

## A Position Paper

Richard Rubin, M.D., Medical Director

The concept of treatment for students at the Grove School is embedded in the concept of therapeutic milieu; that all interactions and all relationships have the potential for being therapeutic, i.e. emotionally corrective. Since all human interactions are, in fact, a form of communication and occurs whether it is intentional or not, whether it is verbal or behavioral, whether it is explicit or implicit, understanding what is being communicated is at the heart of the therapeutic community. Because Grove School strives to be a therapeutic community there is, and will always be, a constant tension between the individual's responsibility to him or herself and their obligation to the larger community. Focusing only on what is at issue within the individual (intrapsychic issues and conflicts) is to ignore the social context in which we are all embedded. Being socially responsible is an integral part of mental health. It is, in fact, balancing this tension between individual needs and social (family, community, society) obligations that constitutes a central aspect of mental health.

What, then, are the central principles that form an organizing theme linking the small (individual) with the large (community)? First it is necessary to recognize that it is not possible to change/grow without experiencing the anxiety and apprehension that comes with moving into uncharted emotional waters. While this is true at any phase of development, it is especially so during adolescence when peers (others) serve as transitional bridges in the separation and individuation process. This focus on obtaining a sense of validation from and through others, referred to as "other-validation", probably has its roots in a biological imperative, since we are, after all, dependent on others for our very existence in the earliest years of life. Remaining frozen on this transitional bridge, however, becomes increasingly maladaptive in the formation of healthy relationships as one moves into adulthood. Our task is to shift the focus toward a more "self-validated" stance, a psychological position which posits increased differentiation, i.e. a state of emotional separateness while in emotional contact with another, on developing a sense of validation through the self. This is a frightening process, causing one often to retreat to more comfortable, albeit unhealthy or even self-destructive ways of behaving. Being in an environment which is safe and which encourages the individual to tolerate their anxiety as they confront their various fears (ex. rejection, abandonment, embarrassment, etc.) is what Grove provides. It is not the goal of this milieu simply to remove a student's anxiety or fearfulness. While that may, in fact, occur as a result of developing a more "Self-validated" position, it is the purpose of this milieu to foster growth, to insist upon the honesty that is required for self-confrontation (which, in turn, forms the basis of self-validation), and to be respectful of the courage that this process requires. The honesty that is so central to this community also extends to the way the staff conducts themselves. Honesty must always be considered and evaluated in the context of motivation. Criticizing or correcting

someone in the name of honesty is inherently dishonest when the motivation behind the expression of “honesty” is the assertion of power or control.

The milieu must also be anchored in moral principles and values. Grove does not advocate a particular religious set of beliefs nor should it be construed that anchoring treatment upon moral principles is a religious position. Rather it acknowledges that there are moral and ethical precepts by which we live and as such are a part of our social fabric. To ignore this under the guise of psychotherapeutic neutrality is to be dishonest and to communicate to our students that moral principles, ex. respect for others, not lying, not stealing, not intentionally hurting others, are not relevant to their emotional growth. We contend that these principles are an integral part of psychological growth and are necessary ingredients to “self-validated” behavior. Helping a student develop, articulate, and live consistent with their own set of moral principles is an important cornerstone of the therapeutic milieu.

Honesty, courage, moral integrity, consideration of others, self-respect, commitment to holding on to Self in the face of the fear that accompanies true growth and differentiation form the foundations upon which Grove’s community is built. They are the principles which guide individual, group, and family therapy; they are the ingredients necessary for the development of social responsibility and obligation; and they are the guidelines for the staff’s interaction with each other and with their students. All interventions must be consistent with and measured against these principles; they form the grail to which the Grove School continually strives.