

HANDOUTS

Angry & Challenging Youth

Strategies to Nurture Motivation, Self-Discipline, and Resilience

presented by

Robert Brooks, Ph.D.

AGENDA

Thursday

8:15 a.m. Registration

9:00 **Key Concepts**

- Mindsets
- Resilience

10:20 **Break**

10:35 **Background**

- Inner City Boston
- Locked Inpatient School
- A Personal Loss

Key Questions

- Mindsets of Adults, Angry Youth, Resilient Youth

12:00 p.m. **Lunch**

1:15 **Positive Adult Mindset**

- Resilience is Possible
- Importance of a “Charismatic Adult”

2:35 **Break**

2:50 **Positive Adult Mindset (continued)**

- Inborn Wish for Mastery
- Addressing “Avoidance Motivation”
- When to Change sStrategies
- Empathy

4:15 **Adjournment**

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Friday

7:45 a.m. Registration

8:30 **Negative Mindset of Angry Youth**

- Stories of Angry Youth
- Beliefs and Feelings of Angry Youth

9:50 **Break**

10:05 **Frameworks for Identifying
Intrinsic Motivation**

- Attribution Theory
- Deci’s Focus

Interventions to Reinforce “Resilient Mindset”

11:30 **Lunch**

12:45 p.m. **More Interventions**

2:05 **Break**

2:20 **Developing “Stress Hardiness”**

- Disillusionment and Burnout
- Commitment, Challenge & Personal Control
- Promoting Satisfaction & Happiness

3:45 **Adjournment**

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Dr. Robert Brooks

Dr. Robert Brooks has lectured nationally and internationally to audiences of parents, educators, mental health professionals, and business people on topics pertaining to motivation, resilience, family relationships, the qualities of effective leaders and executives, and balancing our personal and professional lives. He has also written extensively about these topics. He is the author or co-author of 15 books including *Raising Resilient Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders*; *The Self-Esteem Teacher*; *The Charismatic Advisor: Becoming a Source of Strength in the Lives of Your Clients*; *Raising Resilient Children*; *Nurturing Resilience in Our Children: Answers to the Most Important Parenting Questions*; *Raising a Self-Disciplined Child*; *Handbook of Resilience in Children*; *Seven Steps to Help Your Child Worry Less*; *Angry Children, Worried Parents: Seven Steps to Help Families Manage Anger*; *Seven Steps to Improve Your Child's Social Skills*; *Understanding and Managing Children's Classroom Behavior: Creating Sustainable, Resilient Classrooms*; *The Power of Resilience: Achieving Balance, Confidence, and Personal Strength in Your Life*; *A Pediatric Approach to Learning Disorders*; and *So That's How I Was Born!* (a sex education book for young children). Drs. Brooks and Sam Goldstein also prepared a parenting video and curriculum about resilience and have produced a documentary "Tough Times, Resilient Kids" that was a finalist in the 23rd Telly Awards.

Dr. Brooks received his doctorate in clinical psychology from Clark University and did additional training at the University of Colorado Medical School. He is on the faculty of Harvard Medical School and has served as Director of the Department of Psychology at McLean Hospital, a private psychiatric hospital. His first position at McLean Hospital was as principal of the school in the locked door unit of the child and adolescent program. He has a part-time private practice in which he sees children, adolescents, adults, and families and has appeared regularly on television shows in the Boston area as well as on national cable television. He completed a videotape and educational guide for PBS titled "Look What You've Done! Stories of Hope and Resilience" that focuses on the resilience in children with special needs and participated in the production of two videotapes by Sunburst Communications, one about parenting children with learning and attentional problems and the other about developing responsibility in children.

Dr. Brooks received a Gubernatorial Award for Distinguished Public Service for his work with the Governor's Alliance Against Drugs; as part of his contribution to the Alliance, he co-authored a pamphlet for parents about talking with children and adolescents about drugs. Dr. Brooks also received "Hall of Fame" awards from both CH.A.D.D. (Children and Adults with Attention Deficit Disorders) and the Connecticut Association for Children with Learning Disabilities for his work with special needs children and adolescents, a Special Recognition and Media Award from the Massachusetts Psychological Association, the Friends of Family Award from the Family Place, MA and the Mandy Overton Award from St. David's Child Development and Family Services, Minnetonka, MN for his work on behalf of children and families, The Lifetime Achievement Award from the Prentice School in Santa Ana, CA for his efforts on behalf of students with learning differences, the Distinguished Leadership Award from Learning Disabilities Worldwide in recognition of his contributions and commitment to the field of learning disabilities, and the Outstanding Educator Award for Mental Health Education from the New England Educational Institute, Pittsfield, MA. In addition, Dr. Brooks has served as a consultant to Sesame Street Parents Magazine.

Angry and Challenging Youth:
Strategies to Nurture Motivation,
Self-Discipline, and Resilience

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Two key concepts: mindsets and resilience

Mindsets: A brief history of this concept in
therapeutic endeavors

Mindsets: The assumptions and expectations we
have for ourselves and others that guide our
behavior

Two key concepts: mindsets and resilience

Resilience: Two shifts in perspective

Broadening the concept of resilience from
applying solely to youth experiencing great
adversity to all youth

Moving from a belief in special, inborn qualities
to "ordinary magic"

Dr. George Bonnano

“What is perhaps most intriguing about resilience is not how prevalent it is; rather, it is that we are consistently surprised by it. I have to admit that sometimes even I am amazed by how resilient humans are, and I have been working with loss and trauma survivors for years.”

Dr. Ann Masten

“Resilience does not come from rare and special qualities; but from the everyday magic of ordinary, normative resources in the minds, brains, and bodies of children; in their families and relationships; and in their communities. The conclusion that resilience emerges from ordinary processes offers a far more optimistic outlook for action than the idea that rare and extraordinary processes are involved.”

Several important roots of my interest in resilience

My work with youth and families in the inner city of Boston

My position as principal of a school in a locked door unit of a psychiatric hospital

The sudden death of my brother and a changing understanding of the reaction of my parents

Major questions to be addressed in this workshop

What is the mindset of adults who are effective in working with angry youth?

What are some of the main characteristics of the mindset of angry youth?

What is the mindset of resilient youth and how do we reinforce a “resilient mindset” in angry, challenging youth?

Major questions to be addressed in this workshop

How do we deal with our own feelings of stress and burnout, moving from a position of stressed out to stress hardy?

Features of an adult’s positive mindset

To believe in the capacity of angry, at-risk youth to overcome adversity and become more hopeful and resilient: To believe we can serve as a “charismatic adult”

“I want to be a charismatic adult. What do I do?”

Reflections and questions about charismatic adults

Do we as adults need charismatic adults in our lives?

What three people in my current life would I list as my charismatic adults?

What do they say or do that make them charismatic adults?

Reflections and questions about charismatic adults

What three people from my childhood would I list as my charismatic adults?

What did they say or do to make them charismatic adults in my life?

What three people in my current life would list me as their charismatic adult? Why would they list me?

Reflections and questions about “anti-charismatic” adults

What three people in my current life would I list as my anti-charismatic adults?

What do they say or do that make them anti-charismatic adults?

Reflections and questions about “anti-charismatic” adults

What three people from my childhood would I list as my anti-charismatic adults?

What did they say or do to make them anti-charismatic adults in my life?

What people in my current life might list me as their anti-charismatic adult? Why would they list me in that way?

Features of an adult’s positive mindset

To believe that all children from birth want to learn and be successful

To believe that all youth are motivated, but unfortunately, some are dominated by “avoidance motivation” as a way of protecting themselves from situations that they believe will lead to failure and humiliation

Features of an adult’s positive mindset

To believe that if the strategies we are using with angry youth are not effective then we must ask, “What is it that we can do differently to help the situation?” rather than continue to wait for the child or adolescent to change first: This should not be seen as blaming but rather as empowering ourselves

Features of an adult's positive mindset

To understand the importance of empathy: Learning to see the world through the eyes of others—Daniel Goleman views empathy as a key component of both emotional and social intelligence

Let's review some exercises and questions to promote empathy and help us to assume the role of charismatic adults

Questions to promote empathy

What words would you hope angry youth and others use to describe you?

Why do you hope they use these words?

What words would they actually use to describe you?

Questions to promote empathy

If there is a noticeable discrepancy between the words you hope they would use and the words they would actually use, what actions can you take to bring the two lists closer together?

How do you know what words angry youth would use to describe you? How do you obtain feedback?

Questions to promote empathy

The power of “indelible memories”

Do we use our own childhood memories as therapists, parents, educators, and other caregivers to guide what we do with youth today? What are some of the main positive and negative themes that emerge from these memories? Let’s look at some specific questions to highlight the importance of these indelible memories

Questions to promote empathy

The power of “indelible memories”

What are two or three of the best experiences you had as a child or adolescent that involved an adult (e.g., parent, teacher, coach) that boosted your self-esteem and hope?

What are two or three of the worst experiences you had as a child or adolescent that involved an adult that diminished your self-esteem and hope?

Empathy: To use empathic communication

Would I want anyone to say or do to me what I have said or done to this other person?

In anything I say or do what do I hope to accomplish?

Am I saying or doing it in a way in which the other person feels respected and can truly hear what I have to say and respond constructively?

Features of an adult's positive mindset

To understand and manage obstacles to being empathic and communicating effectively

It is much easier to be empathic towards those people whose ideas agree with ours. The true test of empathy is to be empathic when we are upset, annoyed, or disappointed with others

Empathy: Understanding the Mindset of Angry Youth

Invaluable information from the stories, drawings, and metaphors of angry youth. What are several of the major themes that emerge?

The negative mindset of many angry, at-risk children and adolescents

Helplessness: Lack of control or influence about events that happen in one's life

Hopelessness: Nothing will ever change

Others don't understand and can't help me

The negative mindset of many
angry, at-risk children and
adolescents

I make little difference in the world

General feeling that things are not fair

I feel unaccepted and unloved

Features of an adult's positive mindset

To understand frameworks to guide us in
creating "motivating environments" and
increasing intrinsic motivation and resilience

Attribution Theory: Understanding the successes
and failures of our lives

Features of an adult's positive mindset

Deci's focus on basic needs

The need to feel connected and to belong

The need for self-determination and autonomy

The need to feel competent

Features of an adults's positive mindset

To understand the main characteristics of the mindset of resilient children and adolescents so that we can have guideposts for reinforcing this mindset in all of our interactions with challenging, angry students: Let's look at several of the main features of this mindset, all of which are interrelated

The mindset of resilient youth

To feel comfortable with and appreciate that others can be of support and help

To believe that one can solve problems and make decisions, which promotes a sense of personal control and ownership

The mindset of resilient youth

To define and reinforce one's strengths or "islands of competence" without denying or running from problematic areas

To believe that one can contribute to and make a positive difference in the world

The mindset of resilient youth

To possess self-discipline and self-control

To believe that mistakes are experiences from which to learn rather than feel humiliated

“I love your ideas, but I’m too stressed out to use them.”

Features of a stress hardy mindset

To develop “stress hardiness” rather than becoming stressed out and burned out: To practice the “3 C’s”

Commitment: What brings purpose and meaning to your life and work? Do you lead life in concert with your values?

Features of a stress hardy mindset

To develop “stress hardiness”

Challenge: Do you view difficult situations as opportunities for learning rather than as stress to avoid? The importance of thinking outside the box

Features of a stress hardy mindset

To develop “stress hardiness”

Control (personal): Do you focus your time and energy on situations over which you have some influence or do you frequently attempt to alter situations over which you have little, if any, control?

Features of a stress hardy mindset

Understanding and reinforcing factors that contribute to happiness: Eight recommendations offered by psychologist Sonja Lyubormirsky

Count your blessings

Practice acts of kindness

Savor life’s joys

Factors that contribute to happiness

Thank a mentor

Learn to forgive

Invest time and energy in friends and family

Take care of your body

Develop strategies for coping with stress

A version of this chapter appeared in the book *Reverence in Healing: Honoring Strengths Without Trivializing Suffering* edited by David Crenshaw, Ph.D. and published by Jason Aronson, 2010.

**The Power of Mindsets: A Personal Journey to Nurture
Dignity, Hope, and Resilience in Children
Robert Brooks, Ph.D.**

I am honored that David Crenshaw has dedicated this book to me and that he invited me to contribute a chapter. David is a person whom I greatly admire both as a warm and caring man and a gifted therapist. He possesses great empathy and compassion, enabling him to enter the world of children and gain their trust, heal their emotional wounds, and nurture their hope and resilience. He is a kindred spirit, an individual who appreciates that while we must never neglect to address the problems that burden children, we can do so most effectively by identifying and reinforcing their strengths.

The Beginning of My Journey

In reflecting upon the message I wish to convey in this chapter, my thoughts drift back more than 40 years to the beginning of my career as a clinical psychologist and to the rich journey I have experienced since that time. Psychology was my third major in college and I was pleased that as a senior I finally discovered a subject that triggered my interest and passion. I entered graduate school eager to become a psychologist and therapist and to help others.

I found my initial experiences as a therapist disconcerting. I was plagued by doubts and questions, wondering, “What is therapy? What are the goals of therapy? What impact can I have on the lives of others? What impact do I want to have?” Like many novices, I struggled to make sense of my role as a clinician. Unfortunately, a convergence of my uncertainty and the state of the mental health field at that time contributed to an atmosphere in which I and many other therapists too quickly cast blame on patients for a lack of progress in treatment.

Blame crept into my interpretation of what was transpiring in therapy. When my patients of any age did not improve, I questioned their motivation to change. If my best efforts to nurture a relationship with them did not lead to a feeling of connectedness, I wondered how much they wanted to work with me and confront their problems. In describing my patients, my therapy process notes were filled with words such as “resistant” or “oppositional” or “unwilling to change.”

It was also a time when the medical model dominated the mental health field. Psychiatric diagnoses representing areas of pathology were given and interventions were predicated on identifying and fixing problems. An emphasis on a patient’s strengths, which is a prominent feature of psychology’s current landscape, was absent. When interviewing parents, I asked few, if any, questions to elicit what they perceived to be the strengths of their children or what they considered to be their own assets as parents. Relatedly, I was more apt to speak with children and adults about their problems than invite them to elaborate upon their interests and strengths.

The Power of Mindsets

As I worked with youngsters in a variety of settings it became apparent that to place the emphasis on pathology not only limited my appreciation of the courage and

strengths of individuals, but it also impacted on and weakened my treatment approach. I became increasingly intrigued by the manner in which our perception of other people and our understanding of their behavior determined our interactions with them. I recall a meeting with several clinicians who were involved with the same family. One described the mother of the family as a “manipulator who constantly manipulates the system to obtain services” while another clinician observed this same woman as “a true advocate for her children, a mother who realizes that if you want services for your kids you have to fight for them.” The first framed the mother’s actions in a harshly negative way, while the second interpreted her behavior as a strength. Not surprisingly, their divergent views played out in the efficacy and comfort of their meetings with her.

A concept that I began to articulate in my workshops and writings, and further refined and elaborated in my collaboration with my colleague Dr. Sam Goldstein, was that of “mindsets” (Brooks & Goldstein, 2001, 2004, 2007; Goldstein & Brooks, 2007). We defined mindsets as assumptions and expectations we possess about ourselves and others that guide our behavior. We may not even be aware of certain assumptions, but they influence our actions. For example, a teacher may be angry with a child without fully realizing that the anger is rooted in the teacher’s assumption that the child’s constant asking of questions is an intentional ploy to distract the class. In addition, the teacher may not be aware that his anger is not as disguised as he believes and is being communicated through facial expressions and tone of voice.

In contrast, another teacher with the same child may assume that the child’s ongoing questions represent an attempt to understand the material being presented. This teacher is less likely to express negative verbal and nonverbal messages and more likely to win the child’s trust and cooperation by offering assistance, perceiving the child as feeling vulnerable rather than being oppositional.

A challenging position: a beginning change in mindsets. A pivotal shift in my mindset from a focus on pathology to a strength-based perspective occurred in 1973 when I assumed perhaps the most challenging position of my career, as principal of the school in a locked door unit of the child and adolescent program at McLean Hospital, a psychiatric facility outside Boston. Within several months I began to feel disillusioned, frustrated, angry, and burned out. My response as well as that of my staff to the angry youth in our program was to become increasingly rule-bound, controlling, and punitive. These inpatient youth reacted to our misguided disciplinary techniques not by becoming more cooperative but with a greater resolve to disobey.

I frequently think about my initial experiences at McLean Hospital. At the time I did not give thought to the ways in which my assumptions about the children were contributing to an approach that actually increased their anger. To be honest, I did not view the assumptions as assumptions but rather as the “truth.” What did I see as the truth? If someone would have interviewed me in 1973 and asked, “Describe the kids in your school?” I would not be joking if I answered, “I think they’re out to get me and my staff. I think they plot every night on the inpatient unit about how to make our lives miserable.”

If someone would have asked, “You have children in your unit between five to sixteen years of age, what kind of future do you predict they will have?” I would have responded, “It would not surprise me if by the time they are 18 years old many of them

will have hurt themselves or others, many will be heavily into drugs, and others will probably be in jail.”

I am convinced that on some level the children and adolescents “read” our mindsets, especially as our assumptions found expression in our daily negative interactions with them. Feelings and thoughts such as I had cannot be easily disguised.

I will never forget the day when one student, who continuously found his way to the “quiet room,” defiantly said to me, “You don’t get it, do you Dr. Brooks?”

“Get what?” I responded.

“We are going to outlast you.”

Comments such as these eventually prompted the realization that if we continued to apply the same approach with these youngsters that had proven patently unsuccessful, we would continue to encourage the very behaviors we wished to stop. Consequently and wisely, we adopted a different outlook that contributed to the implementation of more effective strategies. Little did I know at the time that within this new perspective was housed the foundation for what was to become the direction and passion of my career, namely, the desire to nurture hope and resilience in children. I was beginning to shift the spotlight from examining and exposing what was wrong with the students in our inpatient unit to highlighting their strengths.

Let me share a couple of examples. I discovered that some students changed their stance from resistant to cooperative based upon the words and tone of voice I used. They were more likely to follow my request when I said, “I need your help” as opposed to my telling them what they had to do. For instance, to counter an ongoing problem with vandalism, we asked students to join staff as members of a “space committee” whose responsibility it was to notify me of any graffiti or damage and offer suggestions for a cleaner physical plant.

Initially, a few staff questioned whether the inclusion of students on the “space committee” would encourage more vandalism with one predicting, “The kids will do more damage so they can write a longer list of repairs.” This dire prediction did not turn out to be the case. Vandalism was reduced significantly. One student said to me, reflecting an increased sense of ownership and responsibility, “It’s our space and we have to keep it clean.” This was the same child who just several weeks earlier I had viewed as destructive.

A second illustration of a shift in mindset concerned Billy, a nine-year-old boy hospitalized for aggressive outbursts and “sadistic behaviors,” including killing small animals. Billy was adopted at birth and several months prior to his hospitalization his adoptive parents gave guardianship back to the state since they could no longer handle his outbursts. In essence, Billy came to believe that two sets of parents had abandoned him, his biological parents and his adoptive parents. His mindset was dominated by strong beliefs that others could not be trusted and that their intention was to harm him. These beliefs fueled intense anger that was not easily modulated given his learning and language delays.

Each of Billy’s first two days at our school lasted only a few minutes. Upon entering the classroom, he quickly picked up a chair and threw it at one of his teachers. This resulted in his being sent back to the inpatient unit, spending much time in the quiet room as a result of his escalating angry outbursts. At a staff meeting called to discuss how best to handle Billy, the conversation initially centered on the most effective ways of

punishing him. We all agreed that we could not permit a child to throw chairs or attempt to injure others. But as the discussion progressed, I had this nagging thought that six months from now we would still be considering more punitive measures to curtail Billy's violent acts.

One of our teaching staff offered an insight that when first stated met with incredulous stares from colleagues, including myself. What prompted these stares was a very simple comment, but one that was to have a far reaching impact. In considering Billy's behavior, she observed, "I think one of his problems is that he is programmed to throw chairs."

She could see the quizzical expressions on our faces and explained, "Billy doesn't trust people. He doesn't want to be in school. Based on the records we have, school has been very difficult for him. He becomes easily frustrated and angry and the only way he knows how to deal with these intense feelings is through aggressive behaviors. It is as if he is programmed to act this way since he doesn't have any alternative behaviors available at this point."

After absorbing her comment I had an epiphany, which may sound so obvious but was not at the time. I thought, "If Billy is programmed to throw chairs, there are others who are as rigidly programmed as he is, namely, myself and the staff. As soon as he engages in his predictable behavior, we engage in ours. We restrain him and place him in the quiet room."

I shared this insight with the staff, emphasizing that I was not blaming any of us nor was I implying that Billy's behavior should not be met with consequences. However, what I was suggesting was that if we were to create any possibility of altering Billy's programmed behavior, we had the responsibility of changing our programmed reaction.

Although I said I was not blaming us for Billy's behavior, several staff wondered if I was. One asked, "Are you saying that if the behavior of a kid in our school doesn't improve, it's our fault?"

I clarified, "I'm not saying it's our fault. What I am saying is that if what we are doing to manage a kid's behavior is not working then we have a responsibility for thinking about and applying different strategies. Otherwise I think the kids in our school will continue to act the way they have been acting, which hasn't made any of us very happy."

After a thoughtful discussion, the staff agreed that we should consider a different approach with Billy. We concluded that a change in our behavior would only be effective if we shifted our mindset from seeing Billy as an angry, violent child to viewing him as a needy child who had experienced little, if any, success in his life and had difficulty trusting others. We were aware that if we were to short circuit Billy's intense programmed behaviors, we had to do something he was not anticipating, something that would surprise or startle him. We also brainstormed how to use his feelings of emotional hunger and neediness in a constructive way so that he might allow others to enter his world and demonstrate their capacity to nurture and care for him. The staff devised a creative, thinking outside-of-the-box strategy guided by a strength-based vision.

The next day I stood at the entrance of the school. Just as Billy was coming in, most likely prepared to throw another chair, I looked at the woods that faced the school and said in a loud voice, "We have a big problem at McLean." As we had hoped, Billy

appeared startled by what I said and glanced at the woods with an expression of bewilderment.

“What’s the problem?” he asked.

I responded, “You have a room to sleep in at McLean, I have a home to go to after I leave work, but all of the birds at McLean Hospital are homeless, we don’t have one birdhouse on the grounds of the hospital.”

My pronouncement about homeless birds had as one goal diverting Billy’s attention from throwing chairs. In addition, the content of my message represented an attempt to capture through the use of metaphors what we believed were Billy’s feelings of homelessness and a lack of belonging. We wanted to find a productive outlet for his sense of neediness by providing him with an opportunity to feed others, anticipating that this action would lessen his anger and his violence directed towards both humans and animals. While this was our hope, we were not certain of the outcome of our intervention.

Billy’s response to my proclaiming the existence of homeless birds further reinforced my belief in a strength-based approach. He immediately said that we had to do something about this problem and we should build a birdhouse. With the assistance of his two teachers, the ones at whom he had thrown chairs, he was engaged in planning and building a birdhouse. He became involved in reading about birds and how to construct a birdhouse, measuring dimensions, buying wood, accepting help while doing the building, waiting a day for the paint to dry, making a peanut butter ball with seeds as food for the birds, and then placing the birdhouse on a tree near the entrance of the school.

The birdhouse project accomplished several key goals. For a child accustomed to failure, it invited him to demonstrate mastery and competence and then to feel comfortable in displaying his finished product for all to see and admire. For a child hesitant to read or engage in learning, it provided the motivation to discover the benefits of taking in and then applying new information. Almost every phase of the project required Billy to learn to plan and to delay action, not an easy undertaking for such an impulsive child. Very importantly, for a child who was suspicious and always seemed in an attack mode, the task established opportunities for him to relate in a trusting and cooperative spirit with others.

I will never forget the look and smile on Billy’s face as the birdhouse was nailed on the tree and staff and children praised his finished product. I will never forget my thought that prior to the birdhouse activity his provocative actions during his brief first two days at school had prompted us to see him as a violent, not very likeable child with whom it was difficult to connect. We now viewed him as a child in pain and realized that if we were to decrease his anger we first had to lessen his pain and provide him with opportunities to display his strengths and experience a sense of dignity. After the birdhouse project, Billy’s outbursts diminished noticeably both in terms of frequency and intensity. His relationship with his teachers and other students showed significant improvement.

I believe that I learned more from Billy and many other children and adolescents in that inpatient unit than they learned from me—even from the boy who threatened, “We will outlast you.” They prompted me to appreciate and learn about their inner world, to re-evaluate my goals and interventions, and to replenish my own life with greater purpose

and passion. David Crenshaw (2008) expressed similar feelings when he poignantly observed:

I feel honored and privileged that my life work entails listening to the stories of countless children; children whose narratives call out for understanding; children whose pain requires witnessing; children who long to unburden; and whose voices need to be heard. It is the sensitive and delicate work of empathic and relationship healing of the wounded spirits of our children. I feel so fortunate; I can't imagine a calling more rewarding or meaningful. (p. 141)

Mindsets that Heal and Enrich the Lives of Children

In considering the power of mindsets, I began to grapple with a question that I have raised in many of my workshops and writings, namely, "What is the mindset of a parent or professional who touches the mind, heart, soul, and spirit of children?" In my presentations for mental health professionals and educators I have posed the question in the following way: "Assume you were charged with the responsibility of developing a curriculum to train both future and/or seasoned professionals to be as effective as possible with children. In addition to insuring that the curriculum includes the technical skills necessary for their roles, what other material would you include in order to insure that the mindset they develop results in their enriching the lives of the youth they serve?"

This is more than just an academic question. If we can define the features of the mindset of professionals who are effective in interacting with children, especially youngsters who have experienced inordinate emotional hurt and pain, we will be in a better position to train all professionals to embrace this mindset and the interventions that flow from it.

Based on my conversations with countless children as well as the adults in their lives, I believe there are several key assumptions that comprise the mindset of effective professionals. While I believe most professionals subscribe to these assumptions, I think it is essential not only to identify them, but to keep them in constant view so that they may serve as guideposts in our work. I also advocate that professionals engage in ongoing dialogue with colleagues about the assumptions and expectations that determine the basis of their interventions with children. Such dialogue will increase the likelihood that all members of a staff share a common treatment philosophy and approach.

The following are a selection of those assumptions that I believe are essential ingredients of the mindset we should adopt:

Children have the capacity to overcome adversity and become resilient: The significance of a "charismatic adult." As noted earlier, initially I was very discouraged as principal of the school for inpatients at McLean Hospital's child and adolescent program. I did not entertain thoughts of a promising future for the children in my care. I did not envision them as rising above their current problems.

In the years since 1973, my own experiences as well as burgeoning research in the field have taught me that no child should be written off, that youngsters possess an impressive ability to overcome significant obstacles, that resilience represents what Masten (2001) refers to as "ordinary magic." During the past 15-20 years there has been increased interest in attempting to identify those factors that help children to cope more effectively with adversity and demonstrate resilience (Brooks, 1994; Brooks & Goldstein, 2001; Crenshaw, 2008; Goldstein & Brooks, 2005; Katz, 1997; Luthar, 2003; Werner & Smith, 1992).

I learned first-hand that children can sense when we have lost faith in them (and ourselves). Thus, it is essential for professionals to know that a consistent finding in the resilience literature is that one adult can alter a child's life forever. We must never forget that resilience is rooted in the relationship that children experience with caring adults. Segal (1988) captured the immensity of this relationship when he wrote:

From studies conducted around the world, researchers have distilled a number of factors that enable such children of misfortune to beat the heavy odds against them. One factor turns out to be the presence in their lives of a "charismatic adult"—a person with whom they can identify and from whom they gather strength. (p. 3)

While Segal highlighted the role of teachers as charismatic adults, the label can be affixed to any adult who nurtures hope and optimism in children. To serve as a charismatic adult, we must truly believe in the fortitude and persistence of children to become more optimistic and resilient. We must also understand that while many wounded, mistrustful youth may attempt to provoke and push us away, we must not be deterred. We must remain at their sides and help them to understand that we will not abandon our mission to enhance their lives and to have them experience us as caring adults. I learned the importance of this mission from Billy as well as from many other boys and girls with whom I interacted at McLean Hospital and in my clinical practice.

All children are motivated from birth to learn and to be successful. I have been dismayed at many clinical or educational meetings when someone questions a child's motivation to learn or to confront different tasks and challenges. I believe that when an adult uses words such as "unmotivated" and "lazy" to describe a child, it is an indication that the adult's view of the child is dominated by a negative mindset. These are accusatory words that in essence blame the child. It is important to recall the writings of the late Harvard psychologist Robert White who expressed the belief that there is an inborn drive in children to succeed at tasks and to master their environment (White, 1959).

When I have espoused White's position at clinical meetings or in my workshops, some have countered by offering examples of children who do not seem interested in succeeding, but instead run from tasks or sabotage our efforts to assist them. As a therapist I have found it beneficial to understand these seemingly self-defeating behaviors as desperate attempts on the part of these children to avoid situations that they believe will eventuate in further failure, disappointment, and emotional distress. Why attempt a task if you judge it is beyond your capacity to succeed? Why invite a person into your life whom you believe might display behaviors similar to others in the past who have emotionally or physically abused or abandoned you?

If we subscribe to the proposition that all children wish to be successful and that their avoidance behavior is an expression of their fears and hurts, then instead of labeling them as "lazy" or "unmotivated," we can raise the question, "What can I do to lessen their fears and heal their wounds?" Time and energy directed towards answering this last question frees us from resorting to accusations and provides an opportunity for the emergence of strength-based, creative therapeutic strategies.

All children have "islands of competence" that we must identify and nurture. If we are to avoid falling into a trap in which we resort to judgment, accusation, and a focus on pathology, we must give more than lip service to spotlighting a child's strengths. We

must actively identify and reinforce these assets. Years ago, while reflecting upon the self-doubts and low self-esteem displayed by many of my patients, I had an image. I recall thinking that many of my patients appeared to be swimming, or perhaps drowning, in an ocean of self-perceived inadequacy. To counteract this image of despair and pain, I thought of another metaphor, one that reflected strength and accomplishment. It was at that point that I began to say that every child (and adult) possesses at least one small “island of competence,” one area that is, or has the potential to be, a source of pride and achievement.

This metaphor represents a symbol of hope and resilience, constantly reminding me that all children have strengths. Those of us raising or working with youngsters have the responsibility of locating and building on these islands so that eventually they will become more prominent than any existing ocean of inadequacy. As I began to focus on and reinforce the strengths of children, I discovered that a “ripple effect” occurred, in which they were more willing to venture forth and confront situations that had been problematic for them.

In my meetings with parents and teachers, I immediately ask them to describe the strengths of their child or student. I also ask children what they perceive as their own strengths and if they say, “I don’t know,” I respond, “That’s okay, it’s something for us to figure out.” Once islands of competence are identified, I consider the various ways they can be used as part of our treatment plan.

For instance, when I asked Larry, a 10-year-old angry boy who disliked school, what was it that he enjoyed doing and what was it that he thought he did very well, he responded that he loved to take care of his pet dog. His happiness and excitement were immediately apparent as he described how best to care for dogs. I mentioned Larry’s island of competence to the principal who was very receptive to offering him the position of “pet monitor.” The principal asked Larry to come to see him. At the meeting he asked Larry to become the “pet monitor” of the school and handed him a laminated “union card” with the words “pet monitor union” and Larry’s name on it. The principal explained that to begin with, Larry would be expected to arrive at school 10 minutes early each day to take care of a rabbit that one of the classrooms had recently purchased.

Larry handled his duties in a very responsible manner, in marked contrast to his history with school requirements. Within a short time, the principal entrusted him to take care of other pets. Larry’s teacher approached him and said she was very impressed with his knowledge of pets and encouraged him to write a manual about animal care that could be placed in the school library. Larry had always been reluctant to write given his learning problems and he informed his teacher that he didn’t like to write. She responded that she knew he and some other students did not enjoy writing, but that she would assist him. Larry wrote the manual with his teacher’s help and it was bound and added to the library. In addition, by the end of the year he “lectured” in every classroom in the building about taking care of pets.

Larry’s aggressive outbursts and his resistance to doing school tasks decreased noticeably after he assumed the pet monitor position—a position in which he was given the opportunity to display and be acknowledged for his strengths.

A charismatic adult recognizes that a strength-based approach requires us to identify and call upon a child’s islands of competence. Such an approach also directs us

to teach children to appreciate that mistakes are *expected* and *accepted*, and that mistakes and setbacks can provide information for future success.

Empathy is one of our most significant skills in permitting us to look beyond the overt behavior of children and understand their inner world of emotions. I have frequently stated that one of the most basic skills for enriching any relationship is empathy or the ability to see the world through the eyes of the other person. Goleman (1995, 2006) has highlighted empathy as a significant feature of both emotional and social intelligence.

To be a charismatic adult, one must be empathic. Such adults constantly engage in self-reflective questions, including (Brooks, 1991; Brooks & Goldstein, 2001):

“What words do I hope children use to describe me?”

“What have I done in the past few months so that they are likely to use these words?”

“What words do I think they will actually use?”

“How certain am I of what words they would actually use? Have I built into my interactions with children ways of obtaining feedback from them?”

I have encouraged caregivers to actively seek feedback and gather information from children that will assist us in understanding how they perceive us. I have found that the very act of securing feedback from children contributes to their feeling that we care about them. The following are several examples:

There are teachers who have asked students to complete anonymous questionnaires about what they like about the teacher and the class and what they would change.

I met a teacher who developed with students a one-page “report card” that they completed on him during the four times a year when he gave them their report cards.

We developed a questionnaire at McLean Hospital that was completed by both children and their parents following a meeting in which a psychologist and educator reviewed test findings with them. The feedback we obtained focused not only on specific test scores and their implications, but in addition, how caring and thoughtful the professionals were perceived to be and whether they encouraged and spent adequate time answering questions. We discovered that a couple of well-meaning staff were often seen as being rushed and using too much jargon that they did not explain. The feedback we provided to these staff was very helpful in their modifying the ways in which they translated test findings and related to the children and their parents.

Stories and metaphors provide access to the world of children, allowing us to be more compassionate and empathic. Similar to the experiences of David Crenshaw and other clinicians, I discovered that storytelling and metaphors offer a rich avenue through which to gain entry to the world of children; upon entering, we have the opportunity to learn about their strengths, coping strategies, fears, and vulnerabilities. In addition, stories and metaphors represent an invaluable format for communicating with children so that we might nurture their feelings of security, hope, and resilience (Brooks, 1981, 1985, 1987).

In the 1970s I read Gardner’s (1971, 1975) accounts of his Mutual Storytelling Technique and became even more convinced of the therapeutic impact of stories and metaphors. Eventually, I developed my own storytelling technique that I called Creative Characters (Brooks, 1981). I found that within the first couple of sessions of therapy,

children often provided metaphors that I could use to highlight key goals of treatment and begin the therapeutic process. In describing the therapeutic use of metaphors, I noted (Brooks, 1985):

While the question of whether or not the patient is aware of the meaning of metaphors produced in therapy is important, it seems secondary to the challenge for the therapist of selecting those metaphors that will have special meaning for and positive impact on the patient. Preferentially, the metaphors should be those first used by the patient, but a therapist tuned into a patient's inner world can introduce metaphors that will immediately communicate a rich level of understanding. (p. 765)

Milton Erickson, one of the most brilliant and creative clinicians in introducing metaphors and stories in the treatment of patients of all ages, advocated that one need not feel compelled to move from the metaphor to the patient's "real-world" for the therapeutic effect to be felt. Haley (1973), in describing Erickson's work, observed:

Although Erickson communicates with patients in metaphor, what most clearly distinguishes him from other therapists is his unwillingness to interpret to people what their metaphors mean. He does not translate "unconscious" communications into conscious form. Whatever the patient says in metaphoric form Erickson responds in kind. By parables, by interpersonal action, and by directives, he works within the metaphor to bring about change. He seems to feel that the depth and swiftness of that change can be prevented if the person suffers a translation in the communication (pp. 28-29).

The following are two illustrations of the use of metaphors within a strength-based therapeutic approach:

Don't push on a grasshopper: Using a child's metaphors to articulate treatment goals and facilitate the therapeutic process. Meredith, a six-year-old girl, was referred to me because of oppositional behavior and temper tantrums. She told me during our first session that she liked grasshoppers, adding, "You have to treat them nicely and not press on them too hard or they won't feel like jumping."

As might seem apparent, I viewed her warning about how to treat grasshoppers as a message to me about how I planned to relate to her. She appeared to be asking whether I would attempt to push her too vigorously and, if I did, she would refuse to cooperate with me. Accordingly, I responded in the following manner (I am offering our interaction in dialogue format so that I can more easily share with the reader the rationale and treatment goals behind my statements):

Dr. B: Do grasshoppers want to learn to jump? (to assess her wish to learn and grow)

M: Yes.

Dr. B: Do they need help in learning to jump? (to assess whether she feels others can be helpful)

M: Yes.

Dr. B: Who can help them?

M: The trainer (an apparent therapist figure)

Dr. B: How does the trainer do that?

M: He pushes them.

Dr. B: Does he ever push them too hard? (this was based on Meredith's initial comment)

M: Sometimes.

- Dr. B: Why? (to determine whether she experienced the pushing too hard as an intentional and/or angry act)
- M: I don't know.
- Dr. B: Do you think the trainer wants to push down too hard on the grasshopper?
- M: Some trainers might, some trainers are mean. ("mean" was a word that Meredith used to describe her teacher, a woman who Meredith did not like)
- Dr. B: How come?
- M: I'm not sure.
- Dr. B: Gee, you really know a lot about grasshoppers so I'm wondering how would a grasshopper let her trainer know if the trainer was pushing too hard? (I wanted to introduce the notion that Meredith should assume some responsibility and ownership for offering feedback; a sense of ownership is an important feature of resilience)
- M: The grasshopper just wouldn't jump. (an oppositional way of coping)
- Dr. B: Anything else?
- M: The grasshopper could jump in the wrong direction. (another oppositional way of coping)
- Dr. B: Would the trainer know why the grasshopper wasn't jumping or was jumping in the wrong direction? (similar to a previous comment, I wanted to reinforce Meredith's responsibility for what transpired in therapy and to encourage Meredith to communicate her feelings)
- M: No.
- Dr. B: Hmm. That's a problem. If a trainer really wanted to help and was pushing too hard but didn't know it, he couldn't be helpful and the grasshopper couldn't learn. (in part, I was attempting to highlight the self-defeating nature of the grasshopper's coping strategies and to communicate that the trainer could be of help)
- M: Yeah.
- Dr. B: That's a problem that needs solving. (I have found that an important message to communicate is that problems can be solved, another significant component of resilience)
- M: Yeah.

Given Meredith's interest in this dialogue, I introduced the idea of making up a story about a grasshopper who came to a trainer to learn to jump far and straight. This strategy was predicated on the Creative Characters technique (Brooks, 1981). In the subsequent weeks Meredith, through the grasshopper figure, learned important lessons rooted in a strength-based perspective, including ways of approaching challenging tasks, requesting help, giving feedback, and coping more effectively with frustration. Her introduction of the grasshopper metaphor served as a jumping off point, enabling me to understand significant details of her inner world and to communicate important therapeutic messages.

The elephant who was afraid to try: Storytelling as a technique to help a child to become more resilient. Timmy, age nine, had a history of a seizure disorder since he was four years old accompanied by many developmental and learning problems. Timmy's parents and teacher reported that his typical response to a new task was to refuse to do it and say "no." Given Timmy's many developmental issues, one could

easily expend much time and energy classifying all of his difficulties and lose sight of his strengths. Initially, his parents and teacher, feeling very discouraged by Timmy's lack of progress and seeming disinterest in any activity, had difficulty identifying his islands of competence.

In therapy, Timmy was initially very quiet and reticent and when he did engage in play, there was little focus to his material. Play might take the form of darts being shot wildly or paper being scribbled upon. His attention was limited and he frequently failed to respond to any of my inquiries. I recall wondering what activity I might introduce that would not only help Timmy to become more organized but also provide insight into his inner world.

Finally, an opportunity arose. Timmy in one of his rare communications mentioned that he saw a circus on television and liked the elephant act. When I asked what part he especially liked, he mentioned when the elephants walked on their hind legs while placing their front legs on the back of the elephant ahead of them. Timmy could not elaborate what was it that he liked about this procession. I was intrigued that his favorite part of the show involved the elephants balancing on two feet, especially given his history of falling down from seizures.

I told Timmy that I also liked elephants and wanted to tell him a story about an elephant. Unlike with some other patients, I felt that given Timmy's cognitive and language lags, it would be best if I initiated the story. I informed Timmy that I was going to play an elephant who wanted to join the circus, but he had to learn to walk on two legs if he were to be in the performance. I added that the elephant's name was "Johnny Scared, the Young Elephant" and that it was given that name since he was afraid he would fall if he attempted to walk on two legs.

Timmy looked relatively amused as I made believe I was trying to walk on two legs but kept falling over (a behavior that represented Timmy's falling to the ground when he had a seizure). Each time I fell I moaned, "I can't take it any more and I'm going to quit. I'll never learn to stand on my own two feet." Upon uttering these words, I often crawled on all "four feet" behind the chair in my office and said I would never try anything else again, that it's just too hard.

In the Creative Characters technique I typically incorporate a therapist figure within the story (in the previous case example, Meredith herself paved the way for the inclusion of such a figure when she mentioned a trainer who could teach a grasshopper to jump far). I introduced a therapist character in the story I created with Timmy in the person of an animal trainer who was knowledgeable about scared elephants. My goal was to create an individual who would embody a strength-based approach; he would be empathic to Johnny Scared's plight, help him gain the courage to face rather than flee from his problems, and provide strategies by which he could experience a sense of accomplishment. The inclusion of the animal trainer was facilitated by Timmy's interest in the story and his desire to see Johnny Scared learn to walk on his two feet.

In my use of storytelling, I have been impressed with the eagerness with which most youngsters want to play the therapist figure. I think that for many youngsters it permits them to become active problem-solvers rather than passively accepting their condition. In addition, the demeanor they display as a therapist (e.g., shouting or encouraging, being punitive or supportive) provides a reflection of how they view me and

serves as a catalyst for changes I might have to initiate to strengthen the therapeutic alliance.

I invited Timmy to assume the role of this animal trainer. Much to my delight Timmy accepted this invitation with much enthusiasm and I was impressed with the focus and attention he displayed. As the animal trainer he gave me directions about walking on two feet, but I continued to fall over and moan and groan, threatening to quit. However, Timmy persisted in encouraging me as I modeled his typical form of coping (i.e., not trying or quitting).

Another figure I often introduce in Creative Characters is that of a newscaster or narrator who, within the confines of the story, can ask questions, clarify issues, and summarize themes. I have found that children are more likely to respond to questions and observations if they come from a character within the story than if I ask them the same questions as the therapist outside the story line. In Timmy's case, I portrayed a newspaperman who was covering the circus and interviewing different acts. In one sequence I played both Johnny Scared and the reporter. As Johnny Scared I informed the reporter how I had never been able to do things very well and how I always wanted to quit. Johnny said in a despairing voice, "What's the use of trying to do something if you know you can't do it."

I then responded as the newspaperman, "I can understand wanting to quit if you feel like you can't do something, but if you always quit you'll never know whether you could have done certain things. I think you should ask for help from the animal trainer."

I felt that Timmy was ready to begin to consider more effective ways of handling his struggles. I looked at him and asked as Johnny Scared, "What should I tell the reporter, does it help me when I quit?"

Without hesitation Timmy as the animal trainer replied, "Tell him 'no,' it doesn't help."

I responded as the reporter, "Then you and the animal trainer have to figure out how to walk on two legs even if you fall down a lot."

This story lasted for many sessions. Eventually, Timmy, assuming more and more of the role of Johnny Scared, learned to walk on his two feet and became part of the circus show. As the animal trainer I applauded his perseverance and courage. At the same time we were involved with the circus story, I noticed another change. Timmy appeared more willing to respond to questions about his experiences in school. Consequently, I decided to offer some initial comparisons between his not wanting to do certain tasks in school with the predicament that Johnny Scared had faced. As I noted earlier in describing Erickson's philosophy, I don't think it is necessary to tie a story in therapy to the "real world" since I believe on some level children do so themselves. However, Timmy seemed motivated to make the connection.

Timmy's teacher reported that he was attempting more tasks at school and had written in a notebook, "Don't Quit." This was a significant occurrence since as part of the Johnny Scared theme we had hung a sign in my office with the words, "Don't Quit."

Timmy celebrated his emerging strength and resilience by requesting in one of the final weeks of the Creative Characters story that we change Johnny Scared's name to Johnny Brave.

I have learned that if we are to serve as sources of strength in the lives of children, we must look beyond their overt behaviors and search for the feelings and thoughts that

trigger these behaviors. Empathy is a powerful instrument in accomplishing this task, while stories and metaphors are rich sources of information.

To engage children in helping others. In this chapter I have described several examples in which children were enlisted to help others, whether participating on the “Space Committee” or building a birdhouse, or becoming a “pet monitor.” I frequently request my patients to write stories about challenges they have faced that I can read to other patients or at my workshops. The knowledge that their story will be shared with others heightens their motivation and self-dignity. I am continuously impressed by the therapeutic benefits of what I call “contributory activities.” The experience of making a positive difference in the lives of others serves as a powerful antidote to feelings of defeat, anger, and despair (Brooks, 2002). As Werner (1993) captured in her longitudinal research about resilience:

Self-esteem and self-efficacy also grew when youngsters took on a responsible position commensurate with their ability, whether it was part-time work, managing the household when a parent was incapacitated, or, most often, caring for younger siblings. At some point in their young lives, usually in middle childhood and adolescence, the youngsters who grew into resilient adults were required to carry out some socially desirable task to prevent others in the family, neighborhood, or community from experiencing distress or discomfort (p. 511)

Relatedly, when I was gathering material for my book *The Self-Esteem Teacher*, I requested approximately 1,500 adults to complete an anonymous questionnaire (Brooks, 1991). The first question asked them to report on a positive memory of school when they were students, something an educator said or did that boosted their self-esteem. The most cited positive memories pertained to being asked to help out in some fashion. The following are a few examples:

“I remember when a teacher asked me to pass out the milk and straws.”

“I felt so good when a teacher asked me to tutor a younger child.”

“I remember when a teacher told me I was a good artist and asked me to draw some signs as part of an anti-litter campaign.”

The positive outcome of “contributory activities” extends throughout our adult lives as well (Brooks & Goldstein, 2004). Research clearly indicates that elderly people who are involved in assisting others lead longer, more satisfying lives, even controlling for such factors as exercise and diet.

What I find distressing is when opportunities to help others have been denied to children who would benefit immeasurably from the experience. In my consultations to schools and day and residential treatment programs I have heard the following comments in response to my suggestions that certain youth be asked to assist others:

“No, they don’t deserve it. They first have to demonstrate that they can handle responsibilities for their own lives before we’ll let them help others.”

“Why should we allow students who aren’t doing their own work to help others? Doesn’t it communicate to them that you will be rewarded if you fail to meet your responsibilities?”

While on the surface these kinds of reactions may seem reasonable, I have found that they are counterproductive, especially for vulnerable students. I believe that all-too-often the cart is placed in front of the horse. Basically, the message is: “If you first demonstrate that you can act dignified and responsible, we will then allow you to

participate in dignified activities such as helping others.” Many of the suffering children I have worked with feel hopeless and they don’t trust us or don’t trust themselves. In response to preconditions that we establish before we will allow them to engage in “contributory activities,” they basically tell us to “shove off” (that would be a mildly worded reply).

My position is that if we are to assume the role of charismatic adults and soothe the wounds of children who are in pain, we must provide opportunities for these children to help others without their having to “prove” themselves first. I have discovered that when we allow vulnerable, hopeless, often angry youth to engage in activities that involve enhancing the lives of others, and do not set preconditions in which they must first prove themselves, almost all rise to the occasion. Participation in contributory activities sends a powerful message to these youngsters, namely, “Because you are on this earth, this earth is a better place.”

I have received reports from many professionals, who instead of punishing challenging youth modified their own perspective and sought ways in which these youth could have a positive influence on others. One assistant principal asked an elementary school boy who demonstrated violent outbursts to assist the two school custodians each day to help clean up the cafeteria after lunch. She emphasized that the custodians, both men, could really use his help. This provided one of the few opportunities for this child to assist others as well as to interact with men; the latter was important since he was being raised by a single mother and had few, if any, male models in his life. The boy’s behavior improved markedly, the result of an assistant principal who wisely avoided focusing on punishment and instead, created an activity that bolstered the boy’s sense of self-worth.

Flynn Corson, the Dean of Students at the Pacific Buddhist Academy in Honolulu, heard me speak, and applied the metaphors of “islands of competence” and “contributory activities” with an adolescent girl at his school. I was very impressed with the courage he and his colleagues displayed in altering their approach to this adolescent.

The girl was in the tenth grade and Flynn noted that she barely passed her freshman year, even with “an enormous amount of help from one of her teachers.” He added that at the beginning of the year she was not handing in her work “and to avoid the anxiety of having to face teachers under these circumstances, began retreating regularly to the nurse’s office because she ‘didn’t feel well.’” Flynn surmised, “I don’t think these illnesses were completely feigned. When I would check in on her she would look sick, overwhelmed, exhausted. Because her grades and attendance were so low the administration began discussing the potential for dismissal.”

Flynn decided to design a program for this challenging student that was rooted in a strength-based framework. His creativity reinforced my belief that most youngsters will become more responsible if we establish a platform on which they can display their competencies and their capacity for caring. Flynn wrote, “I asked my fellow administrators to roll the dice and allow me to set up an ‘internship’ for this student. She really likes little kids and is a very talented musician (ukulele) and artist. I know this because I asked her what she liked. They allowed me to make arrangements with our elementary school that she could spend approximately five hours per day in various classrooms as a TA (teaching assistant). She plans lessons and implements them for first grade math, spelling, and social studies, and fourth grade music; she helps with the

clerical work in the room and is an aide in PE, art, and the library. She has a total of 60 students in grades preK-4th.

Flynn and his colleagues added another component to this girl's program that proved very successful. Flynn explained, "An interesting component of this internship is the fact we decided to maintain her enrollment in the on-line math program that all of our students are part of, but appointed one of our seniors to be her 'math tutor.' This means that when she's not a 14-year-old elementary school teacher, she's the student of a high school senior with the distanced oversight of the math department head.

"She's made more progress in math in the past semester than she did in her first year and a half that she was in our school. She feels that she's done this on her own. Her math mentor loves that she feels this way, and has recently approached me about starting a peer tutoring center (a work in progress)."

I was drawn to the words "she feels that she's done this on her own." This kind of attitude is a basic ingredient of a resilient mindset (Brooks & Goldstein, 2001). In our therapeutic and educational endeavors with children and adolescents it is imperative that we encourage them to assume ownership for both their successes and setbacks in order that they learn from both.

Flynn's closing observations capture the key messages I have attempted to convey in this chapter. "She's discovered accountability and takes this seriously. I think she is benefiting most from a support team of individuals that cares about her: her internees, her math mentor, her parents, her doctor, and I are all in close touch. She has learned a lot about different learning styles as well as different instructional approaches to reach a diverse group of learners. I think this has taught her a lot about herself. She is more socially successful, more confident, happier, more organized and responsible. Our work is not done with this girl, but we have made some great progress this semester.

"More important is the fact that this situation has helped the school better define the type of institution it is. We're now more capable of taking risks to teach our kids and it seems that our student body and parents have a new appreciation for the type of commitment we're willing to make."

It is interesting how much we learn about ourselves and the values that direct our lives by the manner in which we reach out to children in our care. If we profess that we wish to soothe the hurts of children, we must act accordingly as Flynn and his colleagues did.

Concluding Thought

In echoing the sentiments of David Crenshaw, I believe that those of us who work with children are afforded a great privilege, namely, to serve as "charismatic adults" from whom these children "gather strength" (Segal, 1988). If we establish as a goal the nurturing of a "resilient mindset" in youngsters, we will be better equipped to examine our own mindset and assumptions and develop strength-based interventions. Such interventions can be applied to heal the pain of suffering youth, replacing their anger and despair with realistic hope and accomplishment. If we do so, we will not only have given a lifelong gift to future generations, but we will have added meaning and purpose to our own lives.

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The Power of Parenting

Robert B. Brooks, Ph.D.

I have focused for almost 30 years on examining the impact that parents have in nurturing hope, self-esteem, and an optimistic outlook in their children (Brooks, 1999; Brooks & Goldstein, 2001, 2003, 2011). My intention in this chapter is to examine specific steps that parents can take on a daily basis to reinforce a resilient mindset and lifestyle in their children. Before describing both the characteristics of this mindset and strategies to strengthen it in youngsters, I believe it is necessary to address the following two questions:

1. What is meant by the concept of resilience?
2. Do parents *really* have a major influence on the development of resilience in their children?

What Is Resilience?

Resilience may be understood as the capacity of a child to deal effectively with stress and pressure, to cope with everyday challenges, to rebound from disappointments, mistakes, trauma, and adversity, to develop clear and realistic goals, to solve problems, to interact comfortably with others, and to treat oneself and others with respect and dignity (Brooks & Goldstein, 2001).

In scientific circles research related to resilience has primarily studied youngsters who have overcome trauma and hardship (Beardslee & Podorefsky, 1988; Brooks, 1994; Crenshaw, 2010; Hechtman, 1991; Herrenkohl, Herrenkohl, & Egolf, 1994; Masten, Best, & Garmezy, 1990; Rutter, 1985; Werner & Smith, 1992). However, several researchers and clinicians have raised important issues, such as: “Does a child have to face adversity in order to be considered resilient?” or “Is resilience reflected in the ability to bounce back from adversity or is it caused by adversity?” (Kaplan, 2005).

My colleague Sam Goldstein and I believe that the concept of resilience should be broadened to apply to every child and not restricted to those who have experienced adversity (Brooks & Goldstein, 2001, 2003). All children face challenge and stress in the course of their development and even those who at one point would not be classified as “at-risk” may suddenly find themselves placed in such a category. This abrupt shift to an at-risk classification was evident on a dramatic scale for the hundreds of children who lost a parent or loved one as a consequence of the terrorist attacks on 9/11. Nurturing resilience should be understood as a vital ingredient in the process of parenting every child whether that child has been burdened by adversity or not.

Other mental health specialists have also expanded the definition or scope of resilience to go beyond bouncing back from adversity. Reivich and Shatte (2002) contend that “everyone needs resilience” and they write:

. . . resilience is the capacity to respond in healthy and productive ways when faced with adversity and trauma; it is essential for managing the daily stress of life. But we have come to realize that the same skills of resilience are important

to broadening and enriching one's life as they are to recovering from setbacks. (p. 20)

A more inclusive definition of resilience that embraces all youngsters encourages us to consider and adopt parenting practices that are essential for preparing children for success and satisfaction in their future lives. A guiding principle in each interaction parents have with children should be to strengthen their ability to meet life's challenges with thoughtfulness, confidence, purpose, responsibility, empathy, and hope. These qualities may be subsumed under the concept of resilience. The development of a resilient mindset, which will be described in detail later in this chapter, is not rooted in the number of adversities experienced by a child, but rather in particular skills and a positive attitude that caregivers reinforce in a child.

Do Parents Have a Major Influence on the Development of Resilience in Their Children?

Many people, convinced of the profound influence that parents exert on a child's development and resilience, might wonder why it is necessary to pose this question. However, the answer is not as clearcut as many may believe (Goldstein & Brooks, 2003). Recently developed, sophisticated scientific instruments have highlighted the significant impact of genetics on adult personality, adaptation, and cognitive and behavioral patterns. As a consequence, the degree to which parents influence their child's development has been questioned by several researchers (Harris, 1998; Pinker, 2002).

In her book *The Nurture Assumption*, Harris (1998) presented evidence to suggest that the extended environment outside of the home, particularly the impact of peers, explained much of the non-genetic differences in human behavioral traits. Though some have lauded Harris for her contribution to the field of child development, she has also been widely criticized by professionals who have interpreted her conclusions as suggesting that parents are inconsequential players in their children's lives (Pinker, 2002).

However, Harris' position may be interpreted not as a dismissal of the influence of parents, but rather as a call to be more precise in understanding the impact of parents on the present and ultimately, future lives of their children. Pinker (2002), citing a number of studies of fraternal and identical twins reared together or apart, contends that it is not that parents don't matter; they in fact matter a great deal. It's that over the long term, parent behavior does not appear to significantly influence a child's intelligence or personality. In contrast, Siegel (1999) has posited that a child's attachment and relationship with caregivers is a major determinant of mental health and adaptation.

The position taken in this chapter is that even if those personality qualities in a child attributed to parental influence are in a statistical equation much smaller than previously assumed, they may in the daily lives of children be the difference in determining whether or not a child succeeds in school, develops satisfying peer relationships, or overcomes a developmental or behavioral impairment. Parents possess enormous influence in the lives of their children. Data suggesting that a particular parenting style may play a minimal role in intelligence or personality development does not absolve parents of their responsibility to raise their children in moral, ethical, and humane ways. The quality of daily parent-child relationships makes a vital difference in the behavior and adjustment of children. As Sheridan, Eagle, and Dowd (2005) note,

“The development of resiliency and healthy adjustment among children is enhanced through empathetic family involvement practices” (p 168).

Not surprisingly, the impact of parental behavior on children is less debatable when the behavior in question is inappropriate, humiliating, or abusive compared with that which is positive or benign. For example, Jaffee (2005) has highlighted the devastating effects on a child’s emotional well-being and resilience when confronted with parents who have a history of mental disorder and also engage in violent and abusive behavior. Kumpfer and Alvarado (2003), emphasizing the significance of parental behavior write:

The probability of a youth acquiring developmental problems increases rapidly as risk factors such as family conflict, lack of parent-child bonding, disorganization, ineffective parenting, stressors, parental depression, and others increase in comparison with protective or resilience factors. Hence, family protective mechanisms and individual resiliency processes should be addressed in addition to reducing risk factors. . . . Resiliency research suggests that parental support in helping children develop dreams, goals, and purpose in life is a major protective factor. (p. 458)

Pinker (2002) notes, “Childrearing is above all an ethical responsibility. It is not okay for parents to beat, humiliate, deprive, or neglect their children because those are awful things for a big strong person to do to a small helpless one” (p. 398). Similarly, Harris writes, “If you don’t think the moral imperative is a good enough reason to be nice to your kid, try this one: Be nice to your kid when he’s young so that he will be nice to you when you’re old” (p. 342).

Pinker (2002) poignantly captures the moral dimension of parenting practices in the following statement:

There are well-functioning adults who still shake with rage when recounting the cruelties their parents inflicted on them as children. There are others who moisten up in private moments when recalling a kindness or sacrifice made for their happiness, perhaps one that the mother or father has long forgotten. If for no other reason, parents should treat their children well to allow them to grow up with such memories. (p. 399)

Given the complexity of a child’s development, it is unlikely that a specific number will ever be assigned as a “parent’s share” or percentage of that development. As Deater-Deckard, Ivy, and Lynch (2005) wisely observe, “The question is no longer whether and to what degree genes or environments matter, but how genes and environments work together to produce resilient children and adults” (p. 49).

They conclude:

. . . resilience is a developmental process that involves individual differences in children’s attributes (e.g., temperament, cognitive abilities) and environments (e.g., supportive parenting, learning enriched classrooms). The genetic and environmental influences underlying these individual differences are correlated, and they interact with each other to produce the variation that we see between children, and over time within children. . . . It is imperative that scientists and practitioners recognize that these gene-environment transactions are probabilistic in their effects, and the transactions and their effects can change with shifts in genes or environments. (p. 60)

Although researchers and clinicians debate the extent to which particular parenting practices impact on children in specified areas, it seems that all agree that parents make a significant difference either in the day-to-day and/or future lives of their children. We concur with this position and believe that it is essential that we identify both those parental practices that nurture the skills, positive outlook, and stress hardiness necessary for children to manage an increasingly complex and demanding world as well as those that do harm to children. We must search for consistent ways of raising children that will increase the likelihood of their experiencing happiness, success in school, contentment in their lives, and satisfying relationships. If children are to realize these goals they must develop the inner strength to deal competently and successfully, day after day, with the challenges and pressures they encounter (Brooks & Goldstein, 2001).

The Characteristics of a Resilient Mindset

Resilient children possess certain qualities and/or ways of viewing themselves and the world that are not apparent in youngsters who have not been successful in meeting challenges. The assumptions that children have about themselves influence the behaviors and skills they develop. In turn, these behaviors and skills influence this set of assumptions so that a dynamic process is constantly operating. This set of assumptions may be classified as a mindset (Brooks & Goldstein, 2001).

An understanding of the features of a resilient mindset can provide parents with guideposts for nurturing inner strength and optimism in their children. Parents adhering to these guideposts can use each interaction with their children to reinforce a resilient mindset. While the outcome of a specific situation may be important, even more essential are the lessons learned from the process of dealing with each issue or problem. The knowledge gained supplies the nutrients from which the seeds of resiliency will flourish.

The mindset of resilient children contains a number of noteworthy characteristics that are associated with specific skills. These include:

They feel special and appreciated.

They have learned to set realistic goals and expectations for themselves.

They believe that they have the ability to solve problems and make sound decisions and thus are more likely to view mistakes, setbacks, and obstacles as challenges to confront rather than as stressors to avoid.

They rely on effective coping strategies that promote growth and are not self-defeating.

They are aware of and do not deny their weaknesses and vulnerabilities but view them as areas for improvement rather than as unchangeable flaws.

They recognize and enjoy their strong points and talents.

Their self-concept is filled with images of strength and competence.

They feel comfortable with others and have developed effective interpersonal skills with peers and adults alike. This enables them to seek out assistance and nurturance in a comfortable, appropriate manner from adults who can provide the support they need.

They are able to define the aspects of their lives over which they have control and to focus their energy and attention on those rather than on factors over which they have little, or any, influence.

The process of nurturing this mindset and associated skills in children requires parents to examine their own mindset, beliefs, and actions. We will now examine guideposts that can facilitate this process together with case examples.

Parenting Practices that Nurture Resilience in Children

Following is a list of ten guideposts proposed by Brooks and Goldstein (2001, 2003) that form the scaffolding for reinforcing a resilient mindset and lifestyle in children. These guideposts are relevant for all interactions parents and other caregivers have with children whether coaching them in a sport, helping them with homework, engaging them in an art project, asking them to assume certain responsibilities, assisting them when they make mistakes, teaching them to share, or disciplining them. While the specific avenues through which these guideposts can be applied will differ from one child and one situation to the next, the guideposts themselves remain constant.

1. Being Empathic. A basic foundation of any relationship is empathy. Simply defined, in the parenting relationship empathy is the capacity of parents to place themselves inside the shoes of their children and to see the world through their eyes. Empathy does not imply that you agree with what your children do, but rather you attempt to appreciate and validate their point of view. Also, it is easier for children to develop empathy when they interact with adults who model empathy on a daily basis.

It is not unusual for parents to believe they are empathic, but the reality is that empathy is more fragile or elusive than many realize. Experience shows that it is easier to be empathic when our children do what we ask them to do, meet our expectations, and are warm and loving. Being empathic is tested when we are upset, angry, or disappointed with our children. When parents feel this way, many will say or do things that actually work against a child developing resilience.

To strengthen empathy, parents must keep in mind several key questions, questions that I frequently pose in my clinical practice and workshops. They include:

“How would I feel if someone said or did to me what I just said or did to my child?”

“When I say or do things with my children, am I behaving in a way that will make them most responsive to listening to me?”

“How would I hope my child described me?”

“Do I behave in ways that would prompt my child to describe me in the way I hope?”

“How would my child actually describe me and how close is that to how I hope my child would describe me?”

While thinking about these questions are essential features of effective parenting, they are often neglected when parents are confronted with frustration and anger. This is evident in the following two case examples.

Mr. and Mrs. Kahn were perplexed why their son John, a seventh grader, experienced so much difficulty completing his homework. John was an excellent athlete but had a long history of struggling to learn to read. His parents, noticing John’s lack of interest in school activities, believed he was “lazy” and he could do the work if he “put his mind to it.” They often exhorted him to “try harder” and they angrily reminded him on a regular basis how awful he would feel as a senior in high school when he was not accepted into the college of his choice.

Although perhaps well-intentioned, when Mr. and Mrs. Kahn told John to “try harder” they failed to consider how these words were experienced by their son. Many youngsters who are repeatedly told to “try harder” interpret this statement not as helpful or encouraging but rather as judgmental and accusatory, intensifying their frustration rather than their motivation to improve. Thus, the words the Kahns used worked against their goal to motivate John. If they had reflected upon how they would feel if they were having difficulty at work and their boss yelled, “Try harder,” they may have refrained from using these words.

Mr. and Mrs. Kahn learned that by placing themselves inside John’s shoes, they could communicate with him in ways that would lessen defensiveness and increase cooperation. They told him that they realized they came across as “nagging” but did not wish to do so. They said that they knew he possessed many strengths, but there were areas that were more challenging for him such as reading. By being empathic they transformed an accusatory attitude into a problem-solving framework by asking John what he thought would help. This more positive approach made it easier for John to acknowledge his difficulties in school and prompted his willingness to receive tutoring.

Sally, a shy 8-year-old, was frequently reminded by her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Carter, to say hello when encountering family or friends. Yet, from a young age Sally’s temperament left her feeling anxious, fearful, and easily overwhelmed in new situations. It was not unusual for Sally to seek refuge behind her mother when people she did not know visited the Carter home. Both of the Carters were outgoing and were perplexed by Sally’s cautiousness and fearfulness, especially since they viewed themselves as supportive and loving parents. They felt that Sally could be less shy “if she just put her mind to it.”

The Carters became increasingly frustrated and embarrassed by Sally’s behavior, prompting them to warn her that if she failed to say hello to others she would be lonely and have no friends. They frequently asked her after school if she had taken the initiative to speak with any of the children in her class. These kinds of comments backfired, prompting Sally to become more anxious.

Mr. and Mrs. Carter, desiring their daughter to be more outgoing, failed to appreciate that Sally’s cautious demeanor was an inborn temperamental trait and could not be overcome by simply telling her to “say hello” to others. They were to discover that each reminder on their part not only intensified Sally’s discomfort and worry but also compromised a warm, supportive relationship with their daughter.

In parent counseling sessions the Carters learned that they could assist Sally to be less shy, but they first had to reflect upon how their current actions and words impacted on their daughter. They had to ask, “If I were shy would I want anyone to say to me what I say to Sally?” or “Am I saying things to Sally that are helping or hindering the process of her becoming more comfortable with others?” In essence, these kinds of questions helped them to assume a more empathic stance. Both parents learned that telling a shy person to try to become less shy is often experienced as accusatory and not as a source of encouragement.

Mr. and Mrs. Carter informed Sally that they knew that it was not easy for her to say hello to people she did not know and added that it was not easy for many other children as well. They said that maybe working together with Sally they could figure out steps she could take to make it less difficult to greet others. These comments served to

empathize and validate what Sally was experiencing and also to convey a feeling of “we’re here to help, not criticize.” Finally, they communicated to Sally, “Many kids who have trouble saying hello when they’re young, find it easier as they get older.” This last statement conveyed realistic hope. And hope is a basic characteristic of a resilient mindset.

Being empathic permitted the Carters to communicate with Sally in a nonjudgmental way and in the process they nurtured their daughter’s resilience.

2. Communicating Effectively and Listening Actively. Empathy is closely associated with the ways in which parents communicate with their children. Communication is not simply how we speak with another person. Effective communication involves actively listening to our children, understanding and validating what they are attempting to say, and responding in ways that avoid power struggles by not interrupting them, by not telling them how they should be feeling, by not derogating them, and by not using absolute words such as *always* and *never* in an overly critical, demeaning fashion (e.g., “You never help out”; “You always act disrespectful”).

Resilient children demonstrate a capacity to communicate their feelings and thoughts effectively and their parents serve as important models in the process. When 10-year-old Michael insisted on completing a radio kit by himself and then was not able to do so, his father, Mr. Burton, angrily retorted, “I told you it wouldn’t work. You don’t have enough patience to read the directions carefully.” Mr. Burton’s message worked against the development of a resilient mindset in his son since it contained an accusatory tone, a tone focusing on Michael’s shortcomings rather than on his strengths. It did not offer assistance or hope.

Covey (1989), describing the characteristics of effective people, advocates that we first attempt to understand before being understood. What he is suggesting is that prior to expressing our views, we would be well advised to practice empathy by listening actively and considering what messages the other person is delivering. Effective communication is implicated in many behaviors associated with resilience, including interpersonal skills, empathy, and problem-solving and decision-making abilities.

Given the significance of effective communication skills in our lives, during my therapeutic activities and my workshops I frequently pose the following questions for parents to consider when they interact with their children:

“Do my messages convey and teach respect?”

“Am I fostering realistic expectations in my children?”

“Am I helping my children learn how to solve problems?”

“Am I nurturing empathy and compassion?”

“Am I promoting self-discipline and self-control?”

“Am I setting limits and consequences in ways that permit my children to learn from me rather than resent me?”

“Am I truly listening to and validating what my children are saying?”

“Do my children know that I value their opinion and input?”

“Do my children know how special they are to me?”

“Am I assisting my children to appreciate that mistakes and obstacles are part of the process of learning and growing?”

“Am I comfortable in acknowledging my own mistakes and apologizing to my children when indicated?”

If parents keep these questions in mind, they can communicate in ways that reinforce a resilient mindset. However, this task is not always easy to accomplish as was evident at a family session with Mr. and Mrs. Berlin and their 13-year-old daughter Jennifer. The Berlins sought a consultation given Jennifer's sadness and what they called "her pessimistic attitude towards everything."

At the first session, Jennifer said, "I feel very sad and unhappy."

Mrs. Berlin instantly countered, "But there's no reason for you to feel this way. We are a loving family and have always given you what you need."

Jennifer's expression suggested both sadness and anger at her mother's remark. While Mrs. Berlin may have intended to reassure her daughter, her comment served to rupture communication. People do not want to be told how they should or should not feel. If someone says she feels depressed, she does not want to hear that there is no reason to feel this way.

What might Mrs. Berlin have said? A good place to start is validation. Parents must first validate what their child is saying. Validation does not mean you agree with the other person's statement, but that you convey to that person you "hear" what is being said. Consider the following response that Mrs. Berlin might have offered:

"I know you've been feeling depressed. I'm not certain why, but I'm glad you could tell us. That's why we're seeing Dr. Brooks to try and figure out what will help you to feel better and also, how dad and I can help."

If the messages of parents are filled with empathy, validation, and support, a climate is established for nurturing resilience.

3. Changing Negative Scripts. Well-meaning parents have been known to apply the same approach with their children for weeks, months, or years even when the approach has proven ineffective. For instance, a set of parents reminded (nagged) their children for years to clean their rooms, but the children failed to comply. When I asked why they used the same unsuccessful message for years, they responded, "We thought they would finally learn if we told them often enough."

Similar to the reasoning offered by these parents, many parents believe that children should be the ones to change, not them. Others believe if they change their approach, it is like "giving in to a child" and they are concerned that their children will take advantage of them. One mother said, "My son forgets to do his chores and I keep reminding him and we keep getting into battles. But I can't back off. If I do my son will never learn to be responsible. He will become a spoiled brat like too many other kids are these days." Without realizing it, the mother's constant reminders backfired. They not only contributed to tension in the household, but in addition, they reinforced a lack of responsibility in her son by always being there to remind him of what he was expected to do rather than having him learn to remember his responsibilities on his own.

Parents with a resilient mindset of their own recognize that if something they have said or done for a reasonable amount of time does not work, then they must change their "script" if their children are to change theirs. This position does not mean giving in to the child or failing to hold the child accountable. It suggests that we must have the insight and courage to consider what we can do differently, lest we become entangled in useless, counterproductive power struggles. It also serves to teach children that there are alternative ways of solving problems. If anything, it helps children learn to be more flexible and accountable in handling difficult situations.

Mr. Lowell was imprisoned by a negative script, especially towards his 12-year-old son Jimmy. The moment Mr. Lowell arrived home, the first question he asked Jimmy each and every day was, “Did you do your homework? Did you do your chores?” Even if Jimmy had not done his homework or chores, he quickly responded “yes” just to “get my father off my back.” Over several years their relationship deteriorated. Jimmy felt all his father cared about were grades and chores. Mr. Lowell felt his son was “lazy” and needed daily “prodding” to become more responsible.

In counseling sessions, Mr. Lowell became aware of how his words echoed those of his father when Mr. Lowell was Jimmy’s age. With impressive insight he said, “Jimmy must see me just like I saw my father, an overbearing man who rarely complimented me but was quick to tell me what I did wrong.”

Mr. Lowell ruefully asked, “Why do we do the same things toward our kids that we didn’t like our parents doing to us?”

It is a question frequently raised. While the answer may differ to some extent from one person to the next, the basic issue is how easily we become creatures of habit, incorporating the script of our own parents even if we were not happy with that script. We practice what we have learned.

Yet, parents are not destined to follow these ineffective, counterproductive scripts. Once they are aware of their existence they can consider other scripts to follow. Mr. Lowell, equipped with new insight, no longer greeted Jimmy with questions about his homework or chores, but instead showed interest in his son’s various activities, including drawing and basketball. He and Jimmy signed up for an art class together offered by a local museum and they “practiced hoops” on a regular basis. Similar to the Kahn’s approach with John and the Carter’s with Sally, Mr. Lowell recognized that if Jimmy were to change, he, as the adult, would have to make the initial changes.

4. Loving Our Children in Ways that Help Them to Feel Special and Appreciated. It is well established that a basic foundation of resilience is the presence of at least one adult (hopefully several) who believes in the worth and goodness of the child. The late psychologist Julius Segal referred to that person as a “charismatic adult,” an adult from whom a child “gathers strength” (Segal, 1988). One must never underestimate the power of one person to redirect a child toward a more productive, successful, satisfying life.

Parents, keeping in mind the notion of a charismatic adult, might ask each evening, “Are my children stronger people because of the things I said or did today or are they less strong?” Certainly, Mr. Burton yelling at his son Michael when the latter had difficulty completing a radio kit or Mr. and Mrs. Carter questioning Sally each day if she had initiated conversations with classmates were actions that diminished their children’s emotional well-being. Neither Michael nor Sally was likely to gather strength when confronted with their parents’ statements and questions.

Unconditional love, which we will discuss in greater detail in the next guidepost, is an essential feature that charismatic adults bestow on children. If children are to develop a sense of security, self-worth, and self-dignity, they must have people in their lives who demonstrate love not because of something they accomplish but because of their very existence. When such love is absent, it is difficult to develop and fortify a resilient mindset.

When I have asked adults to recall a favorite occasion from their childhood when their parents served as a charismatic adult for them, one of the most common memories involved doing something pleasant and alone with the parent. One man described having his father's "undivided attention." He said, "My father really listened to me when no one else was around and we could talk about anything. It was tougher to do when my older sister and younger brother were also there."

Similarly, a woman said, "I loved bedtime when my mother or father read me a story. If my mother was reading to me, my father was reading to my brother. If my father was reading to me, my mother was reading to my brother." With a smile, this woman added, "Don't get me wrong, I loved my brother and I enjoyed when we did things as a family, but I think I felt closest to my parents when I did something alone with each. My husband and I do the same things with our kids today."

The power of "special times," poignantly captured in the words of this man and woman, are recalled by many adults. It is recommended that parents create these times in the lives of their children. Parents of young children might say, "When I read to you or play with you, it is so special that even if the phone rings I won't answer it." One young child said, "I know my parents love me. They let the answering machine answer calls when they are playing with me."

When children know that they will have a time alone with each parent, it helps to lessen sibling rivalry and vying for the parent's undivided attention. A parent of six children asked at a workshop, "Is it possible to create special moments with each child when you have six." The answer is that it is more difficult with six than with two children in the household, but it is still possible. It requires more juggling, but if these times result in children feeling special in the eyes of their parents, the struggle to juggle one's schedule is worth the effort. As Pinker (2002) advised, "If for no other reason, parents should treat their children well to allow them to grow up with such memories" (p. 399).

Children are very sensitive if a parent is not present at their birthday, at a holiday, at their first Little League game, or at a talent show. In today's fast-paced world many parents work long hours and travel and thus, it is likely they may miss some of their children's special moments, but these absences should be kept to a minimum. One adult patient recalled that his father missed all but a couple of his birthdays between the ages of 5 and 12. "I know he had to travel for his business, but he knew when my birthday was. I think he could have scheduled his business trips to be there for my birthday." Tears came to his eyes as he added, "You certainly don't feel loved when your father misses your birthday. And to make matters worse, most of the time he forgot to call."

Time alone with each child does not preclude family activities that also create a sense of belonging and love. Sharing evening meals and holidays, playing games, attending a community event as a family, or taking a walk together are all opportunities to convey love and help children feel special in the eyes and hearts of their parents.

5. Accepting Our Children for Who They Are and Helping Them to Establish Realistic Expectations and Goals. One of the most difficult but challenging parenting tasks is to accept our children for who they are and not what we want them to be. Before children are born parents have expectations for them that may be unrealistic given the unique temperament of each child. Chess and Thomas (1987), two of the pioneers in measuring temperamental differences in newborns, observed that some

youngsters enter the world with so-called easy temperaments, others with cautious or shy temperaments, while still others with “difficult” temperaments.

When parents lack knowledge about these inborn temperaments, a powerful determinant of personality and behavior according to Harris (1998), they may say or do things that compromise satisfying relationships and interfere with the emergence of a resilient mindset. This dynamic certainly occurred in Mr. and Mrs. Carter’s initial approach to their daughter Sally’s shy demeanor. Basically, they exhorted her to make friends, feeling that her cautious, reserved nature could easily be overcome. They did not appreciate how desperately Sally wished to be more outgoing and have more friends, but it was difficult to do so given her temperament. It was only when her parents demonstrated empathy and communicated their wish to help, that Sally felt accepted.

Another example concerned 10-year-old Carl. He dawdled in the morning, often missing the school bus. His parents, Mr. and Mrs. Thomas, found themselves obligated to drive him to school. A neighbor suggested they not drive Carl to school, that by doing so they were just “reinforcing his lateness.” They took this neighbor’s advice and told Carl if he was not ready when the school bus arrived, they would not drive him and he would miss school. Carl missed school, which upset him. However, much to the dismay of his parents, his upset did not prepare him to be ready for school the next day. They were confused about what to do next and became increasingly angry with their son for his irresponsibility. As a further motivation to be ready on time, they decided to restrict many of his pleasurable activities if he were late. Unfortunately, that failed to bring about the desired results.

Carl’s parents were unaware that his difficulty with lateness was not because he was irresponsible, but rather because he moved at a slow pace and was distractible, frequently becoming drawn into other activities. Instead of yelling and punishing, it would have been more effective to accept that this is their son’s style and to engage him in a discussion of what he thinks would help to get ready on time. As we shall see under the guidepost for developing responsibility discussed below, when given the opportunity even young children are capable of offering sound solutions to problems they encounter.

In addition, collaborating with Carl’s school to have a motivating “job” or responsibility waiting for him might have provided a positive incentive to assist him to consider ways to be ready on time even with his slower temperament. I frequently use such a strategy. A child with whom I worked who was tardy on a regular basis was given the job of “tardy monitor” at his school, a position that entailed arriving early and keeping track of which students were late. The child loved the responsibility and arrived on time with renewed purpose.

Accepting children for who they are and appreciating their different temperaments does not imply that we excuse inappropriate, unacceptable behavior but rather that we understand this behavior and help to modify it in a manner that does not assault a child’s self-esteem and sense of dignity. It means developing realistic goals and expectations for our children. Fortunately, in the past 10 to 15 years there have been an increasing number of publications to help parents and teachers appreciate, accept, and respond effectively to a child’s temperament and learning style (Carey, 1997; Keogh, 2003; Kurcinka, 1991; Levine, 2002, 2003; Sachs, 2001).

6. Helping Our Children Experience Success by Identifying and Nurturing Their “Islands of Competence.” Resilient children do not deny problems that they may

face. Such denial runs counter to mastering challenges. However, in addition to acknowledging and confronting problems, youngsters who are resilient are able to identify and utilize their strengths. Unfortunately, many children who feel poorly about themselves and their abilities experience a diminished sense of hope. Parents sometimes report that the positive comments they offer their children fall on “deaf ears,” resulting in parents’ becoming frustrated and reducing positive feedback.

It is important for parents to be aware that when children lack self-worth they are less receptive to accepting positive feedback. Parents should continue to offer this feedback, but must recognize that genuine self-esteem, hope, and resilience are based on children experiencing success in areas of their lives that they and significant others deem to be important. This requires parents to identify and reinforce a child’s “islands of competence.” Every child possesses these islands of competence or areas of strength and we must nurture these rather than overemphasize the child’s weakness.

During an evaluation of a child, I regularly ask the parents to describe their child’s islands of competence. I ask the child to do the same, often via the question, “What do you think you do well?” or “What do you see as your strengths?” For children who respond, “I don’t know,” I answer, “That’s okay, it can take time to figure out what we’re good at, but it’s important to figure out.” If we are to reinforce a more optimistic attitude in children, it is imperative that we place the spotlight on strengths and assist children to articulate the strengths that they possess.

One problem related to the issue of acceptance discussed in the previous guidepost, is when parents minimize the importance of their child’s island of competence. For example, 13-year-old George struggled with learning problems. Unlike his parents, Mr. and Mrs. White, or his 16-year-old sister, Linda, he was not gifted academically or athletically. When his parents were asked during an evaluation to identify George’s islands of competence, they responded with an intriguing, “We’re somewhat embarrassed to tell you. We just don’t think it’s the kind of activity that a 13-year-old boy should be spending much of his time doing.”

Eventually, Mr. White revealed, “George likes to garden and take care of plants. That would be okay if he did well in school and was involved in other activities. How can a 13-year-old boy be so interested in plants?”

Rather than my finding fault with the Whites’ reactions to George’s interests, it was vital to help them understand the importance of identifying and building on his strengths even if those strengths were not initially valued by them. To be resilient children need to feel that they are skilled in at least one or two areas that are esteemed by others.

Clinicians and educators should insure that treatment and educational plans begin with a list of the child’s strengths and include strategies that can be used to reinforce and display these strengths for others to see and praise. Of what use are a child’s strengths if they are not observed and supported by others?

Laurie, a teenager, had difficulty getting along with her peers, but young children gravitated towards her. Her parents described her as the “pied piper” of the neighborhood. Given this strength, she began to baby-sit. As the responsibilities involved with baby-sitting helped her to develop confidence, she was more willing to examine and change her approach with her peers, which led to greater acceptance. Similarly, 10-year-old Brian, a boy with reading difficulties, had a knack for artwork,

especially drawing cartoons. His parents and teachers displayed his cartoons at home and school, an action that boosted his self-esteem and in a concrete way communicated that his reading problems did not define him as a person, that he also possessed strengths.

When children discover their islands of competence, they are more willing to confront those areas that have been problematic for them. Adults must be sensitive to recognizing and bolstering these islands.

7. Helping Children Realize that Mistakes Are Experiences from Which to Learn. There is a significant difference in the way in which resilient children view mistakes compared with nonresilient children. Resilient children tend to perceive mistakes as opportunities for learning. In contrast, children who are not very hopeful often experience mistakes as an indication that they are failures. In response to this pessimistic view, they are likely to flee from challenges, feeling inadequate and often blaming others for their problems. If parents are to raise resilient children, they must help them develop a healthy attitude about mistakes from an early age.

The manner in which children respond to mistakes provides a significant window through which to assess their self-esteem and resilience. For example, in a Little League game two children struck out every time they came to bat. One child approached the coach after the game and said, “Coach, I keep striking out. Can you help me figure out what I’m doing wrong?” This response suggests a child with a resilient mindset, a child who entertains the belief that there are adults who can help him to lessen mistakes (strikeouts).

The second child, who unfortunately was not resilient, reacted to striking out by flinging his bat to the ground and screaming at the umpire, “You are blind, blind, blind! I wouldn’t strike out if you weren’t blind!” Much to the embarrassment of his parents he then ran off the field in tears, continuing to blame the umpire for striking out. Since this child did not believe he could improve, he coped with his sense of hopelessness by casting fault on others.

Parents can assist their children to develop a more constructive attitude about mistakes and setbacks. Two questions that can facilitate this task are to ask parents to consider what their children’s answers would be to the following questions:

“When your parents make a mistake, when something doesn’t go right, what do they do?”

“When you make a mistake, what do your parents say or do to you?”

In terms of the first question, parents serve as significant models for handling mistakes. It is easier for children to learn to deal more effectively with mistakes if they see their parents doing so. However, if they observe their parents blaming others or becoming very angry and frustrated when mistakes occur or offering excuses in order to avoid a task, they are more likely to develop a self-defeating attitude towards mistakes. In contrast, if they witness their parents use mistakes as opportunities for learning, they are more likely to do the same.

The second question also deserves serious consideration by parents. Many well-meaning parents become anxious and frustrated with their children’s mistakes. Given these feelings they may say or do things that contribute to their children fearing rather than learning from setbacks. For instance, parental frustration may lead to such comments as: “Were you using your brains?” or “You never think before you act!” or “I

told you it wouldn't work!" These and similar remarks serve to corrode a child's sense of dignity and self-esteem.

No one likes to make mistakes or fail, but parents can use their children's mistakes as teachable moments. They can engage their children in a discussion of what they can do differently next time to maximize chances for success. Using empathy, they can refrain from saying things that they would not want said to them (e.g., how many parents would find it helpful if their spouse said to them, "Were you using your brains?").

Parents must also have realistic expectations for their children and not set the bar too high or too low. If the bar is set too high, children will continually experience failure and are likely to feel they are a disappointment to their parents. Setting the bar too low may rob children of experiences that test their abilities and their capacity to learn to manage setbacks. Very low expectations also convey the message, "We don't think you are capable."

If parents are to reinforce a resilient mindset in their children, their words and actions must convey a belief that we can learn from mistakes. The fear of making mistakes and being humiliated is one of the most potent obstacles to learning, one that is incompatible with a resilient lifestyle.

8. Developing Responsibility, Compassion, and a Social Conscience by Providing Children with Opportunities to Contribute. Parents often ask what they can do to foster an attitude of responsibility, caring, and compassion in their children. One of the most effective ways of nurturing responsibility is offering children opportunities to help others. When children are enlisted in helping others and engaging in responsible behaviors, parents communicate trust in them and faith in their ability to handle a variety of tasks. In turn, involvement in these tasks reinforces several key characteristics of a resilient mindset including empathy, a sense of satisfaction in the positive impact of one's behaviors, a more confident outlook as islands of competence are displayed, and the use of problem-solving skills.

Too often parents label the first responsibilities they give children "chores." Most children and adults are not thrilled about doing chores, whereas almost every child from an early age appears motivated to help others. The presence of this "helping drive" is supported by research in which adults were asked to reflect on their school experiences and to write about one of their most positive moments in school that boosted their self-esteem and motivation (Brooks, 1991). The most frequently cited memory was being asked to assist others (e.g., tutoring a younger child, painting murals in the school, running the film projector, passing out the milk and straws).

To highlight the importance of teaching responsibility and compassion, I typically ask parents how their children would answer the following questions:

"What are the ways in which your parents show responsibility?"

"What behaviors have you observed in your parents that were not responsible?"

"What charitable activities have your parents been involved with in the past few months?"

"What charitable activities have they and you have been involved with together in the past few months?"

Parents would be well-advised to say as often as possible to their children, "We need your help" rather than "Remember to do your chores." In addition, parents who involve their children in charitable endeavors, such as walks for hunger or AIDS or food

drives, appreciate the value of such activities in fostering self-esteem and resilience. Responsibility and compassion are not promoted by parental “lectures” but rather by opportunities for children to assume a helping role and to become part of a “charitable family,” a family that is engaged in acts of compassion and giving.

9. Teaching Our Children to Solve Problems and Make Decisions. Children with high self-esteem and resilience believe that they are masters of their own fate and that they can define what they have control over and what is beyond their control. A vital ingredient of this feeling of control is the belief that when problems arise, they have the ability to solve problems and make decisions. Resilient children are able to articulate problems, consider different solutions, attempt what they judge to be the most appropriate solution, and learn from the outcome (Shure, 1996; Shure & Aberson, 2005).

If parents are to reinforce this problem-solving attitude in their children, they must refrain from constantly telling their children what to do. Instead it is more beneficial to encourage children to consider different possible solutions. To facilitate this process, parents might wish to establish a “family meeting time” every week or every other week during which problems facing family members can be discussed and solutions considered.

Jane, a 9-year-old girl, came home from school in tears and sobbed to her mother, Mrs. Jones, that some of her friends refused to sit with her at lunch, telling her they did not want her around. Jane felt confused and distressed and asked her mother what to do. Mrs. Jones immediately replied that Jane should tell the other girls that if they did not want to play with her, she did not want to play with them. While this motherly advice may have been appropriate, quickly telling Jane what to do and not involving her in a discussion of possible solutions took away an opportunity to strengthen her own problem-solving skills.

As another example, Barry and his older brother, Len, constantly bickered. According to their parents, Mr. and Mrs. Stern, they fought about everything, including who would sit in the front seat of the car and who would use the computer. Len was frequently reminded by his parents to be more tolerant since he was the older of the two. They warned him that his failure to comply with their request would result in punishment. Len’s response was to become angry and distant, feeling he was being treated unfairly. Eventually, the parents sat down with Barry and Len, shared with them the negative impact that their arguing was having on the family, and asked them to come up with possible solutions to particular problems and to select what they considered to be the best solution.

Much to the surprise of Mr. and Mrs. Stern, their sons came forth with solutions that were noteworthy for being grounded in simple rules. The boys decided that they would take turns sitting in the front seat as well as alternating every half hour in the use of the computer.

As Shure (1996) has found in her research, even preschool children can be assisted to develop effective and realistic ways of making choices and solving problems. When children initiate their own plans of action with the guidance of parents, their sense of ownership and control is reinforced, as is their resilience.

10. Disciplining in Ways that Promote Self-Discipline and Self-Worth. To be a disciplinarian is one of their most important roles that parents assume in nurturing resilience in their children (Brooks & Goldstein, 2007). In this role parents must

remember that the word *discipline* relates to the word *disciple* and thus is a teaching process. The ways in which children are disciplined can either reinforce or erode self-esteem, self-control, and resilience.

Two of the major goals of effective discipline are: (a) to ensure a safe and secure environment in which children understand and can define rules, limits, and consequences, and (b) to reinforce self-discipline and self-control so that children incorporate these rules and apply them even when parents are not present. A lack of consistent, clear rules and consequences often contributes to chaos and to children feeling that their parents do not care about them. On the other hand, if parents are harsh and arbitrary, if they resort to yelling and spanking, children are likely to learn resentment rather than self-discipline.

There are several key principles that parents can follow to employ discipline techniques that are positive and effective. Given the significant role that discipline plays in parenting practices and in nurturing resilience, they are described in detail:

Practice prevention. It is vital for parents to become proactive rather than reactive in their interactions with their children, especially in regard to discipline. For example, discipline problems were minimized in one household when a young, hyperactive boy was permitted to get up from the dinner table when he could no longer remain seated. This approach proved far more effective than the previous one used by the parents, namely, to yell and punish him; when a punitive atmosphere was removed, this boy also learned greater self-control. In another home a boy's tantrums at bedtime ended when he was allowed to have a nightlight in his room and keep a photo of his parents by his bedside (both were his ideas to deal with nightmares he was experiencing).

Work as a Parental Team. In homes with two parents, it is important that parents set aside time for themselves to examine the expectations they have for their children as well as the discipline they use. This dialogue can also occur between divorced parents. While parents cannot and should not be clones of each other, they should strive to arrive at common goals and disciplinary practices, which most likely will involve negotiation and compromise. This negotiation should take place in private and not in front of their children.

Be Consistent, Not Rigid. The behavior of children sometimes renders consistency a Herculean task. Some children, based on past experience, believe that they can outlast their parents and that eventually their parents will succumb to their whining, crying, or tantrums. If guidelines and consequences have been established for acceptable behavior, it is important that parents adhere to them. However, parents must remember that consistency is not synonymous with rigidity or inflexibility. A consistent approach to discipline invites thoughtful modification of rules and consequences such as when a child reaches adolescence and is permitted to stay out later on the weekend. When modifications are necessary, they should be discussed with children so that they understand the reasons for the changes and can offer input.

Select One's Battlegrounds Carefully. Parents can find themselves reminding and disciplining their children all day long. It is important for parents to ask what behaviors merit discipline and which are not really relevant in terms of nurturing responsibility and resilience. Obviously, behaviors concerning safety deserve immediate attention. Other behaviors will be based on the particular values and expectations in the house. If children are punished for countless behaviors, if parents are constantly telling them what to do in an arbitrary manner, then the positive effects of discipline will be lost.

Rely when Possible on Natural and Logical Consequences. Children must learn that there are consequences for their behavior. It is best if these consequences are not harsh or arbitrary and are based on discussions that parents have had with their children. Discipline rooted in natural and logical consequences can be very effective. *Natural* consequences are those that result from a child's actions without parents having to enforce them such as a child having a bicycle stolen because it was not placed in the garage. While *logical* consequences sometimes overlap with natural consequences, logical consequences involve some action taken on the part of parents in response to their child's behavior. Thus, if the child whose bicycle was stolen asked parents for money to purchase a new bicycle, a logical consequence would be for the parents to help the child figure out how to earn the money needed to pay for the new bicycle.

Positive Feedback and Encouragement Are Often the Most Powerful Forms of Discipline. Although most of the questions I am asked about discipline focus on negative consequences or punishment, it is important to appreciate the impact of positive feedback and encouragement as disciplinary approaches. Parents should "catch their children doing things right" and let them know when they do. Children crave the attention of their parents. It makes more sense to provide this attention for positive rather than negative behaviors. Well-timed positive feedback and expressions of encouragement and love are more valuable to children's self-esteem and resilience than stars or stickers. When children feel loved and appreciated, when they receive encouragement and support, they are less likely to engage in negative behaviors.

Concluding Remark

Research may never be able to assign a precise percentage to capture the impact of a parent on a child's development. However, as noted earlier, whatever the percentage, we know that the day-to-day interactions parents have with their children are influential in determining the quality of lives that their children will lead. Parents can serve as charismatic adults to their children. They can assume this role by understanding and fortifying in their children the different characteristics of a resilient mindset, by believing in them, by conveying unconditional love, and by providing them with opportunities that reinforce their islands of competence and feelings of self-worth and dignity. Nurturing resilience is an immeasurable, lifelong gift parents can offer their children. It is part of a parent's legacy to the next generation.

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CREATING NURTURING CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENTS: FOSTERING HOPE AND RESILIENCE AS AN ANTIDOTE TO VIOLENCE

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One of the most effective ways I can describe the ingredients of creating a nurturing classroom environment is to share a journey, a mindset, and a selection of strategies. The journey is the path I have taken as a clinical psychologist, therapist, principal of a school in a locked door unit of a psychiatric hospital, and consultant to many schools. The mindset represents the transformation that occurred in (a) the way I viewed angry, resistant youth, (b) my own feelings of efficacy, and (c) my understanding of the main components of classroom environments that would lessen hostility and increase cooperation. The strategies or interventions we use to create school environments that are safe and nurturing and support the process of learning are rooted in the mindset or the assumptions we have about ourselves and the youth with whom we work.

This mindset is guided by a model of crisis prevention rather than crisis intervention; that is, the main focus is not on answering what to do when a crisis emerges, but rather what can we do to create environments in our schools that will minimize these crises from emerging in the first place. I am not downplaying the importance of having clear crisis plans in place, but in this chapter my goal is to outline an approach to school safety and school violence that places the spotlight on prevention.

In terms of my journey I have often been asked what prompted my interest in creating positive classroom environments and in fostering motivation, self-esteem, hope, and resilience in angry and resistant youth. To be honest, my interest can be traced to how ineffectively I interacted with these youngsters when I first began as a therapist in the mid-1960s (Brooks, 1997a, 1997b) and when I assumed the position of principal of a school in a locked door unit in a psychiatric hospital in the early 1970s. In many ways, the mid-1960s represented the “dark ages” of our understanding of such youngsters. It was a time when we possessed little, if any, knowledge about the biological substrates of emotions and behaviors; we were unaware of the extent to which the inborn temperament of children interacted with the environment in an ongoing, dynamic fashion to contribute to the formation of their personality, to their capacity to delay gratification, to handle frustration, to soothe themselves, to respond to others, and to learn. Relatedly, we knew little about learning disabilities, AD/HD, learning styles, or multiple intelligence theory. Thus, we could not appreciate how these factors could have such a powerful impact on how successfully a child met developmental challenges.

The Blame Game Phase of My Journey

This limited knowledge together with my own insecurities as a beginning therapist and school principal contributed to an ineffective approach in working with these youngsters and

their parents. If children and adolescents did not show signs of improvement under my care, I routinely anointed them with such labels as “oppositional,” “unmotivated,” or “resistant,” thus blaming them for a lack of positive change and for failing to learn.

The blame was manifested in many forms, some subtle and some not-so-subtle. I assumed that all kinds of behavior were well within the control of the child and that changing behavior was a matter of “will.” I would ask hyperactive children who were roaming my office to sit down (I’m not certain why I believed that therapy would be enhanced if a child were seated, especially since I often did my best thinking standing up and moving around) and when they did not respond to my request, I thought of them as oppositional. I constantly exhorted my patients to “try harder” and when they appeared not to follow my advice, I questioned their motivation and their desire to change. The blame extended to the parents of these youngsters. When interventions did not work I frequently questioned the motivation, skill, or perseverance of the parents. If children were angry or oppositional I was quick to assume that these feelings were a consequence of poor parenting, never appreciating the major contribution of a child’s inborn temperament to how they felt and perceived their world (Brooks, 1998; Greene, 1998; Ingersoll & Goldstein, 1995).

Perhaps the defining moment of my career occurred when I became principal of a school in a locked door unit of a psychiatric hospital. Within several months of accepting this position I began to experience headaches and stomachaches before going to work each morning prompted in large measure by my sense of confusion and helplessness about what to do with these very challenging youth. As a result, I began to dislike all of the children and adolescents in my school, a rather poor attitude for a school principal. My response to these angry, violent youth was to become increasingly punitive; this was reflected in the classroom environments I helped to create, environments devoid of any sense of nurturance and caring. Little did I realize that my approach was actually reinforcing rather than lessening resentment and anger among the students.

This “blaming” and “punitive” phase of my professional career left me feeling upset and dissatisfied. I actually began to assume that these students were “out to get me,” that they were “placed on this earth to make my life miserable.” My work was increasingly pervaded by feelings of frustration, helplessness, and burnout. I was relying on therapeutic and educational interventions that produced limited success, but I was unable to develop alternative strategies to help youngsters who displayed angry or defiant behaviors in the classroom. Staff meetings were dominated by discussions of how to restrain these youth rather than how to reach and teach them. However, as my feelings of burnout became more intense, I was forced to do a great deal of self-reflection from which emerged a far more positive, energizing mindset and approach.

I came to appreciate that one of the most powerful obstacles to helping these youth and designing a more nurturing, caring school environment was the mindset and negative assumptions I and my staff had developed. In essence, I was blaming the very people I was supposed to help. As a result, I wondered, “Are these students truly resistant? Were they put on this earth to make my life miserable? Do they really not want to get better? Are they lazy and unmotivated, as some have accused them of being? Or is my approach and the approach of my teachers not providing them with what they need?”

Empathy: The Road to Understanding

My intent in asking these questions was not to shift blame from my students to myself, but rather to challenge myself to expand my understanding of what my patients were experiencing. I realized that if I were to become a more effective and helpful therapist and

school principal, I had to begin to change my negative mindset. A first step was to refine my ability to be empathic, to see the world through the eyes of the youngsters with whom I was working (Brooks, 1991). How could I be of help to others if I did not understand their experiences? While empathy is a vital interpersonal skill in any relationship, it is often difficult to achieve. I have discovered that many people judge themselves to be empathic, but are they? How often do we question how others (our children, patients, students, colleagues) would describe us, which is a significant component of empathy. In addition, I have found that it is more difficult to be empathic when one is disappointed, upset, angry, or frustrated with the other person, including the students with whom we work.

Given my developing belief in the importance of empathy, I placed the spotlight on this concept in all facets of my clinical work. As an example, at some point during my initial meeting with parents who have sought a consultation about one of their children, I pose several questions to assess and then promote empathy. These questions include, "Describe a typical day in your child's life, but through your child's eyes. How does your child feel when he/she first gets up in the morning, sees you, and goes to school? How would your child describe you? How does your child feel about himself/herself, about his/her abilities to succeed? How does your child experience being taught, praised, disciplined?" Interestingly, many parents have told me that of all the questions I raised, the ones pertaining to empathy were not only some of the most difficult to answer, but were also the most important since they triggered much thought.

Similarly, when consulting with educators, I ask them how their students would describe them and the work they are doing together. I ask how would students describe their school experiences. I emphasize that each time we interact with youngsters they form images of us and these images will play a large role in their ability to relate to and learn from us.

Empathy is the road to understanding in any relationship and is a key to a positive mindset that will lead to effective interventions. Goleman (1995) has highlighted empathy as a major component of "emotional intelligence." How can we raise, educate, or do therapy with children and adolescents without comprehending their experiences? How can we create nurturing classroom environments that lessen violence without appreciating the world of our students? Empathic educators continually ask two main questions when relating to students. These are: 1. In anything I say to or do with students, what do I hope to accomplish? 2. When I say or do something, am I saying or doing it in a way in which children will be most responsive to hearing me?

While answering the first question is essential since it relates to goals and expectations, reflecting upon the second question is equally important. Many educators may have clear notions of what they hope to accomplish, but they attempt to do so in ways that are prone to failure. For example, a teacher may have as a goal motivating a student with learning disabilities to produce more work. One of the teacher's prime ways to do so is to exhort the student to "try harder." While the teacher may be well meaning, such a comment is typically experienced in a negative, accusatory, judgmental way. When students feel accused or judged they are less likely to be cooperative. Consequently, the teacher's approach will not lead to the desired results. The more we develop empathy, the more we recognize the possible negative impact of saying such things as "try harder" and the greater the likelihood that we will search for more productive alternatives for motivating students and fostering positive school climates.

As an example of an alternative approach, I frequently say to youngsters who are angry and struggling with school that the problem is not that they are not trying, but rather that the strategies they are using to learn or to handle their feelings or the strategies the teachers are using

to teach them are not working. I have found that children and adolescents are much more willing to discuss their struggles when I attribute these problems to strategies that can be changed rather than to a more moralistic view of “not trying.”

What Empathy Taught Me: The Centrality of “Earned” Self-Esteem

In my attempt to become more empathic and to gain a greater appreciation of these youngsters’ struggles, I gathered information from them through stories I encouraged them to write about their lives (Brooks, 1987). As I read the words of these angry or resistant students, what became evident was the central role that self-esteem and a loss of hope played in their lives. Not only did their stories reflect feelings current feelings of inadequacy, but as they thought about their future, they entertained little hope that things would improve. When youngsters feel hopeless they are likely to engage in destructive (Beck, 1986).

For example, Matt came to see me as a young adolescent who was diagnosed with learning and attentional problems. He was depressed and held a bleak view of his future. His description of school, which follows, captures the way in which many youngsters with special needs experience school; it serves as a testimony to the importance of being empathic and gaining a clearer understanding of the despair and sense of hopelessness that haunt these youngsters:

School has been and still is something I dread profusely. Going to school has been like climbing up a tremendous, rocky mountain with steep cliffs and jagged, slippery rocks. This mountain is very grey and always covered in dark, murky, cold clouds. I step forth to take on this task of climbing this huge mountain. Each step is a battle against strong, howling, icy winds. The winds contain frigid rain that slams against my body, trying to push me down. I keep battling my way up. Sometimes I am knocked down, and sometimes I have to stop to regain my strength. My body is numb. My hands shake like leaves in the wind as I claw myself up the mountainside. Not being able to open my eyes, I blindly claw myself up the steep cliff. I stop because I am in such great pain. I look up and see that my struggle has hardly begun. Sometimes I just do not want to go on any further.

As I read stories written by Matt and other youngsters, I came to appreciate the burden most of these youngsters face, a burden replete with feelings of inadequacy, helplessness, hopelessness, and anger. I recognized that many of the behaviors I had observed in my patients--behaviors that are frequently labeled as “resistant” or “oppositional”--represented desperate attempts to cope with their emotional pain (Brooks, 1992, 1997a; Goldstein & Mather, 1998; Wexler, 1991). Unfortunately, many of these coping strategies such as quitting, cheating, bullying, clowning, avoiding, being aggressive, and rationalizing were ultimately self-defeating and counterproductive, adding to rather than relieving distress.

While children may be angry for a variety of reasons, it has been my experience that one source of anger for many of these youngsters is low self-esteem with accompanying feelings of frustration, hopelessness, and helplessness. Low self-esteem is also evident in depressed youth. Low self-esteem often pervades many areas of a youngster’s life. If you feel inadequate in school, if dreams of success fade into the background, motivation is likely to suffer, and then these children will be accused of “not trying.” In addition, the poor interpersonal skills that many of these youth possess contribute to less than satisfying peer relationships, adding to an overall picture of sadness. As a psychologist and principal of a school, I wondered if school environments could be designed that would nurture hope and self-esteem.

Self-Esteem: A Definition

While numerous clinicians and educators have emphasized the positive qualities of high self-esteem, others have viewed the concept of self-esteem from a much different perspective, contending that many individuals who advocate building self-esteem are doing so at the expense of teaching responsibility, self-discipline, and caring (Baumeister, 1996; Lerner, 1996). One factor contributing to these two different perspectives may reside in the confusion between what Lerner (1996) calls “feel-good-now” self-esteem versus “earned” self-esteem. She argues that: Earned self-esteem is based on success in meeting the tests of reality--measuring up to standards--at home and in school. It is necessarily hard-won and develops slowly, but it is stable and long-lasting, and provides a secure foundation for further growth and development. (p. 12)

In contrast, “feel-good-now” self-esteem is perceived as an approach to reinforcing self-esteem that does not challenge children, nor set up realistic expectations and goals, nor prepare them to cope with mistakes and failures. Lerner (1996) believes that in the quest to help children feel good now, authenticity and dedication are sacrificed, replaced by false praise and lowered standards.

Self-esteem as used in this chapter parallels the notion of “earned” self-esteem and is in concert with the definition advanced by the California Task Force to Promote Self-Esteem and Personal and Social Responsibility (Mecca, 1990). The California group defined self-esteem not only in terms of “appreciating my own worth and importance” (p. 1), but also “having the character to be accountable for myself and to act responsibly toward others” (p. 1). This definition proposes that a basic ingredient of self-esteem includes the respect and compassion that we demonstrate towards others and is very different from narcissism or conceit.

Self-esteem may be understood as embracing the feelings and thoughts that individuals possess about their competence and about their abilities to have a positive impact, to confront rather than flee from challenges, to learn from both success and failure, and to treat themselves and others with dignity. Self-esteem directs and motivates our behavior and, in turn, the outcome of these behaviors impacts on our self-esteem so that a dynamic, reciprocal process is continuously in force, playing a significant role in determining whether or not a child will become resilient (Brooks, 1992, 1994).

Two Frameworks to Understand the Components of Self-Esteem and Motivation

If our interventions to create positive school climates and to lessen anger and defiance in youth are to be guided, in part, by the concept of earned self-esteem, it is important to examine the mindset of individuals with high self-esteem; to appreciate the components of this mindset will help parents and professionals reinforce self-esteem, hope, and cooperation in children and adolescents.

Attribution Theory

One promising framework originally proposed by psychologist Bernard Weiner (Weiner, 1974) is called “attribution theory.” What I found appealing about this theory is that research examining its fundamental assumptions included children with special needs. In addition, its basic tenets could be applied to the “real world.” I could actually use attribution theory as a blueprint for what I said and did with at-risk children and with their parents and teachers to foster self-esteem and hope.

Children encounter numerous challenges as they grow, some of which result in success, others in failure. What attribution theory highlights is that youngsters assume different reasons for why they succeed or fail and that these reasons, which vary from one child to the next, are

strongly tied to their self-esteem. In terms of success experiences, research indicates that children with high self-esteem believe that their successes are determined in large part by their own efforts, resources, and abilities. These youngsters assume realistic credit for their accomplishments and feel a genuine sense of control over their lives. They are typically children who experience success early in their life within a responsive and encouraging environment. They are likely to be very motivated to face new challenges.

In contrast, youth who have encountered many frustrations and disappointments and whose self-esteem has suffered erosion are more likely to assume that their achievements are predicated on luck, or chance, or fate, on variables outside of their control, thus weakening their confidence of being able to succeed in the future. For instance, I have worked with many children with learning problems who quickly dismiss a high grade with such comments as, "I was lucky" or "The teacher made the test easy." These children minimize the role that they have played in achieving any success; unfortunately, the cumulative effect of perceived failure outweighs any success experiences.

Self-esteem and motivation are also strongly implicated in how children comprehend their mistakes and failure. As an example, two children in the same third grade class have failed a spelling test. One child thinks, "I can do better than this. Maybe I have to study more or ask the teacher for extra help." The second child explains the low grade by saying, "The teacher stinks. He never told us these words would be on the test. It's his fault I failed." Or, to take another example, a child who felt he was incapable of learning, constantly hit other students. As he gained insight into his difficulties, he told me in therapy, "I'd rather hit another kid and be sent to the principal's office than have to be in the classroom where I felt like a dummy."

The child who is willing to seek additional help and/or work more diligently, basically believes that mistakes are experiences to learn from rather than feel defeated by. Such children typically attribute making mistakes to factors that are within their power to modify, such as a lack of effort (especially if the task is realistically achievable) or ineffective strategies (e.g., poor study habits). In marked contrast, students who resort to blaming or hitting others typically adhere to the painful view that "I am a failure, I cannot change, I cannot do well." Rather than believing that mistakes are the foundation for future learning, children with low self-esteem frequently experience each new mistake as another rock being placed around their necks, weighing them down more and more. To such youngsters mistakes result from conditions that cannot be easily modified, such as lack of ability or low intelligence; given this belief, their motivation suffers and often their anger increases.

A vicious cycle is set in motion when children believe they cannot learn from mistakes. Feeling hopeless and wishing to avoid further perceived humiliation, they are apt to quit, offer excuses, cast blame on others, or resort to other ineffective ways of coping, such as assuming the role of class clown or class bully. As these youngsters reach teenage years, our attempts to teach and encourage them may be met with angry retorts such as "Leave me alone!" "I don't care!" "It's my life, I'll do what I want with it" and/or acting out behaviors. It has been my experience that these children care much more than they acknowledge, but feeling hopeless and believing they are unable to change their situation, they do not even want to entertain the notion that things may improve--for them, any hope is false hope that eventuates in further disappointment. While the adults in their lives may believe that such youngsters are quitters or lack perseverance or are bullies, what we often fail to comprehend is that these behaviors are rooted in a sense of hopelessness and a desperate attempt to avoid further humiliation (Brooks, 1992; Wexler, 1991). Working with these at-risk youth involves helping to change their negative attributions and

mindsets (Bernstein, 1996).

Attribution theory offers significant guideposts for designing classroom climates that will reinforce the self-confidence and motivation of angry and defiant students. The following questions stem from this theory:

a. How do we create a school environment that maximizes the probability that students will not only succeed but that they will experience their achievements as predicated in large measure on their own abilities and efforts? Or, stated somewhat differently, how do we assist youngsters to assume an increasing sense of ownership and responsibility for what occurs in their lives?

b. How do we create a school environment that reinforces the belief that mistakes are frequently the foundation for learning, that mistakes are not only accepted, but expected? How do we create an environment that lessens fears of being humiliated or embarrassed, fears that often trigger sadness and anger?

Deci's Approach

A second framework is based on the work of psychologist Edward Deci who has studied self-esteem and motivation through the lens of youngsters' needs (Deci & Chandler, 1986; Deci, Hodges, Pierson, & Tomassone, 1992; Deci & Flaste, 1995). His model has many similarities to Glasser's (1997) "choice theory" (formerly called "control theory") and the work of Brendtro, Brokenleg, and Van Bockern (1990). It suggests that youngsters will develop high self-esteem and be more motivated to engage and persevere at school tasks when the adults in their lives have created a school environment that satisfies basic needs. Deci highlights three needs that provide direction for fostering self-esteem and motivation. They are:

1. To belong and feel connected. Youngsters are more likely to thrive when they are in environments in which they feel they belong and are comfortable, in which they feel appreciated. Many adolescents join gangs to satisfy this need for connectedness and identity. When youngsters feel alienated or detached they are more likely to act out and fail at school (Strahan, 1989). Related to this feeling of belonging, is the importance of helping each child to feel welcome in the school environment. When I asked students of all ages what a teacher could do each day to help them to feel welcome in school, the two most frequent responses I received were: (a) being greeted warmly by a teacher who uses your name, and (b) a teacher smiling at you. Obviously, small gestures can go a long way towards assisting at-risk children to feel welcome at school and in other environments. If students do not feel welcome, they are more prone to becoming angry.

2. To feel autonomous and have a sense of self-determination. At the core of most theories of self-esteem and motivation, including attribution theory, is the concept of ownership and self-determination (Brooks, 1991). Motivation is increased when people genuinely believe that their voice is being heard and respected, when they feel they have some control over what is occurring in their lives (Dicintio & Gee, 1999). If students feel they are constantly being told what to do and that their lives are being dictated by adults, they are less likely to be enthused about engaging in learning tasks that they feel are being imposed upon them. If anything, their main motivation may be to avoid or oppose the desires of others. A power struggle or angry outbursts are likely to ensue. An emphasis on reinforcing self-determination requires that educators use classroom experiences to teach youngsters how to solve problems and make wise choices and decisions. In addition, we must provide these children with ongoing opportunities to develop and refine these skills.

3. To feel competent. We all hope to be successful, to possess skills in our lives that

help us feel competent and accomplished, skills that generate satisfaction and pride. Unfortunately, many children do not feel competent. Feelings of incompetence, which are often associated with anger and sadness, prompt children to retreat from challenges and to engage in self-defeating behaviors, including aggression, that serve to intensify an already difficult problem.

It is important to emphasize that all students require positive feedback and encouragement from educators. However, a focus on encouragement should never be confused with giving false praise or inflated grades since children are quite perceptive in knowing when they are receiving undeserved positive evaluations. As noted earlier, positive feedback must be rooted in actual accomplishment and success. This requires teachers to provide opportunities for children to succeed in areas judged important by themselves and others. Their accomplishments should be displayed for others to see (what good is listing a child's strengths on an educational plan, for example, if no one witnesses these strengths?).

In addition, a focus on competencies and positive feedback is not mutually exclusive with offering feedback to correct a child's performance or behavior. However, corrective feedback must be undertaken in a nonaccusatory, nonjudgmental manner that does not humiliate the child. Instead, corrective feedback is most effective when presented to the student as a problem to be solved.

The Search for Islands of Competence

As we consider the tenets of attribution theory and Deci's model, it is important to recognize that any intervention that teachers implement to develop a classroom milieu in which self-esteem, motivation, hope, and resilience are fostered must be guided by a strength-based approach and must promote autonomy and self-determination in a climate of genuine caring for and appreciation of the child. While we must never minimize a child's difficulties, weaknesses, and vulnerabilities, we must not lose sight of the strengths that angry, defiant children have. If we are to minimize anger in our schools, we must ensure that all students feel welcome, important, and hopeful (Charney, 1991; Heath, 1999; Malicky, Shapiro, & Mazurek, 1999).

There are youngsters who are much more confident playing baseball or basketball than they are taking a math test or talking with their peers. There are other children and adolescents who feel secure in the classroom but are very self-conscious and anxious playing a sport, and still others who are self-assured working on the motor of a car or drawing a cartoon but dread writing an essay. A child's self-esteem may vary from one situation to the next. Thus, there is little wonder that some children are sad or angry in certain environments or with certain people, but more content and cooperative at other times. Unfortunately, if youngsters experience self-doubt and failure in many situations, especially those that they judge to be of value to significant others, their overall sense of competence and confidence is lessened and they are more likely to demonstrate anger. I use a metaphor to capture this feeling that involves an image in which I see these youngsters swimming or drowning in an ocean of self-perceived inadequacy. In therapy and in the classroom, these children have communicated to me that they doubt that they will ever be successful. To counteract this image of despair, I believe that every person possesses at least one small "island of competence," one area that is or has the potential to be a source of pride and accomplishment (Brooks, 1999b).

This metaphor of "islands of competence" is not intended to be merely a fanciful image, but rather a symbol of hope and respect, a reminder that all children and adolescents have unique strengths and courage. Caregivers have the responsibility to locate and reinforce these islands of competence so that they increasingly become more prominent parts of the child's. If we can find

and reinforce these areas of strength, we can create a powerful “ripple effect” in which children may be more willing to venture forth and confront situations that have been problematic. For this reason whenever I meet with parents or teachers or other professionals to discuss an angry youngster, within a few minutes I ask them to describe the child’s islands of competence. Then I ask how we might strengthen these islands and display them for others to see.

Clinicians and researchers have emphasized the importance of reinforcing these areas of strength. Rutter (1985) in commenting about resilient individuals noted, “. . . experience of success in one arena of life led to enhanced self-esteem and a feeling of self-efficacy, enabling them to cope more successfully with the subsequent life challenges and adaptations” (p. 604). Similarly, psychologist Mark Katz (1994) has written, “. . . being able to showcase our talents, and to have them valued by important people in our lives, helps us to define our identities around that which we do best” (p. 10).

The case of a young boy who was referred to me is an illustration of the importance of identifying a child’s islands of competence. Billy was an angry and depressed 10-year-old boy with learning problems who dealt with his anxieties about school by hiding behind the bushes of the school instead of entering the building. In our first session, Billy and I discussed why he hid behind the bushes. He responded quickly and directly, informing me that he “liked the bushes better than he liked school.” Rather than engage in a debate about the merits of bushes versus schools, I decided to discover what he saw as his islands of competence. He responded that he enjoyed taking care of his pet dog. With his permission, I mentioned Billy’s expertise in taking care of animals to the school principal, suggesting that the school might benefit from the presence of a “pet monitor.”

The following day the principal scheduled a meeting with Billy and asked if he might be interested in becoming the school’s first pet monitor, even handing Billy a pet monitor “union card” that he had created to emphasize the position’s importance. When Billy asked about a pet monitor’s responsibilities, the principal said that to begin with, Billy would be expected to come to school 10 minutes early each day to take care of a rabbit the school had recently purchased.

Billy accepted the offer and handled his duties in a very responsible manner, in marked contrast to his history with academic requirements. Within a short time, he began to take care of other pets. Billy’s teacher communicated how impressed she was with his knowledge of pets and helped him to write a manual about animal care. Billy had always been reluctant to write, but under these circumstances his hesitancy disappeared since he felt more confident and recognized that he had information to communicate. His manual was placed in the school library. In addition, by the end of the school year, Billy “lectured” in every classroom in the building about taking care of pets.

Billy’s aggressive outbursts and his avoidance of the school building decreased significantly once he assumed the position of pet monitor. Very importantly, Billy’s teacher and principal had been willing to take a risk and change the way in which they had been approaching his avoidant behavior. Rather than seeing Billy as a “resistant,” annoying child who had to change his behavior, they had the courage to ask what they could do differently so that he would not be as frightened in school.

Resilience and Hope

All parents worry to some extent about what the future holds for their children; this worry is greatly magnified for parents of children who are angry, defiant, and/or depressed, especially when they witness their children confronting so many burdens and frustrations. A typical question I often hear when speaking with these parents is, “Will my child always be so unhappy

and angry and feel so unsuccessful?” Educators often pose a similar question when they question whether they can “reach” students who have replaced hope with anger.

Faced on a daily basis with children who have low self-esteem, it can become very easy for caregivers to focus on pathology and risk factors rather than on those factors that help children bounce back. Yet, as I encountered a number of adults who as children experienced years of frustration, failure, humiliation, or abuse, and were now leading satisfying, successful lives, my focus and questions shifted. I began to ask, “Why are some high risk children successful as adults while others are not?”

Answering this question is perhaps one of the most important tasks that those of us who work with, raise, or educate youngsters must address. If we can understand those factors that contribute to children bouncing back, to becoming hopeful and resilient, then we can develop and implement more effective interventions that will give all of our children a fighting chance.

Fortunately, during the past 15-20 years there has been a burgeoning literature focusing on the topic of resilience (Beardslee, 1989; Brooks, 1994; Brooks & Goldstein, 2001, 2003, 2004; Katz, 1994, 1997; Rutter, 1985, 1987; Werner, 1993; Werner & Smith, 1992).

Researchers and clinicians have noted that three interrelated domains influence the occurrence of resilience, namely, the inner characteristics of the child, the family, and the larger social environment (Hechtman, 1991). The inner resources of the child that contribute to resilience include an “easy” temperament from birth, more advanced problem-solving skills, good social skills, and effective coping strategies. Very importantly, resilient youngsters possess a high level of self-esteem, a realistic sense of personal control, and a feeling of hope. Concerning the family dynamics, it is not surprising to find that resilient children are more likely to grow up in homes characterized by warmth, affection, emotional support, and clear-cut and reasonable guidelines, limits, and consequences.

Supportive adults outside the immediate family have also proved to be a major source of resilience. When resilient adults were asked what they believed was one of the most important factors in their childhood that helped them become resilient, invariably they responded “an adult who believed in me.” Segal (1988) referred to such a person as a “charismatic adult,” someone from whom a child or adolescent gathers strength. Schools have especially been highlighted as environments that can provide angry, resistant, or alienated youngsters with experiences that enhance their self-esteem and competence, lessen their sadness and bitterness, and strengthen their resilience and hope (Brooks, 1991; Curwin, 1992; Goldstein, 1995; Segal, 1988). In this regard, a recent report issued by the U.S. Department of Education (Dwyer, Osher, & Warger, 1998) about “safe schools” noted:

Research shows that a positive relationship with an adult who is available to provide support when needed is one of the most critical factors in preventing student violence. Students often look to adults in the school community for guidance, support, and direction. Some children need help overcoming feelings of isolation and support in developing connections to others. Effective schools make sure that opportunities exist for adults to spend quality, personal time with children. (pp. 3-4)

Strategies to Foster Self-Esteem, Motivation, Hope, and Resilience

There are a number of self-esteem strategies, predicated on attribution theory and Deci’s framework, that build upon a child’s islands of competence to reinforce a sense of confidence, motivation, hope, and resilience. These strategies can be applied in our homes, schools, and offices. As many will recognize, they are also strategies that can help to develop skills implicated in “emotional intelligence” (e.g., self-awareness, empathy, self-control, responsibility,

and ease in interpersonal relationships), skills crucial for success and contentment in life (Goleman, 1995). The following are a selected group of these strategies together with some recommendations for the implementation of an “orientation” period at the beginning of the school year:

1. Developing Realistic Expectations and Goals and Making Accommodations when Necessary

I am often asked what are realistic expectations and goals in our schools and homes for children of different ages. My answer is, “I don’t know. First, tell me about your child and then we can decide what are realistic expectations and goals.” Although there is a wealth of research that prove children have different temperaments from birth (Chess & Thomas, 1987), possess different learning styles (Levine, 1994, 2002; Rief & Heimburge, 1996), and that there are multiple intelligences distributed differently among children (Gardner, 1983), we often give lip service to accepting children for who they are; instead we respond to youngsters as if they were a homogeneous group. When we fail to make appropriate accommodations based on the unique quality of each child, children are more likely to fail and become sad and angry and display aggressive outbursts. This scenario is often seen in the school environment.

For example, it is not unusual to hear a teacher say that it would not be “fair” to offer accommodations for one child since what would the other children feel. I can appreciate what the teacher is saying, but I also believe that if children are different, the least fair thing we can do is to treat all of them the same. If we do not teach students in the ways that they are able to learn best then we will continue to have many youngsters who feel mistreated, ill-at-ease, alienated, and angry in our schools. However, the issue of fairness must be addressed lest other students begin to resent those students who are receiving accommodations. One suggestion I advocate for schools is to use the first couple of days of the new school year as an “orientation” period (Brooks, 1997a, 1999b). During this period, teachers would not take out any books, but instead would use the time to set the foundation for a classroom climate in which all students would have the opportunity to thrive. Key questions and concerns would be considered and possible obstacles to learning would be confronted before they became obstacles.

As an illustration, to minimize the possibility of children feeling a teacher is unfair because some children might be doing more reading or homework than others, it is recommended that on the first day of school, the teacher discuss with the class how each one of them is different, how some students can read more quickly than others, that some can solve math problems more efficiently, that some can run a mile in less time than others. The teacher can say that in light of these differences, there will be different expectations of the amount and kind of work that is done by each student. Next, the teacher can say, “Since I will treat each of you somewhat differently because you are different, one of my concerns is if you begin to feel I am not being fair it will interfere with your learning. Thus, if at any time during the year you feel I am not being fair, I want you to tell me so that we can discuss it.” Feedback I have received indicates that when a teacher brings up the issue of “fairness” before it has become an issue, it remains a nonissue and permits teachers to accommodate to each student’s needs without negative feelings emerging. It lessens frustration and the anger and sadness that are typically by-products of frustration. I also suggest that teachers communicate the same message about fairness to parents, perhaps through a short, written statement of class philosophy that is sent home.

The kinds of accommodations I typically recommend do not require major modifications in a student’s program, nor do they demand that a teacher have extremely different educational plans for each student in the classroom. I believe that effective accommodations on the part of

parents, teachers, and other professionals need not be complicated. What is required is that all parties--students, teachers, therapists, parents--appreciate a child's strengths and weaknesses, share an understanding of appropriate expectations and goals, and define what each has to do to maximize the probability of success in meeting these goals. We must help at-risk youth to understand their strengths and vulnerabilities and the accommodations that will help them to succeed. Realistic expectations lessen the frustration that results in anger and/or sadness. A few examples of typical accommodations follow:

Homework time. Some youngsters experience attending school as the equivalent of climbing Mt. Everest each day. Then they are required to do homework after school. If they have learning problems, they often must spend two or three times as long to do homework than their peers. By bedtime they are frustrated and exhausted, as are their parents. Commonsense would dictate that a time limit be established for homework, regardless of how much work is actually finished. For example, if most students can complete a homework assignment in an hour, then the limit should be approximately an hour for all students even those with special needs. Some might argue that this approach will result in some children not completing as many of the problems as other students in the class and thus, not learning as much; however, to ask these children to spend several more hours per evening on homework will typically prove counterproductive. It may produce sadness, anger, and defiance.

Testing. Students with learning or attentional problems usually encounter more difficulty taking timed tests than their peers. As one child with learning difficulties once asked me with tears in his eyes, "Why did they ever invent timed tests?" I have seen the test scores of students increase noticeably when taking untimed tests and yet, they only required another 10 minutes. The pressure of a timed test no longer existed and they were more relaxed. Relatedly, some students will display far more of what they know when answering questions orally, than when having to write these same answers. We should test students under the best possible conditions for them. These kinds of accommodations should not be viewed as spoiling these youngsters, but rather as treating them with fairness and dignity. In doing so we lessen the probability of acting out behaviors.

Assignment assistants. I have worked with many youth who engage in ongoing battles with parents about homework. The nightly routine is filled with frustration and anger, and family harmony is almost nonexistent. The reasons that students do not do homework are varied. Among them are difficulties copying homework assignments from the blackboard. Providing the child with a monthly "syllabus" of assignments (it is interesting to note, that professors in colleges typically distribute a syllabus for the entire semester during the first class--I'm not certain why we cannot do the same in our elementary, middle schools and high schools) can be helpful as well as assigning a "buddy" to ensure that the child has an accurate picture of what homework is required.

School books at home. A vast number of books are lost being transported between home and school. I have found that providing two sets of books to a student, one for home, the other for school, so that no textbooks have to go back and forth, has helped many students. It is one less pressure that students have to worry about, giving them more time to focus on learning the material in the books and less time to be angry or depressed.

2. Developing Responsibility by Providing Opportunities to Contribute to Others

It has been my experience that when children develop a sense of accomplishment and pride, they are less likely to feel sad or angry and less likely to engage in defiant, uncooperative

behaviors. It is therefore essential to provide youth with opportunities for assuming responsibilities, especially those that help them to feel that they are making a contribution to their home, school, or community environments. The experience of making a positive difference in the lives of others reinforces self-respect and a sense of hope. It serves as a powerful antidote to feelings of defeat, anger, and despair (Brooks, 1988). One of the best ways to boost self-esteem and motivation is for youngsters to taste success. As Werner (1993) has noted:

Self-esteem and self-efficacy also grew when youngsters took on a responsible position commensurate with their ability, whether it was part-time paid work, managing the household when a parent was incapacitated, or, most often, caring for younger siblings. At some point in their young lives, usually in middle childhood and adolescence, the youngsters who grew into resilient adults were required to carry out some socially desirable task to prevent others in their family, neighborhood, or community from experiencing distress or discomfort. (p. 511)

The child who was asked to become the “pet monitor” of the school is an example of a youngster making a contribution. Other examples include the following:

Charitable projects. An educator I know, enlisted visually handicapped adolescents with learning difficulties to create piggy banks to sell and sponsor a bake sale and raffle, with the proceeds going to a needy family. The educator noted that the students’ self-esteem and cooperation improved as did the many academic skills that were involved in the charitable project.

“Budding.” I visited an elementary school in which fifth graders were “buddies” with kindergarten and first grade students. They would spend time each week with their buddies in a variety of possible activities including reading to them, helping them with their work, or playing a sport with them. All of the students benefited from this approach and I was impressed by the atmosphere of cooperation that permeated the building.

Committee membership. A school social worker formed a committee made up of five elementary school students who were often absent from school. The committee focused on the question of what prompted students to be absent and the five students engaged in “research” to answer the question. Not only did they prepare a report of their findings, but they also recommended keeping track of the attendance of first graders and intervening early for all first graders who were absent a great deal. Since becoming members of this committee the attendance records of the five students improved significantly. They now had a reason to come to school.

School beautification. Youngsters can take care of plants in school, or paint murals on the wall, or hang up favorite drawings. When I was a principal I found asking students to decorate the walls was a strong antidote to vandalism.

Peer tutoring. Co-operative learning as well as tutoring younger children is a powerful way of increasing a sense of belonging and competence in the school setting (Brooks, 1991). I am reminded of the impressive results of the Valued Youth Partnership Program reported by the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (Hornbeck, 1989). The program was developed to address the large percentage of youth dropping out of school before they reached high school. It was highly successful as the Carnegie report noted:

A rise in tutors’ self-esteem is the most noticeable effect of the program. . . . As a result, only 2 percent of all tutors have dropped out of school. This is remarkable, given that all of these students had been held back twice or more and were reading at least two grade levels below their current grade placement. Disciplinary problems have

become less severe, grades have improved, and attendance of tutors has soared. (p. 47)

3. Providing Opportunities for Making Choices and Decisions and Solving Problems: Reinforcing a Sense of Ownership

Theories of self-esteem and motivation as well as research about hope and resilience emphasize the importance of reinforcing the belief that one has some control over one's life. I believe that a sense of powerlessness is often one trigger for anger and defiance. To develop this sense of control, ownership, and autonomy, children require opportunities to learn the skills necessary to make sound choices and decisions and to solve problems. They also need opportunities, in keeping with their developmental level and interests, to apply and develop these skills, especially in those situations that have an impact on their lives (Adelman & Taylor, 1983; Deci & Chandler, 1986; Deci & Flaste, 1995; Deci, Hodges, Pierson, & Tomassone, 1992; Dicintio & Gee, 1999; Glasser, 1997; Kohn, 1993; Shure, 1994). If children and adolescents feel that they are always being told what to do, if they feel they have little control over their lives, they are less likely to be cooperative. Teachers and other professionals have many opportunities to reinforce problem-solving and decision-making skills. The following are some examples:

Choice. I spoke with a group of teachers who always gave their students a choice in what homework problems to do. For example, if there were eight math problems on a page, the students were told that they had to do six of the eight and it was their choice which six to do. The teachers told me that they actually received more homework on a regular basis when permitting their students some choice since it reinforced a sense of ownership for doing the homework. Similarly, a resource room teacher found that students were more likely to write when he gave them several pens each with a different color ink and asked them which color they would most like to use on that day. When students are provided these kinds of options, they are less likely to view school as a hostile environment.

Guided problem solving. I advocate that teachers should incorporate some time in a class schedule to obtain the input of students about solving particular problems. I have found that assisting students to articulate what the problem is, to think of possible solutions to the problems, and to consider the likely consequences of each solution, increases the probability of children not only learning to solve problems, but also following through on the solutions (especially since they have helped to formulate the solutions). For instance, when I was principal of the school in the locked door unit we established a Student Council; the opportunity and structure for the student patients to discuss their concerns and criticisms noticeably lessened hostility while increasing a more responsible attitude.

Input. I believe that from an early age we must involve students in providing input about their own education. An article in Teacher Magazine (Jacobson, 1999) titled, "Three's Company" about parent-teacher conferences reported:

When Michelle Baker first learned that her son Colin would take part in a parent-teacher conference, she was skeptical. "I thought, This is going to be a fiasco," she recalls. Instead, the meeting turned out to be a big success: Colin. . . showed unusual insight into his academic strengths and weaknesses. "He had the opportunity to hear his teacher talk about him with him sitting there," Baker says. "He was able to communicate and understand better what he was being judged on." (p. 23)

It is interesting to note that Colin was only in the first grade.

4. Establishing Self-Discipline by Learning to Discipline Effectively

As might be expected, many of the questions I am asked at my workshops, especially

about angry and defiant youth, revolve around the issue of discipline. In turn, I often ask the audience to think about the purpose of discipline. Not surprisingly, the first response I typically receive focuses on the importance of establishing rules and guidelines in order to ensure that our home and school environments are safe and that both children and caregivers feel secure. I am in total agreement with this purpose of discipline, especially since I have seen what can occur in an environment in which rules, limits, and consequences are vague and inconsistently followed. But we must not lose sight of a second very important purpose of discipline, namely, to promote self-discipline and self-control in our children. It is difficult to conceive of children developing high self-esteem, motivation, and resilience if they do not possess a comfortable sense of self-discipline, that is, a realistic ability to reflect upon one's behavior and its impact on others, and then to change the behavior if necessary. In essence, self-discipline implies ownership for one's own discipline.

Before examining more closely strategies that nurture self-discipline without a loss of self-esteem, one point about discipline deserves special mention. As much as possible, parents, teachers, and other professionals should anticipate those situations that may prove very difficult for particular youngsters, situations that are likely to result in disruptive behaviors. We should consider ways to help children either avoid these situations, until we know that they are better able to manage them, or to provide them with alternative behaviors. One illustration of a preventative approach was the child who was appointed the "pet monitor." A couple of other examples include: (a) having a hyperactive child take messages to the office every half hour to provide needed physical activity, and (b) as one teacher told me, she asked a disruptive child who was constantly being sent to the assistant principal's office for disciplinary purposes, to become the "assistant to the assistant principal." This position required the child to work in the assistant principal's office for a short time at the beginning of each day. The disruptive behavior ceased, especially as the child formed a more positive relationship with the assistant principal. In addition, the child's self-esteem increased.

Even if we create school environments that lessen the probability of students misbehaving, we still know that children will, at times, act in ways that invite disapproval from educators. Many angry and defiant youngsters require more limits and guidelines than their peers, but they are the first to experience limits as significant impositions on their life, arguing that the teachers are not being "fair." We must remember that discipline stems from the word disciple and should be understood as part of a teaching process. In helping children to develop self-discipline, it is essential not to humiliate or intimidate them (Charney, 1991; Curwin & Mendler, 1988; Mendler, 1992). Humiliation and intimidation are more likely to result in increased anger and uncooperativeness, the very feelings and behaviors we wish to change. If we want children to assume responsibility for their actions and to perceive rules as being fair, they must understand the purpose of the rules and participate within reason in the process of creating these rules and the consequences that follow should the rules be broken. Adults often walk a tightrope when discipline is involved, maintaining a delicate balance between rigidity and flexibility, striving to blend warmth, nurturance, acceptance, and humor with realistic expectations, clearcut guidelines, and logical and natural consequences. Several examples follow:

Self-reflection. I spoke with an assistant principal of a middle school who asked students to write a brief essay while serving detention. They were given a choice of over 30 topics including what they would do if they ran the school, what they could do in the future to avoid detention, what dreams they had for their future. As I reviewed some of the themes the

students had written about, I was impressed with their ability to reflect upon their lives and their behaviors and to consider alternative ways of behaving in the future. In addition, the exercise led to a decrease in defiant behaviors.

Shared rule making. During the “orientation” period I advocate for the first couple of days of school, I have encouraged teachers to ask students what rules were necessary in the classroom or school, the best ways to remember these rules (so that adults did not have to remind or nag them), and the most effective consequences should rules be broken. In recommending this approach, I also emphasize that the students should be informed about nonnegotiable rules that are related to safety and security issues. Although some teachers have voiced reservations about allowing students to have an input in the creation of rules and consequences (they predicted that students would take advantage of the opportunity and do away with all rules), what I and others have found is that the students make up strict rules and consequences. If anything, many teachers have reported that they must help students to develop less rigid and harsh rules and consequences. The key point is that students are more likely to remember and follow rules that they have helped to create since they feel a greater sense of ownership for these rules (Rademacher, Callahan, & Pederson-Seelye, 1998). In addition, if students have a difficult time following their own rules, teachers can use their difficulty as an opportunity to discuss more effective ways of remembering these rules.

One other important point about discipline. We must never forget that perhaps the most powerful forms of discipline involve positive feedback and encouragement. I will include a discussion of this when I consider ways to help our children feel special and appreciated (point #6).

5. Helping Children to Deal More Effectively with Mistakes and Failure

All children worry about making mistakes and feeling foolish. At-risk youngsters are typically more self-conscious and/or worried about making mistakes than their peers. As attribution theory highlights, these children believe that mistakes cannot be modified and are an ongoing source of embarrassment and humiliation. Many children spend more time and energy in attempting to avoid a task they believe will result in failure than in seeking solutions. This avoidance is often manifested in oppositional and defiant behaviors. Since self-esteem and resilience are linked to a child’s response to mistakes and failure, we must convey the message that mistakes are part of the learning process. We can do so in a number of ways.

Modeling. Parents, teachers, and other professionals serve as models. I frequently ask youngsters to describe how their parents or teachers handle mistakes or frustrations. I have heard a wide array of responses including, “They scream,” “They yell,” “They don’t talk with each other,” “They walk around with a frown on their face.” Obviously, these parents and teachers are not modeling an effective way of dealing with frustration.

Responding to mistakes. Relatedly, teachers must reflect upon how they respond to a child’s mistakes. This implies that we must have realistic expectations for children and not overreact to their mistakes or shortcomings. All of us from time to time become frustrated with the behavior of youngsters, but we must avoid disparaging remarks such as: “You have to pay closer attention.” The goal is to communicate that mistakes will occur and we should learn from them. We can also engage a child in problem solving by asking what might help to minimize the mistake from occurring in the future.

Anticipating mistakes. Since the fear of failure has such a strong influence in classrooms, it should be addressed directly even before any student makes a mistake. This can be accomplished during the “orientation” period. One illustration is for a teacher to ask at the

beginning of the new school year, “Who in this class feels that they are going to make a mistake or not understand something in class this year?” Before any of the students can respond, the teacher raises his or her own hand and then asks why they think this question was posed. The students’ responses can serve as a catalyst to discuss how fears of making mistakes interfere with offering opinions, answering questions, and learning. The teacher can then involve the class in problem solving by asking what he or she can do as their teacher and what they can do as a class to minimize the fear of failing and looking foolish. To acknowledge openly the fear of failure renders it less potent and less destructive. Early in the school year youngsters can be taught that not understanding material is to be expected and that the teacher’s job is to help them to learn. Mistakes can be “celebrated” as part of the educational process. This intervention for dealing with mistakes is important for all students, but even more so for those youngsters who feel vulnerable, sad, and angry.

Focus on the positive. Adults who focus on children’s strengths and their capabilities rather than on what they cannot do lessen the fear of failure. For instance, the seemingly simple practice of teachers marking tests by adding points for correct answers rather than subtracting points for incorrect answers places the spotlight on the positive. I visited one school in which teachers engaged in this practice and did so with green rather than red ink, feeling that the use of red ink for indicating errors on papers had a negative impact on children.

6. Letting Children and Adolescents Know that They Are Special and Appreciated

In my workshops I often ask the audience, “In the past week or two, what have you done to help another person to feel special and appreciated?” I pose this question since I have found that although most of us are thrilled to receive a note or phone call of appreciation, many well-intentioned people do not make use of opportunities to show appreciation. I am reminded of an article I once read that noted that many adults have a “praise deficit.” I believe that we must make certain that we find ways to appreciate angry or sad youngsters, especially since they often feel scared, vulnerable, and not well-liked. Self-esteem, motivation, hope, and resilience are nurtured when we convey appreciation and encouragement to students, when we become the “charismatic adults” in their lives. Words and actions that communicate encouragement are always welcome and energizing. They are very vital for defiant children, many of whom are burdened with anger and self-doubt, and may not at first accept the positive feedback. However, we must persevere and never forget that even a seemingly small gesture of appreciation can generate a longlasting positive effect. The following are examples:

Connecting outside of school. I met a high school teacher who had more than 150 students in his classes at the beginning of each school year that he planned to call each of them at least twice at home in the evening during the school year to find out how they were doing. He told me that the practice took only about 7-8 minutes an evening, but had very positive effects, including students being more respectful and more disciplined in class, and doing their homework more regularly. This particular teacher was gifted in knowing how to help his students to feel welcome and appreciated.

Becoming a “charismatic adult” or mentor. Relatedly, research indicates that when students have at least one adult in school who they feel cares about them and is an advocate for them, they are less likely to be violent or drop out and more likely to attend (Brooks, 1991).

School-wide recognition. Schools can hold recognition assemblies not just to acknowledge the achievements of students with high grades, but also to spotlight the islands of competence of students whose grades do not qualify for the honor role, but who have made other contributions to the school environment.

Concluding Thoughts

Anger and resistance in youth present major challenges for educators. I believe that if we use a strength-based model guided by empathy, self-esteem, self-discipline, motivation, resilience, and hope we will be able to create nurturing school environments that reach an increasing number of these youngsters and help direct them towards a more constructive path in life. A review of questions to assess whether we have provided a positive school climate for each student may be found in the Appendix.

As educators we must remember that we have a great privilege, namely, that of having an impact on the life of a developing youngster. Having this privilege, we must always ask, "Are we using it in the most effective way?" Educating angry, alienated, at-risk students presents many challenges and struggles, but out of these can emerge children who become very productive, resilient adults. Although it is not an easy task, all of us are capable of becoming the "charismatic adults" in children's lives. It is our gift to the next generation.

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Chapter 4 Appendix

Guideposts to Providing a Positive School Climate for a Student

I. Helping students to feel they belong, are connected and are welcome in the school.

Is there at least one staff member who the student feels cares about him or her?

How is this caring communicated to the student?

What are strategies that teachers might use to help this student feel that they are genuinely interested in him or her?

Is this student accepted by other students? If so, who are these other students?

If the student is isolated, what can be done to help this student develop closer relationships with other students?

II. Fostering self-determination and helping students to have a sense of ownership.

What choices would this student say he or she has had in the past few months in school?

What decisions would the student say he or she has made about his or her educational plan during this school year?

Is the student invited to IEP meetings and parent conferences? If so, who prepares the student for what will occur in the meeting and what will be expected of the student?

Does the student have an opportunity to discuss issues and possible solutions pertaining to his or her school program?

If the student is not in attendance at IEP meetings and parent conferences, is the student asked what he or she would like to have discussed at the meeting or conference and are suggestions elicited from the student?

If the student is not in attendance at the meeting or conference, who will meet with the student to discuss what occurred?

If the student is on a contract, does the student feel he or she was an active participant in the development and implementation of the contract?

If educational and/or psychological testing was conducted, did the student receive feedback about the results of the testing, both in terms of areas of strength and areas of weakness?

Does the student have a clear understanding of why certain interventions have been implemented?

III. Identifying, reinforcing, and displaying a student's "islands of competence."

What are the student's competencies or strengths?

Has anyone asked the student what he or she believes are his or her areas of strength?

How are these strengths displayed in the school setting (e.g., if a student is an excellent artist is the student's artwork displayed in school?).

If the student has an IEP, are the areas of strength not only listed but is it also indicated how these strengths will be used?

One of the best ways to help students to feel competent is for them to feel that they are making a contribution to the school setting (i.e., that they have at least one responsibility that helps them to feel that because they are in the school, the school is a better place). What does this student contribute to the school?

IV. Identifying a student's coping strategies.

What are the main ways this student copes with school and with mistakes (e.g., asking for help, being a bully, quitting, being a class clown)?

Does this student's main ways of coping lead to positive or negative outcomes?

How can we help this student to develop more adaptive coping strategies (e.g., asking for and accepting assistance, developing new strategies for learning)?

I wrote the following article for my website (www.drrobertbrooks.com), April, 2005. Other articles are posted on the website.

The Violence at Red Lake: Further Reflections About Creating Safe Schools

Sadly, in the past few weeks another school in the United States has borne witness to acts of murder and violence. Jeff Weise, a 16-year-old, shot his grandfather and the grandfather's girlfriend before driving to Red Lake High School on his Indian reservation in Minnesota. According to accounts in several newspapers, he shot an unarmed security guard and then roamed the school killing a teacher and five students, and wounding seven others before taking his own life. It was the second worst school massacre in the United States, following only the murders at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado six years ago.

In my visits to many school districts throughout the country, I am acutely aware that issues of safety are on the minds of administrators, faculty, parents, and students, more so in some districts than others. Understandably, when an event such as Red Lake occurs, these issues assume greater prominence as reflected in the scope of media coverage and the renewed urgency in which questions are posed to experts in the field. Questions include:

Can school violence be predicted?

Can school shooters be identified before they act violently?

What are the best ways to prevent school violence?

Is school violence on the rise?

Is school violence primarily a reflection of what occurs in schools or is it basically a reflection of what is transpiring in our society?

Should the outside doors of schools be locked throughout the day to protect students and staff from intruders?

Should all schools be equipped with metal detectors?

Obviously given the complex factors involved in youth violence there are no simple answers to these or related questions. I have shared some thoughts about several of these questions in previous articles. I should like to expand on some of these ideas in this article, especially drawing on a comprehensive report issued jointly by the United States Secret Service and the United States Department of Education in 2002 titled "Threat Assessment in Schools: A Guide to Managing Threatening Situations and to Creating Safe School Climates." Two of the authors are Dr. Bill Pollack, a good friend and colleague and author of the bestselling book *Real Boys*, and Dr. Robert Fein, a psychologist with whom I have had the privilege of presenting at several conferences. Dr. Fein works closely with the Secret Service and has been involved in interviewing youth who commit homicide. I would highly recommend that those interested in the topic of school violence read this document.

As I noted in an earlier website article (March, 2002), I strongly support measures that enhance the safety of a school, whether those measures include the installation of metal detectors or cameras in the corridors or keeping outside doors locked. I also believe that each school and each community (educators, parents, law enforcement personnel) are in the best position to decide what actions are most appropriate for their

district to insure that schools are as safe and secure as possible. What one school or community deems necessary may be very different from that of another school or community.

However, we must recognize that there are limits to these safety measures. Metal detectors, cameras, and similar devices provide some modicum of protection, which is very important, but they fail to address what I consider to be a vital ingredient of school safety and violence prevention, namely, the relationship that is developed and reinforced by staff with each student. If students do not feel a connection to adults or their peers in school, then exclusionary cliques or gangs will readily fill the void and relationships among the entire school community will be fractured. When students experience a sense of belonging and caring, they are less likely to engage in bullying or angry behavior.

I am not implying that acts of bullying or violence perpetrated at schools are just a “school problem” or can be traced solely to the existing school milieu. The roots of anger, violence, and mental illness, stretch far beyond the schoolyard to encompass the homes and communities in which students reside. Comprehensive programs are necessary to address such issues as poverty, the easy accessibility of guns to our youth, the widespread use of drugs, and the need for parenting programs, mental health services, and activities that enrich the lives of youngsters and help keep them off the street. However, schools are an essential part of the community and thus are in a position to assume a vital role in addressing the issue of youth alienation and violence.

The Secret Service and Department of Education report cautions against the belief that school shooters can be identified before they engage in violent acts. One of their “key findings” is that “there is no accurate or useful ‘profile’ of students who engage in targeted school violence.” They note that in reviewing school shooters, “the demographic, personality, school history, and social characteristics of the attackers varied substantially. The use of profiles to determine whether a student is thinking about or planning a violent attack is not an effective approach to identifying students who may pose a risk for targeted violence at school or – once a student has been identified—for assessing the risk that a particular student may pose for targeted school violence.”

The report recommends that “rather than trying to determine the ‘type’ of student who may engage in targeted school violence, an inquiry should focus instead on a student’s behaviors and communications to determine if that student appears to be planning or preparing for an attack.” The authors of the report contend that “the process of thinking and planning that leads up to an attack potentially may be knowable or discernible from the attacker’s behaviors and communications.” This appeared to be the case with Jeff Weise as well as other students who have engaged in violent acts.

A similar conclusion about the limitations of identifying school shooters was offered by Edward Mulvey and Elizabeth Cauffman of the University of Pittsburgh in their article “The Inherent Limits of Predicting School Violence” published in the October, 2001 issue of the *American Psychologist*. They write, “Preventing violent incidents in school does not require either more sophisticated methods for assessing students individually or a magical, uniform method for intervening with them for a short while after they have been identified.” Mulvey and Cauffman cite empirical evidence that indicates “promoting healthy relationships and environments is more effective for reducing school misconduct and crime than instituting punitive penalties. . . . Students

who are committed to school, feel that they belong, and trust the administration are less likely to commit violent acts than those who are uninvolved, alienated, or distrustful.”

They observe that the best source of information about the activities of students in schools is other students. “A long line of research has demonstrated that students are well aware of the problem children in their own classrooms. Peers and teachers who talk with problem students can often provide the most useful information about when such students are in trouble.” Mulvey and Cauffman conclude, “Establishing school environments where students feel connected and trusted will build the critical link between those who often know when trouble is brewing and those who can act to prevent it.”

The power of connections is also accentuated in the “Threat Assessment in Schools” report. “Connection through human relationships is a central component of a culture of safety and respect.” The report advocates a proactive approach in developing these connections, especially for students who feel alienated. “Schools that emphasize personal contact and connection between school officials and students will take steps to identify and work with students who have few perceptible connections to the school. For example, during staff meetings in a school in a California School District, the names of students are posted, and school faculty members are asked to put stars next to the names of the students with whom they have the closest relationships. Faculty members then focus on establishing relationships with those students with few stars next to their names.” As I read this, I thought, “Wouldn’t it be wonderful if all schools engaged in this practice. What a beneficial impact it would have on each student.”

The report also emphasizes that the establishment of nurturing connections helps to break the so-called “code of silence” that exists among youth. When students trust adults in school they are more likely to approach these adults when they have problems or are concerned about classmates who are encountering difficulties.

In an Associated Press article by Ben Feller that appeared in *The Boston Globe*, experts shared thoughts about the Red Lake killings. Bill Bond was principal at Health High School in western Kentucky in 1997 when a student shot eight of his classmates, killing three of them. Bond observes, “People want to have metal detectors and security guards and all of this, but the real thing that makes a difference is working with the kids and adjusting to the kids. These kinds of situations are just like terrorist situations. When people have so much hate in them that they don’t mind dying, you don’t have any deterrents left.”

Feller writes that while Federal government figures have shown a significant decrease in violent crime in schools between 1992 and 2002, critics believe the data are already out-dated and fail to portray accurately the problem of bullying and violence in our schools. “More broadly, the numbers don’t capture what safety specialists say is the most critical goal: changing school culture. That means adults who model good behavior, monitor warning signs of violence, and even train students to help stop peers from bullying.”

William Lassiter, school safety specialist at the Center for the Prevention of School Violence in Raleigh, North Carolina observes that the Columbine shootings prompted greater attention to the creation of more physically secure buildings. “What’s missing is we need to make sure that students feel connected to their community and to their school. We must make sure they have a trusted adult.”

I recognize that a number of my writings emphasize the theme of connectedness. These include the books about resilience that I have co-authored with my colleague Dr. Sam Goldstein as well as my May and June, 2004 website articles that focus on the report “Hardwired to Connect.” I am also aware that one must be careful not to filter all information through the lens of a particular concept such as connectedness, lest tunnel vision dominate one’s thinking. However, I continue to be impressed by the emphasis that professionals in different fields such as law enforcement, education, and mental health place on the importance of connectedness in lessening school violence.

Thus, while we must not neglect developing and implementing measures for physically secure buildings, we must also appreciate the life-altering impact that one adult can have on a child or adolescent’s emotional well-being. In my March, 2002 article I wrote, “In the absence of a positive relationship, students often experience discipline and rules as arbitrary impositions to be broken. They experience our attempts to teach them about respect and dignity as hollow preachings that lack genuineness and conviction. As others have said and I wish to reinforce, ‘Students don’t care what we know until they first know we care.’ It is within this caring, authentic relationship that our interventions will prove most successful and our schools will become more supportive and safe.”

Given the pressure that many educators (and students) are experiencing in relation to the increased emphasis on standardized tests and the need to prepare students for these tests, I should like to end with this thought. The development of a relationship with a student should never be interpreted as an “extra curriculum” that takes valuable time away from academics. Instead, when students feel safe and secure, when they are not worried about being bullied or humiliated, and when they have a trusting relationship with a teacher, the learning process will be enhanced. A student who feels known in a positive way in school is more likely to behave in a caring, responsible manner and will be more motivated to achieve. It is difficult for the seeds of violence to flourish in a field in which students feel supported and respected.

I wrote the following article for my website (www.drrobertbrooks.com), February, 2004. Other articles are posted on the website.

Resilience: A Common or Not-So-Common Phenomenon?

In my last article I discussed the emergence of “positive psychology” as an area of research and practice that focuses on human strengths and virtues rather than on weaknesses and pathology. This past week I read a thought-provoking article by Dr. George Bonanno of Columbia University Teachers College that appeared in the January, 2004 issue of the journal *American Psychologist*. The article, titled “Loss, Trauma, and Human Resilience: Have We Underestimated the Human Capacity to Thrive After Extremely Aversive Events?” raises important questions about commonly held views of pathology and resilience. It also supports a basic tenet of positive psychology, namely, that the potential for individuals to handle adversity may be far greater than has previously been recognized.

At this beginning of his article, Bonanno makes an important distinction between the concepts of resilience and recovery. He notes that *recovery* is best understood as a process in which “normal functioning temporarily gives way to threshold or subthreshold psychopathology (e.g., symptoms of depression or posttraumatic stress disorder--PTSD), usually for a period of at least several months, and then gradually returns to pre-event levels. By contrast, *resilience* reflects the ability to maintain a stable equilibrium. . . . Resilience to loss and trauma, as conceived in this article, pertains to the ability of adults in otherwise normal circumstances who are exposed to an isolated and potentially highly disruptive event, such as the death of a close relation or a violent or life-threatening situation, to maintain relatively stable, healthy levels of psychological and physical functioning.”

Bonanno then emphasizes, “A further distinction is that resilience is more than the simple absence of pathology.” While the process of *recovery* involves the presence of symptoms occasioned by the loss or traumatic event, “resilient individuals, by contrast, may experience transient perturbations in normal functioning (e.g., several weeks of sporadic preoccupation or restless sleep) but generally exhibit a stable trajectory of healthy functioning across time, as well as the capacity for generative experiences and positive emotions.”

This distinction between *recovery* and *resilience* is an important one, especially if one appreciates the assumptions of normality that dominated the fields of psychology and mental health for many years. In reviewing the literature, Bonanno observes that many practitioners believed that losing a significant loved one or enduring a traumatic event necessitated clinical intervention. He writes, “Trauma theorists have focused their attentions primarily on interventions for PTSD. Nonetheless, trauma theorists and practitioners have at times assumed that virtually all individuals exposed to violent or life-threatening events could benefit from active coping and professional intervention.”

This viewpoint of the need for “universal” professional intervention may have arisen in the context of a “skewed distribution,” that is, it is often people who are suffering the most who eventually seek therapy. Thus, therapists are most likely to see individuals who are experiencing the most intense problems coping with adversity. All too often we can fall prey to generalizing from a “clinical” population to all individuals.

In the process, we lose sight of the many individuals who are faring rather well without professional help. Those who are resilient, who maintain a psychological equilibrium even when encountering loss or trauma, typically do not seek treatment. However, I have heard the argument that many who do not seek treatment may actually require psychological intervention; they are seen as engaged in denial, a form of coping that leaves them vulnerable to a “delayed reaction” that will emerge at some future point to disrupt their lives.

Bonanno suggests that it is only a small subset of people who require professional help, “most likely those struggling with the most severe levels of grief and distress.” He contends, “Resilience to the unsettling effects of interpersonal loss is not rare but relatively common, does not appear to indicate pathology but rather healthy adjustment, and does not lead to delayed grief reactions.” In addressing trauma, he notes, “Although chronic PTSD certainly warrants great concern, the fact that the vast majority of individuals exposed to violent or life-threatening events do not go on to develop the disorder has not received adequate attention.” Bonanno supports this position by citing the results from different research studies including those that indicate the large percentage of New York City residents who rapidly returned to effective functioning following the terrorist attacks of September 11, or body handlers in the aftermath of the Oklahoma City bombing who demonstrated “unexpected resilience.”

Bonanno certainly recognizes that there are individuals who in the face of loss and trauma require professional assistance. He notes that while there is an absence of evidence for the existence of delayed grief during bereavement, “delayed PTSD does appear to be a genuine, empirically verifiable phenomenon. Nonetheless, delayed PTSD is still relatively infrequent. . . and applies at best only to a subset of the many individuals who do not show initial PTSD reactions.”

The implication of Bonanno’s work is much more far-reaching than my brief summary may capture. It challenges the assumption that only “rare individuals with exceptional emotional strength are capable of resilience.” It highlights the inner resources that most people possess (a subheading in Bonanno’s article reads “resilience is common”) and questions any position that emphasizes the limitations of individuals to respond to adversity. It also resonates with the work I have done with my close friend Dr. Sam Goldstein, prompting us to identify the qualities that resilient individuals possess—such as a “resilient mindset”—that contribute to their maintaining a sense of equilibrium in their lives. Bonanno describes different pathways of resilience to loss and trauma including becoming “stress hardy” as well as using positive emotion and laughter (the reader is referred to my April, May, and June, 1999 website articles about the concept of stress hardiness; my January, February, and September, 2003 articles about “personal control”; my January, 2002 article about humor and negative scripts; and the book I co-authored with Sam Goldstein, *The Power of Resilience*).

For example, Bonanno observes, “Historically, the possible usefulness of positive emotion in the context of extremely aversive events was either ignored or dismissed as a form of unhealthy denial. Recently, however, research has shown that positive emotions can help reduce levels of distress following aversive events both by quieting or undoing negative emotion and by increasing continued contact with and support from important people in the person’s social environment.”

As I read Bonanno's article I could not help but think of one of the most devastating moments of my and my family's life, when my brother Irwin, an officer in the Air Force, lost his life. I was entering my senior year of high school at the time. A terrorist placed a bomb on his plane and all of the crew was killed when the plane exploded. One feature of the response of my parents could easily be seen as maladaptive, and I must admit that for a period of time I interpreted it as such. For several years following Irwin's death they had difficulty talking about him or even using his name. When I became a psychologist I remember thinking that if a therapist had consulted with my parents after Irwin's death, he or she would have suggested that they talk about him and their loss since their reactions were not helping them or the rest of the family to deal with their grief.

Yet, as the years have passed and as I have adopted a more strength-based approach, I now question whether my parents' response was pathological. I believe my initial assessment was too narrow and failed to consider the strengths demonstrated by my parents in their daily existence. My parents had a great deal of love for each other and had a network of relatives and friends who were very supportive. While they could not talk about Irwin's death for several years (eventually, they were able to do so), they found pleasure in my brother Henry's three children and later in my brother Michael's three children and my two sons. They relished the achievements of their sons (I remember fondly their joy when I received my Ph.D. and their delight in the publication of my first book, which was released just a month before my mother's sudden death).

Irwin's death understandably diminished my parents' happiness, but in their day-to-day functioning they continued to live, to love, and to add meaning to the lives of others. While I may have wished that they could have discussed Irwin's death in a more prompt and comfortable manner, they discovered their own timetable and while doing so they ensured that love would permeate their relationship with their family and friends. I slowly came to appreciate the magnitude of their resilience.

In the March, 2001 issue of the *American Psychologist*, Dr. Ann Masten, a psychologist at the University of Minnesota and one of the foremost researchers in the area of resilience in children, wrote an article that parallels the conclusions reached by Bonanno in his research with adults. The title of Masten's article, "Ordinary Magic: Resilience Processes in Development," captured her strong belief that "resilience is made of ordinary rather than extraordinary processes."

Masten writes, "The message from three decades of research on resilience underscores central themes of the positive psychology movement. Psychology has neglected important phenomena in human adaptation and development during periods of focus on risk, problems, pathology, and treatment. . . . Resilience does not come from rare and special qualities, but from the everyday magic of ordinary, normative resources in the minds, brains, and bodies of children, in their families and relationships, and in their communities. . . . The conclusion that resilience emerges from ordinary processes offers a far more optimistic outlook for action than the idea that rare and extraordinary processes are involved. The task before us now is to delineate how adaptive systems develop, how they operate under diverse conditions, how they work for or against success for a given child in his or her environmental and developmental context, and how they can be protected, restored, facilitated, and nurtured in the lives of children."

Experiences from both my personal and professional life have taught me that within each person there is a capacity for resilience. For some, it is highly accessible. For others, particular biological givens and environmental experiences make it less available, but as Masten and Bonanno note it is imperative that we understand the processes that may either nurture or diminish resilience. While we must never minimize or deny the impact of stress, pressure, and adversity on each person's functioning, we must not lose sight of how effectively so many adapt to the day-to-day challenges that they encounter. We must expend an increasing amount of our time and effort in the task of identifying and reinforcing those factors that reinforce a resilient mindset and allow each person to thrive and experience the power of ordinary magic.

Dakota tribal wisdom says that when you discover you are riding a dead horse, the best strategy is to dismount.

In child care, however, it seems that we often try other strategies with dead horses, including the following:

- Buying a stronger whip
- Changing riders
- Saying things like "This is the way we always have ridden this horse"
- Appointing a committee to study the horse
- Arranging to visit other sites to see how they ride dead horses
- Increasing the standards to ride dead horses
- Appointing a tiger team to revive the dead horse
- Creating a training session to increase bur riding ability
- Comparing the state of dead horses in today's environment
- Change the requirements declaring that "This horse is not dead"
- Hire contractors to ride the dead horse.
- Harnessing several dead horses together for increased speed
- Declaring that "No horse is too dead to beat"
- Providing additional funding to increase the horse's performance
- Do a CA Study to see if contractors can ride it cheaper
- Purchase a product to make dead horses run faster
- Declare the horse is "better, faster and cheaper" dead
- Form a quality circle to find uses for dead horses
- Revisit the performance requirements for horses
- Say this horse was procured with cost as an independent variable
- Promote the dead horse to a supervisory position