

Dr. Michael Ungar

Counseling Children and Families with Complex Needs: Interventions to Nurture Hidden Resilience across Contexts and Cultures

Summary and Objectives of the Workshop

This workshop will help professionals working with children, youth and families labelled 'dangerous,' 'deviant,' 'delinquent' and 'disordered' intervene effectively by addressing both individual and contextual factors that threaten wellbeing. Based on clinical practice with individuals with complex needs who use multiple services (mental health, child welfare, corrections, special education, and addictions) and research with children and their families around the world, a social ecological model of intervention will be presented that nurtures "hidden resilience." While we commonly think of resilience as an individual's capacity to 'beat the odds' and overcome great adversity, this workshop focuses on how mental health professionals in clinical and community-based practice settings can 'change the odds' to make resilience more likely to occur. Using interactive exercises, clinical transcripts and video recordings of work with children and families, Dr. Ungar will show how to identify seven factors that protect people from adversity and ways to help people navigate and negotiate for the resources they need to sustain positive psychosocial growth. This culturally-sensitive approach avoids the resistance commonly found when those intervening label and stigmatize those they are trying to help. This workshop both explores this model of treatment and gives participants an opportunity to discuss the most challenging children, youth and families with whom they work in different practice settings.

Specifically the goals for the workshop are:

1. To understand how individuals and families with complex needs use "problem" behaviours to enhance their resilience and wellbeing when more socially acceptable solutions are not available;
2. To become familiar with the principles of an engaging ecological model of individual and family intervention (that includes elements of solution-focused, postmodern/constructionist, and ecological therapeutic techniques) suitable for work in multiple service settings;
3. To demonstrate how to use a model of practice that helps clinicians, families and communities identify and build upon atypical, complex, culturally relevant patterns of coping;
4. To develop a strategy for working without resistance with different hard-to-reach individuals and families based on examples drawn from participants' own practice.

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