

# Reaching Teens: The Power of Human Relationships

## Illinois Quality Afterschool Workshop

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# The protective power of human connection



Breathe



# The Parable of the River

(Adapted from Rolbeiser. The holy longing. NY: Doubleday; 1999)

# Childhood Trauma May Affect:

The Body

The Brain

Behavior

Genetics

# An inflection point in human history, but we need a course correction . . .

An Integrated Model that includes all we've learned from

- ✓ Positive Youth Development
- ✓ Resilience Building Strategies
- ✓ Trauma-sensitive Practices
- ✓ Restorative Practices

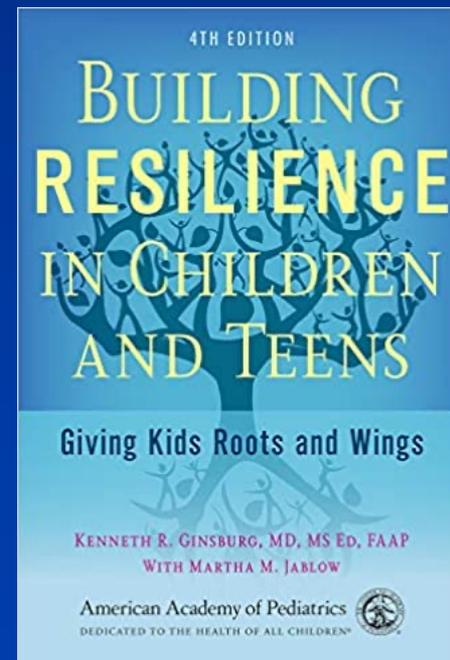
A model that acknowledges pain, but sees the best in people.

A model that recognizes structural racism and the undermining forces of low expectations, but prevents a new label from being applied to already marginalized communities. In sharp contrast, it must recognize the strengths of individuals, communities, and cultures.

An equity and anti-racist lens must be fully integrated lest aspirational models do harm.

An Integrated Model that includes what we've learned from:

Positive Youth Development  
Resilience Building Strategies  
Trauma-Sensitive Practices  
Restorative Practices

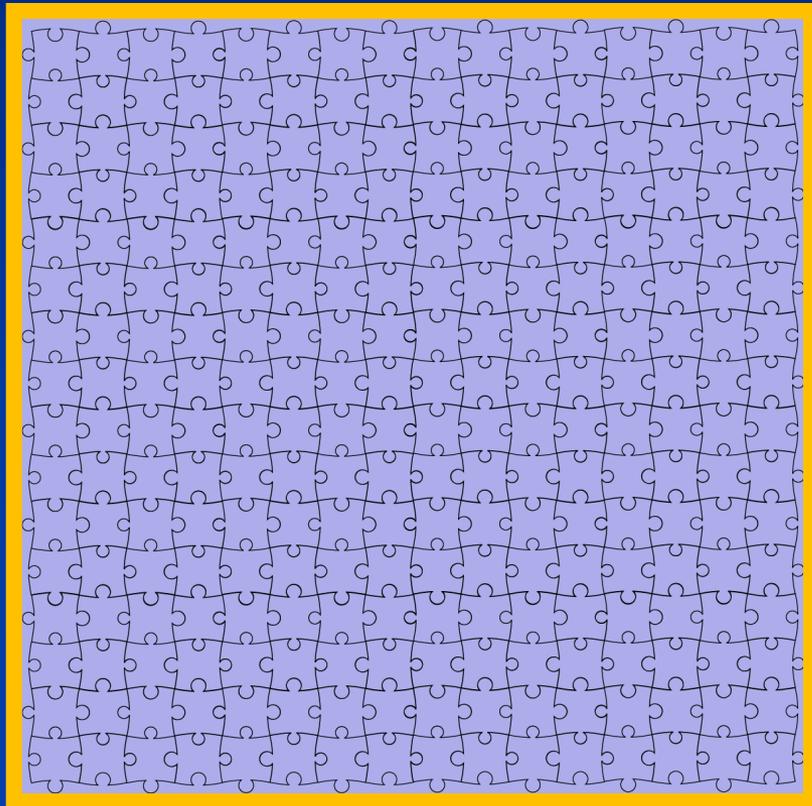


At the root of all models is the primacy and power of human relationships both to build strong, successful youth and to heal those who have endured hardships

# Seeking the “Sweet Spot”

We know young people need **safe, secure, sustained relationships** to thrive. We even know that such relationships can allow them to heal from hard pasts. We must guide them so they are accountable to being their best selves. When we do so, they must know that our high expectations are rooted in our caring. Ideally **our efforts at accountability must enhance, rather than disrupt, our protective relationships.**

Where can the greatest progress be made with adolescents, but especially for those with the hardest lives?



# Youth Development 101

**How do we define success for  
ALL Young People?**

# We Matter...

more than the buildings or programs.



Young people come for the **content**, but the **human context** is what heals them.

# Restorative Practices at a Glance

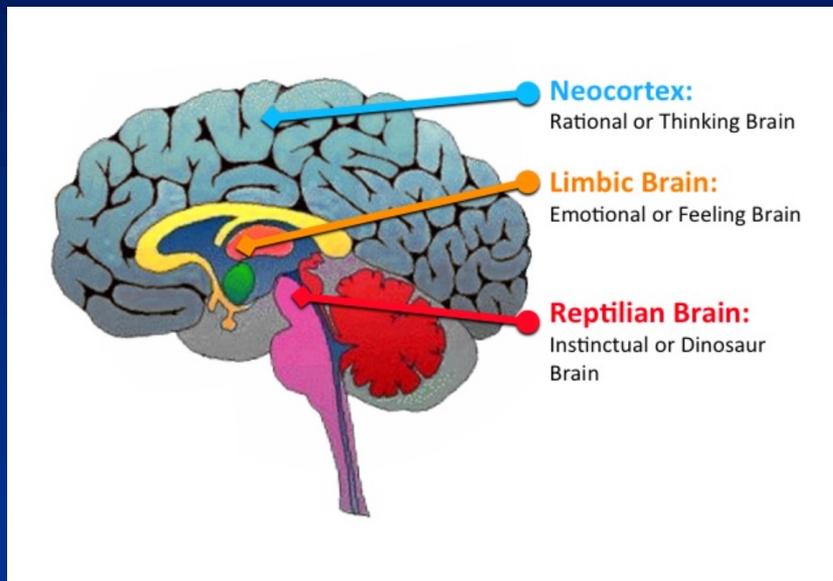
Adults support young people to reach their potential by offering corrective guidance when they stray from being their best selves.

Punitive actions or punishment are ineffective, and potentially harmful, means of holding young people accountable.

Restorative practices work when all parties understand expectations and are solidly rooted in a cohesive culture in which everyone benefits from respectful interactions.

Once these healthy cultures are mutually valued, when someone (young person or adult!!) needs to be held accountable, they can be invited in a genuinely caring and transparent manner to return or restore themselves to their place as an integral community member.

# Brain Development for Communicators



Emotional centers develop first

Development is a process not an event

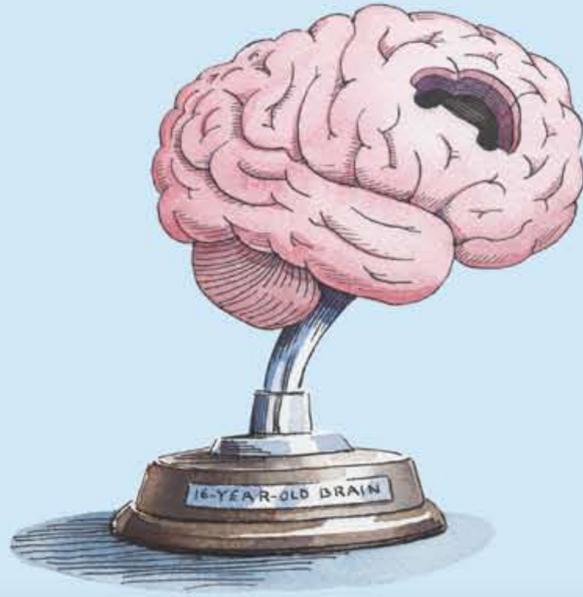
Reasoning ability *ALWAYS* exists, but is solidifying

# The **WRONG** Way to See It

Why do most 16-year-olds drive like they're  
*missing a part of their brain?*



BECAUSE THEY ARE.



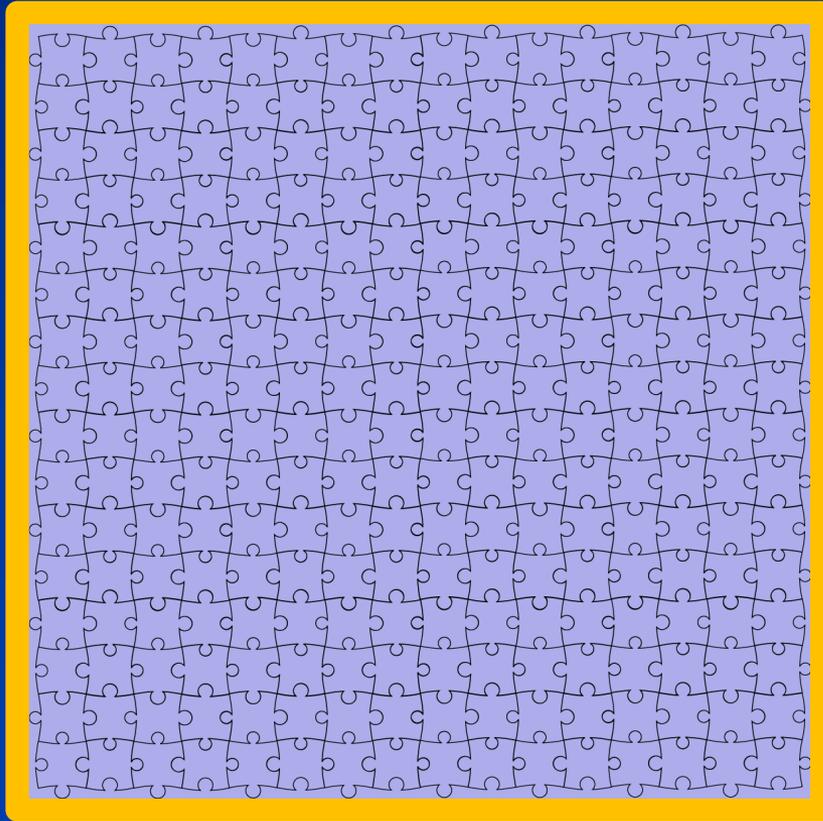
The **Right** Way to See It:  
A Critically Important Opportunity to Shape the Future



# Enrichment and Protection

- Adolescents are super-learners
- Experimentation is a necessity, it is our job to create enriching, exciting, **safe** opportunities for growth.
- It is also our job to protect from harm

Why super - learners must push the edges. And, our role.



# Communication for the Developing Brain

(Which incidentally is inside of a person)



# Resilience

# Resilience

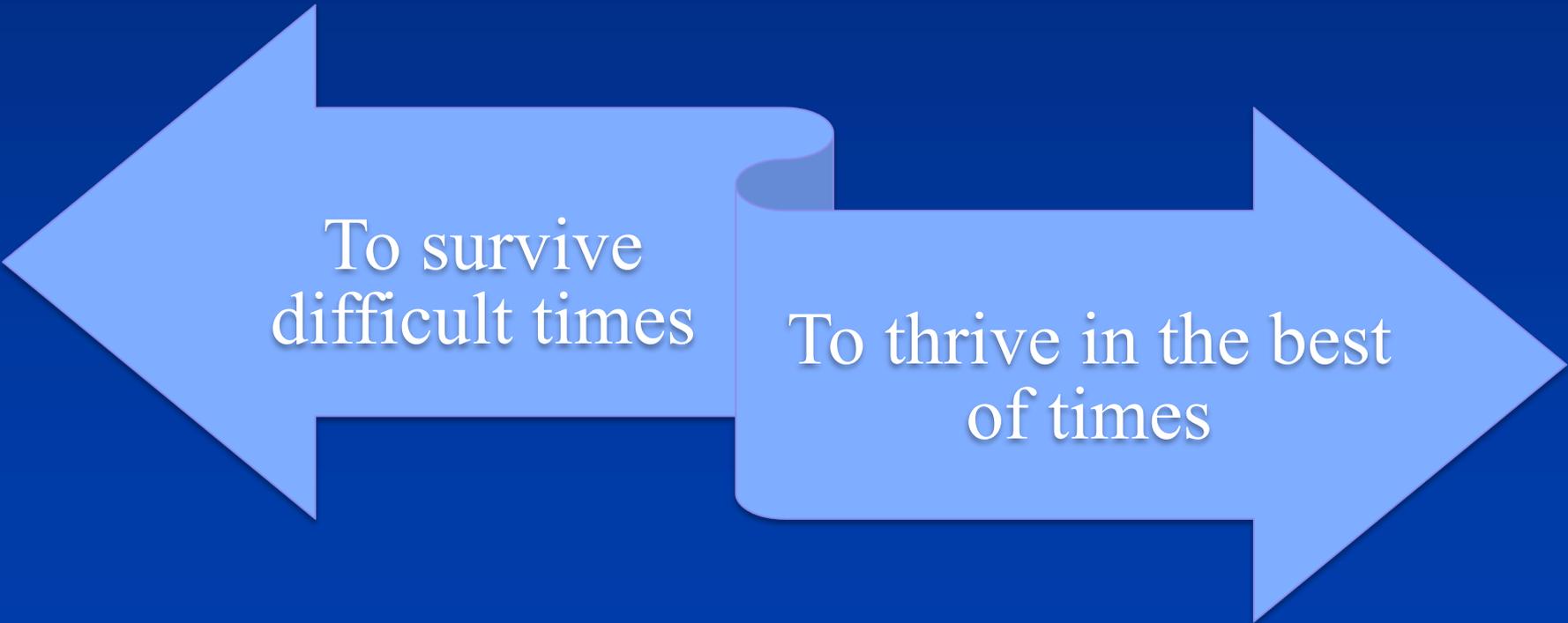


The ability to overcome adversity

The diagram features two large, light blue arrows pointing in opposite directions. The left arrow points left and contains the text 'The ability to overcome adversity'. The right arrow points right and contains the text 'The capacity to bounce back'. The two arrows are connected at their inner ends by a curved, ribbon-like shape, suggesting a continuous or interconnected process.

The capacity to bounce back

# Resilience



To survive  
difficult times

To thrive in the best  
of times

# Resilience is a Mindset





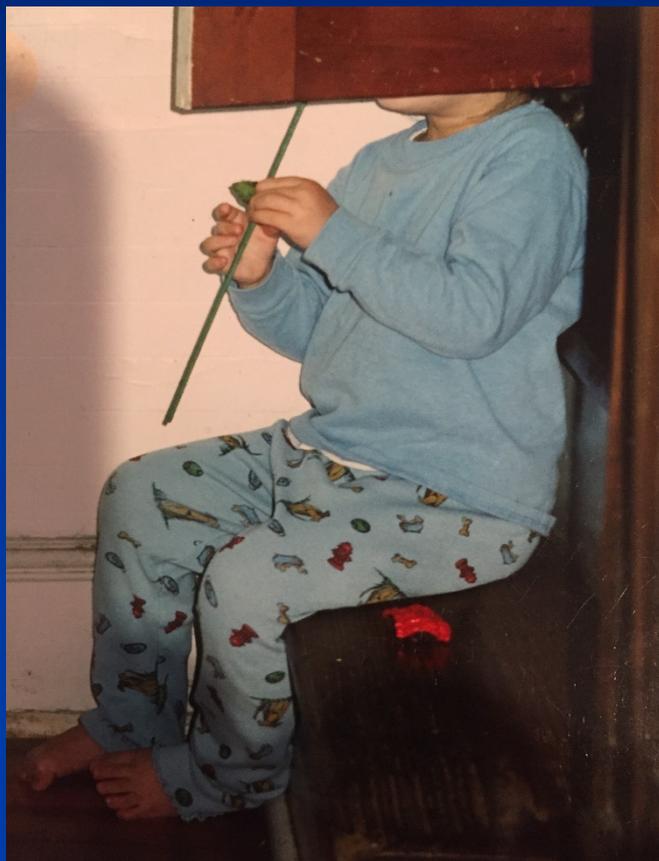
Where's the tiger now?

Uncertainty may be the greatest challenge to our  
sense of security

We adults can be the “lookouts” for youth, so they  
can focus on their development

# The Bottom Line

- Young People will be more resilient if the important adults in their lives believe in them unconditionally and hold them to high expectations
- Young People live up or down to the expectations we set for them.



# Trauma Sensitive Practices

# Childhood Trauma May Affect:

The Body

The Brain

Behavior

Genetics

# UNLESS



# The Potential Effect of ACEs on Behavior



# Trauma Does Not Break Kids . . . . . . Nor Does it Cause Brain Damage

- Having a “Protector’s Brain”
- Having a Brilliant Amygdala

# How Do Hard Lives Make People Experience Transitions Differently?

Every new opportunity is a chance to be rejected entirely

- Where's the tiger?
- Am I safe?
- What if I am judged? Will I be rejected?
- Should I pretend I don't care?
- Should I fail fast to maintain my control?
- Should I choose to fail, so at least I'll control my destiny?

# Key Principles of Trauma Sensitive Practices

1. Knowing what is about you and what is not about you
2. Changing your lens from “What’s wrong with you!” to “What happened to you?”
3. Seeing people as they deserve to be seen, not based on labels they’ve received or behaviors they’ve displayed
4. Giving control back to people from whom control has been taken away

*To enable all young people, especially those who need us most, to reach their full potential as productive, caring, responsible citizens.*

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- Youth who need us the most are often those who push us away
- Youth who need us the most are often those who push our buttons
- Youth who need us the most may raise uncomfortable feelings in us
- Youth who need us the most often don't give us the feedback we crave

Nobody dared go near the tower. A fearsome dragon sat on its top.

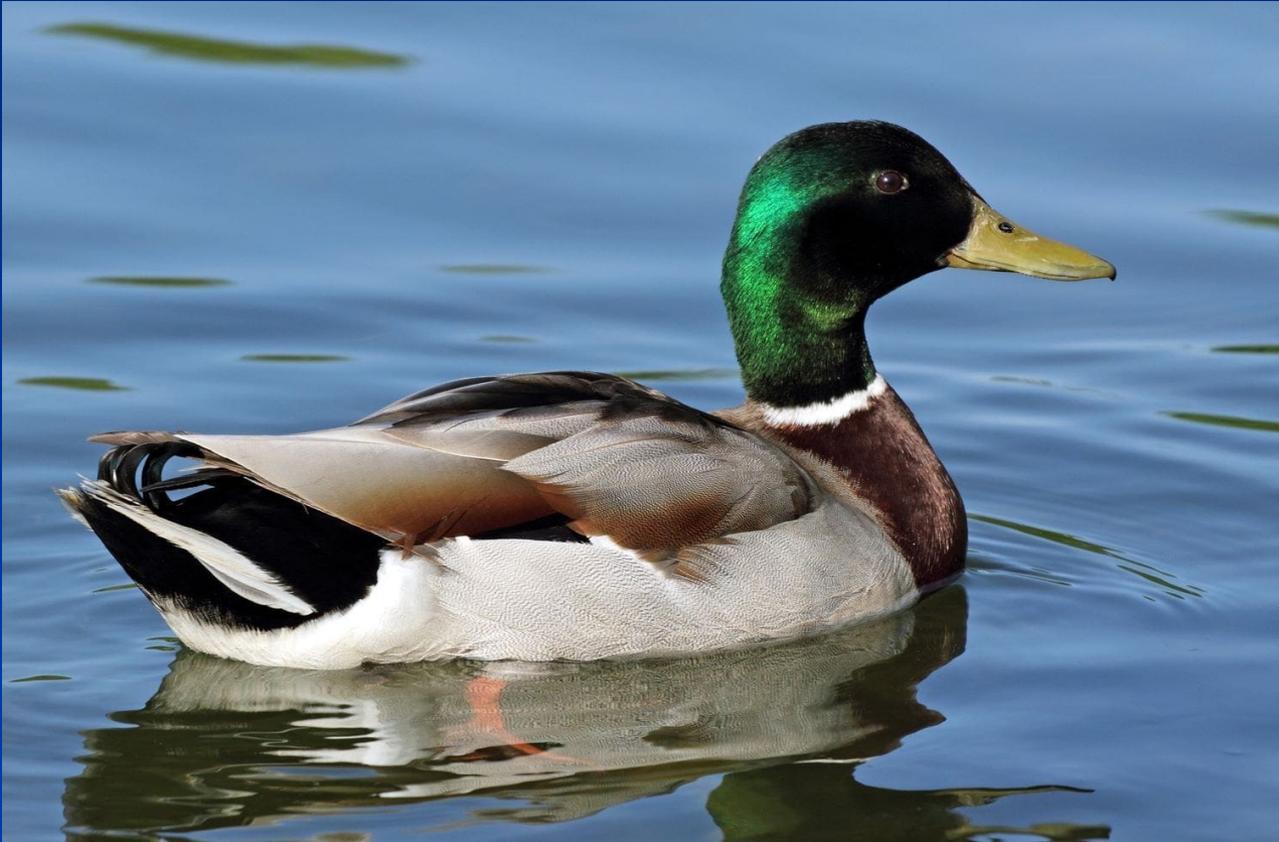
Until one day, a knight rode up. "Do you need help to get down?"

"Please."

# Giving Youth Control Over Their Decisions

Offer radical calmness, even amidst a chaotic reality, as a first step to helping youth access their thinking powers and compassionate natures

- **Co-regulation**
  - Amygdala to amygdala communication
  - Key to de-escalation
  - Critical to anticipation
  - Key to allowing “Mother Teresa” to surface
- **Self-regulation is a skill to be developed**





# Respect



# Learning Not to Undermine Competence

- Talking in a way young people understand
- Recognizing them as the experts in their own lives
- No more lectures!!!!!!
- No **hot** Communication

$$x = \sqrt[3]{2 + \frac{10}{3\sqrt{3}}} + \sqrt[3]{2 - \frac{10}{3\sqrt{3}}}$$

# Strength-based Communication

# Strength-based Communication is not about praise for the sake of praise

- It is about listening until genuine strengths are revealed
- It is about joining someone's team
- It is about facilitating the recognition and celebration of their strengths
- It is about planting seeds
- It must be real!

Strength-based communication is essential to promoting positive behavioral changes

# **Behavioral Change 101**

(Forward and Backward Movement)

**What Does it Mean to Have Somebody's Back?**

# Behavioral Change 101

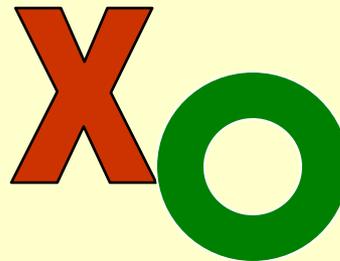
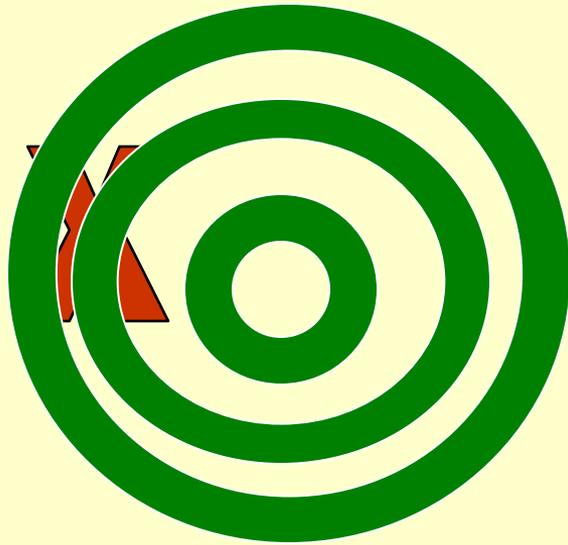
(What they're missing)

**? Pre-contemplation ?**

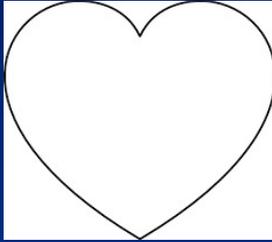
**Confidence gets it started . . .**

**. . . and shame and demoralization  
prevent action**

# Finding Competence . . . . . . Building Confidence

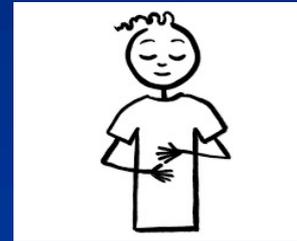


“Love is seeing someone as they deserve to be seen, *as they really are* , not through the lens of the behaviors they have sometimes needed to display.”



Heart

Belly



Head

Hands



We know young people need **safe, secure, sustained relationships** to thrive. We even know that such relationships can allow them to heal from hard pasts

# Secure?

- Knowing that the person is not going anywhere
- Knowing that you are not reliant on their presence

# Secure and Sustained









A close-up portrait of Maya Angelou, an elderly African American woman with short, curly grey hair. She is wearing large gold hoop earrings, a gold necklace, and a dark patterned top. She has a slight smile and is looking directly at the camera. The background is plain white.

I've learned that people will forget  
what you said, people will forget  
what you did, but people will never  
forget how you made them feel.

*Maya Angelou*