

Volusia teachers learn how to help kids cope

By KEN MA
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DAYTONA BEACH — Volusia County's public-school teachers became the students Thursday.

They gathered at Tubman King Community Church to learn how to counsel and teach troubled youths. Their instructor, Ruth Herman Wells, is a renowned expert on recognizing emotionally challenged children and helping them cope.

The two-day workshop was sponsored by the Daytona Beach Black Clergy Alliance, which represents 40 churches in east Volusia.

Wells shared examples that could cause children to be disruptive in class: They might be pregnant; they could be eating out of a garbage can because their father is always drunk; or their mother's boyfriend threatens to kill them when he's high.

Teachers need to show students how to function academically and emotionally, as well as encouraging them to participate in counseling, she said.

Teachers "are dealing with [troubled] children that may not be at the same [academic] level as other children," said the Rev. L. Ronald Durham, president of the black-clergy alliance. "As a result, they develop a disruptive kind of behavior in the classroom."

The teachers were joined at the workshop, which concludes today, by guidance counselors, assistant principals, principals and a Department of Children & Families administrator. The workshop has been offered across the United States and Canada, as well as in Orange County, but Durham said it's the first time the training session has been in Volusia. About 16 people attended Thursday's session.

"We don't know what will happen to a child that goes

through hell, but the people in this room can make a difference," said Wells, of Woodburn, Ore., who has written 21 books on youth issues.

Wells told educators that because students have different emotional problems, they should be handled individually, rather than using a standard punishment.

Schools, she said, are not providing teachers with adequate training to handle emotionally charged students.

"Kids are changing radically,

but we continue to teach Beaver Cleaver," she said.

Wells told educators that child abuse, especially sexual abuse, is more pervasive than people think. Children are reluctant to tell teachers they are being abused, she said.

The most important sign from children that may indicate a troubled family is the need for secrecy, Wells said.

John Ariani, an Ormond Beach Middle School teacher who teaches students with severe emotional problems, said

he wanted to learn ways to handle his disruptive students.

"I came here so I can make an impact on the students I teach," Ariani said. "I'm their last chance before they get sent to a juvenile detention center."

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