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NEWS

For immediate release

Ouachita's 2017 Christian Counseling Conference explores adolescent issues

By Sarah Davis

March 6, 2017

For more information, contact OBU's news bureau at newsbureau@obu.edu or (870) 245-5208

ARKADELPHIA, Ark. – Ouachita Baptist University's Pruet School of Christian Studies hosted the seventh annual Conference on Issues in Christian Counseling on Friday, Feb. 24. The conference, which is sponsored by Ouachita, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and the Arkansas Baptist State Convention, brought together 174 mental health professionals, social workers, nurses and ministers to explore the topic of "Adolescent Issues."

"It is so gratifying to see our enrollment increase each year," said Dr. William Viser, professor of Christian ministries at Ouachita and the creator of the conference. "It is a testimony to the strength of our program that the vast majority return year after year telling me it is their favorite conference. I truly believe this conference will grow through the years and it is such a blessing to a part of it."

Among several breakout sessions that professionals could attend included such topics as "Teens and Trauma: Helping Adolescents Find Their Way Through Crisis" led by Dr. Aaron New, "Moral Development in Adolescence" led by Dr. Larry Henderson, "Restoring Trust Between Adolescents and Parents: Moving Past the Lies" led by Dr. Jeff Nave and "Adolescent Sociology" led by Dr. Elizabeth Kelly.

The counseling conference was approved by the National Board for Certified Counselors (NBCC) for continuing education credit. Eight NBCC hours were available for licensed alcohol and abuse, professional and marriage and family counselors; national career counselors; nursing professionals; and social work professionals. The conference also included a pastoral track.

Dr. Viser led the lunch session, titled "Wounded Adolescents: Confronting Cutting." In the session, he discussed the psychology behind self-mutilation in adolescents and the signs that a teenager may be self-injuring.

"The adolescent is trying to deal with feelings that are overwhelming for them, and this is the reason they deliberately destroy body tissues," Dr. Viser said. "When they self-injure, endorphins are going to kick in, and it's going to mask their pain. They may do it consciously, they may do it unconsciously."

Dr. Viser said there are several different forms of self-mutilation, but cutting is the most common. Adolescents who cut themselves are not necessarily suicidal, they just want relief from the symptoms they are experiencing, he noted. Signs an adolescent may be cutting include wearing long sleeves in hot temperatures and bloodstains on clothes.

One breakout session titled "The Adolescent Brain: Why They Do What They Do" was led by Dr. Kathryn Steele, professor of counseling and director of clinical training at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, where she holds the James H. & Susan E. Brown Christian Counseling Chair. The session addressed how the brain develops from infancy until adulthood but mainly focused on the underdeveloped parts of the brain during adolescence. These underdeveloped parts, including the prefrontal cortex, explain why many teens often have poor decision-making skills and extreme mood swings.

“I think it is very important for us to understand the wonderful complexity of how God created us and yet how it impacts us emotionally and relationally,” Dr. Steele said. “It’s very important for us to learn about that and to discover the best ways and most effective manners to deal with all the issues we are helping adolescents with.”

For more information about the conference, contact the Pruet School of Christian Studies at (870) 245-5599.

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