

'Teach them how'

Seminar focuses on reaching troubled kids

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Gleaner staff

Think about the worst trauma you have dealt with.

What everyday activities couldn't you perform at the peak of that emotional period?

"Think," "drive," "sleep," "remember my phone number," answered workshop participants Wednesday, most of whom were school counselors.

"The same is true with kids," author Ruth Herman Wells, of Oregon, told the group gathered in Henderson.

"Could you learn?"

But some students are sent to school every morning and expected to learn after a night of beating or rape or some other tragedy at home, she said.

Teachers and counselors should balance helping the student with their personal issue and educating them, she said.

"Never abandon the educational or job training mission, but don't try to accomplish it at all costs," Wells said.

This could include allowing the troubled child to work on less demanding projects on days he or she designates as "bad work days," she said.

Unless the student also has behavior problems, he or she won't likely take advantage of that arrangement, she said.

Wells was at Wolf's Banquet and Convention Center and will be there again today to talk about teaching and counseling troubled youths. She focuses on helping kids cope and educating them on social and school skills using strategies which she has written about in her 18 books.

"Teachers don't sign up to deal with mental health issues with kids, but they can do things to help," Wells said.

Wells' visit was made possible by a \$9,400 grant from the state



Ruth Herman Wells addresses a conference for educators Wednesday that dealt with teaching and counseling troubled youths. The workshop continues today. (Gleaner photo by Mike Lawrence)

School-to-Work program, said Kenny Barkley, School-to-Work coordinator for the region that includes Henderson, Union and Webster counties. The grant paid for the workshop, as well as materials for those in attendance.

Of the approximately 60 counselors and other school personnel at the workshop Wednesday,

22 were from schools within Henderson County. Others were from Union, Webster, Daviess, Hancock, McLean and Ohio counties.

Elementary through high school students who are constantly traumatized and anxious are among the four groups of youth at-risk to leave school and follow a perilous path through life, Wells said.

The others are anti-school students, or those that blame teachers and others for their dislike of school; unmotivated students; and distracted students who have too many other life events in motion to concentrate on school, she said.

"We just want kids to show up and be good, but we don't teach them how to," Wells explained after the workshop.

Barkley said after the session that he hopes those that attended will take the information back to teachers, counselors and others at their schools.

"We can't put the responsibility for teaching coping skills on counselors," he said, "but they have to have a big role."