

The New Zealand Psychological Society
Auckland 20 August, Wellington 22 August,
2018 9:00am-4:30pm

*Effective intervention with contact
resistance-refusal dynamics: research
informed, trauma-sensitive, creative strategies
for the highest conflict families*

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Defining Terms

- Resist-Refuse dynamics
- Intervention
- Systemic focus
- Service models

Early Intervention Does *Not* Mean...

- Neglecting Assessment
- Ignoring safety concerns
- Compromising investigations
- Ignoring realistic anxiety, trauma or parenting deficits

The reality of uncertainty

- Symptoms may have multiple meanings
- Complexities with
 - Memory
 - Perception
 - Children's expressive abilities
 - Reinterpretation
- Inconclusive findings are common
- Patterns may emerge over time

How Do We Recognize Children in Trouble?

- *Are they meeting developmental expectations?*
- *Are they moving forward?*
- *How do they respond to intervention?*
- *How do they relate to others?*

Toddler



Many families need
SOLUTIONS
before they need ANSWERS

**They are NOT mutually
exclusive!*

The Case for Early Systemic Intervention

Risks of delay

Difficulties of
intervening when
problems become
entrenched

Initial treatment
goals surround
universal issues

clear, early,
adaptive messages
to parents and
children

real time
observations

Available tools in
children's activities
and daily routines

Reversing Common Thinking

- The “little stuff” is really the most critical
- Daily issues critical
- If you can't improve it, create a clear track record
- Explain to the Court why it matters

The child's "job" is to ...

- *Grow up healthy*
- *Mastering developmental tasks along the way*
- *Learn to have successful relationships with others*
- *Learn to solve problems constructively*
- *Manage stress*
- *Learn emotional control..*

The parent's “job” is..

- To provide the tools and environment that helps the child reach those goals
- Engage with surrounding systems
- Get necessary help and support
- Support autonomy and development

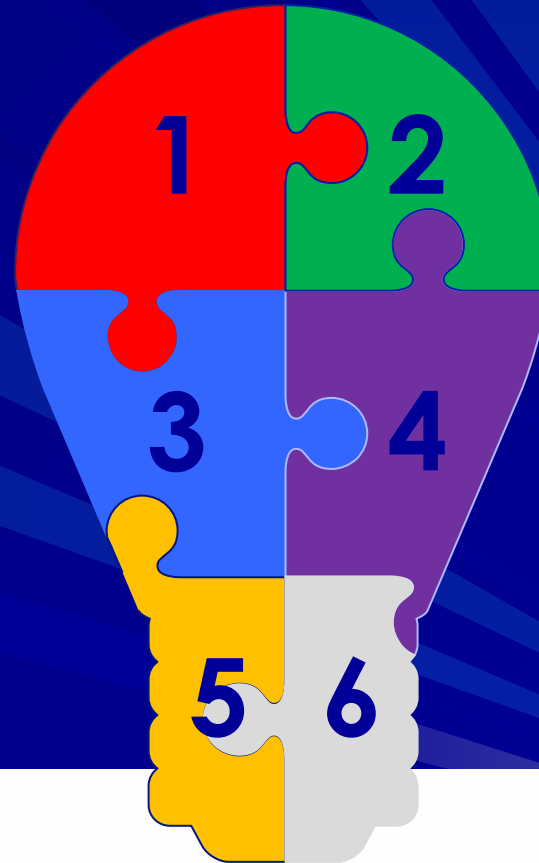
<https://app.vyond.com/videos/6368d722-5637-42ca-b1dc-87f7669f6521>

What should happen next?

How Do We Recognize Children in Trouble?

- *Are they meeting developmental expectations?*
- *Are they moving forward?*
- *How do they respond to intervention?*
- *How do they relate to others?*

1. Support for children's development
2. Structure
3. Behavioral Focus
4. Accountability
5. Tiered Information System
6. Integration with Daily life



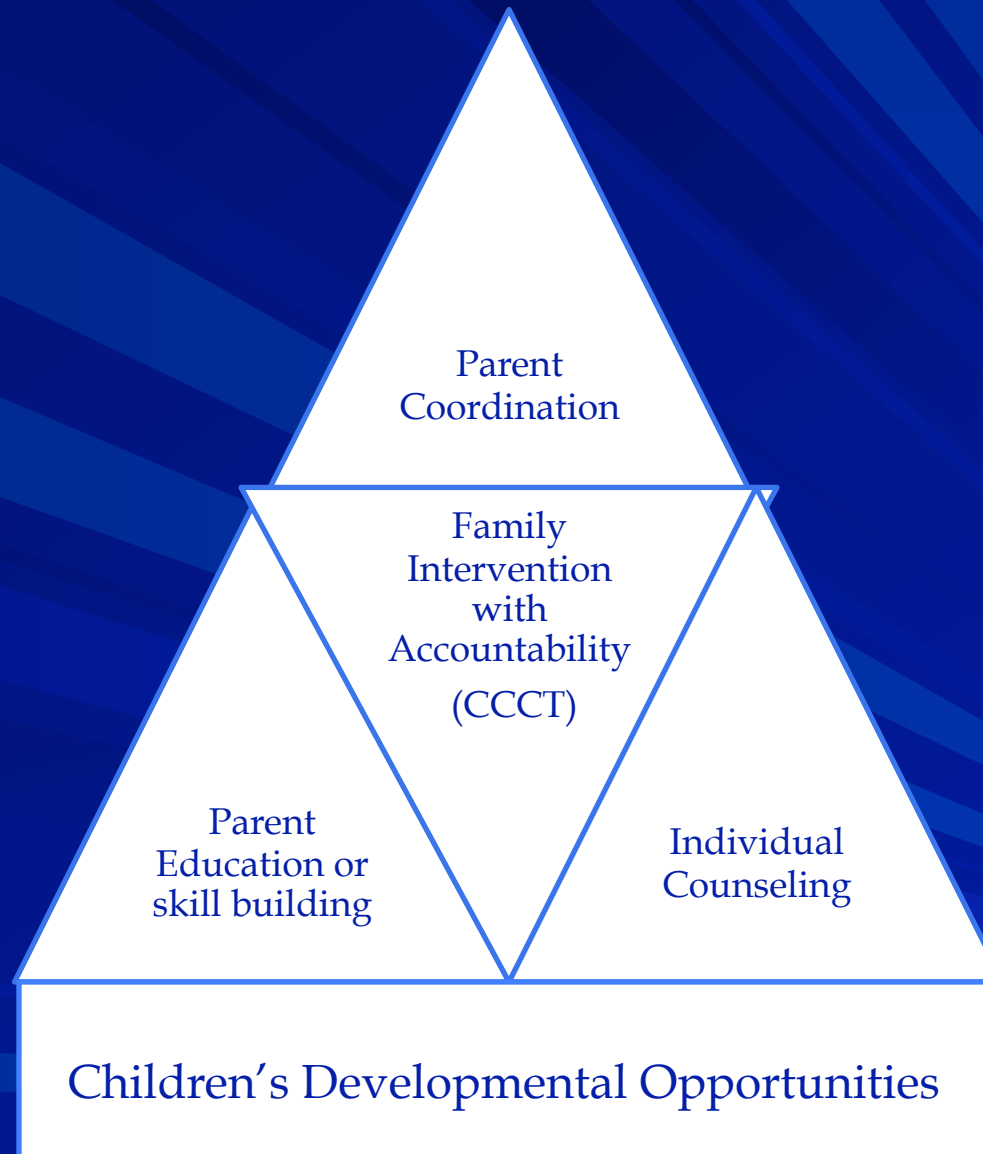
Essential Elements

Child-Centered Conjoint Therapy

- Evidence-informed
- Developmentally based
- Coping focused
- Trauma sensitive
- Multisystemic
 - Focused on the *reasonable*”

Focus on Behavior

- Targeted interventions
- Early intervention to protect children
- Clear opportunities, tight agreements
- Cognitive and practical strategies
- Accountability
- Avoid interference in investigations



Systemic Intervention Planning

- What does the child or family need to learn/master?
- What activities or conditions can help the child get there?
- What developmentally regressive influences do we need to address, or protect the child from?
- How do we build resilience in the child?
- What assessment questions
 - MUST be answered beforehand
 - Can be addressed while intervention is ongoing

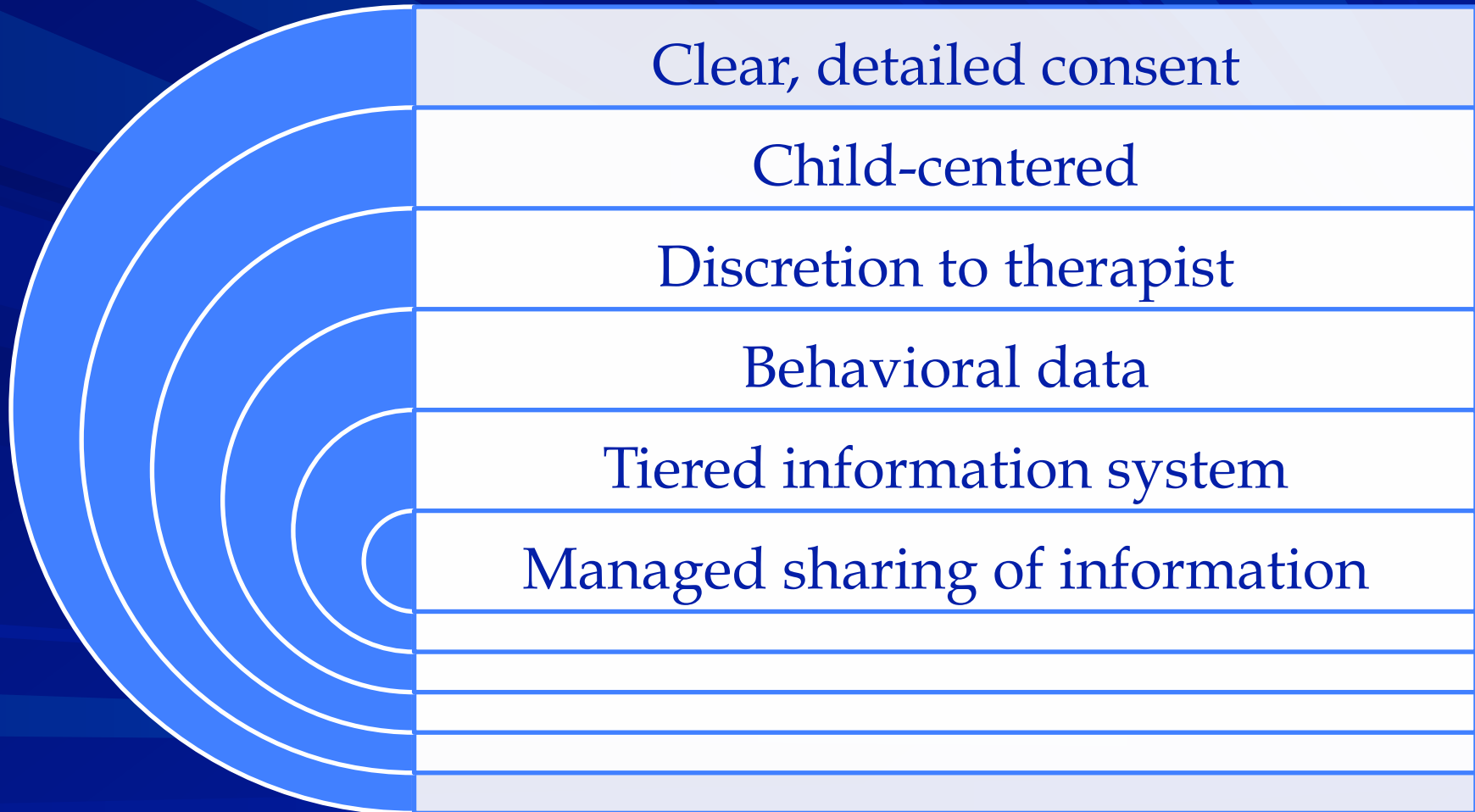
Systematic Intervention Planning (cont.)

- Recreation
- Focus on behavior
- Potential activities with parent
- Attention to daily issues
- Direct or Indirect Accountability

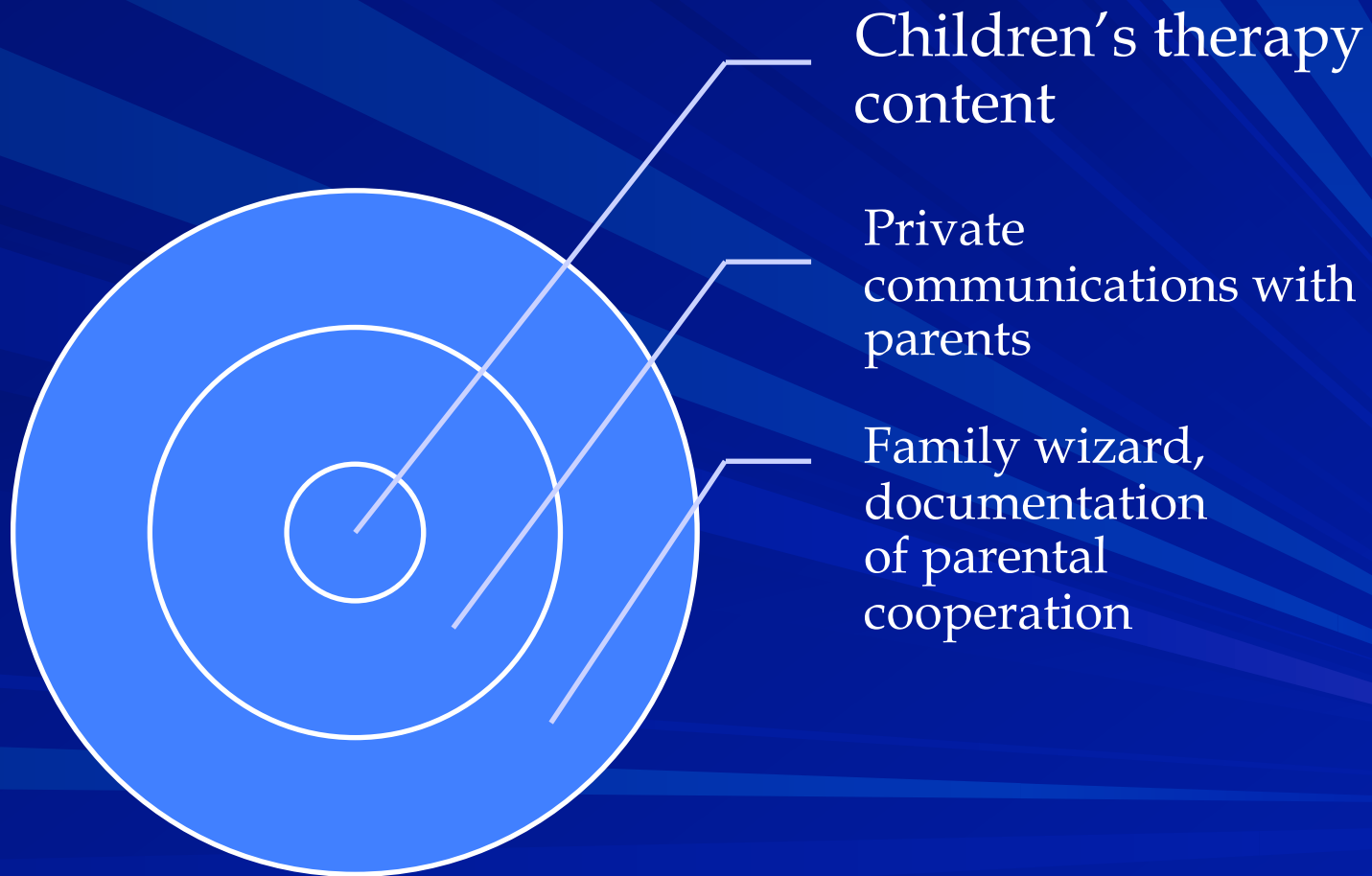
What Can the Child's Therapist Do?

- Support *Developmentally appropriate, Active Coping*
- Emphasize management/mastery of
 - Emotions
 - Daily stressors
 - Resolution of trauma
- Support/teach *appropriate* communication, relationship skills

Structure is Essential



Tiered information system



Other Potential Providers, System Actors

*Including,
but not
limited
to....*

- Educators
- Individual therapists
- Recreation leaders
- Medical professionals
- Caregivers
- Family Members
- Social connections, friends

Children's Outcome is Related To...

- Coping effectiveness (healthy coping skills)
- Coping efficacy (belief that what one says or does will work)
- Access to healthy relationships
- Stability
- Authoritative parenting
- Access to normative activities
- Management of developmental risks

BEWARE

The “I didn’t want it to work anyway” model

- Sealed treatment in a high conflict case may produce:
 - No treatment at all
 - An accountability-free acting-out zone
 - Unprotected children
 - Simple transfer of chaos from courtroom to therapist’s office
- Sabotage of treatment by other professionals

Teach Problem Solving



Seeking and evaluating information

Questioning assumptions

Temporary agreement on behavioral targets

Experimenting with an approach, providing feedback

Researching alternatives

Multiple hypothesis focus

Reminders that the child's needs will outlast the custody conflict



I get good grades
because I'm really smart





So How Do We Help Them?

- Early Intervention
- Promote resilience and effective coping
- Management of emotions/behavior
- Creative use of resources
- Educate, educate, educate

What Do We Want Them to Learn?

- How do we build resilience?
- How do we help them adjust going forward?

**I'm too
traumatized to
follow rules.**

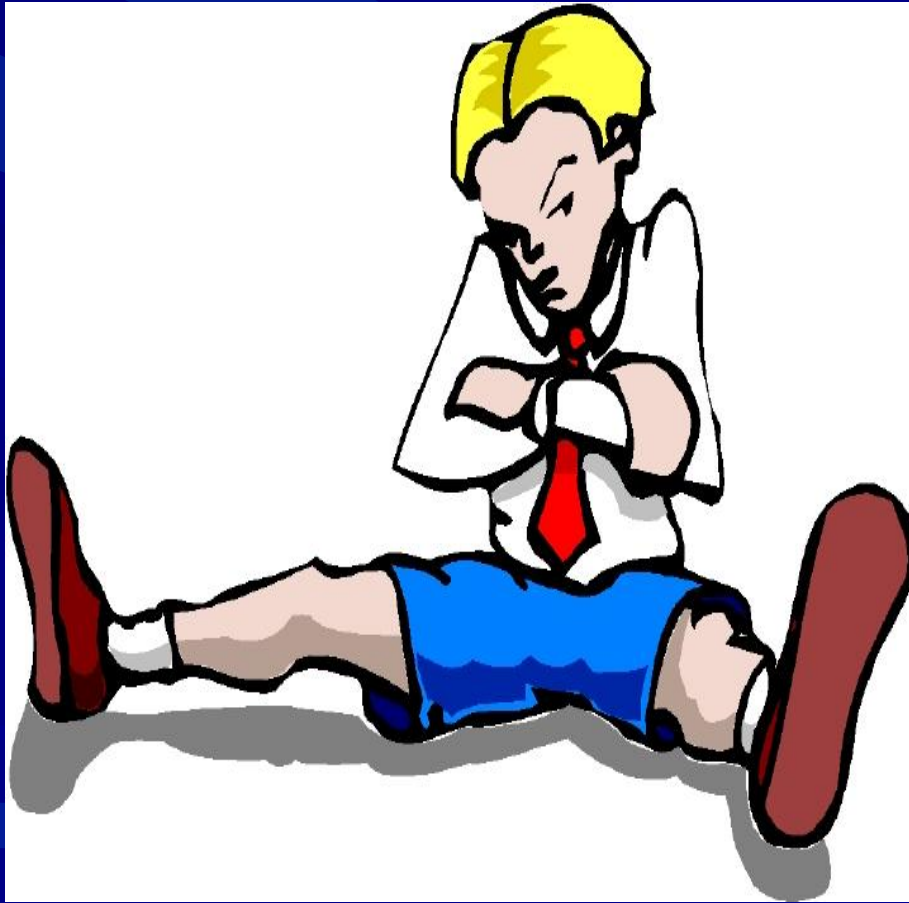




“She hurt me so
I will be
angry
forever.”

I'm too fragile to deal with
anything





“If I’m not comfortable, I shouldn’t have to do it.”

My feelings are too
dangerous to tolerate...



Is anyone here teaching avoidance?

- head start trauma smart

OR..



I can use my words







I CAN DO HARD
THINGS



**“When I get
scared or
nervous I
can...”**





**“Everyone has
to follow rules,
just like in
school.”**



When they say mean things, I don't have to listen





Everyone makes
mistakes

