

A therapeutic school is a type of alternative school that specialized in educating and helping troubled teenagers and young adults. These troubles can range from behavioural and emotional challenges, to cognitive learning challenges that can't be properly addressed in a traditional school environment. In addition to offering classes, these schools typically provide psychological counselling and are often involved with the students on a very deep level to help rehabilitate them and restore their mental, physical, and emotional health. There are both therapeutic boarding schools, which have intensive residential programs, as well as therapeutic day schools, at which students remain at home outside of the school day. Want to learn more about these unique schools and see if it might be right for your child?

Why Do Students Attend Therapeutic Schools?

Students often attend therapeutic schools because they have psychological issues to work on, including substance abuse or emotional and behavioral needs. Students sometimes have to attend residential programs or therapeutic boarding schools in order to have a completely drug-free environment removed from negative influences at home. Other students who attend therapeutic schools have psychiatric diagnoses or learning issues such as Oppositional Defiant Disorder, depression or other mood disorders, Asperger's Syndrome, ADHD or ADD, or learning disabilities. Other students in therapeutic schools are attempting to understand difficult life situations and need stricter environments and healthier strategies for doing so. Most students who attend therapeutic schools have faced academic failure in mainstream educational settings and need strategies to help them succeed.

Some students in therapeutic programs, particularly in the residential or boarding programs, need to be removed temporarily from their home environments, in which they are out of control and/or violent. Most students who attend therapeutic schools are in high school, but some schools accept slightly younger children or young adults as well.

What Do Therapeutic Programs Offer?

Therapeutic programs offer students an academic program that also includes psychological counseling. The teachers at these types of programs are generally well versed in psychology, and the programs are typically overseen by a psychologist or other mental health professional. Students in these programs usually attend therapy, either at the school (in the case of residential or boarding schools and programs) or outside of school (at day schools). There are therapeutic day schools and therapeutic boarding schools. Students who need a more intensive program with support that extends beyond the typical school day tend to choose boarding programs, and their average stay in these programs is about one year. Students in residential and boarding programs often undergo individual and group counseling as part of the program, and the programs are very structured.

The goal of therapeutic programs is to rehabilitate the student and make him or her healthy psychologically. To this end, many therapeutic schools offer additional therapies such as arts, writing, or working with animals in an attempt to help students better cope with their psychological issues.

What Is a TBS?

TBS is an acronym that refers to a Therapeutic Boarding School, an educational institution that not only serves a therapeutic role, but also has a residential program. For students whose home lives may not be conducive to healing or for whom round the clock monitoring and support is required, a residential program might be most beneficial. Many residential programs are located in rural areas in which students have access to nature. Some programs also include a twelve-step program to deal with addiction.

How to Find a Therapeutic School

The National Association of Therapeutic Schools and Programs (NATSAP) is an organization whose member schools include therapeutic schools, wilderness programs, residential treatment programs, and other schools and programs that serve adolescents with psychological issues and their families. NATSAP publishes an annual alphabetical directory of therapeutic schools and programs, but it is not a placement service. In addition, educational consultants who have experience working with troubled students can help parents choose the right therapeutic school for their children.