

Here be dragons: Navigating complex adolescent cases

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- Disclosures – None (though, I am willing to hear any offers)
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My Story



Boys Town

- Who get's to the program
- What do they look like before
 - Diagnoses/Providers
 - Medications
 - Drug Use
 - Achievement
- After 18 months
 - Diagnoses
 - Medications
 - Achievement



What do we have in common?

Why this matters

- Success stories surprisingly similar
- There was no light bulb – or “Good Will Hunting” moment
- Failure, and mistakes continued afterward
- Change the context, change their lives

My Assumptions and approach

- We all do what works
 - Corollary *But we don't know why (inaccurate)
 - What works for NOW, often hurts us LATER
- Behavior reciprocally interacts with the environment in a constant cycle
 - "We have a hand in creating the very circumstances that we suffer from"
- Children are a robust phenomenon (MWR)
 - Strategic change now, larger effect later

Who are we talking about?

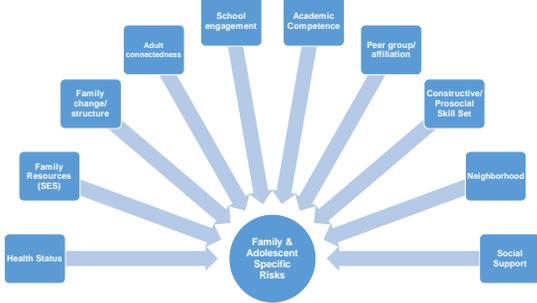
- Internalizing symptoms
 - Anxious distress
 - Depressed mood
 - Avoidant
- Externalizing symptoms
 - Resistant, oppositional, "strong willed"
- Developmental and/or learning difficulties
- Family stressors



Common family processes

- Avoidant family relationships
 - Mutually critical and negativistic
 - Coercive parent-child conflict
- Parent and child report low reinforcement value in their day to day interactions
- Child
 - Avoidant
 - Increased time engaged in isolating, reclusive activities
- Parenting
 - Over reactive and/or emotionally driven

And there's this....



Looking downfield

- Looking at "success" with a different lens
 - Altering trajectories rather than managing symptoms
 - Reducing coercion during interactions
 - Build processes that support positive interactions
 - Building islands of resilience and strength for the adolescent and the family
 - Getting them back on the road, not necessarily to the finish line



Steps along the path

1. Listen, match them, and join
2. Repair relationships
3. Changing "default" mode
4. Change the game
5. Change signals
6. Reducing the "in-betweens"
7. Taking parents and adolescents to school"
8. Enlarge the therapy room



Changing the Context

Family Interventions

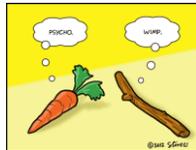
Listen and Lean In

- Put down the notepad
- Identify the keystone
- If we aim to shape context, we need to understand it
- Shared family vision



Repair Relationships

- You cannot farm with a spear in your hand
- Disturbed relationships between carrots and sticks
 - Relational bank account and insolvency
 - Analogy using coaching
 - Looking beyond "stuff" to time, effort, and acknowledgement
- Prosocial action has little immediate power



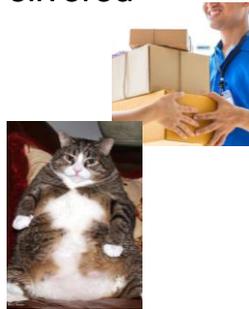
Growing What You Want to See More Of



- Behavioral momentum, and the vacuum salesman
- Lowest hanging fruit
- Generalize from current evidence based practice
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Somatic issues
- Anger
- Sleep
- Academic underperformance
- School Refusal

Renegotiating How Good Stuff is Delivered

- Build an "enjoyment map"
 - Correct understanding of control
 - Understand what is important, what is valuable (to the adolescent), and how time is spent
 - What the adolescent gives, they receive - just in a different way
- Fat cats need to be on a diet
- Renegotiating expectations with adolescent and family



Changing "Default" Mode

- Difference between "learning about" and "learning to be"
 - The latter **requires** failure
- Change "default mode" with discipline
 - Problem with the "take away game"
 - Goal to stop punishing parents, shift burden to adolescent
- **Changing from time to effort**
 - Expectations to shift energy/effort to the adolescent



Example: Compliance

- Compliance
 - Simple, but often frustrating and source of family conflict
- Example: The Privilege Thief
 - Start small. Stuff that is observable, and able to be completed by parents.

Change the Game

- Clear definitions of unacceptable actions/conduct
 - Normative inappropriate behavior
 - High intensity, low frequency
- Eliminate the adolescent's "trump cards"
 - Running away
 - Aggression
 - Suicidal threats/actions



Examples

- In home behavior: Verbal aggression
- Boundary concerns: Drug use

Keeping the Game Simple

- Capitalize on past interventions
- Parents – in coordination with the adolescent
- Construct expectations –
 - Concrete
 - Specific
 - Objective and agreed upon
- Examine and evaluate reinforcement before punishment

Change Signals

- Signals, names, and my wife
- Nature of conversations in distressed families
- Timing and history is everything!
- Topics
 - School
 - What needs to happen
 - What didn't happen
 - None are pleasant
- Helping parents to listen, and be interested - REALLY!



Manage the “In-betweens”



- What are the “in-betweens”
- Importance of peers
 - Glove in the mud
 - Peer groups are incredibly powerful
 - Immature response to reinforcement & punishment
- Educating parents, and engaging the adolescent
 - What can and cannot be done
- Role of response effort

Taking the family to school



- Alter the association school and unpleasantness
- Academic performance
 - Redefine concept of academic engagement
 - Shift burden to the adolescent
 - Create ownership
- Two groups of kids at any school
 - Those that remain after the bell
 - Those that do not

Enlarge the Therapy Room

- Build quality relationships with pediatricians in your community
 - You are not the first professional they have talked to
- Identifying range of supports available
- Build connections to middle and high schools
- Identify social service programs, charities and mentoring programs

Summary

- We are only as powerful as the change we create in a family's experience
- Real therapeutic work occurs through functional, and positive interactions in the adolescent's world
- Context matters
 - Actively engages parents and their adolescents in the act of creating a family
 - Promotes independence, resilience, and growth (which isn't always pleasant)
