"Use the Force, Luke!"

Managing Number One, First!

&

Staying Motivated to Make a Difference Using a Positive, Strength-Based Approach

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The Power of a Positive, Strength-Based Approach

What is it? An emerging approach to guiding students that is exceptionally positive and inspiring. It begins with belief that all young people have or can develop strengths and utilize past successes to mitigate problem behavior and enhance social and academic functioning. It continues with practice methods that identify and marshal these strengths for necessary changes.

Strength-based practice is essentially about two words: Attitude & Actions

Educators & caregivers maximize the potential of the students they serve when they convey an attitude to each and every one that says: *I believe in you. I know you will succeed this year and beyond and I am absolutely thrilled to be part of your life. Let's go!* And then, through their daily actions - show that they mean it.

"I was successful because you believed in me."
                                                                    - Ulysses S. Grant in a letter to Abraham Lincoln

Genuine believing helps kids to feel better about themselves, attacks self-doubt ("Self-doubt kills ability." – Degas), and, most importantly, provides hope – which is humanity's fuel.

Strength-based practice is, to a great extent, about the power of positive relationships.

Research has shown that a student entering high school with a history of committing aggressive acts is not likely to commit further acts of aggression (at his/her school) if the student believes there is at least one educator at the school that thinks "I'm terrific!"
                                                                    - James Garbarino, Ph.D.

"Countless studies have found that social relationships are the best guarantee of heightened well-being and lowered stress, both an antidote for depression and a prescription for high performance."
                                                                    - Shawn Achor, The Happiness Advantage, p.14

Have you ever watched an actor in a bad mood? If you're in a bad mood, it might be prudent to fake that you're not. Actors entertain for a few hours; educators save lives.
Attitude is a choice. A positive attitude sends the message: I want to be here. I care about you. I believe in you. And I know you will succeed. Which all leads to hope, happiness and success!

"The research has been absolutely clear for a long time: Students in all grades have a greater chance of success if the adults in the school believe in them, are available not only as teachers but also as caring human beings who understand that the relationship between teacher and student extends beyond the academic. Equally important, children need to understand that education is an exciting adventure not to be feared, but to embrace as strategies that will help them realize their goals throughout their lives. These simple *Common Care* standards need to be part of any education strategy. "

Almost two decades ago, Yale psychiatrist James Comer said, 'No significant learning happens without a significant relationship.' Today, our studies reveal that 43 percent of students in grades 5-12 lack a sense of engagement with their schools."   - Rick Miller, KidsatHope.com

According to Achor, what do all happy people have in common?

Broken Window Theory

      Meaningful Social Connections

      Strong Social Support Networks

A smile and a warm greeting is the face's way of giving an emotional hug. (Welcome to Moe's!) Do the "little" things right (e.g. greet warmly, maintain a neat and appealing environment, etc.) and big problems diminish. This is what we call the: *Broken Window Theory* (*"*How are you?" "Fantastic!" "All the better for seeing you!" "I'm living the dream, and you?")

"Countless studies have found that social relationships are the best guarantee of heightened well-being and lowered stress, both an antidote for depression and a prescription for high performance."

      - Shawn Achor, The Happiness Advantage, p.14

At-risk youth often struggle to create and maintain healthy and meaningful peer relationships due to excessive egocentrism and under-developed social skills often related to adverse developmental factors (i.e. failure to socially accommodate & subordinate) and/or neurological deficits.

New research in psychology and neuroscience finds: "We become more successful *when* we are happier and more positive. Students primed to feel happy before taking math achievement tests far outperform their neutral peers. *It turns out our brains are literally hardwired to perform at their best not when they are negative or even neutral, but when they are positive."*

      - Shawn Achor, The Happiness Advantage, p. 14

"Recent research shows that the *broadening effect* (how positive emotions broaden the amount of possibilities we process, making us more thoughtful, creative, and open to new ideas), is actually biological. Positive emotions flood our brains with dopamine and serotonin , chemicals that not only make us feel good, but dial up the learning centers of our brains to higher levels. Positive emotions help humans to organize new information, keep that information in the brain longer, and retrieve it faster later on. And they enable us to make and sustain more neural connections, which allows us to think more quickly and creatively, become more skilled at complex analysis and problem solving, and see and invent new ways of doing things. Brain change, once thought impossible, is now a well-known fact, one that is supported by some of the most rigorous and cutting-edge research in neuroscience."

      (Achor, P. 29)

Happiness is not the belief that we don't need to change; it is the realization that we can.
      Achor, The Happiness Advantage, p.24

Hope is Humanity's Fuel

The Brain & Resilience

All young persons have strengths and with positive support can change the course of their lives. They have resilient brains that can be "rewired" by positive learning experiences.

Resilience is the ability to thrive in spite of risk or adversity. The term comes from physics: a resilient objects bends under stress but then springs back rather than breaks. A resilient child not only springs back from adversity but can become stronger in the process. The feeling of accomplishment that comes from solving life problems is the core of resilience.

Resilience is a natural trait in all humans. Human brains are specifically wired to cope with problems. However, humans cannot survive and thrive alone – they require support and encouragement from others.

Resilience is a combination of inner strengths and external supports. All youngsters need supportive families, peers schools, and mentors to optimally sustain and develop their potential strengths.

Recent advances in resilience science find that the human brain is designed to be resilient. The brain is structured to overcome risk.

The brain is not like a computer, but more like a resilience library. It stores information bearing on survival and well-being and discards most other data. Problems can either be treated as occasions for punishment or opportunities for learning and growth.

Neuroplasticity refers to the reality that the brain is malleable and can therefore change throughout its existence. Positive, and frequently occurring experiences, can create new neural pathways that enhance functioning and produce growth.

Conversely, negative emotional experiences like rejection activate pain centers in the brain just as physical stress does. Brain scans indicate that being excluded or rejected triggers feelings of distress and a burst of activity in the area of the brain that also reacts to physical pain. Destructive or defensive reactions (fight, flight, fright) can be triggered by such negative emotional states. Thus, being able to think about problems, talk them over with others, or even write about feelings or express them creatively can be helpful.

(Much of this information was excerpted from
the paper: *The Resilient Brain*, by Brendtro & Longhurst)

The brain has three major parts with different functions:

• **The Logical Brain** (prefrontal cortex) handles language, reasoning, and emotional control so Humans can intelligently solve problems and make meaning of life events. This area of the brain does not fully develop until adulthood.

• **The Emotional Brain** (limbic brain) triggers emotions that motivate behavior. The *amygdala* scans for stimuli for cues of danger or interest, triggers emotions, and stores important events in long term memory.

• **The Survival Brain** (brain stem) reacts to danger by triggering fight or flight mechanisms. These reflexive behaviors insured survival in the wild but are not geared to the threats faced by humans in modern life.

Psychiatrist Bruce Perry (2004) has found that children traumatized by neglect and abuse overuse more primitive brain systems. Their survival brains are chronically stimulated, and they are at high risk of engaging in behaviors which hurt themselves or others.

These destructive emotional impulses can only be regulated by mature capacity in the higher brain centers. But many of these youngsters have not had the nurturance and learning experiences to fully develop brain pathways for self –control. Thus their heightened impulsivity, frustration, and motor hyperactivity combine with an underdeveloped capacity to accurately perceive situations and problem solve. This unfortunate combination severely limits the child's ability to maximize his or her potential.

As mentioned, Brendtro writes that human brain is like a library. Individuals who have suffered trauma remember everything. It's as if they have wings of pain, shame, and humiliation in the lower regions of their brains. And they can't afford to add any new books! A positive, safe, strength-based culture diminishes the fear that many traumatized kids live with. It replaces the wings of pain and shame with wings of accomplishment and pride. Positive, safe environments allow these individuals to venture outside their circles of protection (survival brain) and access (utilize) the higher regions of their brains – enhancing decision making, complex thinking, creativity, success and happiness.

The (survival) brain of a traumatized individual

Three Universal Truths from Kids at Hope (KidsatHope.org), an evidence based, strategic-cultural model which reverses the youth at risk" paradigm by establishing a holistic methodology that engages an entire school, youth organization and/or community:

1. Children succeed when they are surrounded by adults who believe they can succeed no exceptions.
2. Children succeed when they have meaningful and sustainable relationships with caring adults.
3. Children succeed when they can articulate their future in four domains rather than one, which is generally: Education and Career; Family; Community and Service; Hobbies and Recreation.

Help Kids At-Risk to Cultivate Friendships

Kids who grow up in dysfunctional homes and/or have cognitive-neurological conditions often have trouble making and sustaining friendships. Quite simply, many of these children are overly egocentric due to their upbringing (i.e. I need to take care of myself. I don't trust others to do so) or neurological handicap…and, as a result, have trouble with reciprocity and maintaining friendships. Kids entering kindergarten normally begin to *socially accommodate* and *subordinate* their needs to be in charge – they give up their outsized egocentrism – and, as a result, learn to make friends. At-risk kids struggle with accommodating and subordinating. Practice friendship building with them. Pair kids together to practice the give and take of relationships. Post friendship skills on a wall and frequently refer to them.

The Power of Motivation

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   "As teachers, let us commit to learning why "unmotivated" kids are unable to find their drive and inspiration on playing fields, on skateboard courses,
in poolrooms, in video arcades, on mall concourses…or at nine thousand
feet. What do these settings provide that we do not provide in the classroom?

  We constantly search for ways that we can "change the child." Perhaps the first significant change should come from us. Perhaps we should first analyze and change our policies, procedures, and practices when dealing with hard-to-reach kids. "   -
-Richard Lavoie, *The Motivation Breakthrough*,
Preface XIX

 "Most teachers and parents recognize that motivation is the key to learning.
Reflect for a moment on your favorite teacher in high school. The chances are that he was an effective motivator. He inspired you. He was not merely a teacher, he was also a leader.

  He did not necessarily make learning fun, but he made learning attainable and purposeful. Whether you serve children as a teacher, parent, coach, or instructor, you will multiply your effectiveness immeasurably if you learn how to motivate your charges and maintain that motivation throughout the learning process."

- Richard Lavoie, *The Motivation Breakthrough*, p.5

Understanding, Normalizing, and Learning from our Feelings

Think: *"What must have occurred in this kids life to get him or her to make me feel this way? Behavior is a message.*
No kid likes acting out (or in) If I could put truth serum into any youth who seriously misbehaves or self-harms, and ask: "Whom would you rather be? You, the kid who is struggling terribly? Or that kid over there who has lots of friends, a great family and a bright future ahead or him/herself?" No kid would pick him/herself.

Typical Feelings and/or Traps

1. Angry
2. Frustrated
3. Out-of-Control
4. Disgusted
5. Guilty
6. Indifferent
7. Furious
8. Afraid
9. Hopeless
10. Overwhelmed
11. Anxious
12. Savioristic
13. Add your own

Influenced by:

Personal baggage, limited resources, quality and quantity of supervision, training and temperament.

Feelings: Yes

Inappropriate Actions: NO!

All feelings are okay. Learn from them. They're diagnostic.

"Check Your Baggage at the Door"

This is a reflective questionnaire about who you are and why you're here. No one will see this document but you. It is given to increase your self-awareness about past experiences and how they can influence present day decisions, practices, and attitudes.

Were you raised in a happy home?

Did you receive enough attention from both parents?

What kind of limit setting did your folks employ? (e.g. spanking, yelling, logical consequences, punishment, etc.)

Were your parents physically affectionate to you?

What kind of values were taught and modeled?

Were there a lot of rules and structure in your home?

Did your childhood experiences influence your decision to work with kids?

What baggage should you check at the door?

What should come through?

The Observing Ego

"I'm REALLY ticked…I could just - it's okay. Stay cool…ALL feelings are normal. Learn from this. I'm suffering a bad self-esteem injury, but in a little while it will heal. ***Respond*** instead of ***React.*** *Use the Force, Betty!* …*I mean, Luke.*"

Lack of support leads to punitive actions.

Self-talk to use in order to keep your cool:

1. Think about the principle of lack of support being related to punitive actions – and don't go there. Think: *I can do anything for 90 more minutes*! Ask: You have the *audacity* to compare your life to theirs?

2. Visualize yourself driving home at the end of a brutal day with a BIG smile on your face *thinking I kept my cool today. I did good. I showed these kids they can trust me.*

3. Think about tomorrow: *If I respond instead of react to the end of the day, my relationships will grow stronger… and their behavior will improve..*

4. Think about a M.A.S.H. Unit: *When I'm at my worst, I need to give it my best!*

5. ***Use the Force, Luke!*** *Don't succumb to the Dark Side.*
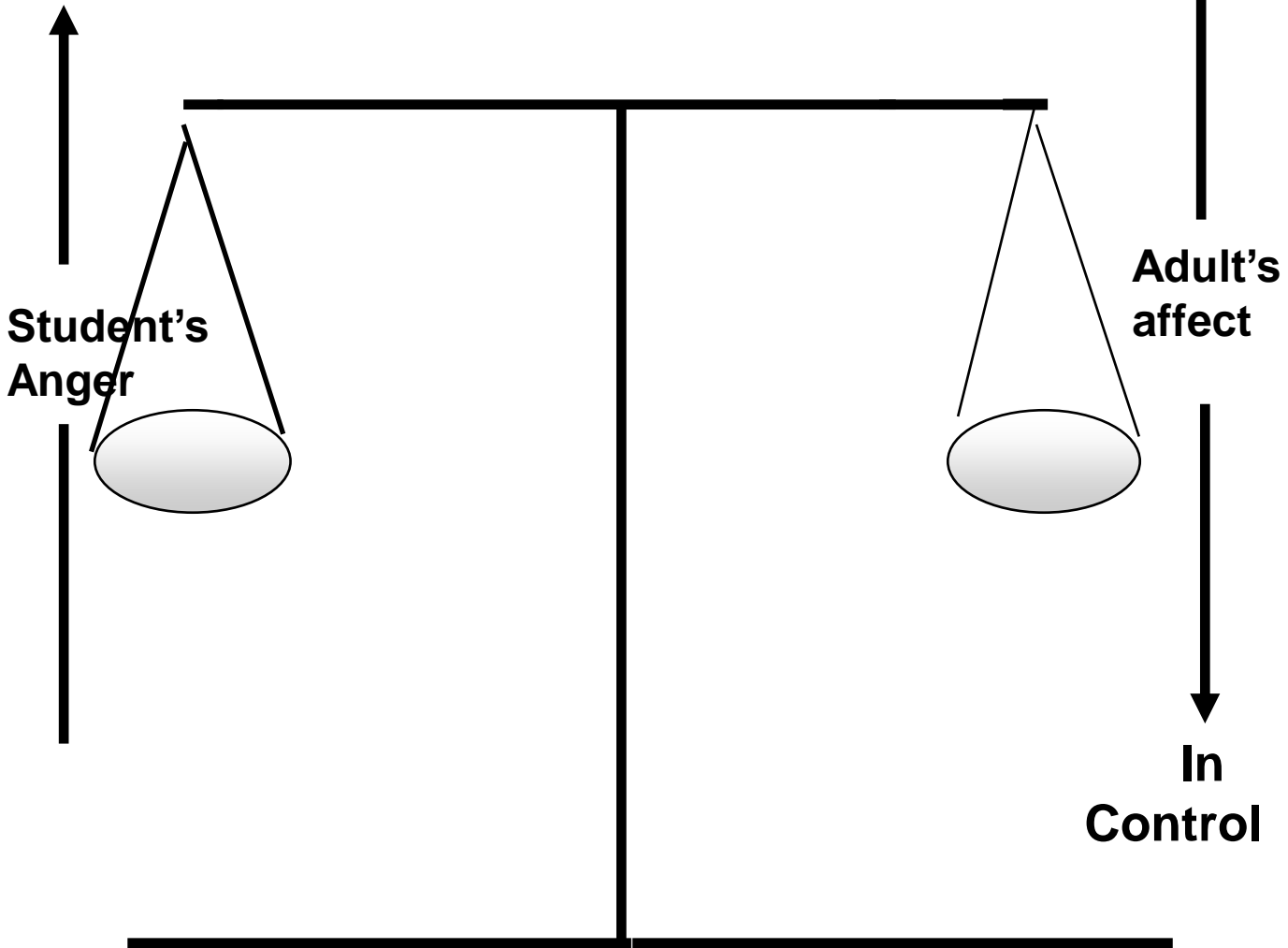
Respond = The Golden Rule

Don't say or do anything to a Student or group that you wouldn't want said or done to you.

Self esteem is fragile even when it's good!

9

The Affect Scale

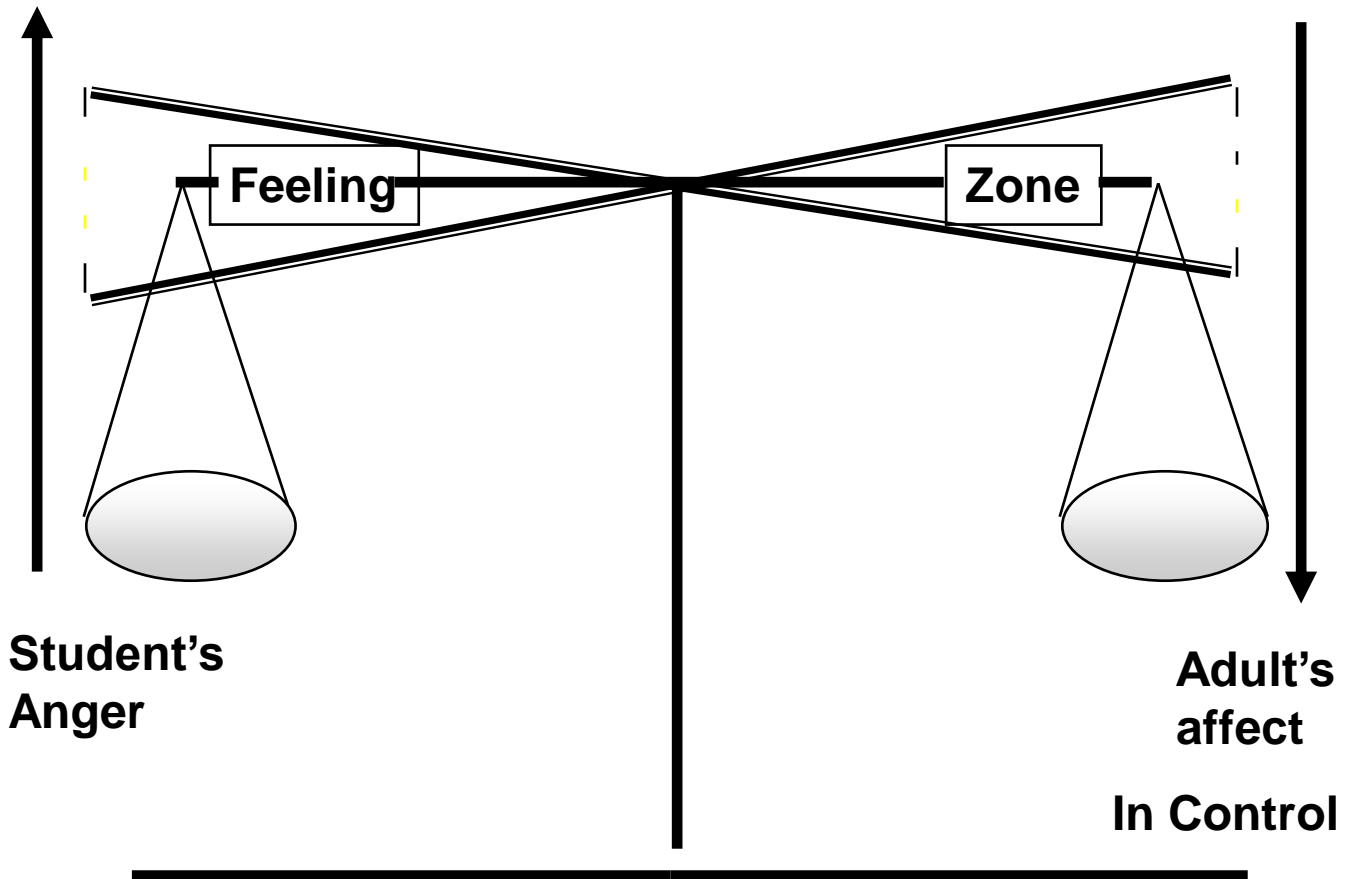**Out of Control**

Student's Anger

Adult's affect

In Control

Key: Establish inverse relationship

As they get louder, you become more quiet

The Affect Scale

Loss of Control

Feeling | **Zone**

Student's Anger

Adult's affect

In Control

Inside the "feeling zone" there is room to model affect-laden content.

Said in a controlled, but somewhat expressive manner:

"John, I'm really upset about the choice you just made."

"Mary, I'm angry about that decision..."

Key: If the student escalates through the zone, the adult's affect should grow more muted.

Content vs. Message

"You won't be around next week?"

2 weeks later…

"*You*…won't be around next week."

Use "I" or "We" instead of "You" and start requests with "Please" and finish with "Thank you." Proper language sends supportive messages.

Body Messages

"C'mon dude…let's get it done, and then we can boogey. NBD brother."

NBD = No Big Deal!

vs.

"You need to get it done now!"

Speak to students at eye level or below. Approach them in a calm manner. Be careful about your pace, posture, tone, facial expression, hand movements and body position.

Pre-Talk Considerations

Number One Goal: Engage!

Listen, empathize, paraphrase, offer help, apologize, repeat, offer hope…HOOK 'EM in!

• Don't be defensive. Anticipate negative comments – don't take them personally…

> *"It's an injury and it will heal."*

• Expect *displacement* (i.e. anger directed at you that is meant for someone else.)

• Assess your relationship and feelings toward the student(s). Think PIE (i.e. everyone deserves an equal slice)

 *"The kid who is pushing you away the most, is probably the one who needs you
    the most"* (*The Gus Chronicles I*, Appelstein)

• Practice the talk in your head. Longer discussions generally have a beginning, middle,
   and end phase.

Other considerations: _____

_____

_____

_____

Core Verbal Interventions

Non-Judgmental Exploration & Supportive Interventions:

"What's up?" "You seem really upset!" "This stinks!" "How can I help?" "I'd feel the same way."

Repeating or Paraphrasing w/qualifiers:

Child: "I hate doing this assignment!"
Parent: "You're saying that you're pretty upset about this assignment *right now*." (Use qualifiers: yet, at the moment, right now, etc.)

Youth: This thing will never end. It will never be the same, again.
Parent: *Sometimes,* we have thoughts like those, don't we? *Right now* we're going through a brutal period, right?"

Feelings Update:

"How do you feel about that?" It is critical for kids to identify their feelings during times of stress: Name it to tame it!

Sandwich Approach:

"I'm really glad that you wanted to get a good score on the test. Yet, you made a bad decision to cheat off Rick's paper. Please see me after school and we'll put some time into this. John, you are clearly smart enough to score well on your on. You've done so all year."

Praise and Encouragement:

"Way to go!" "That was fantastico!" "I like the way you sorted the clothes and folded them." (Try and praise the specific action(s) versus the child) "You've done this before and can do it again." "You have the ability to work this out, don't you?" "Take it slowly. You can do it."

Humor:

To a fifteen-year-old-year-old: "You're acting just like a fifteen-year-old!"

Apologizing:

"I'm sorry for raising my voice to you."

Reasoning Responses:

"What if every teacher let her students...."

Connecting Statements:

"It's not me against you. I'm on your side. I don't like having to send you to the office."

•**Empowering Interventions:**

•"What could you have done differently?" "What do you think we should do?"

Explorative (Control):

"How about we focus on what you can control?"

Explorative Responses (psychological):

"You don't usually get this upset. Could something else be bothering you?"

Explorative Responses (historical):

When kids make hopeless comments. There are two helpful ways to respond. One, explore if the kid or group have ever been in a similar situation and worked it out. (See below)
Two, if this is a first-time situation, bring up others who have been through it and succeeded…worked it out well.

"Have you ever completed such a difficult assignment? How'd you do it?"
"Have you ever got this angry and not lost your cool? Kept in control? Of course you have. What did you think and do to not blow it? Maybe you can remember those strategies – what you've done in the past – next time you feel yourself getting agitated."

"How many other kids across America, one year ago, were in your same shoes. Great kids going through a difficult divorce? And were very down like you are? Well, how many of those kids are feeling pretty good today? Have adjusted to the divorce and are back on track? And why are they back on track? So, maybe you can be one of those kids in the future if you use the same Kind of strategies."

Explorative (reflective):
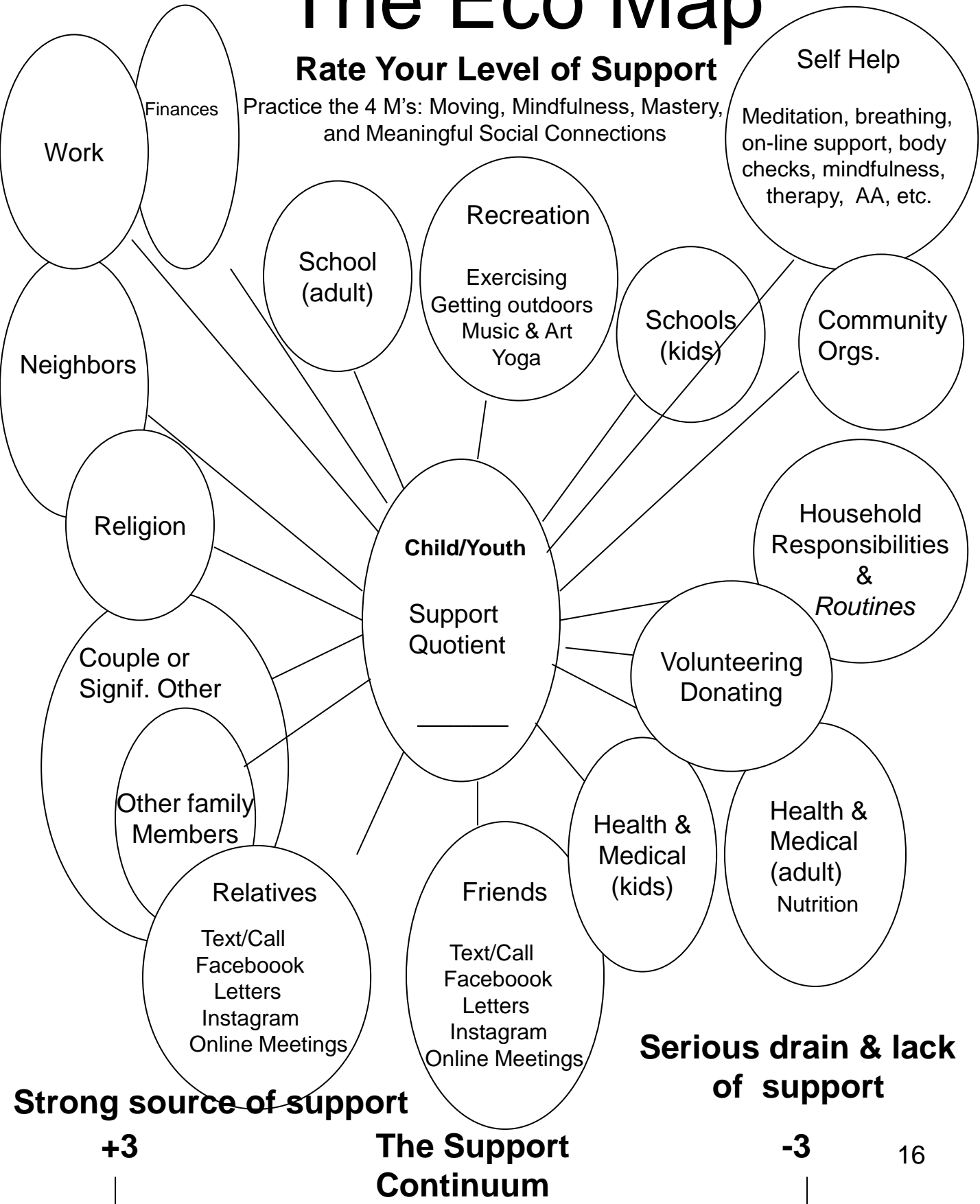
"Is that behavior working for you?"

Plan Making:

"Can we make a plan to handle this situation better next time?"
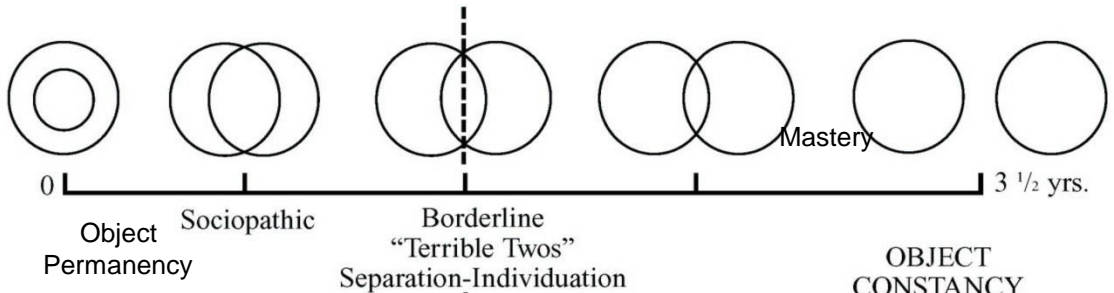
The Eco Map

Rate Your Level of Support

Practice the 4 M's: Moving, Mindfulness, Mastery, and Meaningful Social Connections

Work

Finances

Self Help

Meditation, breathing, on-line support, body checks, mindfulness, therapy, AA, etc.

School (adult)

Recreation

Exercising
Getting outdoors
Music & Art
Yoga

Schools (kids)

Community Orgs.

Neighbors

Religion

Child/Youth

Support Quotient

_____

Household Responsibilities & *Routines*

Couple or Signif. Other

Volunteering Donating

Other family Members

Health & Medical (kids)

Health & Medical (adult)

Nutrition

Relatives

Text/Call
Faceboook
Letters
Instagram
Online Meetings

Friends

Text/Call
Faceboook
Letters
Instagram
Online Meetings

Serious drain & lack of support

Strong source of support

+3

The Support Continuum

-3

16

THE HOLDING ENVIRONMENT
"A Total Environment Provision"

TASK: "good enough parenting"

Mastery

0 ⊢_____⊣ 3 ½ yrs.

Object Permanency Sociopathic Borderline "Terrible Twos" Separation-Individuation

OBJECT CONSTANCY
cohesive self
sense of self

5 yrs.

SPLITTING MECHANISM
Good mother/Bad mother
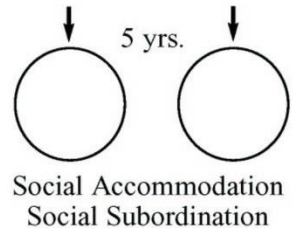
TASK: merge the good and bad introjects

G & B

?

G & B

Social Accommodation
Social Subordination

Foundation

FILLERS VS. TALKERS
DEFICITS VS. CONFLICT
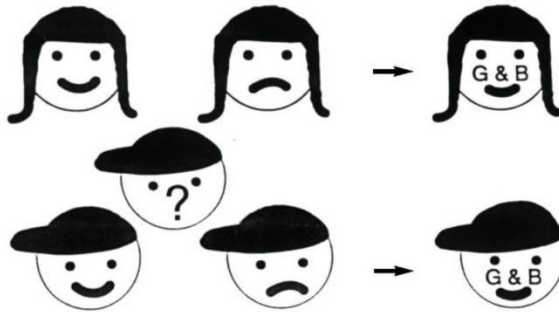
Effect of Separation
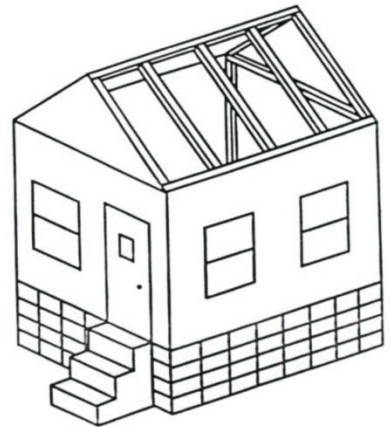
GOAL: Filling in the emptiness

13-17 years old = Second Phase of Separation-Individuation
In other words: "I'm moving on. I'm separating from my parents. I'm thinking about:

- Who I am?   - Where do I fit in?
- Where I'm going?   - Changes in my body?
- What I'll be?   - Sexuality?

17

Splitting

Individuals whose developmental needs get skewed, primarily during the terrible two's period, tend to do a lot of *splitting*. In other words, they try to get the adults in their lives at odds with one another.

Splitting is a normal developmental occurrence that rears its head during the terrible twos, when a child is beginning to separate and individuate and doesn't want to be told what to do. When the emerging two year old hears "No" for the first time, it causes stress, prompting the child to split: "When mom's being good to me, that must be the good mom. When she's saying 'No,' that's the bad mom." If parents remain balanced (i.e. set reasonable limits but stay warm and loving) during the "splitting" (terrible two) period, the child emerges with a good sense of self and understands that mom (and dad) can be both good or bad, but is one cohesive person, and I am too.

Children and youth who tend to seriously split the important adults in their lives, often do so because it brings them back to the developmental stage they still need to master. If the adult caregivers refrain from splitting and stay balanced in their approach to such youth, treatment progresses.

Splitting is a stress reaction. When one feels stress, in the haste to relieve it, polarization occurs: Whatever is causing the stress is bad, and the individual is good (i.e. a split occurs)

The stress of working in an under-supported home or child care setting coupled with the developmental need for some at-risk children and youth to provoke disharmony among the staff members, often results in programs having a great deal of inter-personal and departmental splitting. Therefore, it is essential for professionals to avoid splitting at all costs:

Splitting stops a youth – and a school or progrsm – from moving forward.

Student: My mother said you guys are too punitive.
Teacher: I like your mom. She cares a lot about you. I'll give her a call to make sure we're on the same page.

Tip: Whenever you feel yourself being drawn into a "split" think:

"I'm not as good as I think and they're not as bad. Stress and a number of other factors is causing me to polarize (i.e. See things in black-and-white terms) Stop it. Find the middle ground. Communicate more. Don't be played like a puppet. Stay professional.

Every home, school or agency that guides at-risk kids and families in America should hang the following symbol throughout its setting:

No
Splitting
Zone

18

Strength-Based Tools Checklist

Unflinching Positive Attitude																			
Reframing Understand>Reframe>Squeeze																			
Inspirational Metaphors: Poker, Melting Snowball, Roadblock, Train, Car ("We get better every Day.") Eagle																			
Solution-Focused Questions: Explorative Historical, Repeating w/Qualifiers, When & Will, Scaling Questions, Identifying In-Between Change, Amplifying Change Using Speculation, Exception Questions, Changing Perspective Questions																			
Provide Multiple Opportunities for Individual & Group Success & Trumpet Successes																			
Create a "User-Friendly" Environment for Cognitively Inflexible Young People. Use the A,B,C, baskets																			
Respect & Explore Cultural Diversity																			
The Millimeter Acknowledgement																			
Honoring Hellos & Goodbyes																			
Being Family Friendly																			
Using Seeing is Believing vs. Believing is Seeing (Standard Behavior Man.)																			

Technique																		
Used relationship-based limit setting. Consequences instead of punishment.																		
Practiced self-management strategies with the kids (e.g. wants and needs)																		
One-Line Raps																		
Repetitive Quizzing (The Stretch)																		
Externalizing & Naming Positive and Negative Behaviors																		
Humor (But Not Sarcasm)																		
Incentive Plans that Reward/Celebrate Improvement. Creative Use of the Medium of Exchange (e.g. Billy Dollar)																		
The Observing Ego (Respond instead of React): "It's an injury and it will heal." Lack of Support Leads to Punitive Actions																		
Affect Scale																		
Content/Message ("Please & Thank you. I, We vs. "You".																		
Non-Threatening Non-Verbal Interventions																		
Core Verbal Techniques: Support & Help, Repeating and/or Paraphrasing, Feelings Exploration, Sandwich Approach, Praise & Encouragement, Humor, Apologizing, Reasoning, Explorative (Psychological, Historical, Reflective, Plan Making)																		