

“Reportable” Therapy in Australia: Adaptation of Child-Centered Conjoint Therapy

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For copies of the slides..

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Subject line: Toronto slides

FUN FACTS WA

- 18,000 + kilometers Perth to Toronto
- WA - 2.5 million square kilometers
- Texas 690,000 square kilometers
- Population of WA 2.589 million people
- Perth 2.14 million people
- Esperance to Wyndham – 4 hour flight

HOW BIG IS AUSTRALIA



WESTERN AUSTRALIA

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

0 500 km
0 300 miles



INHABITANTS – THE GOOD



INHABITANTS – THE BAD



INHABITANTS – THE UGLY



FAMILY COURT - WA STYLE

<https://youtu.be/nMbOrmStS5A>

Defining Terms

- “Reportable” therapy
- Child Centered Conjoint Therapy
- Early Systemic Intervention
- ICL

Commonalities

What Goes Wrong in these Cases?

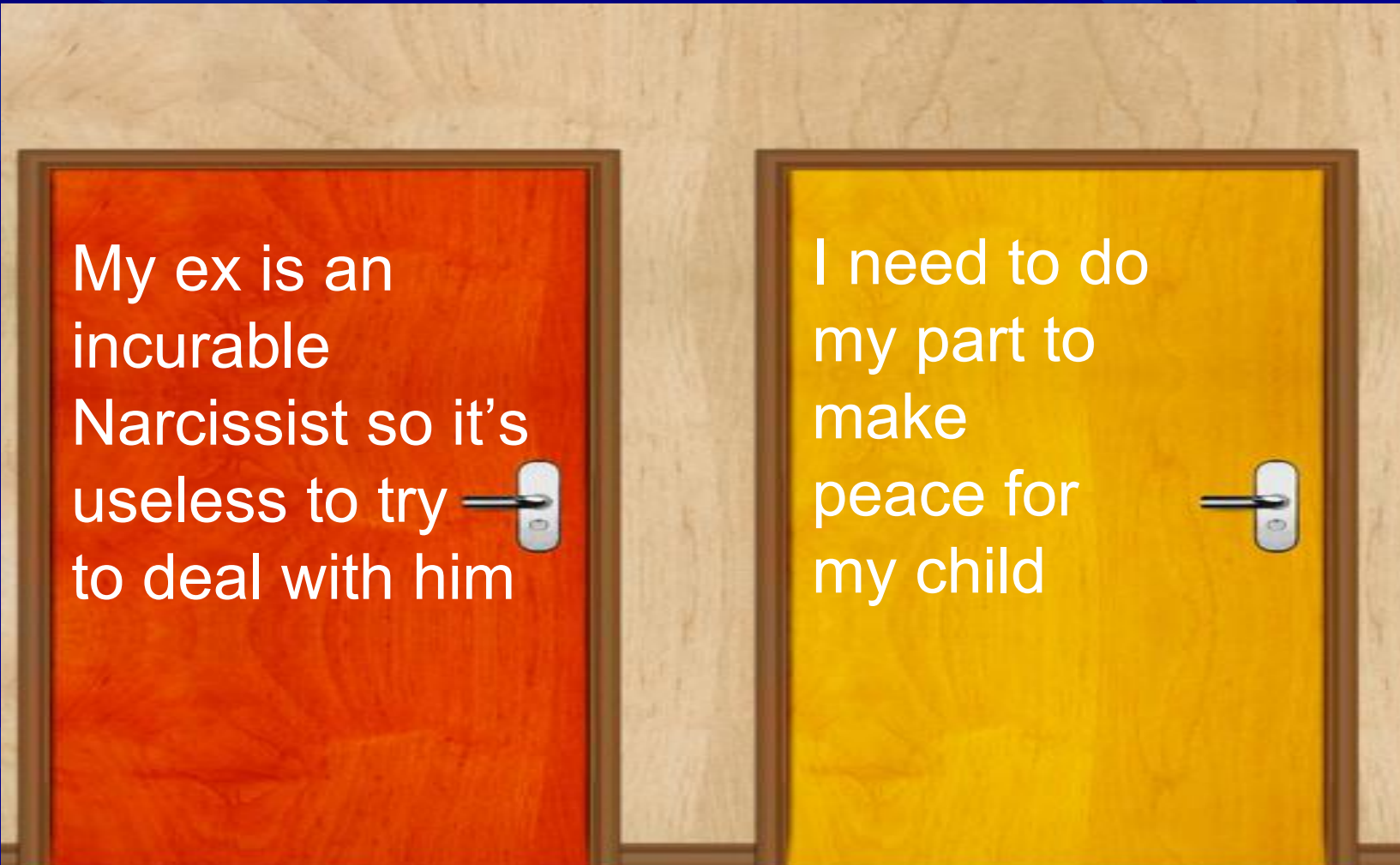
- Focus on blame
- Focus on adults' allegations
- Ignoring developmental issues
- Therapy is too late
- Therapy is poorly structured
- Poor follow up



This is such nonsense. Don't they know co-parenting doesn't work with personality disorders?



Which is more tempting?



My ex is an
incurable
Narcissist so it's
useless to try
to deal with him

I need to do
my part to
make
peace for
my child

Common Dynamics

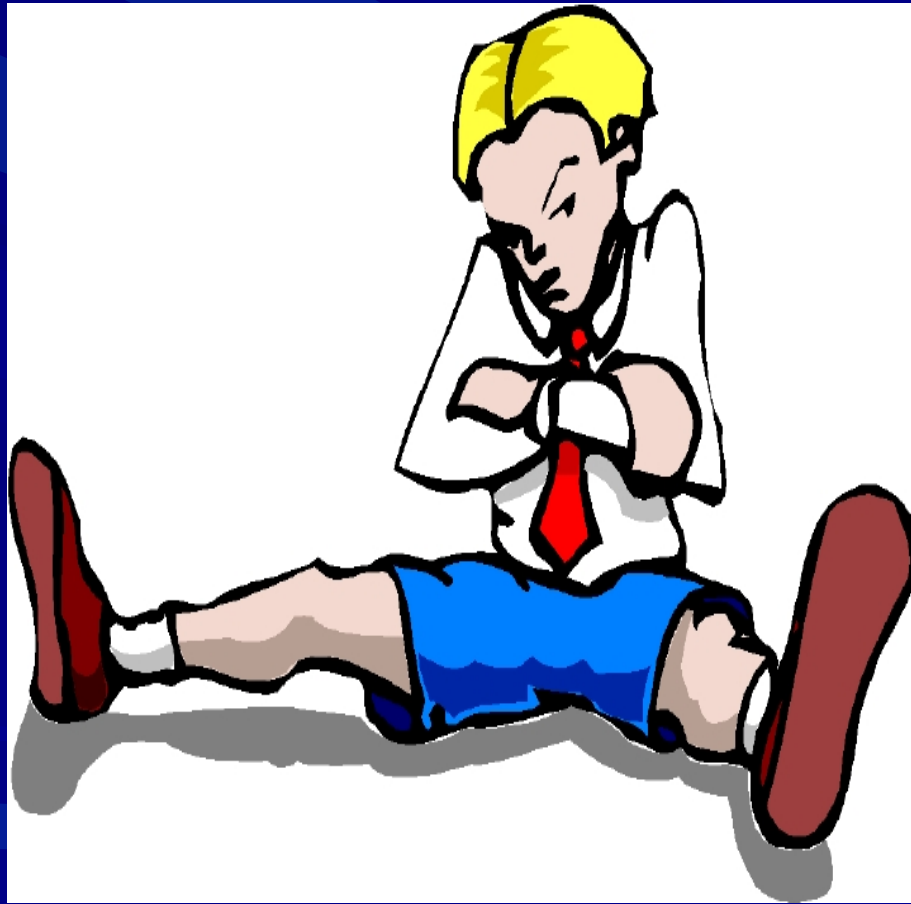
- Polarization
- Black and White Thinking
 - Gender
 - Family violence definitions
 - Resist-refuse dynamics
- Extreme positions

Training Gaps

- Mental Health Professionals
- Lawyers
- Judges
- Other service providers

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





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



My daughter has been having so many more headaches lately. I just think this therapy with her father is too stressful.



“She was mean
to me last
weekend so I
shouldn’t have
to go.”

Fragmented Intervention









I'M THE
CHILD
ADVOCATE!



NO, I'M
THE
CHILD
ADVOCATE
!

The undermining therapist...



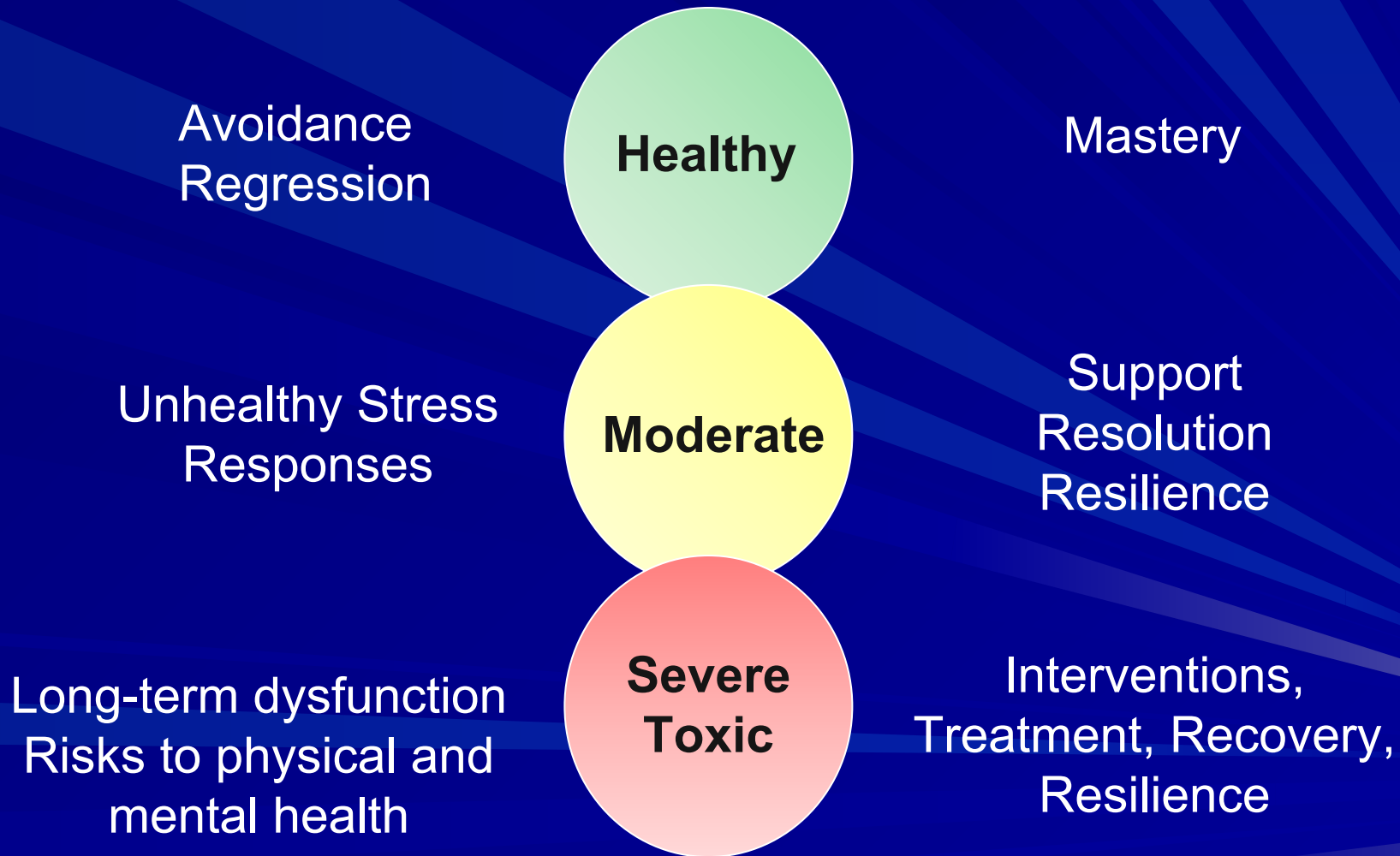
“I’m the advocate for the child, and my client doesn’t want to see her Dad...”

Problems with therapy in a vacuum...

- “I know my client is litigating custody, but (s)he would never lie or distort information”



Levels of Stress, Potential Outcomes



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

Early Intervention Does *Not* Mean...

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

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*
- *Master developmental tasks*
- *Learn to have successful relationships with others*
- *Learn to solve problems constructively*
- *Manage stress*
- *Learn emotional control..*

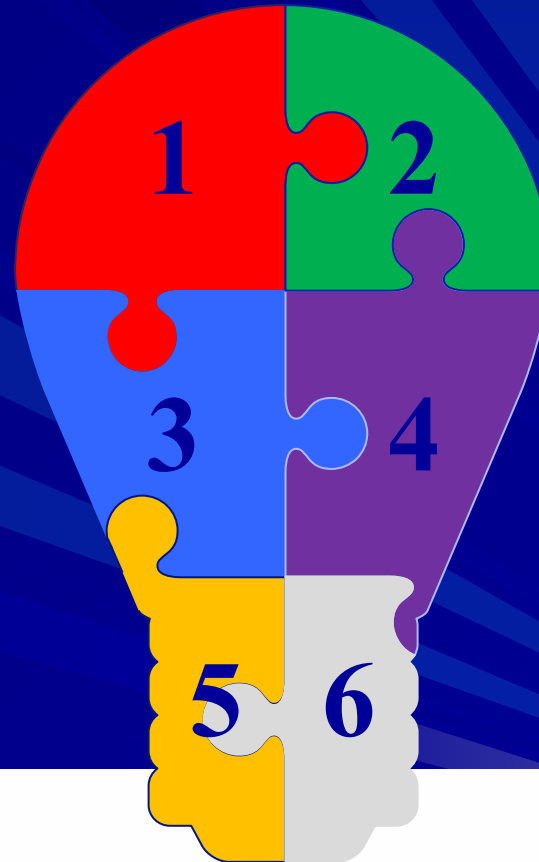
The parent's “job” is..

- 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

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*”

Early Systemic Intervention

- Prompt, Targeted interventions
- Clear opportunities, tight agreements
- Cognitive and practical strategies
- Accountability
- Avoid interference in investigations
- Use available resources

Systemic Intervention

- 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

How Can ICL's help?

- Can't magically invent resources
- Can change the conversation
- Require logical connections between interventions and goals
- Educate the court about easily-missed issues



“I know she didn’t drop off the football uniform or send you the practice schedule. But focus on the big stuff, like getting your week-about plan.”

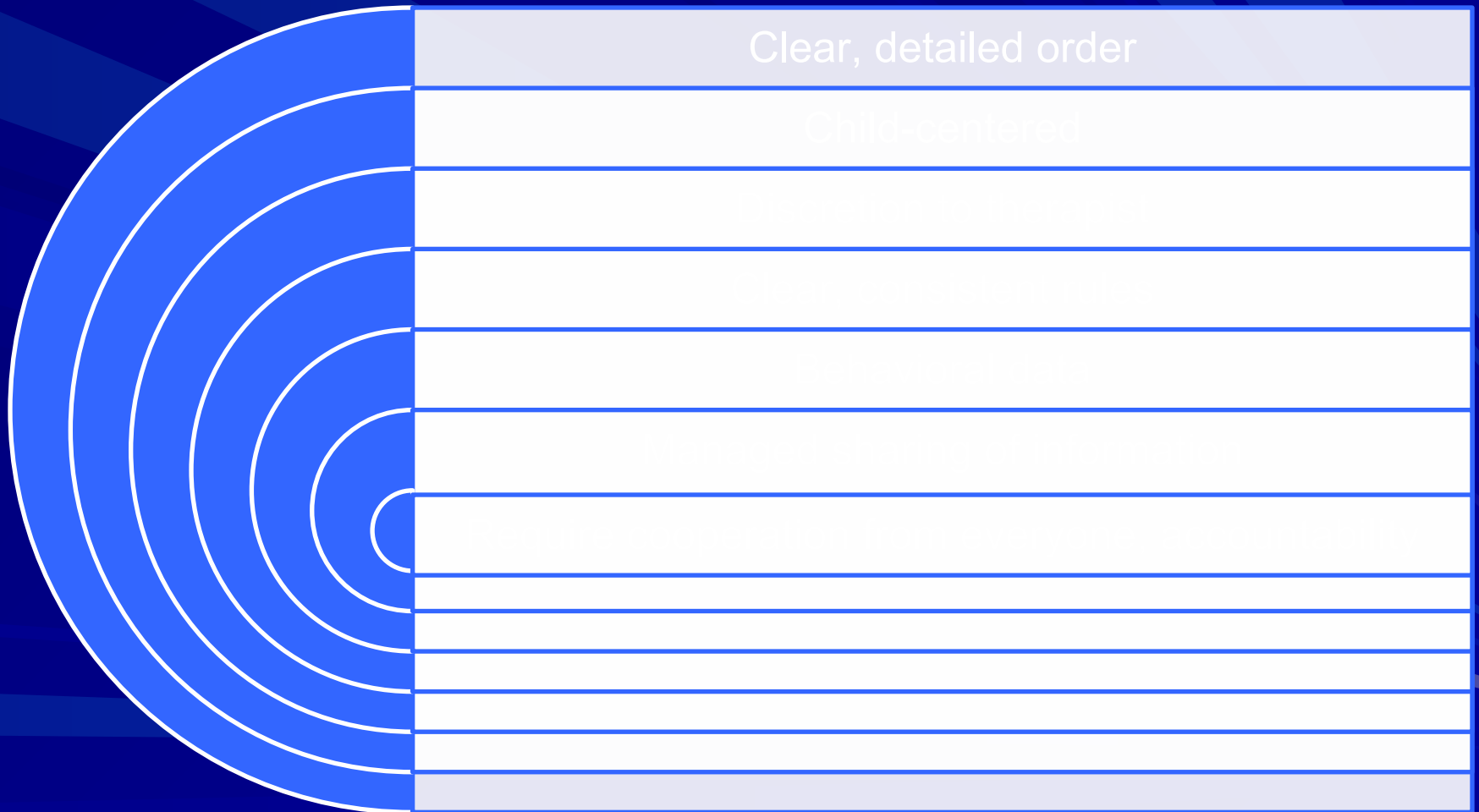


“I know we have bigger goals, but your children need your help *NOW*. And taking these steps may help us reach the broader goals.”



Cooperating
with the
therapist is
your best way
of proving that
what you're
being
accused of
isn't true...

Structure is Essential



Other Potential Providers, System Actors

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

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

Be honest ..



If you'll just
sign this
affidavit,
Doctor, we
won't need
you to come
to court

The importance of engaging other professionals..



I've been subpoenaed?
At no pay?
We need to find a way to refer these people out

Navigating Conflicting Allegations

- Understand possibilities
- Support healthy coping
- Identify behaviors you expect all adults to support
- Avoid buying into myths

Adapting to Culture, Language and Resources

- Adapting the Model
- Western Australia Experience

Julie Jackson, Director Family Law Division at Legal Aid of Western Australia

“We’re going to put some rules in place, so you (both) can show us you can follow rules. Either way, we’ll learn something about you.”

Case Examples

How Children Perceive Themselves...

- *What do they think they're capable of?*
- *What possibilities do they see?*
- *What will they try?*



I get good grades
because I'm really smart





What Do We Want Them to Learn?

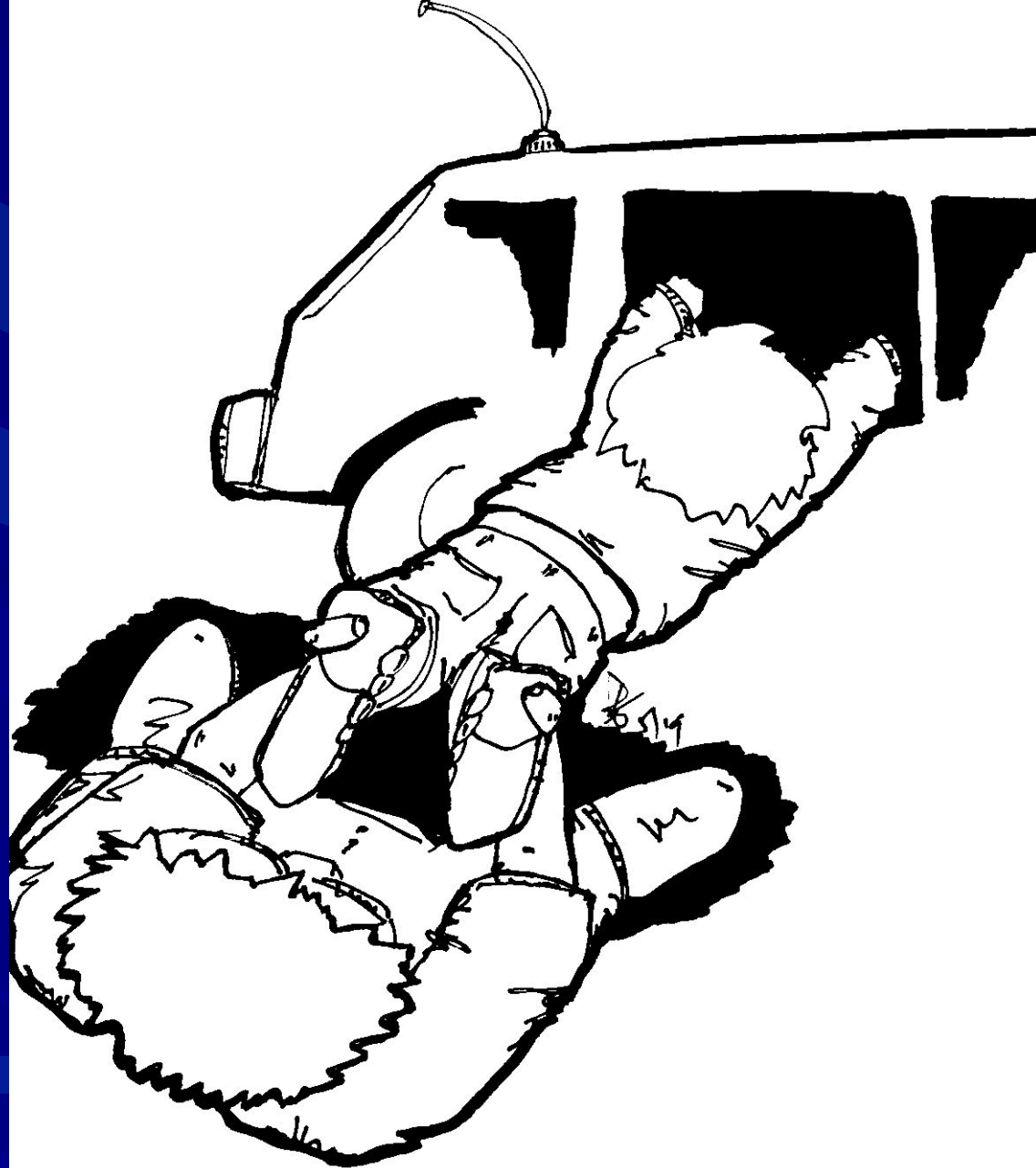
- How do we build resilience?
- How do we help them adjust going forward?



If I know my
Dad is there I
won't be able
to play right



My mom doesn't
deserve to be at
the holiday
program!





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

Is anyone here teaching avoidance?

- head start trauma smart

OR..



I can use my words







I CAN DO HARD
THINGS

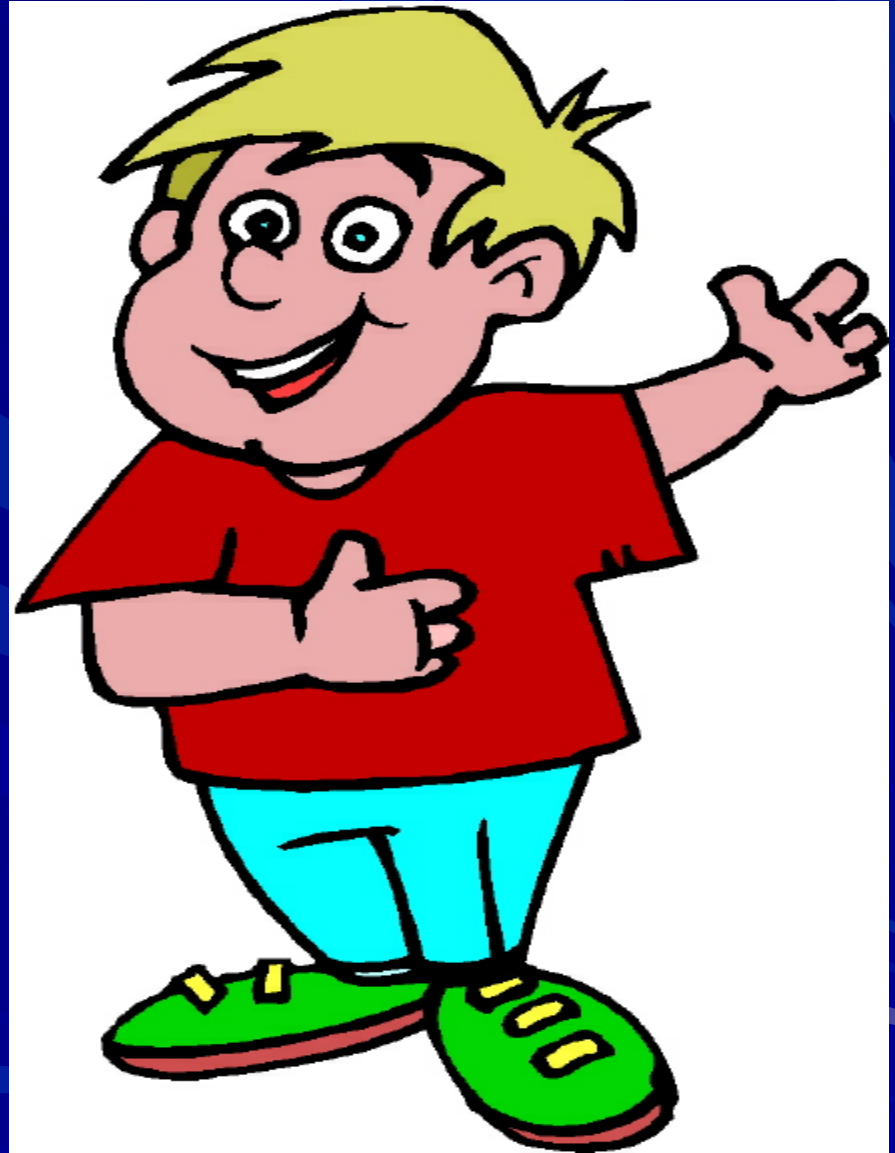


**“When I get
scared or
nervous I
can...”**





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



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





Everyone makes
mistakes



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