

Today's Key Points

- 1.** Many troubled youth have been deeply impacted by traumatic events in their early childhood years. These events often change children emotionally, physically, even biochemically and directly affect behavior in teen years.
- 2.** At-risk children and youth often adopt negative mindsets which let them predict how people will react to them. Aggression, passive aggression, avoidance and dependency are examples of these self-defeating cognitive behavioral patterns which lead youth to fail, but on their own terms.
- 3.** Traumatized youth often overreact emotionally to minor stresses, and can sometimes draw even caring adults into destructive power struggles. In situations like these, it is far more helpful to concentrate on calming and reassuring youth than using consequences to "teach them a lesson."



Getting Through To

Traumatized Youth

Insights & Strategies for Case Workers
and Youth Employment Counselors

For further information about staff training in these concepts
and skills, contact:

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Getting Through to Traumatized Youth

Turning 18 represents a magical transition for many young people: high school graduation, college, voting, full time jobs, and independence. Unfortunately, it is not so magical for many at-risk youth growing up exposed to regular drug use, neighborhood violence, and physical or emotional abuse. They need significant assistance finding work, but these suspicious, defensive, sometimes hostile young people can be particularly trying for case workers to motivate and manage.

This thought-provoking 90-minute session will offer staff insights and skills for connecting with relationship-wary youth. We first discuss the impact of childhood trauma, then delve into four self-protective patterns these youth exhibit, often drawing staff into destructive power struggles. Finally, we explore effective strategies for connecting with and motivating at-risk youth to build greater resilience and make good decisions for adult life, including full time work.

Things that Make you Go “Grrrrr!”

Brainstorm a list of 6-8 common behaviors in your work with challenging youth and young adults.

Connecting with Traumatized Youth What to do as an AGENCY

1. Childhood trauma defenses are often triggered when youth feel anxious or uncertain. **Create physically and emotionally safe learning environments, free of bullying, intimidation, or ridicule.**



2. Traumatized youth often lack the critical thinking and social skills needed to resolve problems and build better relationships. **Help youth get along with others and solve problems by actively teaching these skills in classes and in one on one interactions.**

3. Traumatized youth often lack the stress coping skills to handle distressing issues without overreacting. **Help youth manage themselves by teaching them how to control their feelings and cope with stress.**

4. Traumatized youth are often unable to stand up for themselves without reacting in extremes by fighting or fleeing. **Help them learn self-advocacy skills so that they can develop a healthy level of independence.**



OTHER THOUGHTS: _____

Connecting with Traumatized Youth

What to do as a STAFF MEMBER

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 uses angry threats or physical force to "manhandle" children for noncompliance.

7. Traumatized youth often block out events and fail to learn from problems. Thoroughly and calmly process crises with youth after stressful situations, especially after restraints.

8. Traumatized youth sometimes target particular staff with anger or fears. Recognize when to use other staff to help with problems beyond your own level of expertise.



Four Psychological Dynamics

Traumatized youth see themselves and the world from a fundamentally different perspective, one which creates a self-fulfilling prophesy of failure and rejection.



A

Typical Behaviors:

Underlying Belief:

Dominant Feeling:

P - A

Typical Behaviors:

Underlying Belief:

Dominant Feeling:



A

Typical Behaviors:

Underlying Belief:

Dominant Feeling:

D

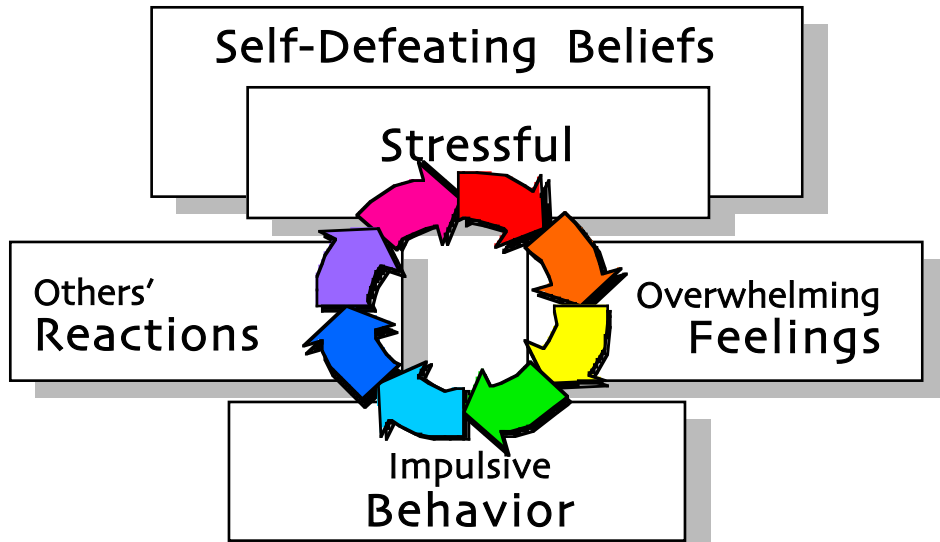
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Conflict Cycle



Created by Dr. Nicholas Long (1963)



Aggressive Andy is a 16-year old participant in a summer youth employment program who seems like he is ALWAYS angry about something. Staff who know him best understand that he was 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 Red Lobster gift certificates for youth who attended on time everyday this week. When Mr. Johnson finally comes to him, he says: "Oops! Looks like I'm one short, Andy. Don't worry though. I'll swing by the restaurant this weekend and bring yours in on Monday, how's that?"

Andy is hurt. He scowls: "@#% it, Johnson. Don't do me any favors, you know? It's not like I want your stupid a-- crab legs, anyway."

Johnson is 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 them myself."

Andy's pain turns to fury. "Yeah whatever, you fat piece of @#%."

He gets up to leave, shoving a chair, but Johnson doesn't want to let him have the last word. "Smart-@\$. See how you feel when you miss this afternoon's party for that comment." The two engage in a power struggle, neither one willing to let the other get the last word...

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.



SITUATION: Avoidant Adrian forgot to bring in her permission form. She is standing near the girls room door, searching frantically in her book bag anyway.
STAFF: "Hurry up & get to class, or I'll write you up!"

ADRIAN'S FEELINGS: _____

HER BEHAVIOR: _____

STAFF'S LIKELY REACTION: _____

Better Response: _____

SITUATION: Dependent DJ gets beaten up on the way in today, and wanders into his first class 10 minutes late, still in pain.
INSTRUCTOR: "You're late DJ! Where have you been? Never mind, get to your seat and start your work."



DJ'S FEELINGS: _____

HIS BEHAVIOR: _____

STAFF'S LIKELY REACTION: _____

Better Response: _____