

“You Can’t Do it, Yet...Michael!”



The Art of Effective, Strength-Based
Communicating with At-Risk Youth and
Family Members

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The Strength-Based Approach

Strength-based practice is an emerging approach to guiding individuals that is exceptionally positive and inspiring. Its focus is on strength-building rather than flaw-fixing; *what people do right* vs. what they do wrong.

It begins with the belief that every person has or can develop strengths and use past successes to curb problem behavior and enhance overall functioning

Positive Emotions/Feelings and The Brain

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. (Testing and “3” example)

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, The Happiness Advantage, P. 29)

Attitude

&

Actions

**“One adult who thinks I’m
terrific!”**



Hope is Humanity's Fuel



James Garbarino:

Postulates that *terminal thinking* – the inability to articulate one's future may be a clue to why some children succeed while others fail.

Positive Predicting



Pepperoni or cheese?
Thin or thick crust?

When you talk about the future in positive terms, you make any desired outcome more possible, and when it's more possible, it becomes more probable!

There's no such thing as a bad kid or bad parent.
Just bad luck and bad choices.

The Train



“You're strong and powerful! All trains get off track from time to time.

Back on track - **JACK!**

Honor Hellos and Goodbyes!

“You can’t say hello until you
have first said goodbye!”

Stages of Grief: Shock & Denial, Anger, Sadness, Acceptance

Examples:

Goodbye to: A loved one

Hello to: Life afterwards but feeling fortunate
to having had this person in my life

Goodbye to: Loss of idealized childhood

Hello to: What was real, the good that can
remembered, and life ahead.



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The Melting Snowball



See your fears, sadness, and worries about _____ as a big snowball in the middle of your chest, and understand that as each day goes by, it's going to melt a little. It may stay forever... but it will become so small that you can build a great life around it.



Change is inevitable, not uncertain...

The 2021 Miranda!



Rarely overheats!

No backfiring!

Slicker design!

More popular!

"There's no such thing as 'same old me.'
You get better **every day!**"

Poker & Life



Life is like a game of poker. Even if you're dealt
a bad hand, you can still win the game....

"Even if you're dealt a bad hand...
You can still play in the band!"

Life isn't what you see,

it's what you perceive!

When you change the way you
look at a challenging kid...

...the kid changes.

Pejorative labels lead to the
development of the:

Stereotype Myth

Deeply entrenched negative
self-perception

-Gladwell



Gus on Pejorative Labeling

Look, I know some of us can be quite difficult. I was a hellion my first six months, considered quite obnoxious. But it was simply defensive posturing. (Can you say defense mechanism?) Kids aren't bad. They're just screwed up. The kid who's pushing you away the most is probably the one who needs you the most.

I think every residential center would be better off if they never used words as manipulative, lazy, un-invested, controlling, and obnoxious. They're pejorative adjectives. When you label one of us in such a way, you contaminate the waters and no one wants to swim with us any more.

"Manipulative kids aren't fun to work with."
"They're a pain in the ass."
"Boy, is that kid manipulative!"

Every time we get blasted for being "manipulative" (or any other such term), our self-concept suffers. We take on that word – we internalize a sense of badness. Yet the kid you call "manipulative" might have come to your facility with a history of manipulating his way out of getting beaten. So, maybe manipulating ain't so bad. Maybe it simply needs to be understood in the context of a child's situation. Maybe people don't need to use these words anymore.

Excerpt from *The Gus Chronicles*/Charles Appelstein, MSW

The Impact of Words

Prune	Dog
Florida	Cat
Wrinkle	Car
Gray	Blue
Cane	Skate

Decoding Problem Behavior

<u>Pejorative Label</u>	<u>Positive, Hope-Based Reframe</u>
Obnoxious	Good at pushing people away
Rude, Arrogant	Good at affecting people, expressive
Resistant	Cautious
Lazy, Un-invested	Good at preventing further hurts, failures
Manipulative	Good at getting needs met
Just Looking for Attention	Good at caring about yourself
Close-mouthed	Loyal to family or friends
Different, Odd	Under-Appreciated
Stubborn & Defiant	Good at standing up for yourself
Tantrum, Fit, Outburst	Big Message
Learning Disability	Roadblocks

Understand >

Behavior is a message

Reframe >

Find the protective, positive value

Hydraulically Squeeze >

**Channel behavior into a
place it can be valued
& appreciated**

Solution-Focused Questions

The Language of Hope and Possibility!

Explorative Historical:

When kids and adults make hopeless comments, explore 2 options: Have they been through it before? Or what about other people who have been in the same situation and succeeded?

Has any other assignment worried you like this one?
How did you get it done? What steps did you take?

How many kids have been, or are, in similar situations? How many succeeded? So why can't you? What steps did they take to succeed?

Qualifiers and Partial Statements:

“I hate what’s going on!” > “So, *right now*, you’re pretty upset with what’s happening. I don’t blame you.”

“Nothing will ever change!”

“So, *at this time*, you don’t think your/this situation will change much?”

“My parents fight.”

“So *sometimes* your parents argue.”

“Nothing ever goes my way.”

“*Sometimes* it seems nothing goes right, eh?”

Past Tense:

“I’m stupid.”

“So you haven’t been feeling real smart, lately?”

“It’s hopeless!”

“So you haven’t been feeling too optimistic. lately.”

When and Will:

“I’ll never make it when I get out of here!”

“When you do, what will it feel like?”

“We’ll never get back to our normal life!”

“When we do, how’s it gonna feel?”

Scaling Questions:

“On a scale of one-to-ten, ten being the highest probability of accomplishing this, what number do you think you’re at now? What number will it be in 3 months? How come you’ll get there?”

Identifying In-Between Change:

“What will be the first sign that you’ve turned the corner?”

Amplifying Change using Speculation:

“Why were you able to change in such a great way? It’s okay if you’re not sure. But I have to wonder if it’s because you’re getting older and more mature and are making better decisions, or if it’s related to doing better in school can open doors for you?

I don’t know, but people really see you making an effort!”

Tip: It’s better to speculate about things that are unlikely to be rejected by the youth.

Changing Perspective Question:

“How come you’re not doing worse?”

Exception Questions:

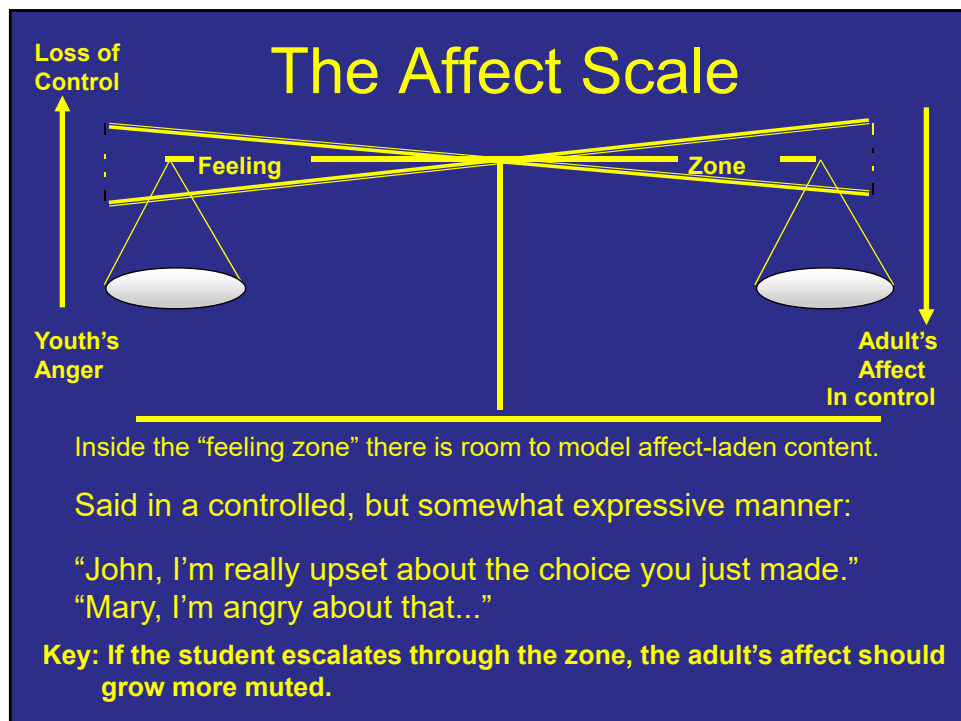
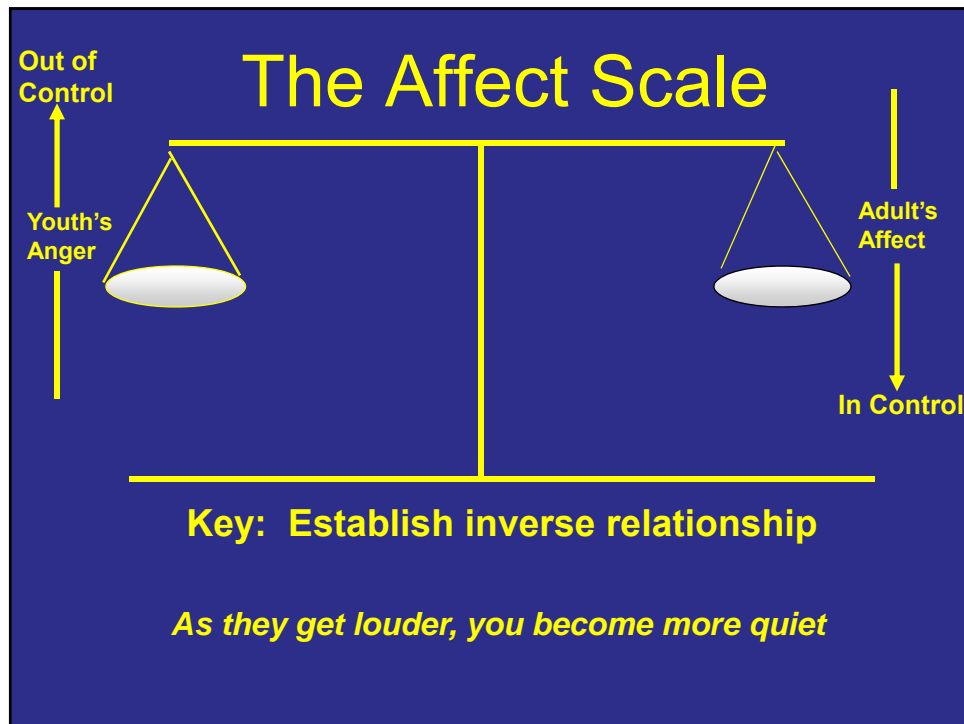
“Have there been times recently when the problem didn’t occur?”

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*.”

Respond =
The Golden Rule
& role modeling





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.”

Body Messages



“C’mon dude...let’s get it done, and then we can smile. NBD brother.”

VS.

NBD = No Big Deal!

“You need to get it done now.”

Approach agitated kids at eye-level or below, and at a 45 degree angle. Stay 2 arm’s length away. Be careful about your pace, posture, tone, facial expression, hand movements, and body position



Non-Judgmental Exploration



“What’s happening?”

“What’s up?”

“What going on?”

Help and Support

“You seem pretty upset.”

“What can I (we) do to help?”

“Hey, I’d feel the same way.”

“This is a tough situation.

I don’t blame you for being
angry.”



Both Support and Help provide empathy, validation,
attention, and promote engagement

Repeating & Paraphrasing

“I hear you. You’re saying this isn’t easy.”

“You can’t do it *yet*, Michael!”



* Insert “qualifiers” that help diffuse tensions and provide hope - such as “yet,” “right now,” “so far,” and “at this moment.”

Feelings Check

How are you feeling?”

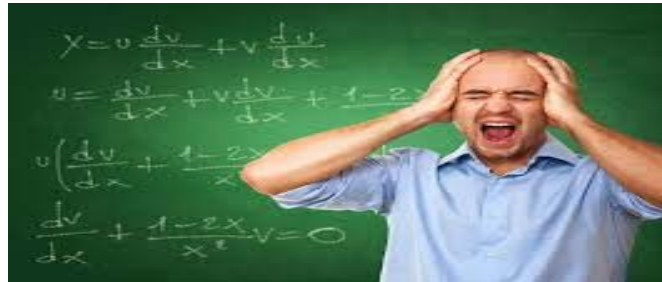
“Some kids would be pretty frustrated about that.”



Name it to tame it!

- After identifying feelings, gently review self-management strategies: Say a cue (eg. “NBD, let it go.”), count, focus on the real issue and talk it through, visualize being in a more soothing place, replace negative thoughts (i.e. change the story, etc.)

Apologizing



I'm sorry for losing my cool, guys."
I made a bad choice."

Praise

Try and be *specific* vs. general with praise

Okay: "Hey, good job guys.

Even

better: "I'm REALLY impressed with the way you guys organized your assignments and handled time management."



Encouragement



“You can do this. You just have to take it one step at a time – like you’ve done before. Let’s get it done!”

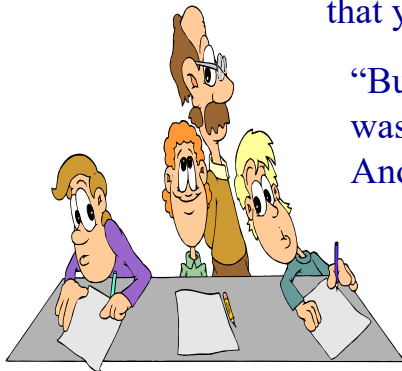


Sandwich Approach

“I’m very pleased that you wanted to do well on this test. It shows me that you care.”

“But copying off Arnold’s paper was a bad choice. Please come And see me after school.”

“I believe in you, Sigfried. You have what it takes to pass any test on your own. See you later.”



Reasoning Response

C'mon, Butch, what if we
allowed kids to get in fights?
It wouldn't feel very safe,
here."



Connecting Statements



"Rayshawn, this isn't me
against you. We're on the
same side. I don't like
what's happening...but what
would you do if...."

Anytime tension builds between you and a youth or
group, reach out with a connecting statement.

Empowering Interventions

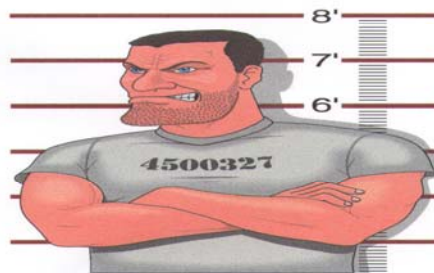


“What can you do next time to prevent the same thing from happening? Any ideas?”

“I’m not sure, but what about...”

That’s a great idea! Next time you feel like exploding...talk it out, walk away...do the breathing stuff, yeah.”

Explorative Reflective



“Is that working for you?”

Get clients to reflect upon their actions. You could inquire whether there is a better way for them to get their needs met?

Exploration of Control



“What *is* in your control?”
“What steps *can* you take?”

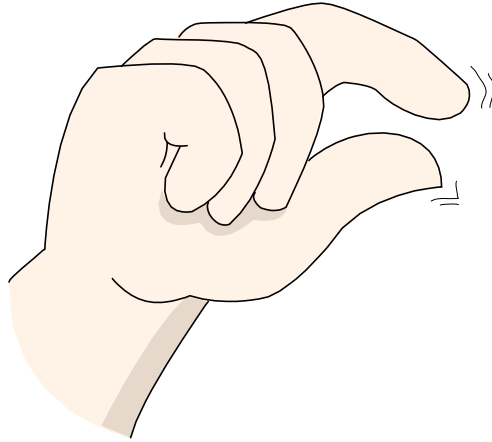
Explorative Psychological



“Bill, could something else be bothering you? You seem a bit off track. Is there a one percent chance this has something to do with the call from your mother yesterday?”

millimeter

The Millimeter Acknowledgement



“Do you think it’s slightly possible that perhaps, maybe....”
“Could, maybe, 1% of this have something do with

Make a Plan

“Okay, man...This has been a good talk. I think we have a good plan to avoid this from happening again. I’ll let everyone know what we talked about.”

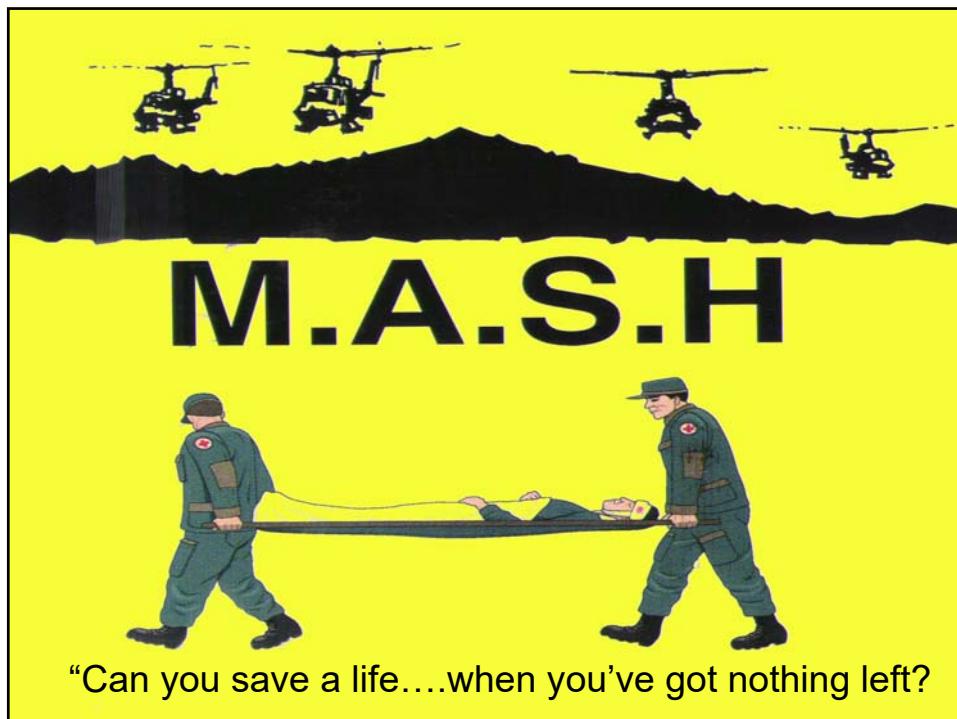


The Observing Ego

"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."

1. Think about the principle: Lack of support = punitive actions
Think: *I can do anything for 2 more hours..*
Ask: Do I have the *audacity* to compare my life to theirs?
2. Visualize driving home feeling content
3. Think about tomorrow, next wk, etc.
4. Think M.A.S.H.
5. Use the Force, Luke!

Respond =
The Golden Rule
& role modeling



We're all Lukes!

\$10.00

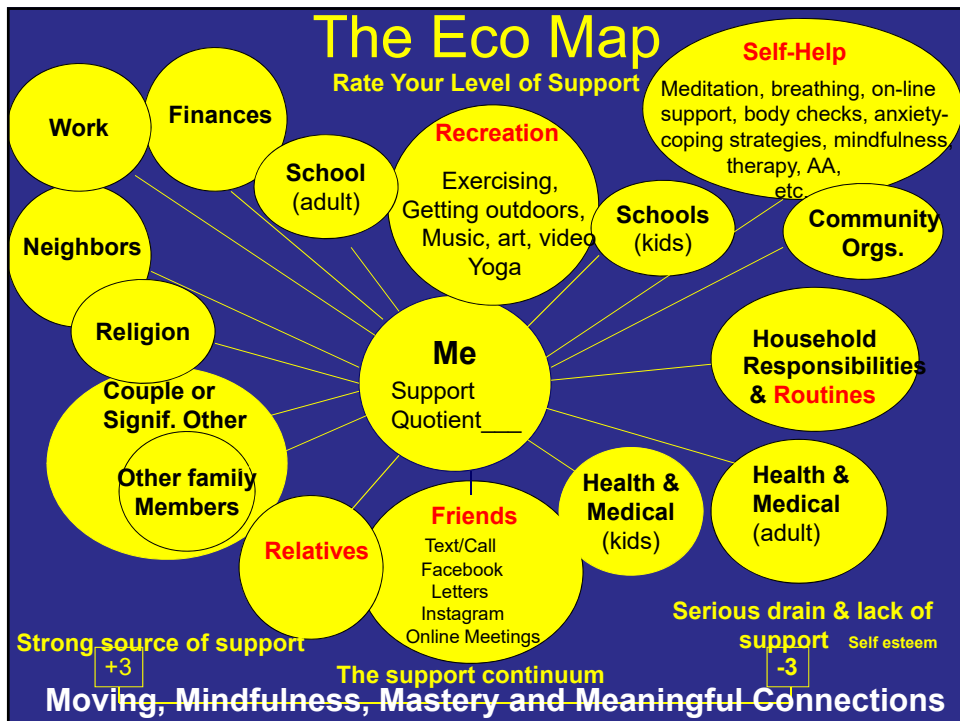


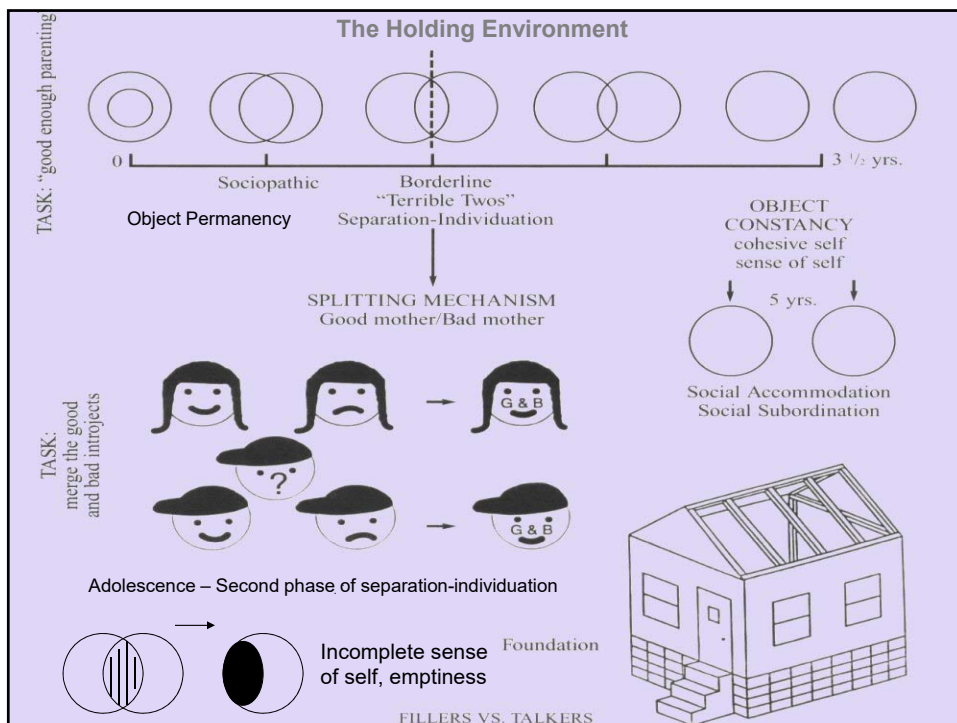
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Splitting can stop a child, family, school or program from moving forward.

Youth: My mother said you guys are too punitive.

Counselor: I like your mother. 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. Do the right thing.



**No Splitting
Zone**