Connecting with Kids Who Outwit Adults

Larry K. Brendtro, PhD

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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
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
FIGHT

Private Logic:

“Hurt or be Hurt”
FLIGHT

Private Logic:

“Hide or be Hurt.”
FOOL
Private Logic:

“Outsmart the enemy.”
Conflict and Coping Cycles
Nicholas Long

Reactivity

Threat

Logic

Actions

Emotions
Three Helping Strategies

1. Connect
2. Clarify
3. Restore
Build bonds between youth and caring adults and peers.
Explore behavior challenges, goals, and private logic.
Provide external supports and build inner strengths.
Six Drives (D⁶)

Adventure

Purpose

Power

Safety

Belonging

Achievement
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 Outside Kid

The Inside Kid
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
Resilient
Outcomes
Transforming Assessment

GF Learning
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
Trust? Liking?
Connecting in Crisis
The way one defines a problem will determine the strategies that can be used to solve it.

Nicholas Hobbs
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
Even if you are not a DIAGNOSTICIAN, you can always be a SUSPECTITION within the daily routines of the school system.

Eli Bower
1917-1991

Bower, 1981
What might one suspect may be troubling Joey?
Joey J. Age 10, Grade 4

In-School Suspension - Self Report

Joey was removed to the ISS room for conflict with peers. He was required to write one page explaining his feelings and why what he did was wrong. What does this tell about Joey?

I feel fine. I also fine ok fine what ever you want to say so there
that is all I have to say so there.
and if I had it my way I would not go to schoool so there and if I do not want to write I do not have to listen to you if I do not want to so there and I do not car what it call anyone so there and I do not car about anything I do to some body so there and that is not all I have to write so I am not saying anything more.
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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What attitudes and behaviors may get in the way of you forming or maintaining quality relationships?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>low self-esteem (including “false pride”)</td>
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<tr>
<td>addictions, compulsions, illness (mental and physical)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prioritizing work over relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>alienizing or isolating tendencies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>super-independence from others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>overdependence on others or co-dependency (with addicts)</td>
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<tr>
<td>worrying too much</td>
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<tr>
<td>social anxiety or shyness</td>
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<tr>
<td>feeling “different” from others</td>
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<tr>
<td>fear of rejection, abandonment or being alone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fear of failure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fear of criticism, confrontation or anger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>oversensitivity (including defensiveness)</td>
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<tr>
<td>excessive feelings of guilt</td>
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<tr>
<td>masochism or “victim syndrome”</td>
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<tr>
<td>frequently comparing self to others</td>
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<tr>
<td>unrealistic expectations toward self or others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>perfectionism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>taking life or self too seriously, difficulty having fun</td>
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<tr>
<td>rigidity, inflexibility or controlling tendencies</td>
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<tr>
<td>chaotic or overflexible tendencies</td>
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<tr>
<td>not being able to take things seriously enough</td>
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<tr>
<td>procrastination or indecisiveness</td>
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<tr>
<td>extreme loyalty to others</td>
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<tr>
<td>people-pleasing or approval-seeking tendencies</td>
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<tr>
<td>non-assertiveness (passivity or passive-aggressiveness)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ignoring or not expressing self and own needs and feelings</td>
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<tr>
<td>caretaking or super-responsibility for others</td>
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<tr>
<td>stereotyping people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aggressiveness or resentment (holding grudges)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jealousy or envy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>super irresponsibility or not keeping agreements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nondisclosure of self (including fear of “being found out”)</td>
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<tr>
<td>dishonesty or manipulative tendencies</td>
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<tr>
<td>avoidance of commitments (includes fear of feeling “trapped”)</td>
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<tr>
<td>overuse of defense mechanisms (e.g., denial, blame)</td>
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<tr>
<td>other</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Focusing on developing healthy relationships is an important life skill.
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.
Planning
Resilient
Outcomes

Nicole
Girl, 17, sent to penitentiary for torture, theft
Steve,

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 end and was brought back to this hell whole. 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 hardcore and wound up pushing away the people who could help me the most because I was ashamed of myself. I got back up for parole in the beginning of July. Six months never seemed so long before.
Planning
Resilient
Outcomes

Andrei
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 again, 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

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
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
Erik Laursen, PhD

Cultures Of Respect
Helping Kids Who Hurt

Howard Bath        John Seita

Three Pillars of Transforming Care

SAFETY
CONNECTING
COPING
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.”
Connecting with Adult-Wary Kids

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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