Kids Who Outwit Adults
Larry K. Brendtro, PhD

Resilience Resources
Adult Wary Youth
Substitute Belongings
Deviant Peer Influence?
Or Elder Deficit Disorder?
We shall have great difficulty in treating those children who have been brought up in an atmosphere devoid of love. They will look on us as they look upon all others who hurt them.

Alfred Adler
1870-1937
Youngsters looking for guidance and help find few adults who treat them as equals... they are pushed around, punished, and made to feel worthless.  

Rudolf Dreikurs
All children have highly absorbent minds.

Maria Montessori
1870-1952
Problems as Opportunity

Maladjustments in children should be considered merely as stages in the process of learning to be mature.

John Morgan
1888-1945
Young people are not future citizens.

They are citizens in embryo.

Janusz Korczak
1877-1942
We start with our naïve theories of behavior. To whom or what do we attribute the problems kids display?

William C. Morse
1915-2008
Defiance Busting: Don’t Give up or Give in.

Do you feel as if you have lost your God-given authority over your family and want to get it back?

A New Way to Manage Behavior

Contracts and Point systems.
Building Therapeutic Alliances
Hiding behind Costumes
ACTING TOUGH IN A CULTURE OF FEAR

Troubled youth want to belong to a positive group, but fear hostility.

They put on a tough front and join in bad behavior they think peers will see as cool. This shared illusion maintains delinquent performance.
The overwhelming majority of evidence-based approaches to youth work...have not been based on what might be termed relational child and youth care.

Kiaras Gharabaghi
Ryerson University
I don't think I need counseling.
John Seita ~
Angry and Adult Wary
Dr. John Seita and Family
Good Will Hunting. Matt Damon and Robin Williams
Dr. Nancy Carlsson Paige and Son
Strategies used by youth who don’t trust adults:

• Fight
• Flight
• Fool
• Follow
FIGHT

Private Logic:

“Hurt or be Hurt”
FLIGHT
Private Logic:

“Hide or be Hurt.”
FOOL
Private Logic:

“Outsmart the enemy.”
FOLLOW

Private Logic:

“Safety in numbers.”
Reasons Kids Don’t Disclose

I wanted to forget it.

I thought it was normal.

I was told to keep it secret.

I didn’t know where to start.

It was wrong and I was ashamed.

I thought what happened was my fault.

I would be seen as crazy, a pervert, …

If I told, others would get in trouble.

Telling would just hurt more.

I just didn’t feel safe.

Sorsoli et al., 2008
Adversarial Encounters

Distrust. Youth believes adult won’t care, understand, or help.

Antagonism. Youth and adult are in conflict and power struggles.

Alienation. Rancor leads to aggression or avoidance.

Positive Alliances

Trust. Youth believes the adult cares, understands, and can help.

Cooperation. Youth and adult work together to solve a problem.

Attachment. Mutual attraction develops from working together.
Caring is not cool with kids who need to act “tough.” Antisocial behavior is often seen as cool and strong.
Problems as Opportunity

We only think when we are confronted with a problem.

John Dewey
Two Approaches to Problem Solving

Adult in authority asserts power.

I will not allow you to bully in this school. There will be serious consequences.

Young people join in problem-solving.

What does the group think when a stronger member picks on a smaller individual.
Making Caring fashionable

Caring is Devalued

Hooked on Helping
Relabeling

Youth thinks bad behavior is cool
Bad behavior is recast as uncool

Don’t mess with me
Acting immature

I will get respect
Having temper tantrums
Labels only apply to BEHAVIOR, not the person.
Reversing Responsibility is a method for challenging persons to take charge of their lives rather than making excuses or blaming others.

**Youth:** I get in trouble because my parents are both alcoholics.

**Adult:** Is Marie saying that all kids with parents who have problems get into trouble?
AUTONOMY INVOLVES MUTUAL RESPECT

Adults do not delegate decision making. Feelings of autonomy come from informal, respectful relationships.

Youth want a voice – but are impatient with a lot of inconclusive talk, e.g., “Okay group, how are you going to deal with that?”

Gold & Osgood, 1992, p. 199
All behavior makes sense if we could but understand the meaning to the person performing it.

*William Morse*
Masking My Pain

You feel pain … you hide it all from the world, that way, no one will have to know how you feel.

- Kiata
Private Logic

I am...
Others are...
The world is...

Alfred Adler
I am ... unlovable, stupid, helpless, bad.

Others are ... mean, don’t care, don’t understand.
Planning
Restorative
Outcomes
Transforming Assessment
Demanding Greatness instead of Obedience
Youth as Experts

You need to set up a comfort zone. Don’t just dive in.
- Russell

I avoid adults who act superior to us: “Do what I say or else!”
- Cindy

You’ve gotta let the kids connect with you, not force it.
- Jonathan
Kids Diagnose Us
- William C. Morse
I deserve to be locked in prison.
To Connect or Not?
Bids to Connect
Connecting in Crisis
To: Mrs. 

Attached find a drawing by your son Joey, Grade 2. This is the second time his teacher has shown me drawings of this type by Joey. In the first instance I spoke to him and suspended his recess privilege for one day.

We feel it is very important that you talk with Joey and help reinforce the fact that using this type of language is not acceptable at school under any circumstances.

In addition, Joey will lose his recess privileges for four days this week.

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact the school

Sincerely,

Principal
Staff at the psych hospital gave me this list of symptoms of mental disorders and said they used it to observe my behavior.

So, each day I would pick a few symptoms and act them out. When people try to mess with my mind, I mess with theirs.

- Joey
Planning
Restorative
Outcomes

Nicole
Girl, 17, sent to penitentiary for torture, theft
Hi, what's up? I hope this missive finds you in the best of health and in the pursuit of spirits as that is how I wish this letter to leave me.

Let's see, to catch you up with what has happened in my life since I last heard from you. I have gotten my G.E.D. finally. I received my parole in December of 2001, but did not get released until May of 2002, because of my interstate state transfer back to Seattle. Unfortunately I messed up my early and was brought back to the Bell Insole. I couldn't stay off the dope. A lot of shit piled on top of me and I couldn't handle it. I started using hard core and wound up pushing away the people who could help me the most because I was ashamed of myself. I go back up for parole in the beginning of July. Six months never seemed so long before.
Introduction

If you are a honest person and truly want to change your issues, I would put this book down and chase another one quickly. This is a book meant to help juveniles all over America quickly and easily complete governmental facilities. Although the teachings are not 100% proven to be successful, if you follow them to fit your personality, it should turn out for the best. After you have completed the program and move on back into society, the choices will then be up to you. I will now begin.
Overcoming Adultism

The belief that adults are superior and entitled to exercise authority without regard to the voice of youth. Do adults treat kids with problems as:

**Victims** – deficit or disorder? 
*Medicate, behavior modification.*

**Villains** – a risk to community? 
*Punishment and exclusion.*

**Contributors** – valued resource? 
*Develop strengths, empower.*
MICHIGAN PEER INFLUENCE STUDY

Martin Gold & D. Wayne Osgood
The University of Michigan
Which is best?

Focus on Behavior
Plus Needs

Focus on behavior
Focus on needs
STAFF MORALE DETERMINES GROUP CULTURE

1. Team cohesion
2. Team involvement
3. Belief in program
4. Optimism about youth
AUTONOMY INVOLVES MUTUAL RESPECT

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Youth want a voice – but are impatient with a lot of inconclusive talk, e.g., “Okay group, how are you going to deal with that?”

Gold & Osgood, 1992, p. 199
SCHOOL FAILURE damages self esteem and predicts poor life outcomes.

Gold & Osgood, 1992
DEFIANT PERFORMANCE that rejects teachers and school is an attempt to rescue self respect.

Gold & Osgood, 1992
SCHOOL SUCCESS has a lasting effect on life adjustment in spite of other problems.

Gold & Osgood, 1992
Connecting with Adult-Wary Kids

1. Make problems learning opportunities.  
   “Coach me, don’t scold me.”

2. Provide fail-safe relationships.  
   “Please don’t give up on me.”

3. Increase dosages of nurturance.  
   “I need to believe that you really care.”

4. Don’t crowd.  
   “If you get too close, I back away.”

5. Use the back door.  
   “Start with what I am interested in.”

6. Decode the meaning of behavior.  
   “I try to hide what I really think.”
7. Be authoritative, not authoritarian. “Help me to control me.”

8. Model respect to the disrespectful. “Your respect helps build mine.”

9. Enlist youth as colleagues. “I am the only real expert on me.”


11. Give seeds time to grow. “Be patient — I am still learning.”

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