

Key Points

Key Point #1

Many troubled youth are survivors of years of traumatic life events, doing their best to get by day to day. Some of their most difficult and annoying behaviors may stem from deeper issues, and so require more subtle interventions than simple punishment.

Key Point #2

At-risk children and youth see themselves from fundamentally different perspectives. They often adopt "survival mindsets," cognitive behavioral patterns such as aggression and dependency which allow them to predict how people will react. In the process however, they sabotage important relationships, pushing away the people whose help they most need.

Key Point #3

Even the most capable of professionals can be drawn into no-win power struggles with challenging youth who seek to recreate familiar patterns of failure. It is essential for staff to resist punitive reactions in moments like these, to instead set reasonable limits and maintain a professional perspective.

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"Leave Me Alone!"



Wait! Don't Go!

Insights into the Psychological World of Emotionally Troubled Youth

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Workshop Description

Emotionally troubled children and youth have learned to be relationship-wary. To avoid deeper loss and pain, they have developed patterns of behavior that allow them to control disappointments by sabotaging relationships before they fail on their own. Unaware, staff may find themselves feeding into these self-defeating patterns, rejecting children instead of behavior.

Participants in this workshop gain valuable insights needed to maintain a therapeutic perspective in challenging situations.

Worst Case Scenario Survival

1. How to SURVIVE A BULL STAMPEDE:

- (a) Lay down and curl into a ball.
- (b) Run alongside the bulls.
- (c) Kneel in the street and pray for Divine Intervention!

2. How to SIGNAL RESCUERS WHEN LOST:

- (a) Light three fires in a triangle shape during day.
- (b) Wait until nightfall and light one large fire.
- (c) Bang out SOS in Morse Code on pots & pans!

3. How to TAKE A PUNCH TO THE HEAD:

- (a) Turn at the last minute and take it on the jaw.
- (b) Move into the blow, take it on the forehead.
- (c) Push your best friend in front of you and let HIM/HER "take one for the team!"

4. How to PURIFY WATER ON THE TRAIL:

- (a) Add a dash of salt, boil, then drain into container.
- (b) Boil water vigorously for 1 minute.
- (c) Add sassafras leaves and allow to sit in sun for 4 hours!

5. How to DEFEND AGAINST GRIZZLY BEAR ATTACK:

- (a) Drop to the ground and cover the back of your neck.
- (b) Make eye contact and slowly back away.
- (c) Set out a bottle of honey and make soft happy sounds!

Traumatized Youth

Things to Remember and Do When Working with Youth Who Have Experienced Trauma.

1. Traumatized youth overreact to perceived threats.

Prevent stress-related problems by promoting a calm, physically and emotionally-safe learning environment.

2. Traumatized youth have trust issues with adults.

Maintain your own self-control even when angry by depersonalizing issues and managing your own emotions.

3. Traumatized youth are easily triggered.

Protect children from retraumatization by stopping bullying and intimidation, whether by peers or other staff.

4. Traumatized youth push the limits and expect abuse.

Redirect minor misbehaviors and enforce rules without angry power struggles, shaming, or unnecessary punitive consequences.

5. Traumatized youth have difficulty calming down.

De-escalate emotional crises by helping youth to calm down and talk about emotions.

6. Traumatized youth are hypersensitive to physical touch.

If absolutely needed, use only minimal physical force and safe, non-threatening holds to control dangerous behaviors. Never use angry threats or physical force to "manhandle" children for noncompliance.

7. Traumatized youth often block out and fail to learn from problems.

Thoroughly and calmly process crises with youth after stressful situations, especially after restraints.

8. Traumatized youth target particular staff with anger or fears.

Recognize when to use other staff to help with problems beyond your own level of expertise.



Predictable Problems

Troubled youth often react to stressful situations in predictable ways. Staff who use consequences to influence these students' behavior may find themselves drawn into power struggles which lead to predictable failure.



Avoidant Adrian forgot her math homework. She is looking frantically through her locker as the bell rings. A staff member sees her and says, **"C'mon Adrian! Get to class before I write you up! You're late!"**

1. Student's FEELINGS:

2. Student's BEHAVIOR:

3. Staff's Neg REACTION:

4. Student's FEELINGS:

5. Student's BEHAVIOR:

6. Staff's Neg REACTION:

Dependent DJ got beaten up outside of school. Bruised and angry, he storms into class 10 minutes late. His teacher says, **"Where have you been DJ? Take your seat and get caught up with the lesson."**



1. Student's FEELINGS:

2. Student's BEHAVIOR:

3. Staff's Neg REACTION:

4. Student's FEELINGS:

5. Student's BEHAVIOR:

6. Staff's Neg REACTION:

Four Self-Defeating Dynamics

Troubled youth see themselves, their peers, and helping adults from a fundamentally different perspective. This distorted view often creates a self-fulfilling prophecy of predictable failure and rejection.



A _____

Belief: _____

Feeling: _____

Behavior: _____

P _____ **-A** _____

Belief: _____

Feeling: _____

Behavior: _____



A _____

Belief: _____

Feeling: _____

Behavior: _____

D _____

Belief: _____

Feeling: _____

Behavior: _____



Four Psychological Dynamics

Four students are taking placement test with the assessment counselor. Each reaches a question which s/he cannot answer, and begins to feel stressed. Identify the pattern suggested by each response:

1. After an uncomfortable silence, Perry snipes:

"Well, I tell you what Doc, I got no clue! Guess you think I'm stupid now, right? What's it like being Mr. Perfect? I mean, DOCTOR Perfect?"

Which Pattern? _____



2. With barely a pause, DJ whines:

"Can you give me a hint? I really need to do well on this test. If I don't, they're going to hold me back a year, I heard. Maybe just a little hint? Pleeeeeeeease?"

Which Pattern? _____

3. Andy stares back at the tester and growls:

"Smart @\$\$ people like you are always tryin' me. I'm @#\$% sick of it, let me tell you. One of these days I'm gonna slap one of you upside the head, then we'll see how smart you are."

Which Pattern? _____



4. Adrian seems to give it deep thought, then asks:

"Can we take a quick break? I had a lot of soda this morning and just need to use the restroom. Don't go anywhere... I'll be right back!" Adrian walks out the door, and never returns.

Which Pattern? _____

Conflict Cycle

The Conflict Cycle, created by Dr. Nicholas Long, explains how an impulsive emotional misbehavior often occurs when a student's underlying beliefs are triggered by a minor stressful event. If staff react with consequences rather than counseling, the problem often escalates to a true crisis.



Aggressive Andy is a 16-year old alternative ed student who seems like he is ALWAYS angry about something. Staff who know him best understand that he was severely neglected as a child, and realize that he takes being overlooked by adults or rejected by peers very personally.

Today, Mr. Johnson is handing out Pizza Hut gift certificates for students who earned their points this week.

Johnson: **"Oops! Looks like I'm one short, Andy. No big deal though. I'll swing by the restaurant tonight and bring yours in tomorrow, okay?"**

Andy is hurt. **"@#\$% it, Johnson. Don't do me any favors, you know? It's not like I need your damned pizza, anyway."**

Mr. Johnson feels stunned, especially since he's paying for this out of his own pocket. He lashes out: **"If that's the way you feel about it, fine! I'll eat it myself."**

Andy's pain turns to fury. **"Yeah whatever, you fat piece of @#\$%."** He gets up to leave, shoving a chair.

Mr. Johnson doesn't want to let him have the last word. **"Smart-@\$\$ See how you feel when you miss Friday's movie for that comment."**

The two engage in a power struggle, neither one willing to let the other get the last word...