When to seek professional help for a child or teen: An interview with Dr. Elina Durchman, Ryther Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist

Dr. Elina Durchman completed her medical training, general psychiatry and child and adolescent residency training as well as a fellowship in Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental and Related Disabilities at the University of Washington.

There is no easy answer for when to seek help for your child or teen, but when there is a behavior or mood change, parents should seek professional help. The most common symptoms are acting out in school or daycare. Very young children who don’t know how to verbalize feelings can be aggressive at daycare or preschool. This can be a warning sign that something is going on. There is often a difference between home life and school. Kids can be very calm and happy in the home environment, but very fearful at school.

Why might a child become anxious or defiant regarding school?

Children may become defiant at school because they don’t understand what their teacher is saying. Sometimes a child has a learning disability that hasn’t been recognized, and it’s very difficult for the kids to explain that they have a learning disability. Parents often think the kids are being defiant, and in this situation school can become a stressor. We know that ADHD is a developmental problem that we can measure, and if it’s severe enough the child may need to be on medication.

What are the most common psychiatric issues that you address?

The most common struggles are anxiety, depression and ADHD. Teens in Ryther’s co-occurring program are receiving help to address both mental health and substance abuse issues. I also work with children and teens with bipolar disorder or other disorders on the psychotic spectrum. There are children who have family stressors due to separation of parents and other difficult home situations. These are often triggers for anxiety, depression and other psychiatric issues. Many people are predisposed to certain mental conditions, and episodes of these can be triggered by a traumatic event. However, if children receive mental health treatment, they will often acquire the tools they need later in life to successfully deal with these events.

What are some common stressors among young children?

Many don’t know how to express sadness, wants or needs, and they communicate these by acting out. I often spend time explaining these behaviors to parents. A child might get diagnosed with something like oppositional defiant disorder because they don’t want to go to school. The child will throw a huge tantrum, but often it isn’t about school at all but rather some source of anxiety or fear related to that particular activity. These conditions cause anxiety and fear for the kids. Think of young children being fearful and not knowing how to explain to their parents that they don’t want to go to a certain place. Often their only response is to fight back. A lot of people don’t recognize these behaviors or know where these behaviors come from, and they are often times very grateful and happy when the situation is explained to them.

Call Ryther at 206.517.0234 to make an appointment with one of Ryther’s psychiatrists for an evaluation or visit our website for more information.
From the Executive Director
I have been working with the Child Welfare System for only the past ten years. As many of you know, my career before that was in Community Mental Health. The connection here is that Ryther is as much or more of a mental health treatment organization as it is anything else. Still if you were to characterize the two “industries” there are some significant differences. For me, however, the most striking difference is how so many people in or related to the child welfare system tend to advocate policies as much from wishful thinking as from data. Some of that wishful thinking applies to how to interpret what little data they have.

One of the more frustrating wishful assumptions that I hear repeated often is that every child who has been placed into the system has a home to go to. This may be true for a great many children in the system, but it is not true for a great many others. For a host of reasons, many if not most of the Ryther children do not have a safe family to whom they could be discharged quickly, if at all.

One of the other assumptions made by many workers and policy makers in the field is that group home care or residential treatment is a bad thing. I won’t disagree that the frequency of ill considered use of such facilities in the past probably helped create this notion which was also probably true. The real fact is that such placements in today’s environment represent a very small fraction of the kids in care, and

Taylor Leaves Ryther a Whole (New) Child
At age nine, Taylor had already experienced a lot of trauma, enduring both physical and sexual abuse as a very young child before he was removed from his home to live with a relative caregiver. Despite her best efforts, she was unable to care for him due to his difficult behaviors that included violent outbursts as well as fire-setting. The first step after he was admitted to Ryther’s Sub-Acute Inpatient Program was a psychiatric evaluation with Ryther’s Child Psychiatrist, Dr. Linda Ford. Taylor’s diagnoses included ADHD, bipolar disorder, depressive disorder and oppositional defiant disorder. Over time, Dr. Ford developed the optimal medication management plan and stabilized his mood and behavior so he could succeed in the therapeutic process of healing. Besides individual therapy, he also had a canine companion, participated in Little Bit therapeutic horseback riding, and attended Survivor’s Group, a group for children who have been sexually abused. He was able to explore the abuse of his past, express grief and resolve some key issues. Taylor’s caregiver was actively engaged in family therapy at Ryther and developed the skills to provide the structure Taylor needed to succeed in her home.

When Taylor left, his Ryther case manager remarked, “His future is really bright. Ryther staff watched him grow into a boy who is socializing, planning, looking forward to things, and was able to say good-bye. He left a whole different child. There isn’t a staff member here who wasn’t affected by his success.”

Today, Ryther is treating 36 children like Taylor in the Sub-Acute Care Program. To learn how you can support our work to help heal children from trauma, mental illness, abuse and neglect, visit the www.ryther.org Give Help pages.

Aspiring Youth
Announcing open enrollment at Aspiring Youth Summer Camps for campers ages 8 and up. Camps provide an exciting choice of activities, from video production to habitat restoration to art. Some campers are shy, some are quirky and some are twice exceptional. Some of our campers have a diagnosis of Asperger’s Syndrome, ADHD, learning disabilities or other similar traits. To enroll or for more information, visit AspiringYouth.net or call 206.517.0222.
**New Academic Component for Inpatient Substance Abuse Program**

Ryther welcomed Natalie Ramsey, Education Coordinator, to expand academics in Ryther’s Inpatient Substance Abuse Program for teen boys. Clients can earn school credit in any subject - all taught through the lens of art and its therapeutic value. For instance, Natalie’s class just finished a unit on Art and Geometry.

Beyond academics, Natalie’s advocacy for students like those in Cottage B - many of whom have struggled in academic settings - is very strong. She follows each client from intake through discharge to get them situated in a school or guide them in earning their GED or meeting community college requirements. Natalie empowers the teens to take charge of their future, spending one-on-one time with each client. She stated, “You see their personal success. They look happier, their confidence builds and, even if they’ve had a tough day, they come to class and walk away thinking ‘This is something I can do.’” For many boys, this is the first time they have received positive feedback in school.

To learn more about Ryther’s Inpatient Substance Abuse Program for teen boys call 206.517.0249 or visit our website at www.ryther.org.

**Thank You Holiday Donors**

The holidays of Ryther children, teens & families were made brighter by our generous community partners. Our deepest “Thank You” to all who helped:

- Abatix
- Amanda Keenholts and Family
- American Seafoods Group
- ASWA Seattle Chapter #9
- AT&T
- Barbara Quenga and Family
- Bear Creek’s Boys’ Basketball Green Team
- Bellevue Firefighters Comm. Support Fdn
- Belltown Grange
- Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
- BNBuilders
- BOMA
- Colleen Calkins
- Curves
- D.A. Davidson & Co.
- Denise Clark and Family
- Edge Asset Management
- Edge Personal Training
- Edmonds Church of God
- Esterline Control Systems Korry
- UW Evans School of Public Affairs
- Fisher-Stocker Family
- US General Accounting Office
- Gilead Sciences
- Hart Crowser
- International Pacific Halibut Commission
- JE Dunn Construction
- Jody Woodruff
- Juanita Santas
- Linda Richards and Family
- Lydig Construction
- MacDonald-Miller Facility Solutions
- Maple Leaf Lutheran
- Maple Valley Blanketeers
- Mattei Insurance Services
- Mercer
- Michelle & Karl Quackenbush
- Natalie Walker
- Nathan Hale High School
- Our Lady of the Lake
- Premera Blue Cross
- Rabourn Company
- Redmond Athletic Club
- Rena Ware International
- Sabrina Friend and Family
- Seattle Police Dept Parking Enforcement
- Seattle Radiologists
- Shana Hageman and Friends
- Solutions IQ
- Stacie & Don Becker and Friends
- Starbucks Coffee Company
- Tana Gall
- The Benaroya Company
- T-Mobile
- University House Wallingford
- UW Medical Center
- UPS
- Vine Dahlen PLLC
- Virginia Mason
- Washington Dental Service
- Washington Holdings
- Wash. State Employment Security Dept
- Wells Fargo Insurance Services
- Western National Insurance Company

League News

The Ryther League continues to support the work at Ryther through its biannual donation awarded at the all-League Holiday Luncheon, where members also gave an additional $3,000 for warm winter wear for the kids. Other events included Noel Unit’s very successful Holiday Luncheon, Sou’Wester Unit’s wonderful Poinsettia Sale and Off Campus’ spectacular February 11th Hearts for Hope Auction & Dinner Dance, supporting the Healing Hearts Fund that will cover costs of therapy groups, materials, psychiatry evaluations and much more. Beta Theta Pi fraternity members visited the boys in Cottage B to talk college, sports and shoot hoops. If you are interested in the League, call the League Liaison at 206.517.0215.
Thank you 2011 Ryther Luncheon Sponsors!

**CONNECT FOR KIDS**
Ryther Annual Luncheon 2011
Jacquie & Michael Casey

Advisory Services & Investments, LLC
American Seafoods Group
The Benaroya Company
BOMA (Building Owners & Managers Assn. of Seattle King County)
Crowley Maritime Corporation
Defran Systems
Felicia C. Guity
Tova & Ken Hornung
MacDonald-Miller Facility Solutions
Premera Blue Cross
Starbucks Coffee Company
Sterling Savings Bank
Alissa & Eric Tanaka
Vine Dahlen PLLC
Washington Trust Bank
Wells Fargo Special Risks
Western National Insurance
Whitman Global Carpet & Floor Care
Wilson Strategic Communications

**Save the date** for the Ryther Annual Luncheon on Thursday, November 15, 2012 at the Grand Hyatt Seattle.

To sponsor or host a table, contact Ryther at 206.517.0215.

**Thank You to Our In-Kind Donors:**
Architecture for Humanity: Design services
Cavalia: 28 tickets
Seattle Seahawks: 40 tickets
Woodland Park Zoo: 145 passes
Abatix: Maintenance supplies

Visit our website & donate securely online: [www.ryther.org](http://www.ryther.org)