



**Jasper Mountain has been fortunate to have worked with some of the most challenging children in our system of care.**

- For four decades we have specifically worked to admit the most difficult children whenever we have an opening.
- Some would not consider this a blessing, but it certainly has been just that with our goal to understand the causes and the solutions to childhood problems and test what does and does not work with the most damaged and challenging children.

This opportunity has resulted in our ability to develop interventions that work with our difficult population. These are the children even our systems of care, including treatment programs, have been unable to help.

**We realize that all children are not as serious as our population, but our belief has been that if an intervention works for the most difficult children, it is likely to be effective with children not as extreme.**

Our population can be extremely difficult to manage much less provide effective treatment. However, we now have **over 20 years** of data that reflects these children improve and some significantly improve.

With some of the most damaged children, Jasper Mountain treatment has shown the following aggregate results over the last **two decades:**

1. Serious behavior reduced by **80%-90%**.
2. Specific clinical symptom improvement of **60%**.
3. **90%** improvement in attachment and relationship skills.
4. Overall the children as a group have been downgraded from severe to moderate.

The above improvement happens within the program, but what happens after the child leaves, **does the improvement last?**

To find out, Jasper Mountain has the most extensive follow up in the nation. **We track graduates for five years.**

# SAMPLE SIZE

With a sample size of **more than 700** our follow up not only reflects the improvement lasts, but in most cases, the graduates continue to improve at an increased pace than while in the program.

One of the most frequent questions we hear at Jasper Mountain is,

“Why are you effective with children no one has been able to help?”

The answer to this question will be covered in this training by breaking down the program’s ecological treatment in **12 foundational areas:**



**Positive brain change** – now that we are in the “Era of the Brain” we know from neurological research that all treatment and all interventions must impact the brain of the individual.

Therefore, our goal is to promote and facilitate positive brain change. Such change must address the negative past neurological impairment from trauma, abuse and most significantly neglectful treatment in the early years of childhood.

But we cannot stop with effective trauma treatment, we must put positive functioning in the place of past negative patterns. Just as nature abhors a vacuum, we cannot remove a problem without filling this void with a new and functional alternative.

The question as to whether improvements in treatment will last over time comes down to how the change has been internalized and neurologically encoded in the brain. If the individual’s brain does not change in positive functional ways, then any improvement will be conditional upon a certain environment and short-lived after discharge, a common problem in many intensive treatment settings.

## 2.

**Trauma recovery in mind, body and spirit** – in order to move in the direction of a positive future, treatment must begin addressing the negative past.

This is essential for several reasons. When children are mistreated, their brains adapt and instincts to connect with adults turn into mistrust and an internal drive to stay distant from adults. Early trauma forces the more primitive survival parts of the brain to work overtime and prevent the development of higher cognitive brain development.

As difficult as it is to effectively raise a normal child, it becomes many times more difficult when negative patterns must be changed before positive functioning is possible. In managed care dominated treatment environments where short-term, symptom focused approaches are encouraged, comprehensive trauma treatment is one of the main reasons why Jasper Mountain stands out due to superior outcomes.

Unless children are ready to perceive adults and the world in a more positive way, they will not be ready to engage even with the best evidence-based approaches.

# 3.

**Disconfirming negative perceptions** – The world we all live in is determined by our perceptions of events and the meaning we place on them.

Difficult early years of childhood often produce very negative perceptions of adults, of events and of self. When children have not found the safety and support needed to manage the ever-present stress of living, they internalize anger, fear, and sense of being unable to handle the challenges they face and develop negative self-perceptions.

Many treatment settings unknowingly reinforce negative perceptions in the process of correcting behavior and reflecting problem issues to children. It is essential that struggling children change their internal perceptions of themselves and their world or else even in positive settings the internal world of the child will remain negative.

# 4.

**Sowing the seeds of attachment** – For children few issues are as important as attachment. The instinctive drive to bond with a primary care provider is the foundation of success in the future in all social areas.

Attachment is the child's protection from excessive stress, fear and isolation and forms the basis of social skills and later empathy. Many children with difficult childhoods, and essentially all children who have been removed from their families for any reason, will develop attachment issues.

If a child missed the opportunity to bond with a care provider, a developmental deficiency will develop that must be addressed with interventions that repair or build attachment. There is a short list of essential skills a child must have to succeed in a complex social world and attachment tops the list.

Some treatment environments find attachment too complex a topic or have few ideas how to work on it but neglecting attachment work is a serious mistake. There are few treatment topics that are as important as improving attachment.

# 5.

## Building skills in the 5 gemstone areas:

- 1) thinking smart
- 2) self-love
- 3) spiritual health
- 4) cooperation
- 5) empathy

When children at Jasper Mountain demonstrate that they understand and put into practice these five skill sets they receive a polished gemstone that represents their accomplishment.

Physical manifestations of achievements are important to everyone, no less so for children who struggle with making good decisions and thinking of others. We use the gemstone approach to help staff remember to look for positive skills so they can catch children demonstrating in addition to correcting misbehavior. We put daily attention into these five skill sets, and children respond to this positive intervention.

Throughout treatment we provide the children with a deeper understanding along the way in each of the five areas. When they earn a gemstone, we have an award ceremony where the gems, that come from Brazil, are given to the children and placed in a trophy case for all to see. When they leave Jasper Mountain the earned gems go with the child in a special display box.



## Enhancing prefrontal cortex activation and executive function –

An important component of positive brain change is promoting the development of neuro-networks in the region of the brain that holds the higher order cognitive functions—the prefrontal cortex.

The best antidote to reactive and impulsive behavior problems in children is to help the child learn self-control, relaxation and stress reduction, delaying gratification, and overriding the reactive limbic region of the brain that responds to stress with fight or flight behavior.

To enhance prefrontal brain growth, the child must experience a safe and secure environment, or you are asking the child's brain to ignore its primary instinctive drive—insuring survival.

The development of the prefrontal cortex, and higher order reasoning, continues in most individuals well into adulthood but important learning must occur in early childhood.



## **Emotional and behavioral self-regulation –**

the most pervasive impact of trauma on children is the loss of self-regulation.

Children become hypervigilant and their primitive brain regions are constantly stimulated by the amygdala resulting in constant reactivity of all kinds. These are the primary causes for the loss of self-regulation.

It is difficult for these children to separate emotions and behavior because they are in a state of reactivity. This is why many traumatized children incorrectly receive a diagnosis of ADHD because many of the symptoms are very similar.

Research has shown that it is very difficult to have future success without self-regulation, and this must be a strong component of an effective treatment plan. Only when the prefrontal cortex overrides the reactive limbic brain can the child regain some level of personal power and achieve an internal locus of control.



**Coping skills to manage stress** – in a stressful world, the difference between success and failure often hinges upon the ability of the individual to cope with the inevitable stress of living.

Although the brain has automatic methods of handling stress, these methods are not always the best adaptations in the long run.

Coping skills such as relaxation, thought stopping and aerobic exercise can be learned by children if they are specifically taught. Children with difficult pasts have an advantage and disadvantage at the same time. They have learned survival coping, but most have not learned coping for thriving.

However, once they learn effective long-term coping skills, these can combine with their resiliency survival coping to give the child the advantage over other children who have not faced as many difficult and stressful situations. The difference between a victim and a thriver often comes down to the ability to cope.



## **Internalization of and generalization of the Jasper environment –**

It is clear that children who live for some period of time at Jasper Mountain will not have the many components of this environment go with them when they leave.

When we take the child out of Jasper Mountain perhaps, we can leave much of Jasper Mountain within the child through internalization. Practically the best way to do this is through practice and mastery. When a child experiences the advantages of learning to self-calm, this can become a life-long skill.

We must also work to make the many changes that take place in one environment generalize to other environments or children will go back to former negative coping methods. Generalization happens when children experience the cues to use new skills in multiple environments.

One way we do this is to have children transition to practice families before they move to permanent families. A flaw in many otherwise good treatment programs happens when generalization and internalization do not occur, and neither happen automatically.

# 10.

## **Resiliency and turning a negative past to an advantage for the future –**

Since coping is the ability to manage the stress of daily life without developing maladaptive problems, resiliency must be the next step.

Resiliency is the ability to bounce back after adversity. Research has found that individuals who have learned resiliency not only do better under stress but have built in neurological accommodations that make the person stronger after each difficult situation.

Using an analogy from physiology, when many cells of the body are exercised or stressed (muscle, bone, neurons, etc.) these cells respond by thriving and growing stronger. It is therefore our goal to have the children we work with not only manage and cope with stress but grow stronger when facing the difficult situations in life that everyone must face.

There is often a difference between adaptation to trauma and resiliency. Many adaptations, often the source of mental health problems, are not positive whereas resiliency is always helpful to the individual. Therefore, resiliency must often be specifically taught, or other negative adaptations will cause further problems for the individual.



**Living simultaneously in the past, present and future** – humans are the only member of the animal kingdom that we know have the ability to mentally project into the future and to focus their attention onto the past.

Neuroscientists believe this is due to our more complex prefrontal cortex and the accompanying higher order reasoning ability. There are clear advantages to be able to remember the past and learn from it.

Although humans are capable of doing so, when they do not use this ability, as the saying goes, they often repeat past mistakes. To learn from the past is an executive function. The future can also be available to those who learn to think about the possibilities that lie ahead.

One advantage of doing so is planning for some desired outcome, another important executive function. Some individuals develop plans and goals for the future but decide to start on them later (quit smoking, lose weight, go back to school, etc.), but later may not ever come.

## Living simultaneously in the past, present and future (Continued) –

In many cases preparing for the desired future must start in the present. Living in the present is the most compelling of the three and it has been said, “the past is gone, and the future is not yet, so all we have is the present.”

This has some truth but not from a neurological standpoint in that our most productive and desirable present involves learning from the past and preparing for the future.

The goal is a healthy balance of all three, which is our goal for the children of Jasper Mountain.

# 12.

**Learning social skills for future success in all areas, particularly social success** – Having the insight of what is needed for success is one thing, being able to accomplish what is needed may be much more difficult.

Getting along with other people is important, but just how to do this can be very difficult for some children (and adults). Because humans are social creatures and we must rely on others for a positive fulfilling life, social skills are the foundation of social success.

After past traumas where children were hurt, deeply disappointed, and even betrayed by others, it is often very difficult to trust and rely on others for these children. Yet if they do not learn to trust and be vulnerable, the most important relationships in living will be either unavailable or problematic such a primary care provider, a best friend, or an intimate partner.

Without such relationships in life, by definition success in life, is unattainable because the most important ingredient of personal contentment is social connection, social support and therefore social success. Because of past relationship trauma with our children, some things must be unlearned, and functional social skills must be specifically taught.

While the above **twelve foundations** of the treatment at Jasper Mountain are not mutually exclusive, and in many ways influence each other, we have found it helpful to somewhat arbitrarily separate them in order to insure an ongoing focus in each.

We have found the most effective and influential environment to provide all twelve foundations is a setting that models and encourages health of **mind, body** and **spirit**.

# SYNERGY

The concept of synergy is important to consider when treating traumatized children.

**Synergy is when the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.**

This can work in a negative or positive direction.



The result of having problems  
in some areas may  
produce overall  
problems in  
others.

When children do  
not get the help  
they need, a  
**negative spiral**  
can develop.

But improvement in a few areas can often result in overall **gains** in many other areas.

The multiple components of treatment at **Jasper Mountain** often work together to develop a **positive spiral** of synergy producing results that are at times remarkable.





The most effective environment for healing and growth is one that provides models and promotes full functioning in a wide variety of areas.

**Beyond the success of competent individuals and techniques, it is total environments of health and growth that are most effective in producing the twelve foundations.**

Few environments have the components found at Jasper Mountain.

However, any treatment can become stronger with the implementation of one or more of the **twelve foundations**.

It will remain the goal of Jasper Mountain to continually improve our ability to be the most optimal environment possible and share what we learn with others.

Why is  
**JASPER**  
**MOUNTAIN**  
successful?

# JASPER MOUNTAIN

creates environments where  
children are encouraged to  
achieve all **TWELVE**  
of the foundational  
areas and  
more.

Like the world they will face when they leave us, children are not required to make improvement in all areas, it is up to them.

But we have the responsibility to free them from their negative pasts to **give them a chance to make informed and positive choices.**

- ✓ **We exercise** children on all levels, we create a positive environment where success is encouraged and rewarded.
- ✓ **We build** bonds between children and key adults to give them a new sense of what adult love and support can do for them.
- ✓ **We help** them experience success in physical, educational and personal goals.
- ✓ **We immerse** them in a setting that is more fun than they have ever experienced, more positive than they have known, and gives them more opportunities to learn and grow every day than they could find anywhere else.

# ASSESSMENT TOOLS

tell the story . . .

At **discharge**, children do best at:

1. **ATTACHMENT**
2. **SOCIALIZATION**
3. **MORE ACCURATE SELF-IMAGE**
4. **REDUCING SERIOUS PROBLEM BEHAVIORS**

Most importantly, we know they change their internal perceptions because the majority of our children **improve more** after they leave us than when they were in the program.

Components of  
integrated treatment  
at

**JASPER MOUNTAIN**

make the most difference.

# Our **trauma work** is effective because of the:

✓ safe environment

✓ school

✓ skilled & intensive therapy

✓ residence

✓ teamwork with treatment

✓ families

This can be referred to as an **ecological model of treatment.**

**ATTACHMENT** may be the most important issue in the long run.

We accomplish this through all the caring adults these children can connect with.

They learn that getting close to adults feels good and helps relieve stress rather than causing it. Most children at Jasper bond with many adults over their time with us.

We build on strengths in the residence and the school, we expose the children to what they are capable of in physical activities like the running program, appropriate personal power like in the equestrian program, and activities.

These areas, as well as the physical environment, making friends, our diet, learning what they are good at and many other aspects of **INTEGRATED TREATMENT.**



## **JASPER MOUNTAIN**

has a complex and difficult job to do. We do it as well, if not better, than any other treatment program for young abused children.

To continue our positive track record of treatment success we must focus on the **TWELVE FOUNDATIONS** of treatment one child at a time.



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