



Building on the Strengths of Youth Who Have Endured Hardships

Risky Business Prevention Conference
Carroll County Health Department

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The Center for Parent and Teen Communication
The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia
Covenant House

Building on the Strengths of Youth Who Have Endured Hardships

ALL young people benefit when we commit to building on the strengths of youth that have been placed at risk.



An Inflection Point in Human History

Childhood Trauma May Affect:

The Body

The Brain

Behavior

Genetics

UNLESS –

What Determines if Trauma May or May Not Produce Harm?



From Generation to Generation of Healers: Wisdom Passed Along Through Intentional Practices



To build strong youth we need to serve them with . . .

A Model that includes all we've learned from

- ✓ Positive Youth Development
- ✓ Resilience Building Strategies
- ✓ Trauma-sensitive Practices
- ✓ Restorative Practices

A model that acknowledges pain, but sees the best in people.

A model that recognizes the undermining forces of low expectations but prevents a new label from being applied to already marginalized communities. In sharp contrast, it must recognize the inherent strengths of individuals, communities, and cultures.

At the root of all models is the primacy and power of human relationships both to build strong, successful youth and to heal those who have endured hardships

All Models in Balance – No Jargon

We know young people need **safe, secure, sustained relationships** to thrive. We even know that such relationships can allow them to heal from hard pasts. We must guide them so they are accountable to being their best selves. When we do so, they must know that our high expectations are rooted in our caring. Ideally **our efforts at accountability must enhance, rather than disrupt, our protective relationships.**

Reaching Teens

**STRENGTH-BASED, TRAUMA-SENSITIVE,
RESILIENCE-BUILDING COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES
ROOTED IN POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT**

Editor: Ken R. Ginsburg, MD, MS Ed, FAAP, FSAHM
Associate Editor: Zachary Brett Ramirez McClain, MD



2nd Edition

- 400+ videos.
- Interdisciplinary guidance from 100+ youth-serving professionals and expert advice from teens.
- Earn up to 65 CME/CEU credit hours.

American Academy of Pediatrics

DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN®



Why the greatest progress with adolescents, but especially for those with the hardest lives, depend on our relationships



Bruce Perry, MD, PH D
Neuro Sequential Model of
Therapeutics



**Understanding and Promoting Positive
Development – And Taking Care Not to
Undermine Adult Engagement**

The Foundational Questions of Adolescence

- Who Am I?
- Am I Normal?
- How Do I Fit In?

Identity Development

Who Am I?

A question of many parts.

How do I fit in?

Effects social development and sometimes risk.

Am I Normal?

Effects emotional development and mental health.

This guides us to better understand the imperative of accepting, uplifting, and embracing youth different from many peers.

The questions adults ask themselves about *their* identity in relationship with adolescents.

- Parents
 - Do I still matter?
- Youth serving professionals and community members
 - Can I make a difference?

Why are these even questions?





Teen Mental Health **Crisis!!**



KALW youth mental health crisis ...



Regis College Online the Youth Mental Health Crisis ...



ABC News - The Walt Disney Co... youth mental health crisis ...



The Hill Parents worry about growing post ...



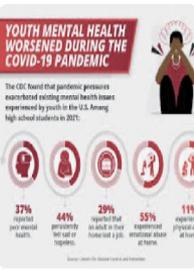
Northern Virginia Magazine Teen Mental Health Crisis



Education Week Youth Mental Health Crisis ...



Serve Boldly Youth Mental Health...



Regis College Online the Youth Mental Health Crisis...



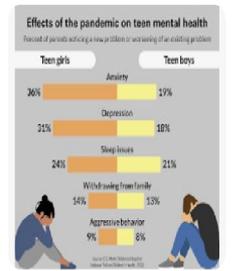
Parents Teens Are in a Men...



Cleveland Clinic Health Essentials Teen Mental Health: How To Help Your Child



At Risk Youth Programs Teen Mental Health During the Holidays ...



National Poll on Children's Health pandemic on teen mental health...



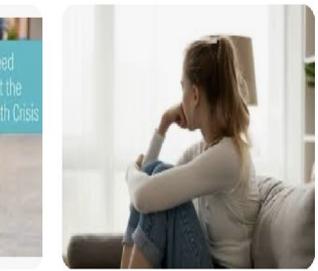
XR Health The mental health crisis among teens ...



Texas Public Radio COVID-19 Brought A Mental Health Crisis ...



Brillia Teen Mental Health Crisis: Why Mental ...



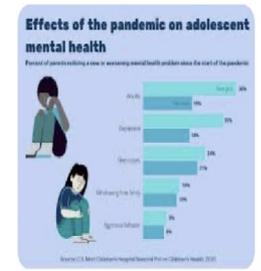
CNN Adolescent mental health shows sign...



Beneath the Stripes Growing Mental He...



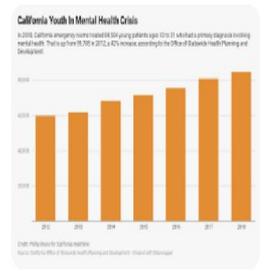
Psychology Today Teen Mental Health...



The Jordan Institute for Families Adolescent Mental Health is in Cri...



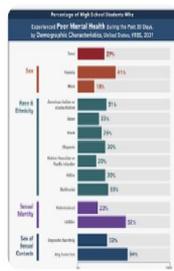
CNN Teen mental health in crisis ...



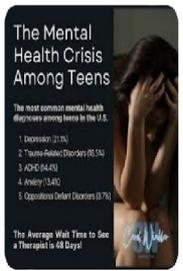
KFF Health News Medical Care For Mental Health Issu...



Caron Treatment Centers A Mental Health Crisis



NBC News Teen mental health: CD...



Carol Winkler Psychiatry The Mental Health Crisis...



The Conversation The mental health crisis among Ame...



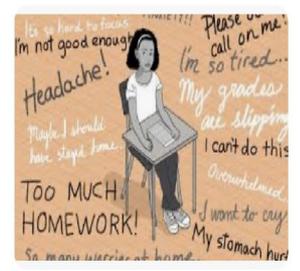
NPR Are screens causing a teen depr...



Brain Harmony Surgeon General: Youth Mental Heal...



Financial Times The teen mental health crisis: a ...



NPR The Mental Health Crisis In Our Schools ...



AY Magazine Youth Mental Health...



Regis College Online the Youth Mental Health Crisis...

We must help people understand developmental context. This triggers empathy rather than condemnation.

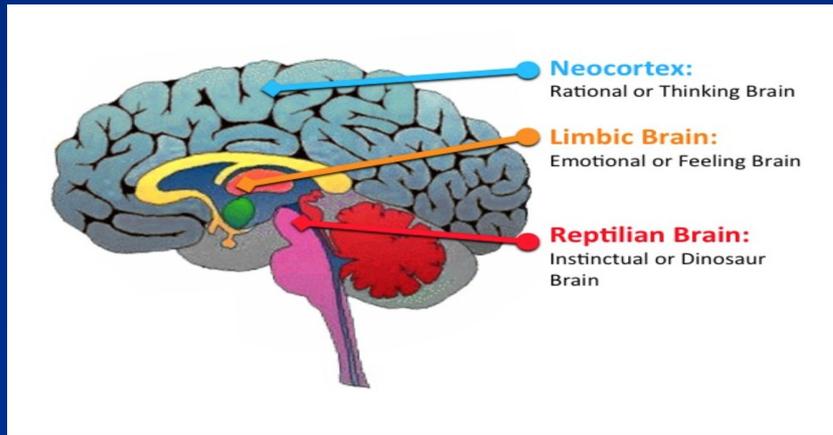
Adolescence is about:

- Gaining independence
- Forming social connections
- Planning the next phase of your life
- Honing your idealism
- Looking for adult role models

Brain Development for Communicators

NeuroScience 101

- **Neuroplasticity** – The brain can change and reshape itself – for better or worse – to adapt to its environment.
- All children are developing, but Adolescence is a time of astoundingly rapid brain growth where brains remain plastic
... Until at least age **25**



Emotional development and Cognitive development are pretty even during childhood, but emotional development takes off during adolescence. This is a critical part of healthy development producing an empathetic and compassionate human.

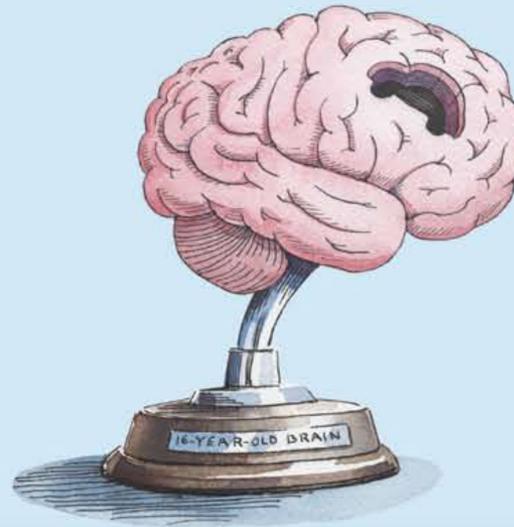
Development is a process not an event

Reasoning ability ALWAYS exists, but is solidifying

The **WRONG** Way to See It

Why do most 16-year-olds drive like they're
missing a part of their brain?

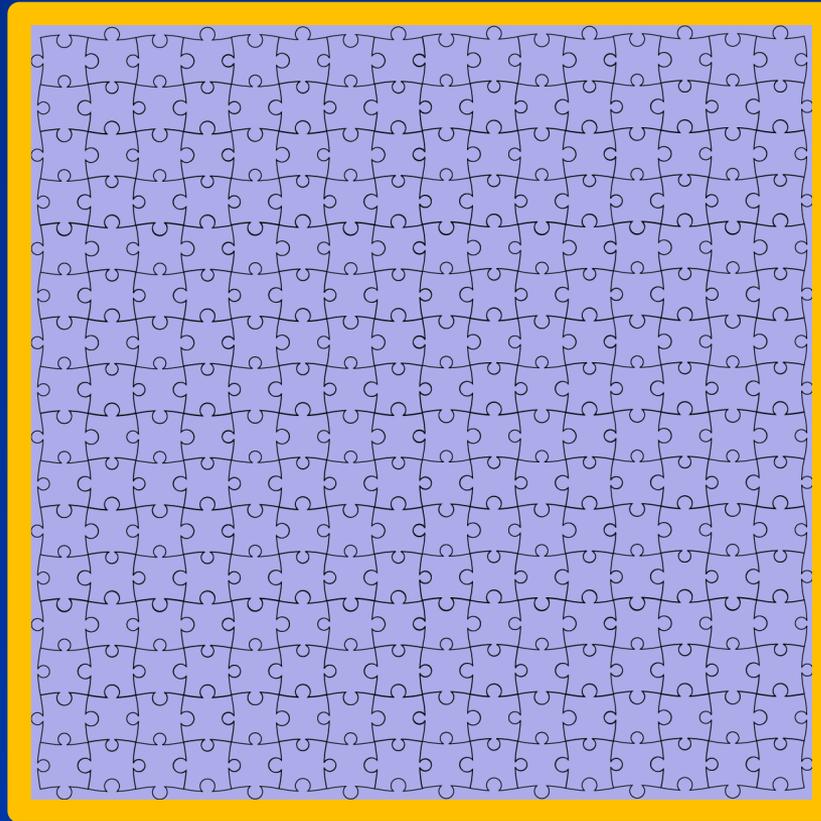
— (M) —
BECAUSE THEY ARE.



The Right Way to See It: A Critically Important Opportunity to Enrich and Protect Youth

- Adolescents are super-learners
- Adolescents are emotionally brilliant, but may not yet have reached the ability to always regulate their emotions.
- Experimentation is a necessity, it is our job to create enriching, exciting, **safe** opportunities for our “natural explorers” to grow.
- It is also our job to protect youth from harm

Why natural explorers must push the edges. And, our role.



Communication for the Developing Brain

(calming emotional reactions – activating reasoning abilities)



Resilience-Building Strategies



Resilience



The ability to overcome adversity

The diagram features two light blue arrows pointing in opposite directions, one to the left and one to the right. The left arrow is positioned slightly higher than the right arrow. The text 'The ability to overcome adversity' is centered within the left arrow, and 'The capacity to bounce back' is centered within the right arrow. The arrows are set against a solid dark blue background.

The capacity to bounce back

Resilience



To survive
difficult times

To thrive in the
best of times

Resilience is (partly) a Mindset

(Adrenaline)





**Cortisol Driven Stress
Uncertainty May Be a Major Driver of Harm**

Life is filled with uncertainties, the more humans can anticipate problems the less “on guard” we will be.

The more humans have other people standing by them and helping them manage uncertainty the more they can withstand stress.

Resilience

is

NOT

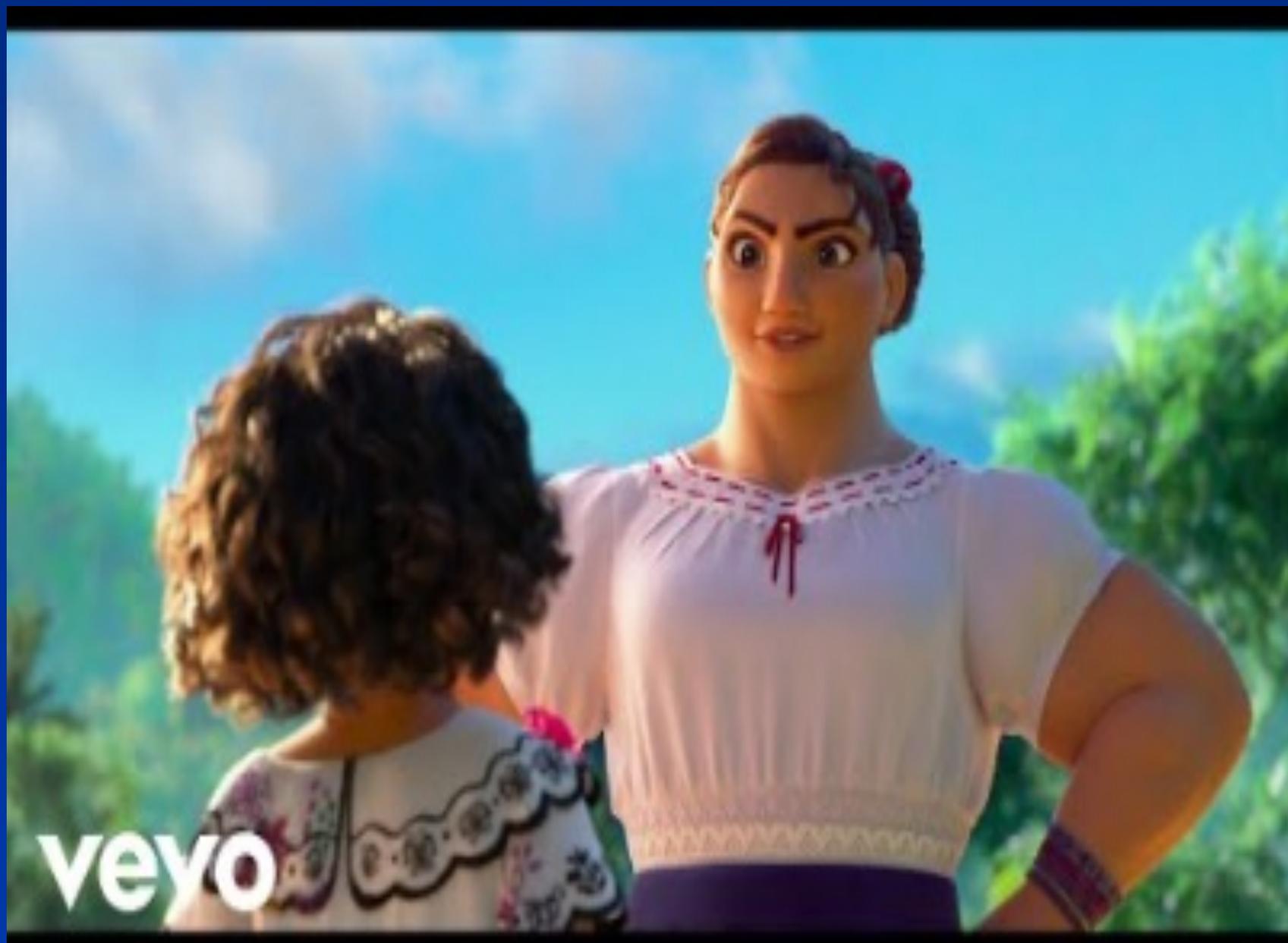
Invulnerability

Resilience

can

be

Exhausting



The 7 C's of Resilience

Confidence

Competence

Connection

Character

Contribution

Coping

Control



(Little, 1993; Pittman et al., 2003; Eccles and Gootman , 2002; Roth and Brooks-Gunn 2003; Lerner, 2004; Ginsburg, 2006; Frankowski, Leader & Duncan, 2009)

When Resilience Reaches Its Limits

Physical symptoms

Fatigue

Disinterest

Dropping grades

Sad mood

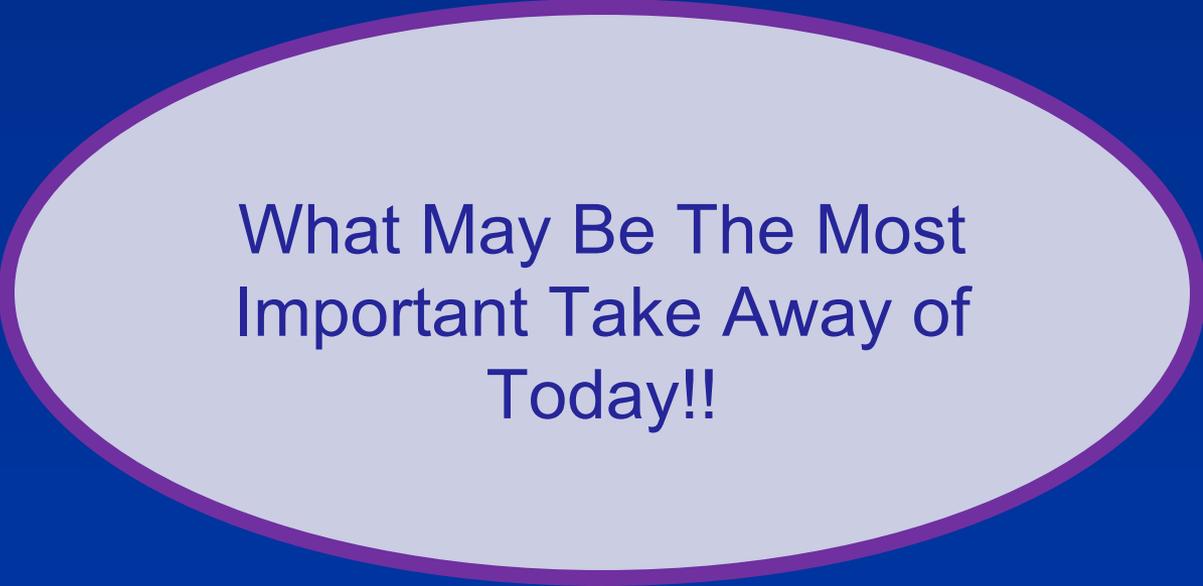
Irritability/anger

Substance use

Above all . . . human connection



Building/Maintaining Connections with Youth that Need Us the Most



What May Be The Most
Important Take Away of
Today!!

We Must Use Praise Wisely

Praise incorrectly offered is
not strength-based

We must help people know we'll be there when they most need us

A white speech bubble with a dark blue outline and a tail pointing to the right. Inside the bubble, the text "“ I need someone who has my back.”" is written in a dark blue, sans-serif font.

“ I need someone
who has my back.”

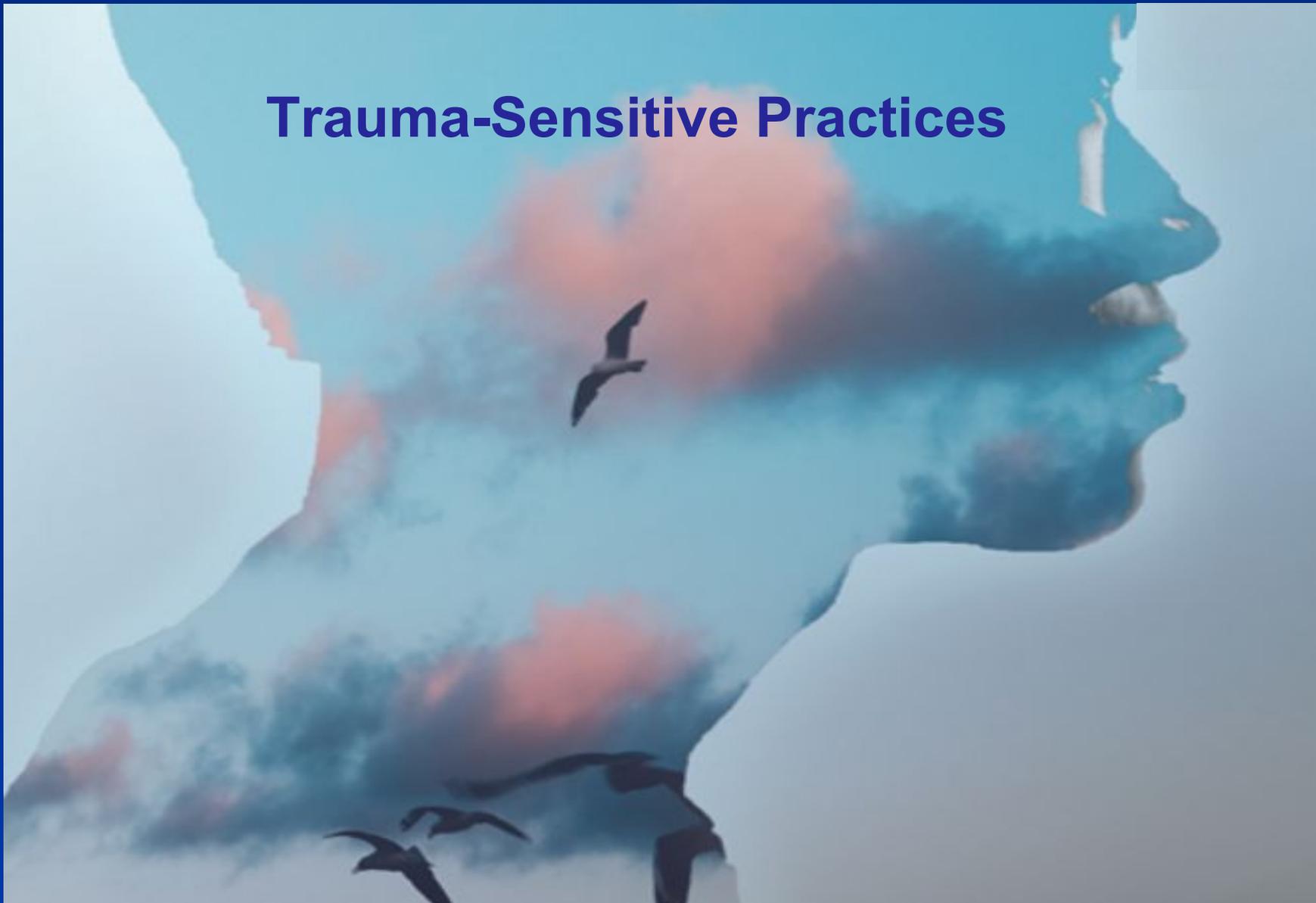
Behavior involves forward and backward movement

When praise looks like cheerleading it backfires

“Friendship” triggers adolescent fears

Make praise about relationship

Trauma-Sensitive Practices



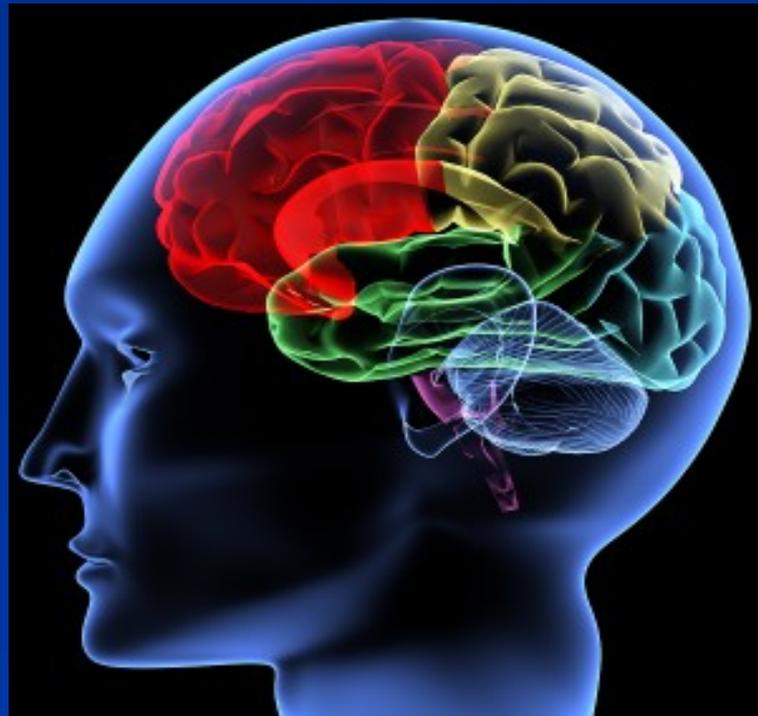
Trauma Does Not Break Us . . .

- Predictive is Not a Determinant
- People who have endured hardships are deserving of focused attention and extra protective forces

When the Reactive Centers of the Brain are Chronically Activated The Brain Molds Itself to Remain “On Guard”



Every interaction is an opportunity to offer safety and security and thereby quiet the vigilant part of the brain . In doing so, **the protector's brain** may have protection to spare - offered through compassion and altruism.



The imperative of shifting to an
understanding of the protector's brain

“Doc, I have an anger problem.”

I’ll bet you’ve earned it.

Do you get frustrated or react more quickly than other people do?

Do you see problems before others do? Do you sense danger?

Do you protect the people you care about?

You have a protector’s brain. You’ve earned it. Your sensitivity, you always thinking about keeping yourself and others safe, that is your POWER—your superpower even—you are somebody who is built to protect yourself and others.

Your challenge moving forward is to know when to use your superpower and to better understand when it might get in your way. Can we work together so you can learn how and when to use this strength of yours?”

The Effect of Adverse Experiences on Behavior



Key Principles of Trauma Sensitive Practices

1. Knowing what is about you and what is not about you (Meaning anger or acting out directed towards may not be based on anything you've done)
2. Changing your lens from “What’s wrong with you!” to “What happened to you?”
3. Seeing people as they deserve to be seen, not based on labels they’ve received or behaviors they’ve displayed
4. Giving control back to people from whom control has been taken away

How Do Hard Lives Make People Experience Interactions and Transitions Differently?

Every new situation is potentially **dangerous**

- Where's the tiger hiding in the grass?
- Am I safe?
- What if I am judged? Will I be rejected?
- Should I pretend I don't care?
- Should I push them away, so they don't come too close?
- Should I strike first?

Working with Youth Who Have Suffered is Not Always Affirming

- Youth who need us the most are often those who push us away
- Youth who need us the most are often those who push our buttons
- Youth who need us the most, raise uncomfortable feelings in us
- Youth who need us the most withhold rewards from us.

Nobody dared go near the tower. A fearsome dragon sat on its top.

Until one day, a knight rode up. "Do you need help to get down?"

"Please."

O. Westin. Micro SF/F Stories



Tying it Together:

**Being the Calming and Reinforcing Presence Youth
Deserve**

Strength-based Communication

Strength- based communication is rooted in potential

Problem Free . . .

. . . Is not fully prepared!

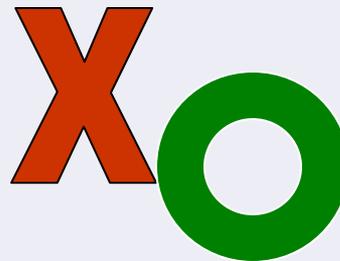
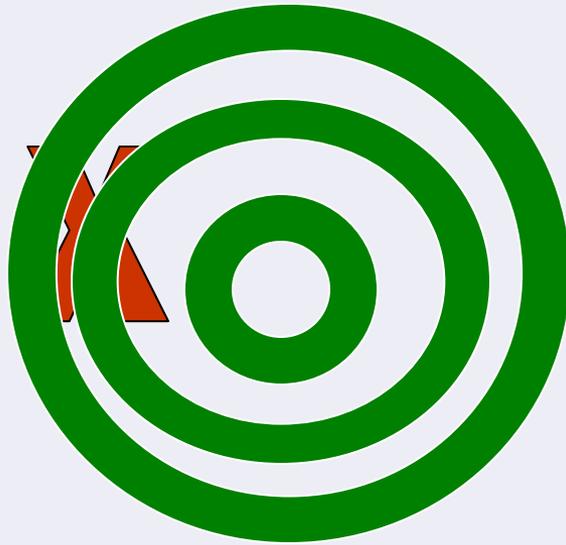
Karen Pittman

Strength-based Communication is about battling shame, stigma, and demoralization

- It is about listening until genuine strengths are revealed
- It is about highlighting and elevating their strengths

Seeing strengths . . .

. . . Leveraging strengths to address challenges



“Love is seeing someone as they deserve to be seen, *as they really are* , not through the lens of the behaviors they have sometimes needed to display.”



Love!?!

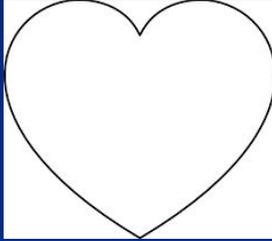
Loving???

Loving is Not the Same as Liking

It is Much Safer

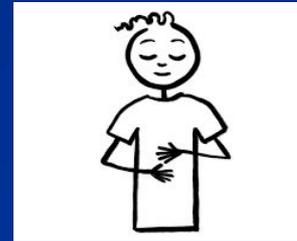
And So Much Easier

I know you can _____ because you have _____.



Heart

Belly



Head

Hands



Giving Youth Control Over Their Decisions

When we offer choices

When we expand their window of tolerance through the language of resilience

When we coregulate as a path towards clear thinking

When we calmly guide them a step at a time to make wise decisions

When we parent or “adult” them wisely

When we help them build stress management skills

Every time we enable the choices that come from
clear thinking . . . But how do we get there?

Stress, and coregulation

Good Stress

Helps us handle challenges and allows us to stretch just far enough that we are likely to grow from the experience.

We should support young people with the skill-sets that draw the greatest developmental growth from good stress.

Dr. Bruce McEwen

Toxic Stress

Toxic stress is more than we can handle in a healthy way and is disruptive to our well-being. We must protect people of all ages from toxic stress.

Dr. Bruce McEwen

Tolerable Stress

Tolerable stress is uncomfortable but within our window of tolerance because we can cope with it. What is tolerable is subjective and fluid.

It is in the window of tolerable stress that we can make the difference. It's about how much someone can handle depending on what else is on their plate and what stress management strategies they possess. The power of **coregulation** is that caring adult presence changes the equation by making challenges tolerable.

Dr. Bruce McEwen

The language of resilience increases the window of tolerable stress

Our words make youth (a bit) more comfortable with discomfort

Although we'd like to protect young people from what might hurt them, the best we can do is prepare them to handle life even when it gets tough. Knowing **preparation is protection**, we do our best when we help them understand they can take control over their own lives.

Words Express How We Think

With our words, we express whether we see youth as vulnerable. Fragile. Incapable.

Our language can also state clearly that we think they are safe. Strong. Capable.

Words Express How We Think

When we jump in with solutions, we deny youth the space to arrive at their own. On the other hand, when we listen to them and act as a sounding board, we give them the opportunity to be thoughtful.

Notice in these examples. . .

- Feelings are validated. The problem is acknowledged as real. It is neither magnified nor minimized.
- Sensitivity is acknowledged as uncomfortable, but a strength to be developed.
- There is an assumption that the young person is developing and learning. Their thoughts and opinions are elicited.
- Adults offer their presence and guidance, not the solutions.

Say this . . .
When Engaging
a Young
Person's
Thoughtfulness

Not that . . .

What do you
think. I'm here
to listen.

I think . . .

Tell me what
you understand

You're too
young to
understand.

Say this . . . about problem solving or solution building	Not that . . .
You haven't yet been able to . . .	You can't . . .
What do you think is the best way to handle this? How can I support your plan?	I'll handle this for you.
Take one step at a time. When you've accomplished something small, you'll prove you can succeed and feel less overwhelmed.	Just get started

Say this . . . about a bad experience	Not that . . .
This must feel awful. In time, it will hurt less. And you'll be stronger for the experience.	It's not that bad.
You'll get through this . . .	I'll protect you.

**Say this . . . about
emotional distress**

Not that . . .

**The best thing about you
is how much you care.
Your challenge in life will
be to learn how to care
without hurting too much
inside.**

You're too sensitive.

**It is great to think as
much as you do. Your
challenge is to remind
yourself you'll be able to
handle this; you just have
to think through a
solution.**

You worry too much.

Say this . . . about seeking help	Not that . . .
A strong person learns how to reach out to others.	A strong person handles tough times
It'll take time. But your own strength and the support you'll get from those who care about you, will help you heal.	Just get past it.
You deserve to feel better.	You need help

Calmness, even amid chaos, helps youth access their thinking powers and compassionate natures

- Co-regulation
 - Amygdala to amygdala communication
 - Key to de-escalation
 - Critical to anticipation
 - Key to allowing “Mother Teresa” to surface







The science of adult presence



Effective Adulting

(Drawing from Parenting Literature)



Balancing Love, Warmth, and Monitoring

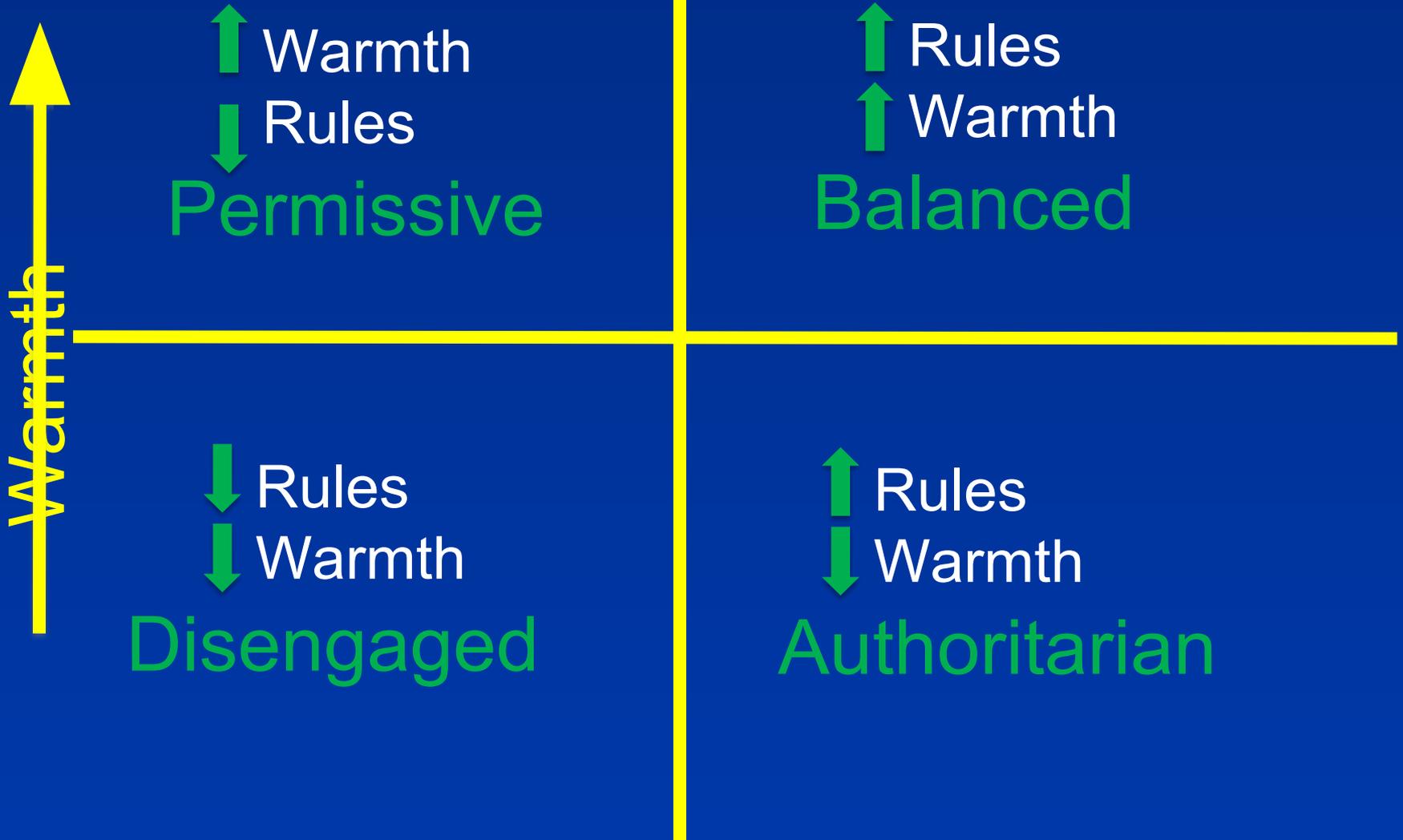


Parenting or “Adulting” Style

Love, **warmth** and
responsiveness

Monitoring, **rules** and
boundaries

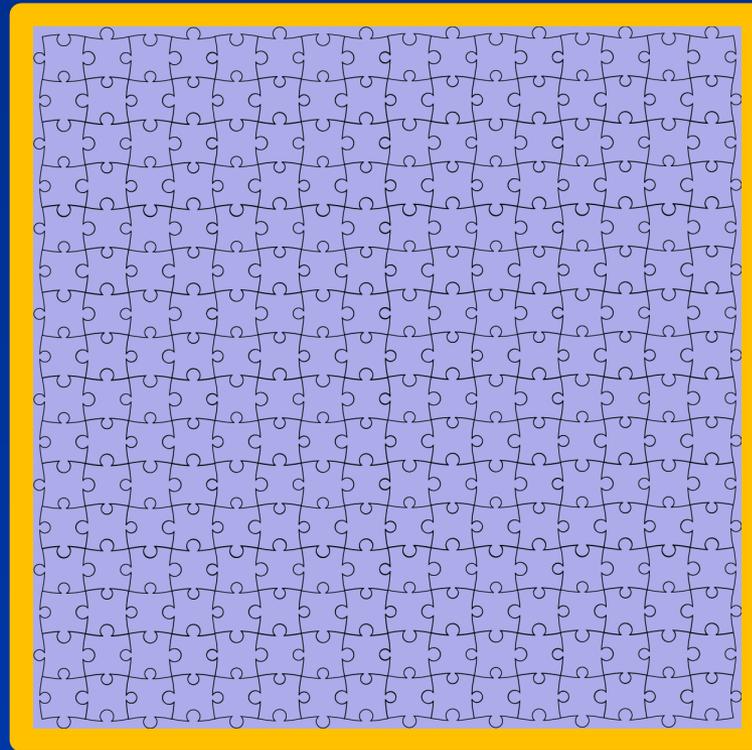
Rules

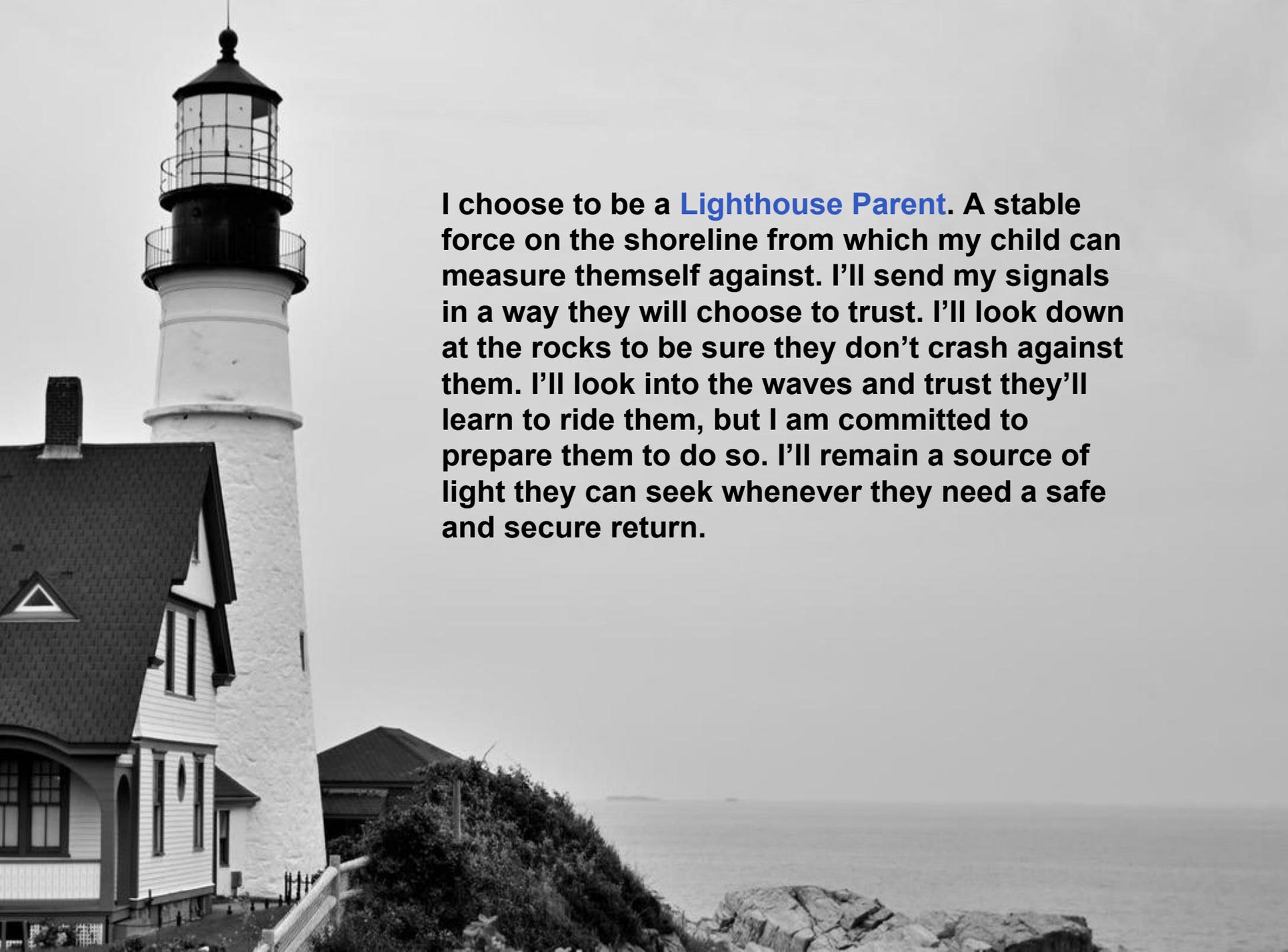


Effective Monitoring

(or, really knowing what's going on)

Youth need and appreciate caring boundaries, but
reject control





I choose to be a **Lighthouse Parent**. A stable force on the shoreline from which my child can measure themselves against. I'll send my signals in a way they will choose to trust. I'll look down at the rocks to be sure they don't crash against them. I'll look into the waves and trust they'll learn to ride them, but I am committed to prepare them to do so. I'll remain a source of light they can seek whenever they need a safe and secure return.

Brief Interventions Should . . .

Engage thinking capacities instead of trigger emotional responses

- Build on an existing strength
- Point towards a desired outcome
- Be delivered in language young people understand
- Be delivered with cold communication
 - No more lectures!!!!!!
- Enable choice as a key to honoring development
- Enable choice to restore control, and in a commitment to being trauma-sensitive
- Engage parents whenever possible

Cognitive Development

The Key to
Communication
and planning

Cognitive Development



Key Point

Related to brain development and state of mind

Cognitive Development

As adolescents mature, they can better reason through problems, increasingly make wise decisions, interpret nuance and people's underlying intentions.



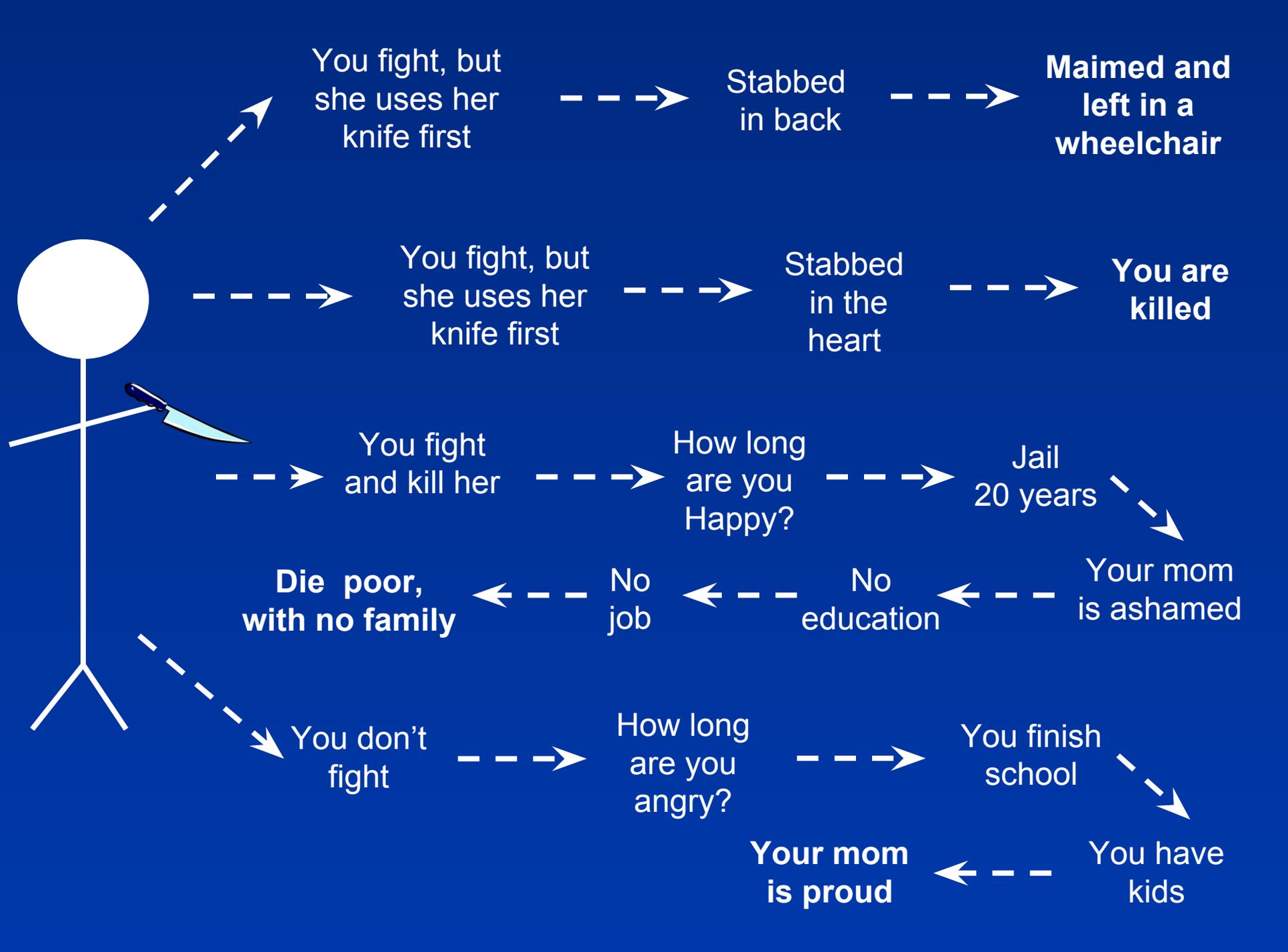
$$1 + 3 = 4$$



$$x = \sqrt[3]{2 + \frac{10}{3\sqrt{3}}} + \sqrt[3]{2 - \frac{10}{3\sqrt{3}}}$$



Decision Trees



You fight, but she uses her knife first

Stabbed in back

Maimed and left in a wheelchair

You fight, but she uses her knife first

Stabbed in the heart

You are killed

You fight and kill her

How long are you Happy?

Jail 20 years

Your mom is ashamed

Die poor, with no family

No job

No education

You don't fight

How long are you angry?

You finish school

You have kids

Your mom is proud

The World Happens to Me

or

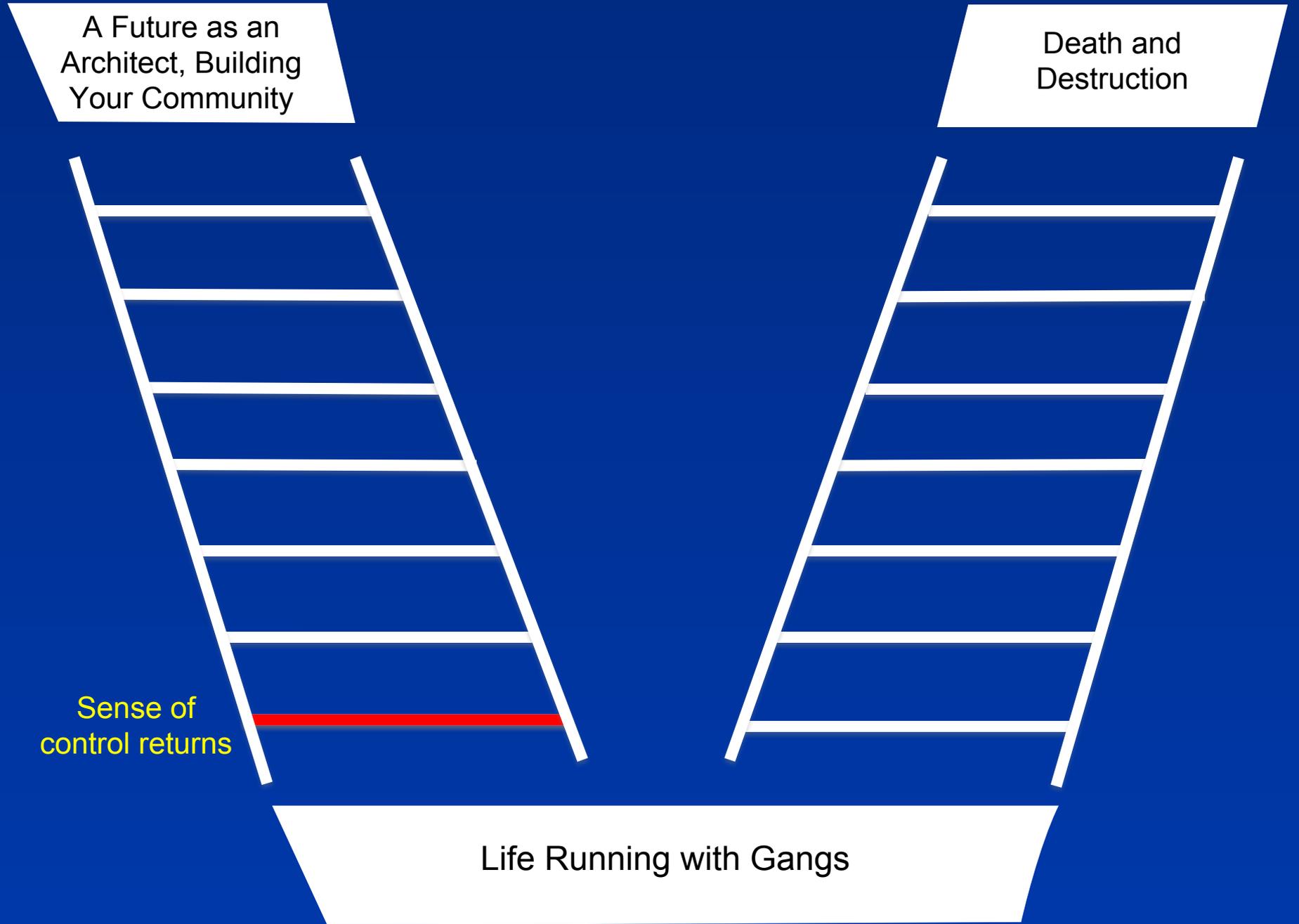
I control my Destiny

A Future as an
Architect, Building
Your Community

Death and
Destruction

Sense of
control returns

Life Running with Gangs



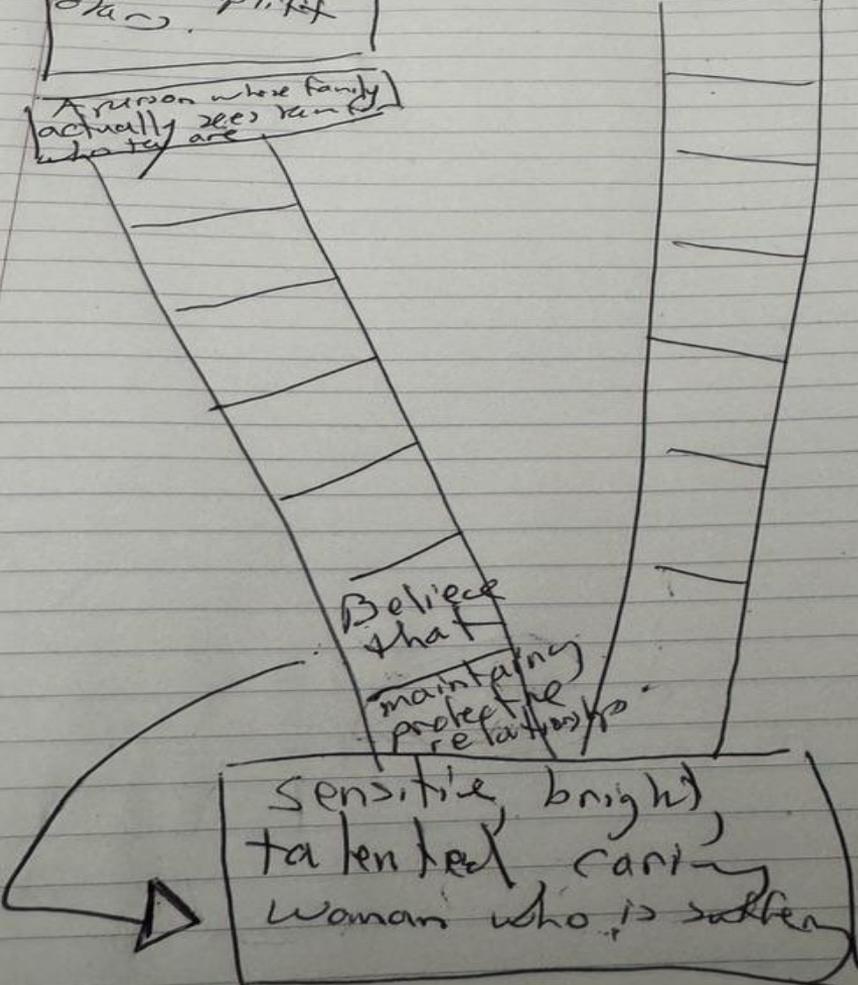
Healer, who
uses her journey
of pain to relate
to an uplift
ok.

Jails,
institutions,
&
death

A person whose family
actually sees her
who they are

Believe
that
maintaining
protective
relationships

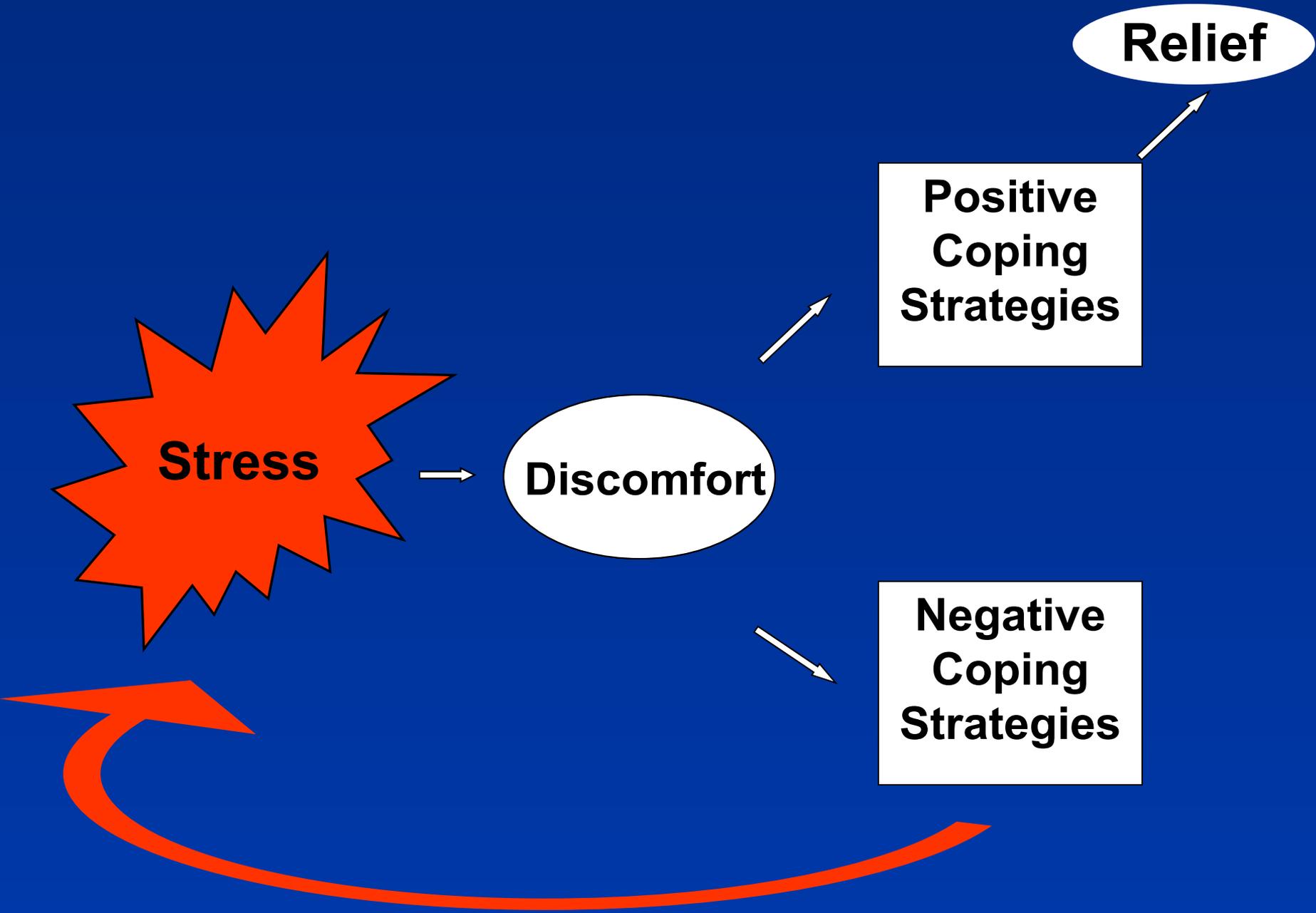
Sensitive, bright,
talkative, caring
woman who is suffering

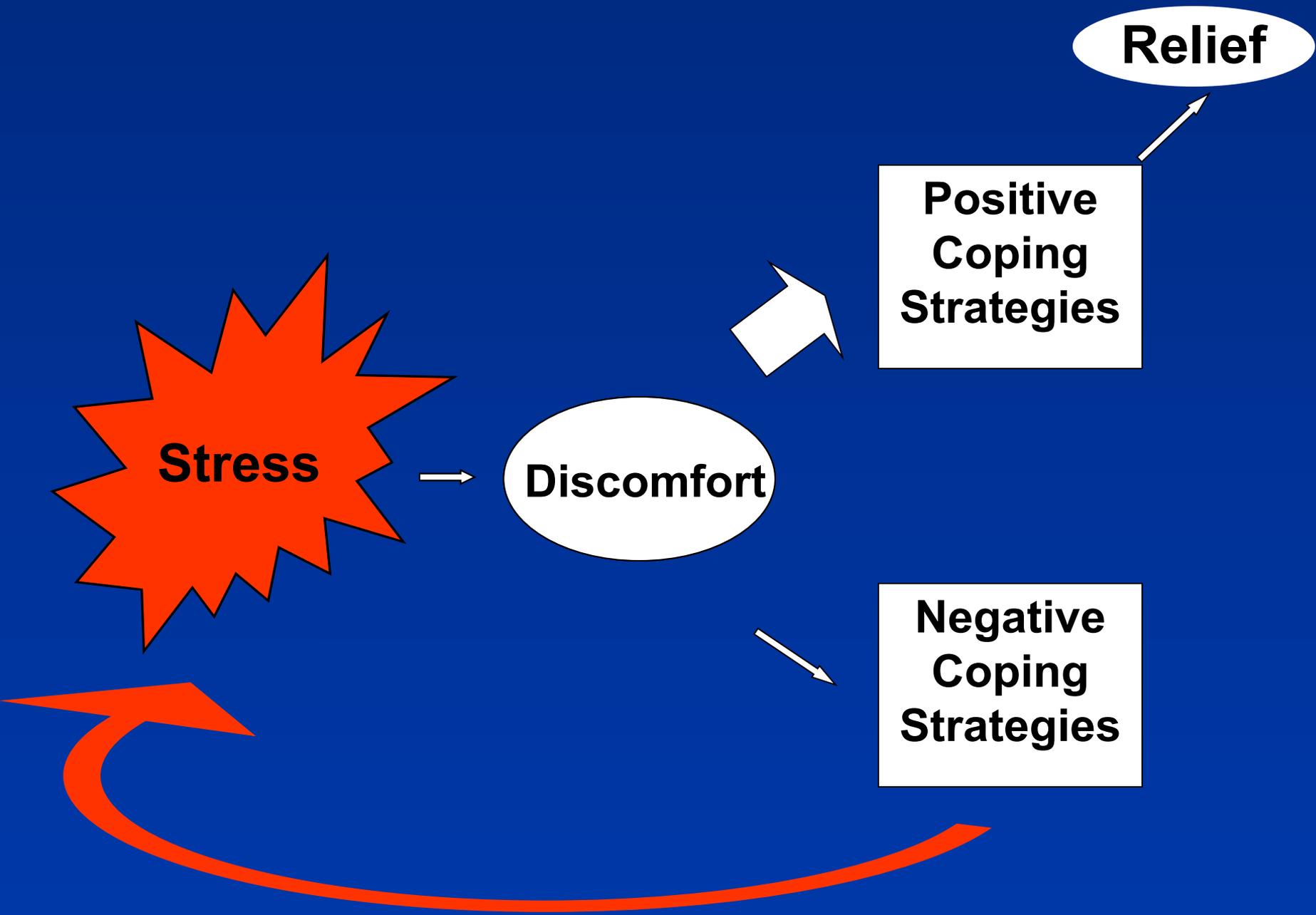


We gain control when we can wisely
manage stress

Stress Management and Resilience

- Is about learning to cope, in a positive way with life's inevitable stressors
- People who can choose positive coping strategies gain control





What happens to a generation who thinks they are supposed to be happy?

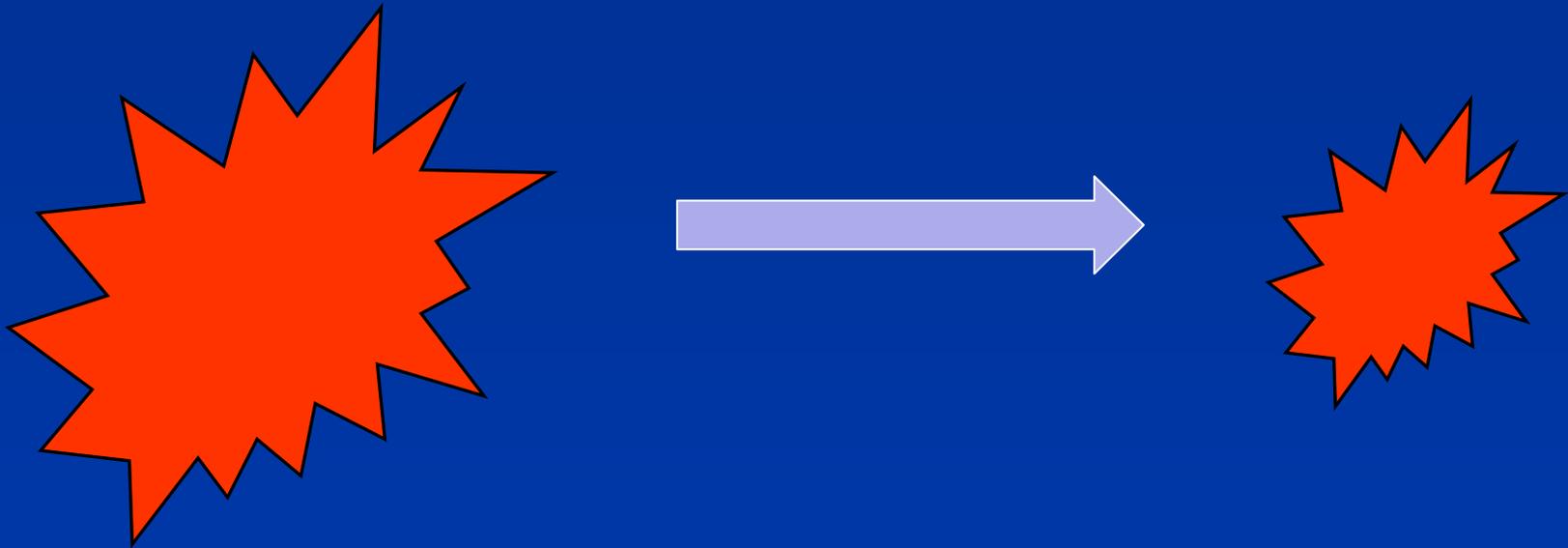
What happens to a generation who doesn't have to grow comfortable with uncertainty?

What happens to youth when the adults are behaving badly?

What happens to a generation that is being intentionally manipulated?

We help people self-regulate when they learn to catch their own thoughts, and therefore have more control over their interpretation of *stress*

Cognitive Reframing as a First Step



Defining the Stressor

Distinguishing Paper Tigers from Real Tigers

Knowing When Bad Things are Temporary

Knowing When Good Things are Permanent

Dialing Down **Catastrophic** Thought

1. Recognize negative thoughts. They often begin with phrases like “I better,” “If I don’t,” or “I should.” This is called thought catching.
2. Stop. Pause. Evaluate thoughts for accuracy.
3. Develop more accurate explanations when difficult things happen. Take away self-blame.
4. De-catastrophize. Let go of harmful thoughts that suggest a mistake or failure will lead to inevitable disaster.
5. Choose to see the present

Dialing Down **Catastrophic** Thought

In conversations, we can miss the opportunity to learn how to change our thinking patterns.

We focus on the A (“What happened?”) and C (“How do you feel now?” or “What are you going to do?”). We can better understand the B connectors - the silent self-talk that drives beliefs, determines how we interpret situations, and can lead to a calm versus **reactive** response.

Dialing Down **Self-Defeating** Thoughts

Self-defeating thoughts often begin with words like “I never” or “I can’t.” This undermines hope. Help teens add the transformative word “yet” to their thoughts.

“I can’t solve this problem” becomes, “I can’t solve this problem yet.” Hope. Then teens can free their minds to make an action plan.

An effective stress management plan must include:

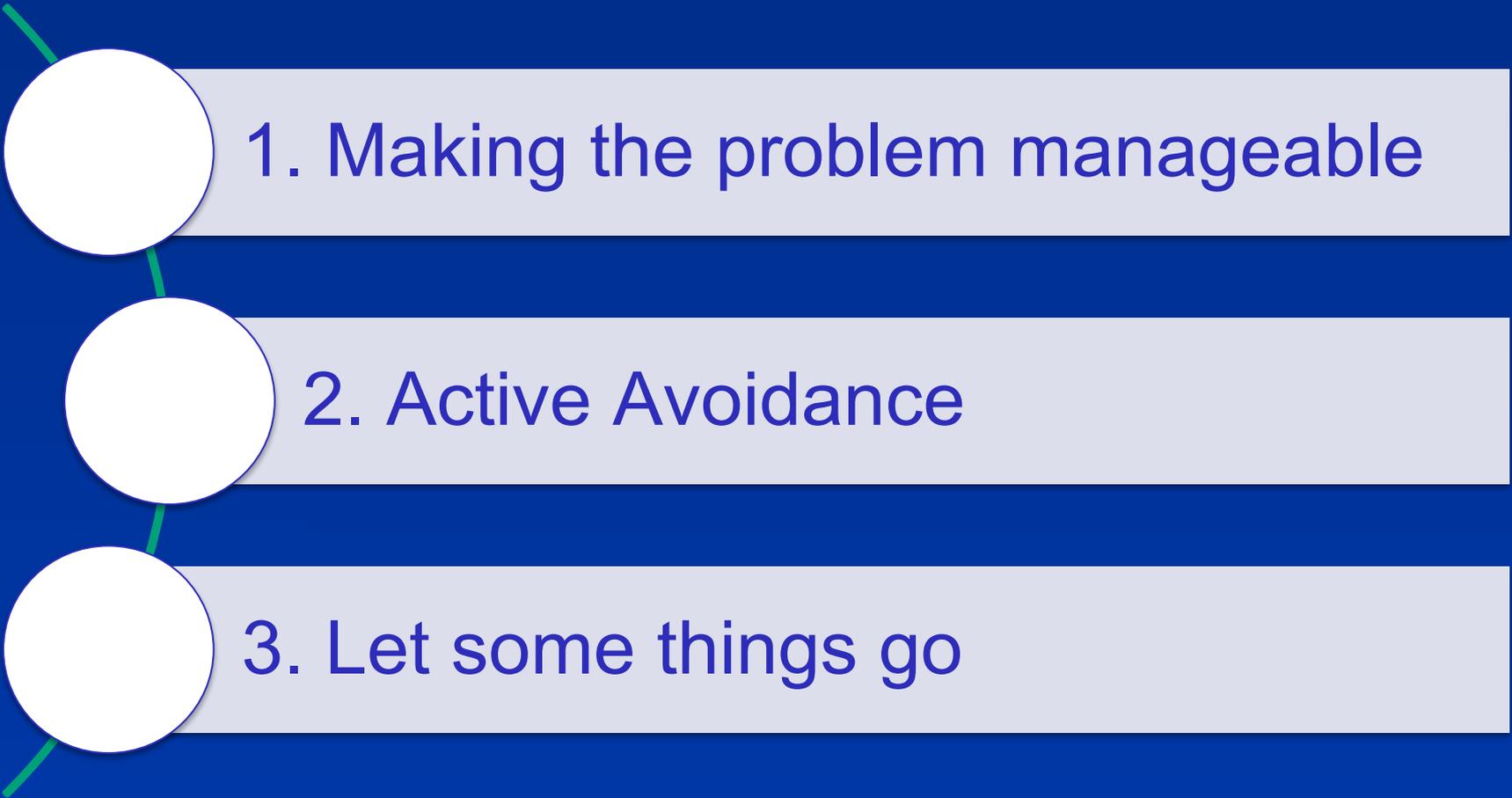
Engagement *and* Disengagement Strategies

Emotion-Focused *and* Problem-Focused Strategies

Strategies that Integrate the Mind and Body

Strategies that Build a Sense of Meaning and Purpose

Stress Management: Tackling the Problem



1. Making the problem manageable

2. Active Avoidance

3. Let some things go

Serenity Prayer

Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference.

Stress Management: Taking Care of my Body



4. Exercise

5. Nutrition

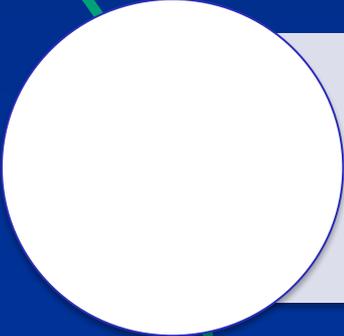
Stress Management: Taking Care of my Body



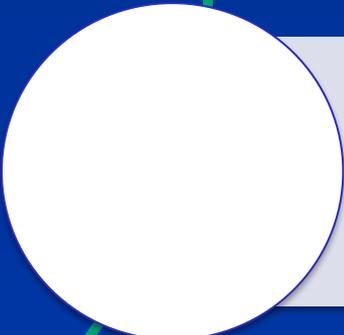
6. Relaxation

7. Sleep

Stress Management: Managing Emotions



8. Instant Vacations

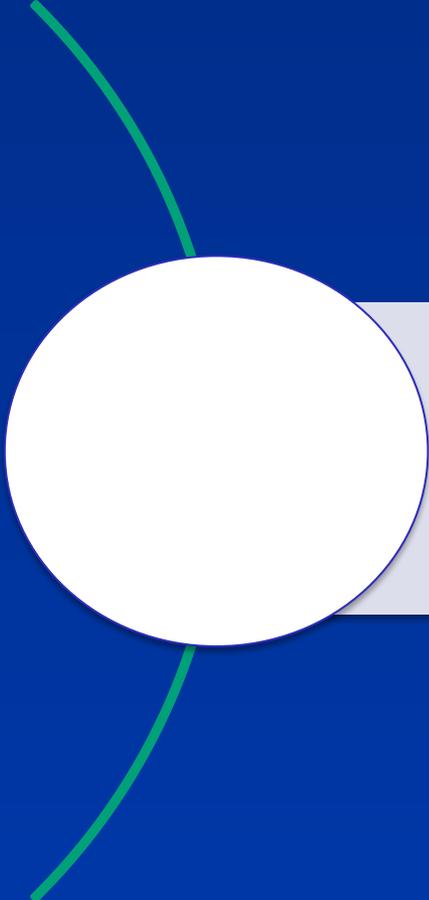


9. Releasing Emotions

The Worst thing is not to be stressed
... it is to be **NUMB**

Emotional Expression as a Key to Preventing Emotional Shutdown or Burnout

Stress Management: Meaning and Purpose



10. Contributing to the world

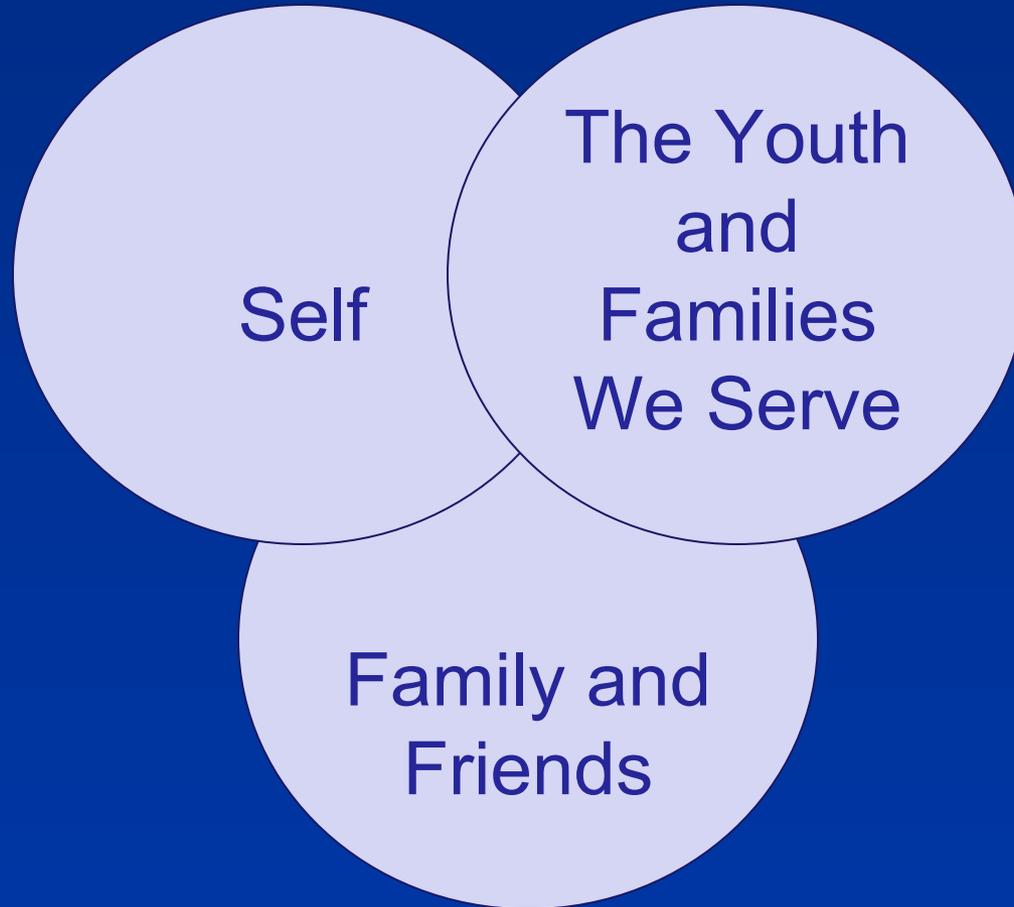


CENTER FOR PARENT & TEEN
COMMUNICATION
strengthening family connections

www.parentandteen.com

Laying the Foundation: Our Own Resilience – Integrating Self-Care with Our Real Lives





Self

The Youth
and
Families
We Serve

Family and
Friends

Becoming a “Protector” or “Sensor” Takes a Personal Toll

We cannot ask for such sacrifice from you unless we commit to your well-being with the same fidelity as you commit to caring for others



Reframing the Meaning of Self-Care

Many **urgently needed and effective** self-care strategies separate us from the sources of professional stress

It is not about . . .



Nor about . . .



It is about . . .

How do you love, give of yourself, while remaining whole?

How do you bear witness without shutting down?

How do you see suffering, while limiting your own reexperience?

How can our work enhance rather than disrupt our relationships at home?

It is about . . .

Experiencing our feelings

The Worst thing is not to be
stressed . . . it is to be **NUMB**



Loving Boundaries and
Reflective Self-Care

Boundaries

Not the easy stuff. How do you love and still remain whole?

- Knowing our buttons
- Being trauma-sensitive
- Knowing who is the expert
- Avoiding the rescue fantasy
- Giving control back
- How much do we share?
- How much do we give to each youth?
- I or We?
- How do we treat those at work versus home

Knowing your buttons



Having more control over your buttons

You don't have to be "healed." That is a life curriculum, not an event.

Bring your journey to consciousness, so there is less below-the-surface emotional labor

Foundational Principle of Trauma Sensitive Practices

Knowing what is about you and what is not about you

(Meaning anger or acting out directed towards you may not be based on anything you've done)

Knowing Who is the Expert



Avoiding the Rescue Fantasy

Why Do We Have a Rescue Fantasy?

Overalignment; relating too closely

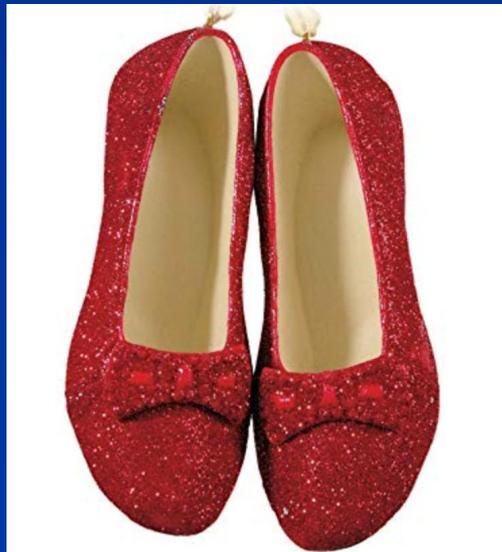
Seeing our own stories, or of someone we love

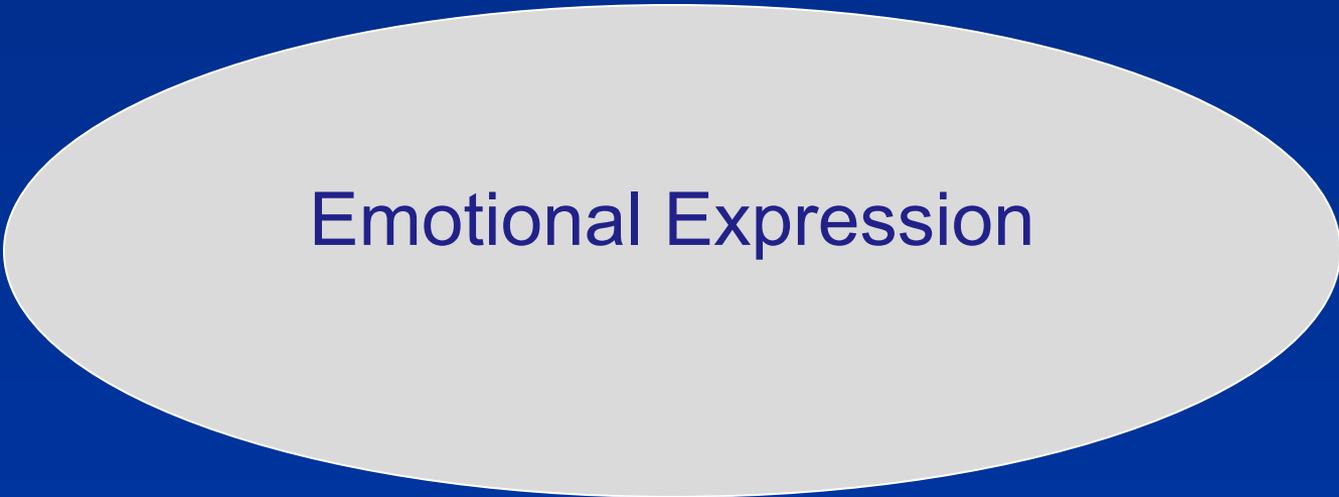
When work is our sole purpose, failure doesn't feel like a safe option

Why Will a Rescue Fantasy Lead to Our Own
Sense of Failure and Therefore Burnout?

Secure and sustained relationships? Giving control back to the people we serve.

- Knowing that the person is not going anywhere
- Knowing that you are not reliant on their presence

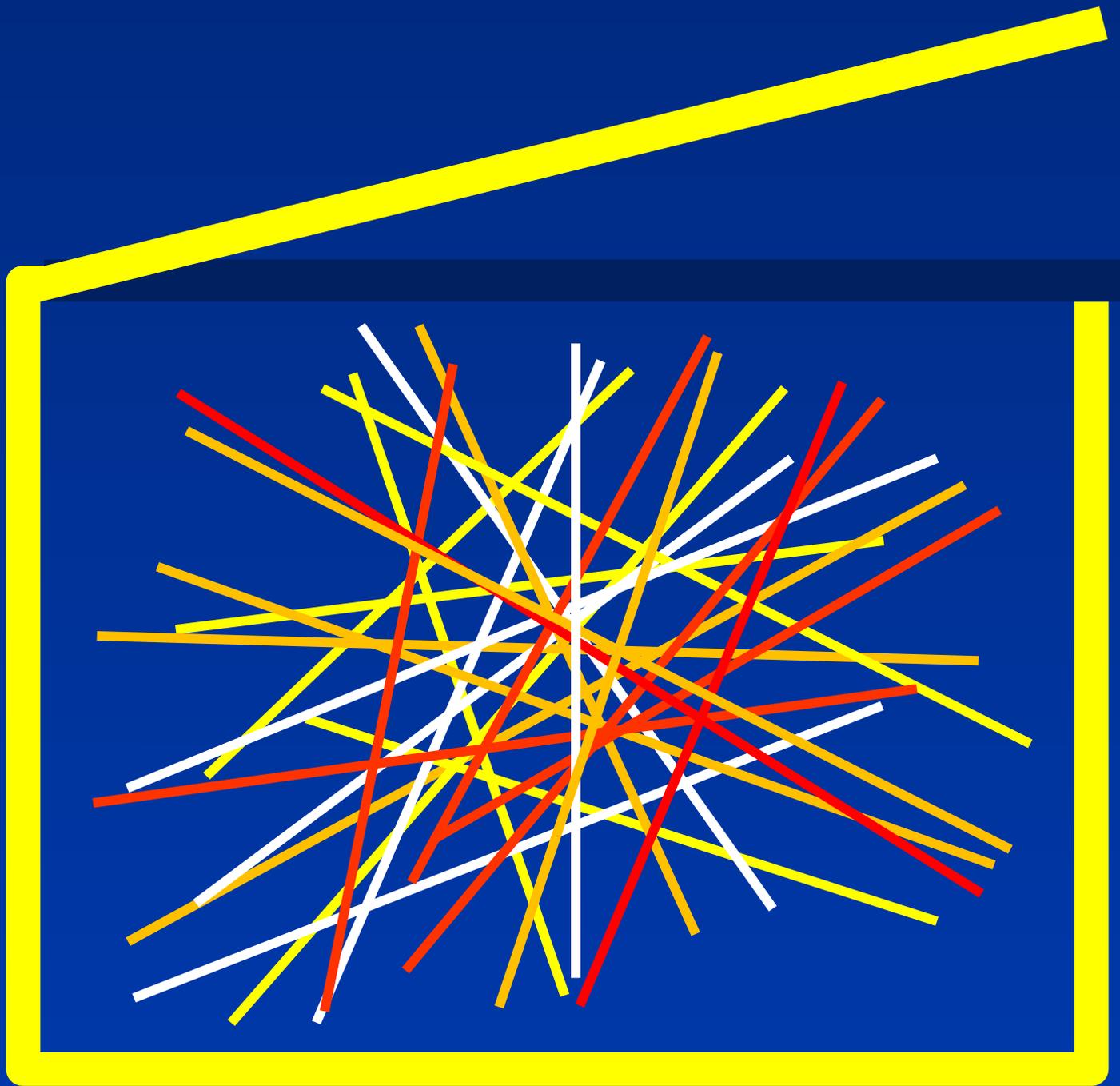




Emotional Expression

Emotional Expression as a Key to Preventing Emotional Shutdown or Burnout

The Worst thing is not to be stressed
... it is to be **NUMB**



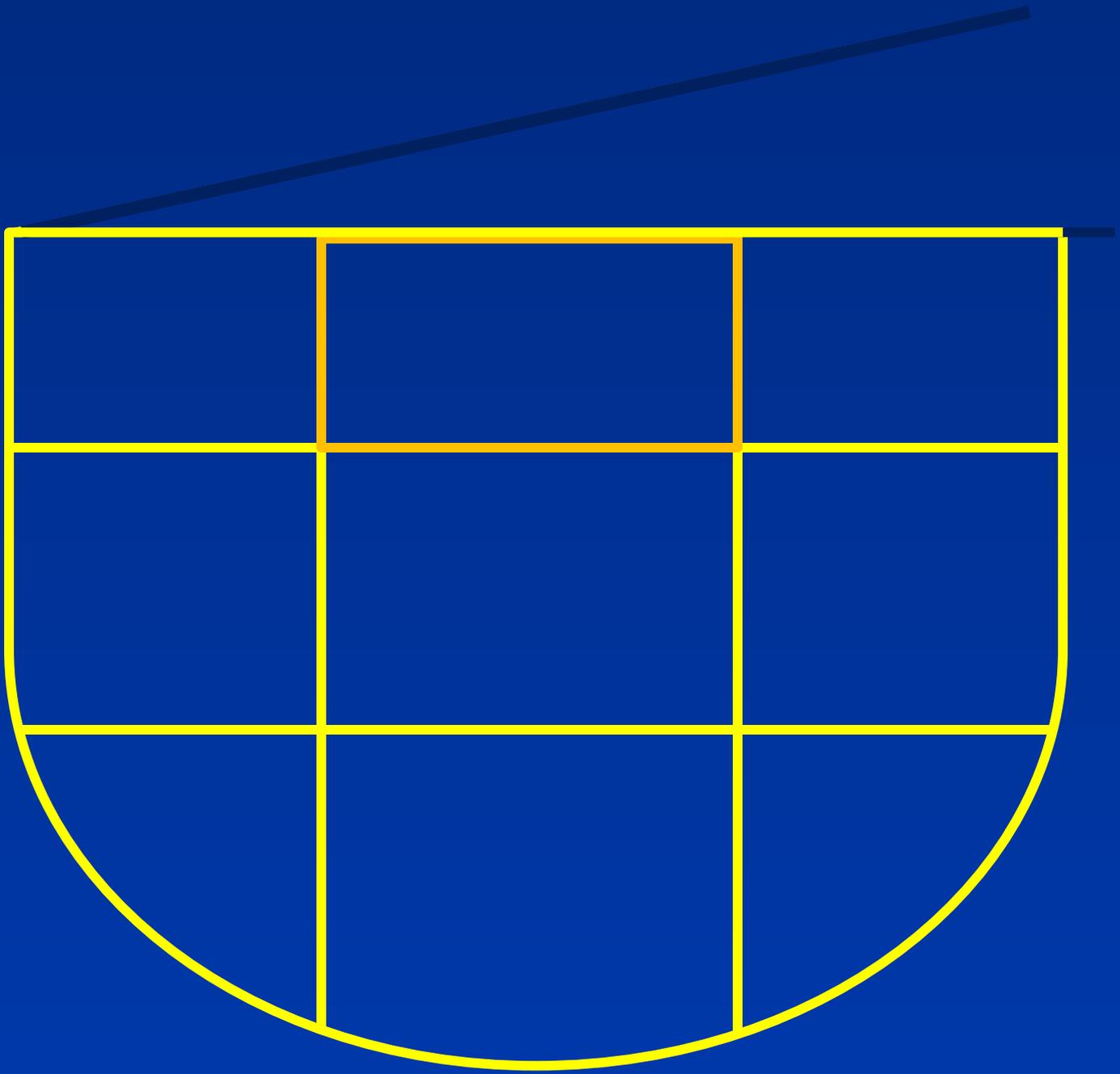
Do the work in real time, there is no choice

Get to calm . . .

Remember the mission . . .

Remember today is just a moment. If nothing else, maintain the relationship to try again another day.

Commit to *really* doing the reflective and freeing work at home, or at work with colleagues or during debriefing with your supervisor.



I _____ it out!

Painted

Danced

Sculpted

Rapped

Drew

Talked

Slammed

Wrote

Screamed

Laughed

Cried

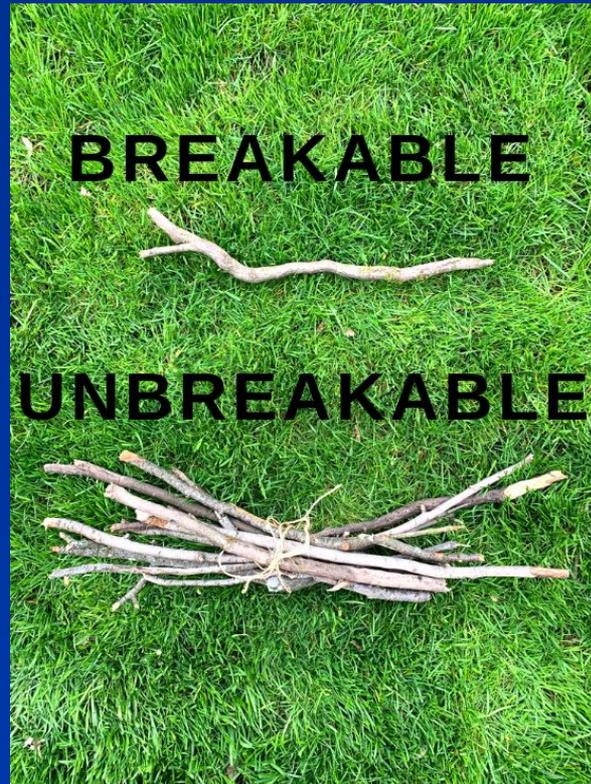
Prayed

Thought

Only you know what will work best for you

But try (at least sometimes) to not do it alone . . .

Join with those who understand



“Don’t Take it Home”

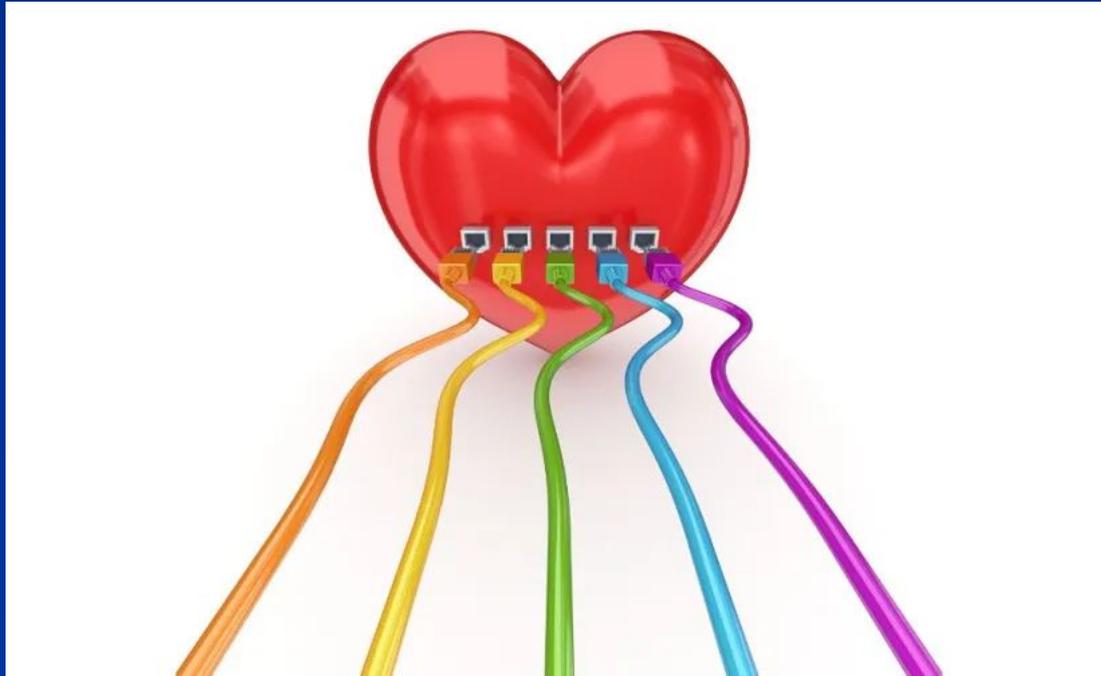
Preventing Our Work From Damaging Our Home Relationships



Understanding the Key to Our Loved Ones Coming To Us When They Need Us Most

(Because when our clients see us as helpful, but our families
spare us it causes us moral injury.)

Displays of self-compassion and self-forgiveness are good for you and essential for your relationships at work and home.



Almost done!!

How will we judge our success?

Through easy measurements: placements, grades, jobs, health status. . . and mental health rates

But mostly in vital ways not easily measured . . .

How will we judge our success?

When we remain thoughtful, engaged, and caring.

How will we judge our success?

When people feel, seen, heard, and empowered.

Why Do We Love?

So people know they are worthy of being loved . . .

Kevin Ryan, Former CEO Covenant House International

Why Do We Respectfully Listen?

So people know they should be heard . . .

Why Do We Protect?

So people know they deserve to feel safe . . .

Why Do We Offer Relentless Support?

So people know that nobody should give up on them, and they must always hold hope for progress . . .