



# BRENDAN HATES MST: THAT MEANS IT'S WORKING

## How Multisystemic Therapy Works, and Why!

Thirteen-year-old Brendan was failing all his classes in school and had just been suspended again when his mother reached out to Sharon King, a multisystemic therapy professional at the South Carolina Department of Mental Health.

This wasn't Brendan's first time in therapy. His mother says many therapists had tried to help Brendan over the past six years, but his behavior never improved. She was at her wit's end until she was referred to King for MST. Brendan's mother said, at first, she was offended that King focused not on Brendan's behavior, but *hers*.

By using the 4 D's – Directive, Duration, Discipline and Disengage – Brendan's mother said she learned how to react to her son's behavior with constructive strategies instead of arguing or yelling.



This is one of the strategies used in Multisystemic Therapy – an intensive home- and community-based intervention designed to reduce antisocial behavior and other clinical problems for youth involved in the juvenile justice system for serious offenses.

The therapy, for youth between the ages 12-17, is delivered in natural environments where influences on antisocial or problem behaviors occur: home, school, neighborhood, and the community. The goal of MST, which normally lasts four months, is to reduce antisocial behavior and to prevent out of home placement.

As for Brendan? He finished seventh grade, making mostly A's and B's, his mother said, and is on track to earn his end-of-summer reward: an expensive pair of sneakers he wants.

What does Brendan think of all this? He told his school counselor that he hated Sharon because, he said, "my mom listens to her. There are rules. It's awful." Brendan's mom said that's a sign MST is working, because "even Brendan says things are better, way easier not fighting all the time at home and at school."

### Multisystemic Therapy

is found to be effective in many areas including:

- Keeping kids in their home, reducing out-of-home placements up to 50%
- Keeping kids in school
- Keeping kids out of trouble, reducing re-arrest rates up to 70%
- Improving family relations and functioning
- Decreasing adolescent psychiatric symptoms
- Decreasing adolescent drug and alcohol use

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