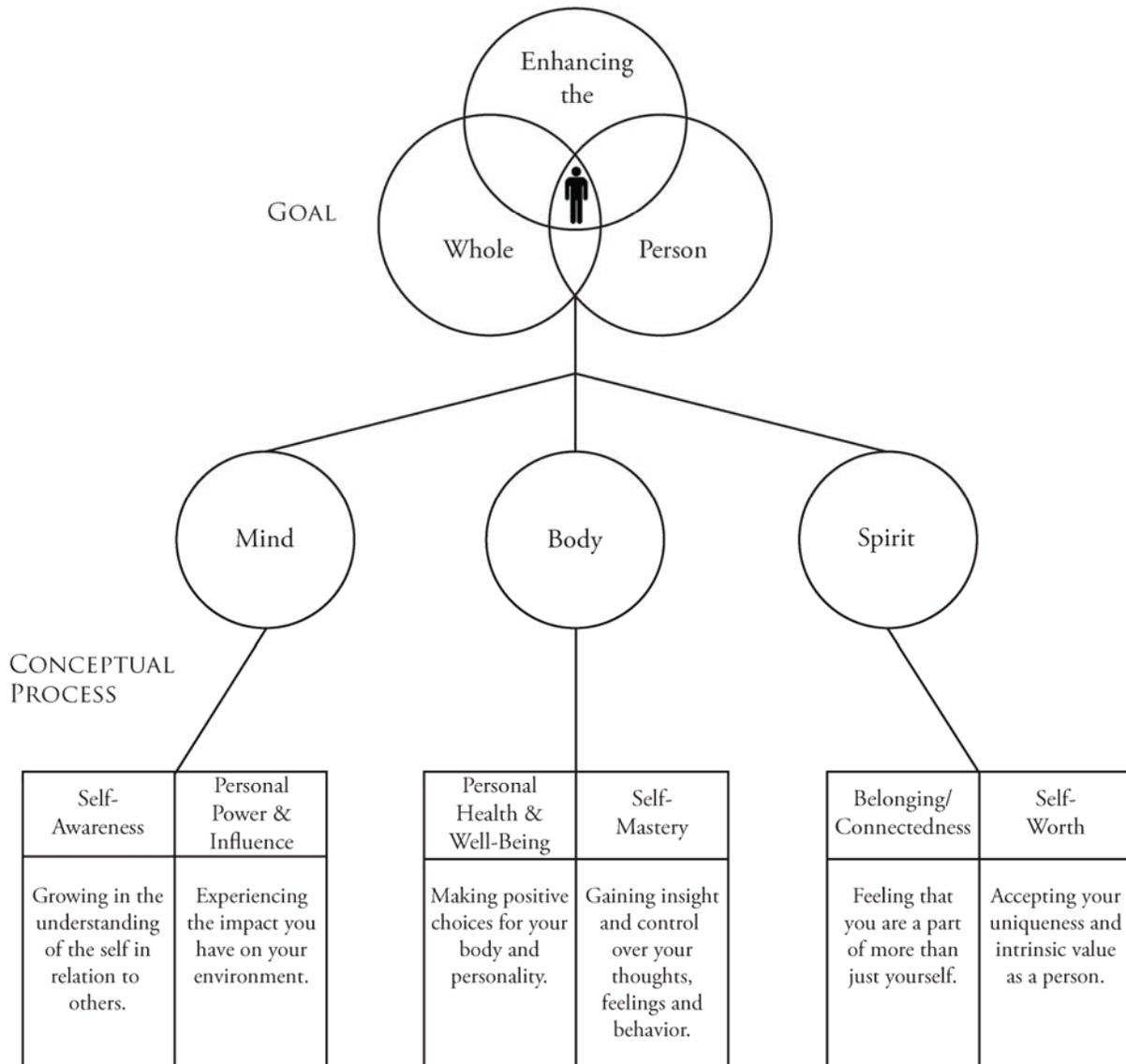
Building Blocks of Treating Emotional Disturbance



Personal Worth	Self acceptance, self respect, self love
Self-Awareness (18 months →)	exterior feedback insight
Relationship (12 – 24 months)	non-victimizing interplay of persons and roles
Trust (12 – 24 months)	respect, fairness, honesty, firmness, power
Belonging (12 – 20 months)	affection, roots, membership in group
Acceptance (12 – 18 months)	person vs. behavior
Security (6 – 18 months)	consistency, structure, locus of control
Safety (3 – 12 months)	predictability, non-violence, basic needs not threatened or conditioned

In addition to these foundations, the agency recognizes that though growth of self is progress, it is not always linear. Instead of a ladder with separate rungs, it is more like a painting in process—attention to separate areas results in a unified whole. Therefore, while work with a child might be very basic and mundane in many areas, there can be receptivity to very advanced teaching in other areas. The following chart “Enhancing the Whole Person” outlines the potential areas for growth and success in each child—mind, body and spirit.

Enhancing the Whole Person



Treatment Modalities

As suggested above, the agency’s approach to treatment is holistic and multifaceted. Specifically, the agency’s programs use four main interactive modalities in providing treatment to children. The fullest array of these modalities are provided through the agency’s intensive residential treatment program, but all the components below are addressed as much as possible in each program we provide—from day treatment, to treatment foster care, to crisis & evaluation stays and in-home services. As with the concept of synergy, the overall effect of these modalities is greater as an interactive system, than the sum effect of each on its own.

1) Environmental Therapy. It is said that life is the best teacher. This teaching is even better when life is supportive, interesting, responsive and abundant in its resources. The agency's twenty four hour a day program has the enormous potential of creating a seamless therapeutic environment. Some important aspects of this are:

- * Treatment family context
- * Specialized diet
- * Emphasis on physical health
- * Holistic medical care
- * A pristine setting, emphasizing a closeness to nature

2) Psychotherapy. This modality is designed to use cause and effect, identification of needs, effective communication, evidence-based practices, and personal relationships to assist the child in more successful interaction with his or her world. Approaches include:



- * Individualized treatment plan
- * Individual & family therapy
- * Group therapy
- * Psychiatric intervention
- * Creative expression (art, drama, music, recreation, dance, etc.)

3) Behavioral Therapy. The change of negative and irresponsible behavior is a core aspect of residential care. Behavior is an excellent indicator of the health or disturbance of an individual. Behavioral approaches include:

- * Teaching responsible behavior
- * Behavioral economy system
- * Intense supervision
- * Behavior modification

4) Self-Esteem Therapy. The goal in assisting the abused child's healing process, is the development of personal power and a recognition of the influence of the individual on his or her world. The result can be the attainment of self-understanding, the foundation for enhancing the whole person. Approaches include:

- * Physical work skills/gardening
- * Self-awareness
- * Video feedback
- * Individualized therapeutic recreation program
- * Equestrian program

Our Philosophy at Work: Jasper Mountain Center

As mentioned earlier, the fullest array of treatment modalities are used in the agency's intensive residential treatment program. The main site for this work is at Jasper Mountain Center, and the following description gives a picture of how agency's philosophy and treatment approaches work together to form the multifaceted treatment environment.

In intensive residential treatment at Jasper Mountain, the family context begins with inclusion and provides the most basic of needs—belonging. This is done by the general attitude of the home; everything is family-oriented. Children receive a room and a physical space in the home. They receive jobs which affect everyone and on which everyone depends. Daily family activities, family-style meals and weekly family meetings set the tone. Affection is shared, feelings are expressed and problems are confronted, all in the context of a struggling family.

School is also an integral part of the treatment focus. Treatment team members work with teachers in the on-site school setting to optimize the self-discovery process. Treatment is fostered in the school setting by the reduction of competitive anxiety. Success can be realized in the effort, not necessarily in the result. Encouragement to expand limits of understanding is the foundation.

For many children, the gap created in the significant other by the loss of natural or foster parents, must be dealt with. As new ties are developed, adults are available, both as healthy role models and to listen and facilitate the grieving process that these children often go through.

The elusive area of understanding self, both from within and also in nature, can take very concrete forms. Both Jasper Mountain Center and SAFE Center are wondrous slices of Oregon's natural beauty. Group nature hikes in all seasons are common. The presence of animals makes birth and death natural occurrences. Respect for life in nature, animals and other family members, is the rule. Day to day, Jasper Mountain looks more like a working family farm than a therapeutic program for children. It is both. Our hope is not only to simulate a family, but to actually be one. Our effectiveness in graduating children who feel whole again, will show how successful we have been.