



Understanding Youth Residential Treatment Facilities

The Role of Youth Residential Treatment Facilities:

Residential treatment provides a necessary level of care for children and adolescents with significant needs, such as those at risk of hurting themselves or others or who have been diagnosed with serious behavior problems.

Children and adolescents requiring this level of care often have difficulty relating successfully to others at home and in school and are at risk of dropping out of school and/or becoming involved in the criminal justice system.

It is critical that policymakers, members of the media, and providers know the facts about youth residential treatment facilities (RTFs), and that worried parents, concerned teachers, and the American public understand why RTFs are a vital part of the behavioral healthcare continuum.

10 Essential Facts About Youth RTFs:

- The goal of psychiatric residential treatment is to provide care to children and adolescents with significant social and emotional needs in a non-hospital, highly structured, and therapeutic environment where individuals can gain stability, support, and treatment for mental health diagnoses, substance use disorders, intellectual/developmental disabilities, sexual conduct disorders, and other disabilities that require long-term treatment.
- Psychiatric RTFs provide 24-hour, therapeutically planned behavioral health interventions in a highly supervised and structured group living and active learning environment. These healthcare settings are subject to external monitoring on validated standards and independent auditing of potential safety issues.
- State agencies license and regulate these treatment settings, and nationally recognized entities such as The Joint Commission and the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities, or CARF, accredit them. There are mechanisms in these settings to prevent self-harm and harm to others as well as opportunities for adolescents and staff to report their concerns.
- Unlicensed providers are not held to the same standards as licensed providers. This adherence to federal and state regulations is a crucial distinction between these provider types that too often is overlooked.
- Many Americans might be unaware of the clinically driven, medical-authorization process that occurs before a patient is admitted to an RTF, which ensures that services align with generally accepted standards of care.
- Without access to highly specialized RTF services, many patients would go without critical treatment, which highlights the important role that RTFs play in the behavioral healthcare continuum.



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- Nearly every state has a required staffing ratio for this level of care that indicates how many staff are required for the number of patients being treated. In some circumstances, the number varies based upon the shift (day/evening/nights) and, in some cases, it singles out the registered nurse-to-patient ratio versus the behavioral health technician-to-patient ratio; these numbers vary widely across state lines.
- There are federal regulations that are applicable to the RTF programs related to using restraint and seclusion as well as emergency preparedness. The state survey agencies, on behalf of the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, have been instructed to conduct a certain percentage of reviews of these regulations each year so that during the span of five years, each RTF is reviewed at least once. All CEOs are required to attest, on an annual basis, that their facilities are compliant with the regulations.
- Each state Medicaid plan also has requirements for this level of care that can begin with staffing or workforce make-up as well as medical record documentation standards. An RTF can have multiple contracts with state Medicaid plans, which also increases the level of oversight for each individual program through onsite and/or desk reviews to ensure compliance.
- Residential treatment settings provide education services tailored to address the needs of children and adolescents with more serious behavioral health conditions. Most of these children and adolescents have struggled in regular school settings and would not be able to succeed without the support these centers provide.

To learn more, please visit NABH's Youth Services [webpage](#) to download our policy paper, [Residential Treatment: A Vital Component of the Behavioral Healthcare Continuum](#), and access our shareable graphics about providing care to children and adolescents.

For additional information, please contact NABH Director of Communications [Jessica Zigmond](#).