

“No Such Thing As a Bad kid!



Understanding and Responding  
to Kids with Emotional & Behavioral Challenges  
Using a Positive, Trauma-informed  
Strength-Based Approach

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# The Strength-Based Approach

Strength-based practice is an emerging approach to guiding kids and in particular, those with emotional and behavioral challenges, that is exceptionally positive and inspiring. Its focus is on strength-building rather than flaw-fixing; *what kids do right* vs. what they do wrong.

It begins with the belief that all young people have or can develop strengths and use past successes to curb problem behavior and enhance academic and social functioning.



“I love the way you open a door, son!”

“But I guess I don’t close them so good.”

“I don’t care about that...I just love the way you open a door!”

# 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!”



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: Living w/family of origin

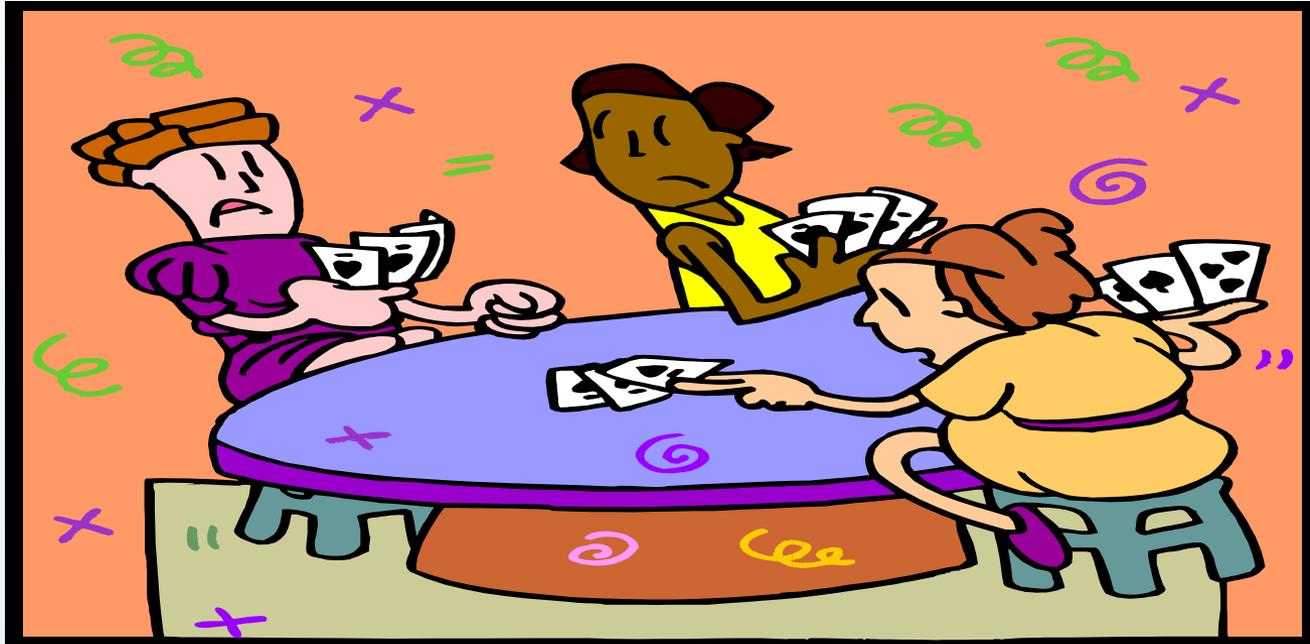
Hello to: Foster or adoptive care

Goodbye to: Loss of idealized childhood

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



# 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!”



“Self-doubt kills  
ability.”

- Degas

Little changes can ripple  
into BIG solutions



Teacher had to tell this boy **to be quiet.**  
But what followed is truly  
**heartbreaking.**

- Based on a true story





“What’s a mistake?”  
“An opportunity to take!”

“What’s a mistake?”



“A chance to learn something new!”

**The Harder I try, The Higher I fly!**



**Be the Eagle!**

If you lose...

Don't get the blues!



If you don't win

Just grin!



Little changes can ripple into BIG solutions



Incentives can, at times, counter extreme cautiousness,  
Celebrate small steps!



“Learning is...my  
ticket to a great life!”



“For twenty years, my research has shown that the view you adopt for yourself profoundly affects that way you lead your life.”

Carol Dweck, *Mindset*

# Dweck: Mindset

**Fixed** = “I’m smart, the best..”

VS.

**Growth** mindset = “It’s all about the effort I give.”

Getting things wrong, making mistakes...  
are opportunities to learn something new.  
And avoid using pejorative adjectives like, rude,  
manipulative, lazy, attention seeker, etc.

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 – Reflections From an Abused Kid* (Appelstein)

# Decoding & Reframing Problem Behavior

## Pejorative Label

Obnoxious

Rude, Arrogant

Resistant

Lazy, Un-invested

Manipulative

Just Looking for Attention

Close-mouthed

Different, Odd

Stubborn & Defiant

Tantrum, Fit, Outburst

Learning Disability

## Positive, Hope-Based Reframe

Good at pushing people away

Good at affecting people, expressive

Cautious

Good at preventing further hurts

Good at getting needs met

Good at caring about yourself

Loyal to family or friends

Under-Appreciated

Good at standing up for yourself

Big Message

Roadblocks

“It’s Not a Learning Disability.”



It’s a Road Block

*Let’s find a detour and enjoy the scenery!*

**Understand >**

**Behavior is a message**

**Reframe >**

**Find the protective, positive value**

**Hydraulically Squeeze >**

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

# Reframing

Reframing involves taking a seemingly negative behavior and "reframing" it in a positive way. In other words, recognize the underlying value of the action(s).

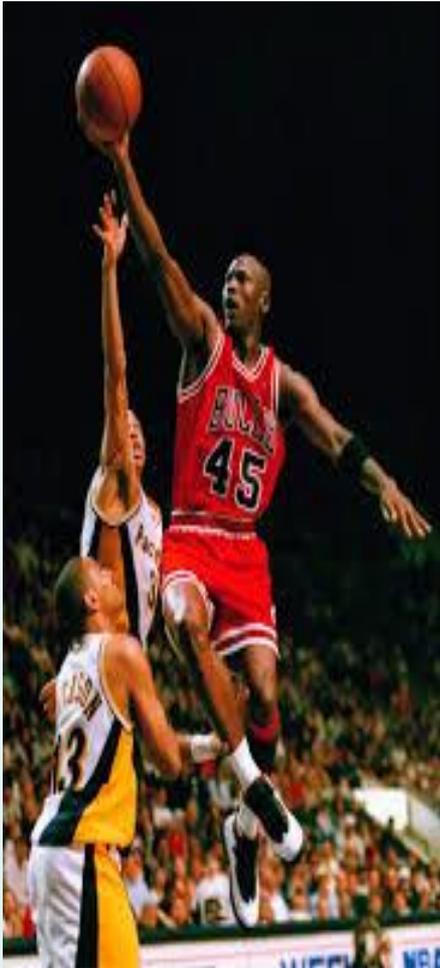
1. A child who is always looking for attention:
2. A youth who won't talk about his/her feelings:
3. A youth who acts rudely:
4. A youth who acts provocatively:
5. A parent who acts in a stubborn manner:
6. A youth who is resistant to trying new endeavors:
7. A youth who frequently swears:
8. A youth who's bossy with peers:

Thomas Edison's teachers said he was "too stupid to learn anything." He was fired from his first two jobs for being "non-productive." As an inventor, Edison made 1,000 unsuccessful attempts at inventing the Light bulb. When a reporter asked, "How did it feel to fail 1,000 times?" Edison replied, "I didn't fail 1,000 times. The light bulb was an invention with 1,000 steps." (Growth mindset)



**Fixed Mindset:**

“I can't do this! Let 'em use candles!”



## Jordan on Character and Grit

"I've missed more than 9000 shots in my career.

I've lost almost 300 games

26 times I've been trusted to take the game winning shot ... and missed.

I've failed over and over and over again in my life. That is why I succeed."

~ Michael Jordan

**If it's Stinkin'**



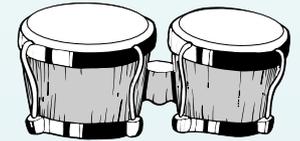
**Change the Thinkin'!**

**Produce catchy mantras that can create neuropathways**

The brain is designed to change in response to patterned, repetitive stimulation.

**Key: Use Rhythm, Repetition, Rhyming, and Humor**

**Proven winners:**



**“NBD (No big deal) ...easier than one, two, three!”**

**“When you get mad, don’t do bad, just talk or walk..”**

**“Let it go, Joe! Just stay cool no need to blow.”**

**“Don’t move all over the place, sit and learn with a happy face.”**

**“If it is to be, it’s up to me.”**

Stop and think...

Don't be a dink!

Stop and listen...

Cause you don't know what  
you're missin'!

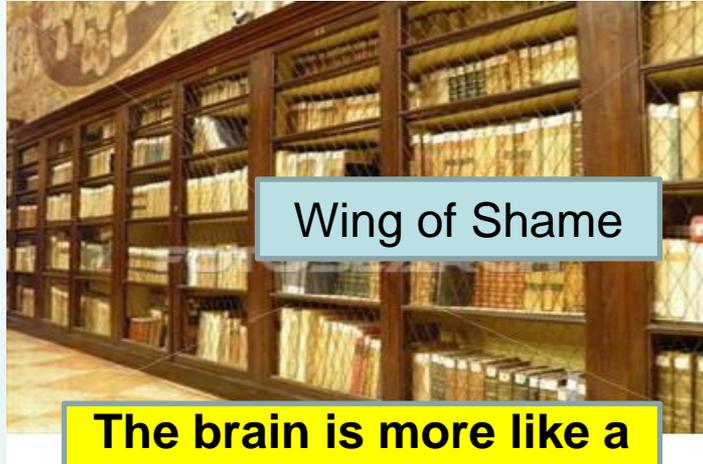
I can make it if I choose  
Only I can make me lose!

I can make it if I choose  
Time to kick the drugs and booze!

If you lose hope  
Don't do dope!

If it is to be, it's up to me!

# The Human Brain



Wing of Shame

The brain is more like a library than a computer

Children traumatized by neglect and abuse overuse more primitive brain systems. Their survival brains are chronically stimulated and are at high risk of engaging in behaviors which hurt themselves and others.

## Three Major Parts

The logical brain

The emotional brain

The survival brain



Wing of Pain

It continually stores information bearing on survival and well-being and discards most other data.

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.

Brendtro, *The Resilient Brain*

**Logical Brain**

**Emotional Brain**

**The Survival Brain**



“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.”

Brendtro & Longhurst

# 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

“How are we going to celebrate....?”



Pepperoni or cheese?  
Thin or thick crust?

# Positive Predicting

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!

# Positive Predicting

“How are we going to celebrate when this ends and we get back to our normal life?”

“What’s the first restaurant you go to when this is over?”

“What kind of jobs are you interested in?”

“What kind of career do you want to have?”

“How are you going to continue your education?”

“How should we celebrate when you/we...”

## *Three Universal Truths*

Children succeed when they are surrounded by adults who believe they can succeed no exceptions.

Children succeed when they have meaningful and sustainable relationships with caring adults.

Children succeed when they can articulate their future in four domains rather than one: Home and Family; Education and Career; Community and Service; and Hobbies and Recreation.

[KidsatHope.com](http://KidsatHope.com)

## **Future Oriented Questions**

1. Do you think you'll attend a trade school, junior college or four year school?
2. What professions are you leaning towards?
3. Do you think you'll travel a lot when you're older? Where?
4. Big family or small? Will you help your kids with their homework?
5. Would you prefer to live in a big city or small town?
6. What kind of hobbies will you have when you're older?
7. Will you be generous and give your time and money to those in need?



# Self-Esteem Building



To help kids enhance low self esteem, show a genuine interest in their interests/strengths & provide tasks and activities that offer a:

**Universal Opportunity for Individual Success**

## Key Strategies:

- Create Success Opportunities
- Modify Current Tasks/Activities
- Tap Existing Strengths





# DICE ROLL





One in particular I wanted to share with you is about one of my students who has been labeled “Tier II” behavioral. Throughout the fall and winter, I was verbally and physically abused by this student. His abusive behavior became so violent, it carried over to the students and he no longer attends my class, but is in a special behavioral classroom in my building.

After your keynote on Friday, I decided that it was time to start repairing the relationship in ways which he could feel successful. So, I took dice to his classroom during my lunch break today and played the doubles challenge.

Boy, was that a hit! He was so excited and ended up winning the challenge 28 (him) vs. 16 (me)!

It was 25 minutes of pure bliss, enjoyment, laughter, and relaxation. When I said I had to go, he wanted to call his mom immediately to tell her the good news that he won and he did! He also recorded our scores on the white board for “the next time you visit me.”  
(His words!)

Thanks for helping me feel more confident in reaching all of my students.

# **Solution-Focused Questions**

The Language of Hope and Possibility!

## **Explorative Historical:**

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

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.”

## **When and Will:**

“I’ll never make it in that new place!”

“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?”

# It's all about Attitude & Actions!



Twenty years from now the kids you currently guide won't remember much of what you said to them, but they'll all recall how you made them feel.

**Being a successful Juvenile Justice Professional means being a great:**

Liar  
& a  
Great Actor





“Mr. Miller I’d like to be honest with you before I operate on your heart this morning....

I’m kind of in a bad mood...”

# The Observing Ego

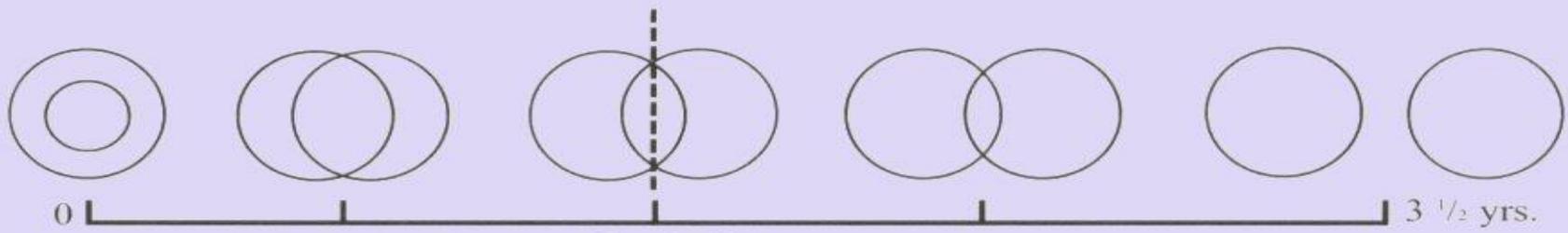
“I’m REALLY ticked...I could just - it’s okay. Stay cool...ALL feelings are normal. Learn from this. I’m suffering a bad self-esteem injury, but in a little while it will heal. *Respond* instead of *React*. *Use the Force, Betty!*  
...I mean, *Luke.*”



Respond =  
The Golden Rule  
& role modeling

# The Holding Environment

TASK: "good enough parenting"



Sociopathic

Borderline  
"Terrible Twos"

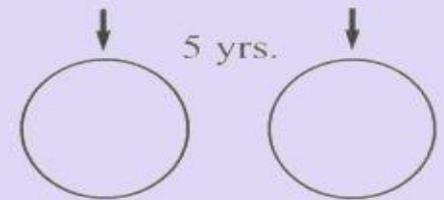
Object Permanency

Separation-Individuation

OBJECT  
CONSTANCY  
cohesive self  
sense of self

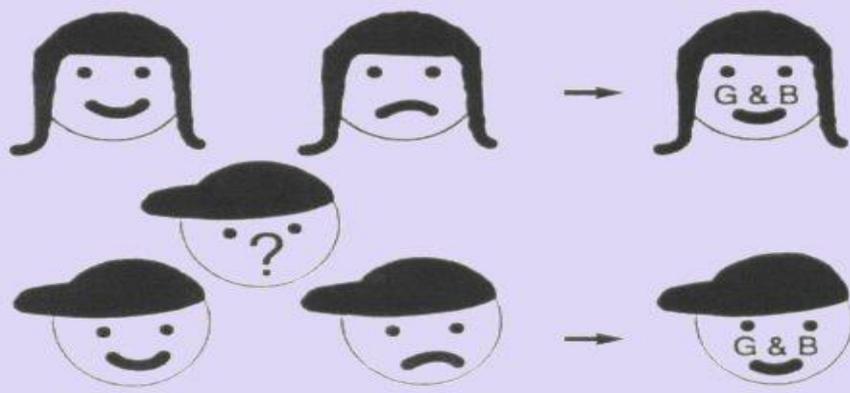
SPLITTING MECHANISM  
Good mother/Bad mother

5 yrs.

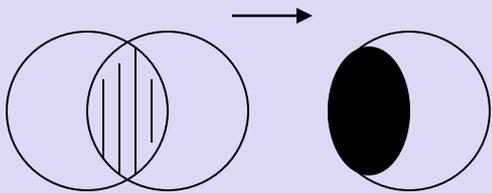


Social Accommodation  
Social Subordination

TASK:  
merge the good  
and bad introjects



Adolescence – Second phase of separation-individuation



Incomplete sense  
of self, emptiness

Foundation

FILLERS VS. TALKERS

