Three Rivers Milieu Treatment Philosophy

The basic assumptions of our treatment philosophy are that children behave poorly because they are frightened and lack the skills to manage their behaviors more constructively. We believe that children behave their best when they experience adults as allies (not police) and when they are supported in learning and practicing better means of understanding and coping with their feelings. All adults are expected to show kindness and patience at all times.

1. **The least coercive and least intrusive intervention is the best.** Offer support, not threats of consequences, in response to agitated behaviors. This approach allows for the child to practice making positive choices with support, rather than submit to adults’ will through fear of consequences or through adults taking physical control. The less we take charge and the less we activate fear, the better. The more often children choose adaptive behaviors the more likely they are to use them in the future. *We are least likely to provoke a physical struggle when we use the least coercive intervention we can.* When children are in crisis, we offer as much support for success as we possibly can. Each child has a “Skills Plan” which they have practiced.

2. **The program makes every possible effort to avoid restraint.**
   Restraints (including forceful escorts) may only be used when there is “demonstrable danger” and all alternatives to the use of physical control have been exhausted. (See Restraint Policy)
   
   *The Three Rivers Program maintains the commitment to develop and utilize every possible means of preventing the use of physical restraint while ensuring the safety of the children we serve.*

3. **Consequences for inappropriate or unsafe behavior should be as educational as possible.** Children are accountable for their behavior in the form of having problem behaviors identified by staff, and being asked to repair damage done and reflect on how to do better in the future. Consequences for problem behaviors direct children to identify feelings, practice skills, repair damage to relationships, and re-commit to a direction of hope. The use of time away is used to create a space for these purposes. The loss of privileges is used to make time for the above activities and to maintain safety. We do not expect children to heal emotionally or gain skills through the leverage of lost privileges. We do not use time as a consequence. We believe that behavior improves based upon increased skills in managing emotions, and social situations, the unfolding of trust in relationships, and through elevated mood resulting from having fun and opening to the belief that success is possible.

4. **We help children feel hope and motivation to do better by** 1. expressing confidence in their abilities to learn, 2. demonstrating that they have strong allies for their growth, 3. pointing out the true value of making changes 4. providing non punitive, recovery-focused accountability for choices 5. providing experiences of feeling useful
and empowered. 6. lightening their mood through having fun and feeling emotionally safe and cared for. We do not emphasize the use of rewards and punishments to motivate changes in behavior. We assume that the children are naturally motivated to have positive relationships if they feel hope, safety, support, pleasure, respect, and are taught the necessary skills. Rewards and punishments often create resentment, power struggles, feeling blamed for one’s problems, and mask the real reasons people are respectful. One of the major opportunities for children at Three Rivers is to discover motivation to improve their lives. It is often difficult to offer these children a happy vision of their future to work toward, though it is important for us to try. However, it is realistic to provide a sense of fun and cheerfulness in the present. It is also an important part of our work to build up each child’s sense of personal power and positive possibilities through the way that we talk to them, as well as to provide meaningful reinforcement (such as enthusiastic, and specific acknowledgement) for adaptive behavior. The rewards for positive behavior are best when they are intrinsic—the natural pleasure of enjoying relationships and activities. Our job is often simply to bring the child’s attention to these intrinsic rewards rather to give them prizes (extrinsic rewards).

5. The culture of the milieu will respect that each child is unique. We will foster a culture among both the children and the adults which understands that fairness means that each person gets what they need. Children may have different privileges than others in their special programs. They have uniquely identified coping strategies (Skills Plans) that may give them access to certain items that others do not have. Each child has an Individualized Treatment Plan, an Individualized Support Essentials plan, and a personal Skills Plan, and may have special programming as needed.

6. The more predictable the environment, the quicker children feel safe and the less they test adult responses. We need to maintain sufficient consistency between all staff such that the children experience the milieu as predictable, safe, and coherent. The most important aspect of this principle is that children can rely on adults to never become harsh or aggressive. In addition, effective treatment depends upon having basic values consistently expressed and modeled. In addition, a predictable and structured routine helps children feel safe.

7. Children develop by building upon their strengths. Treatment plans are focused upon identifying which skills a child needs to develop in order to function in a less restrictive environment. It is our responsibility to teach and build these skills as well as to identify, reinforce and encourage children to use their natural abilities and interests. The term “skills” refers to abilities such as to plan actions, make choices, use words, control impulses, and understand social situations. By focusing on children’s areas of competence we will naturally support them in developing a more positive and competent self-image. We will also tend to build on what they can do, rather than focus on what they can’t. This helps professionals maintain a more hopeful view of the child as well. Treatment goals are framed as skills to be gained rather than problems to be minimized.