



Respectful Alliances with Youth

Creating Positive Staff and Peer Cultures

Larry Brendtro



reclaimingyouth.org



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The Annual Reclaiming Youth Seminars

Sioux Falls, South Dakota

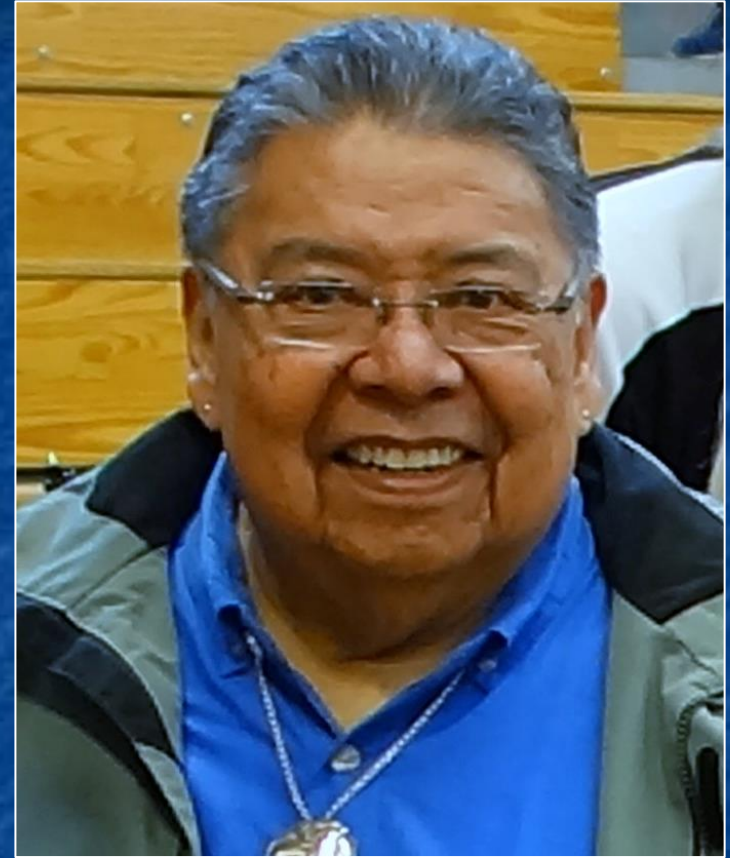
Augustana University, July 13-17, 2021



Joining Indigenous and Western Knowledge

Let us put our minds together
to see what kind of life we
can build for our children.

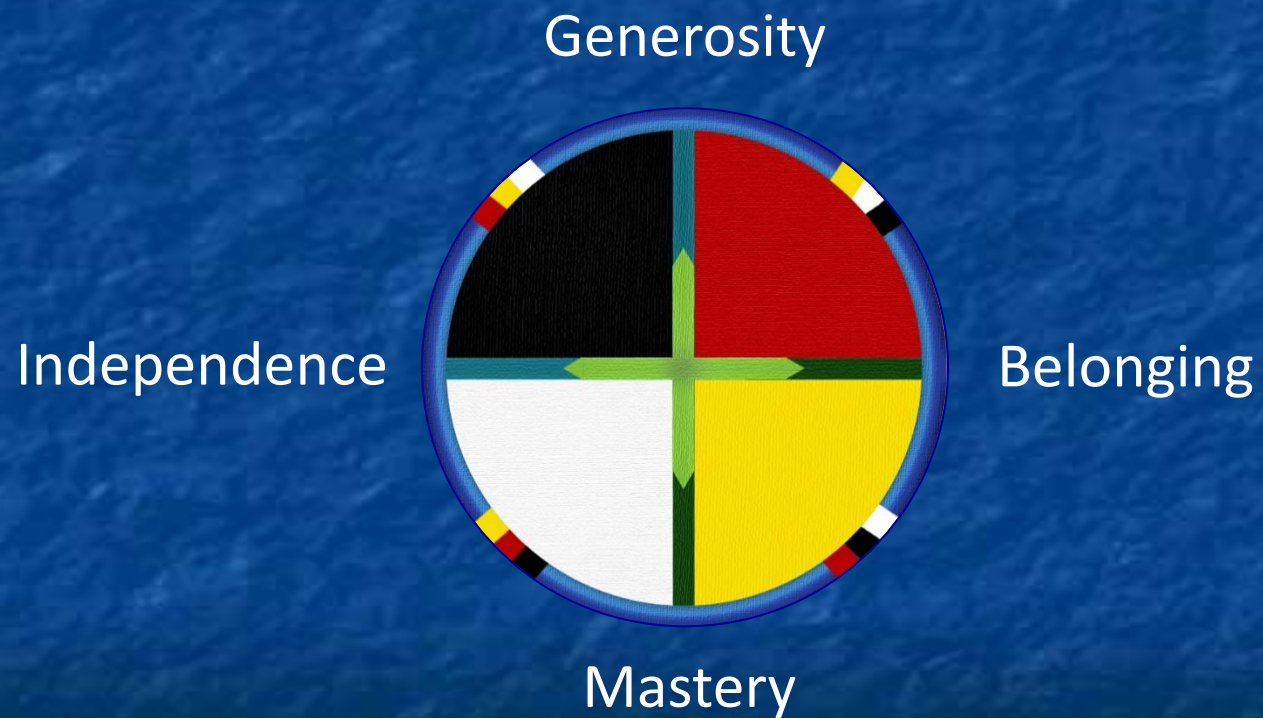
SITTING BULL
Lakota Leader

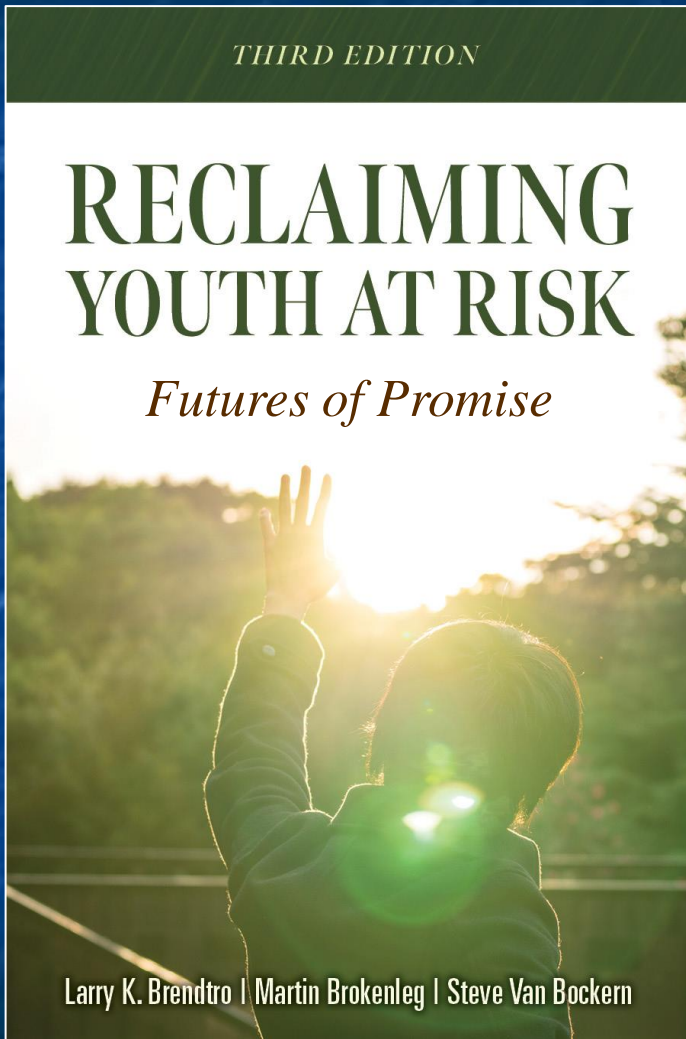


Across all cultures, children and youth have the same needs.

MARTIN BROKENLEG

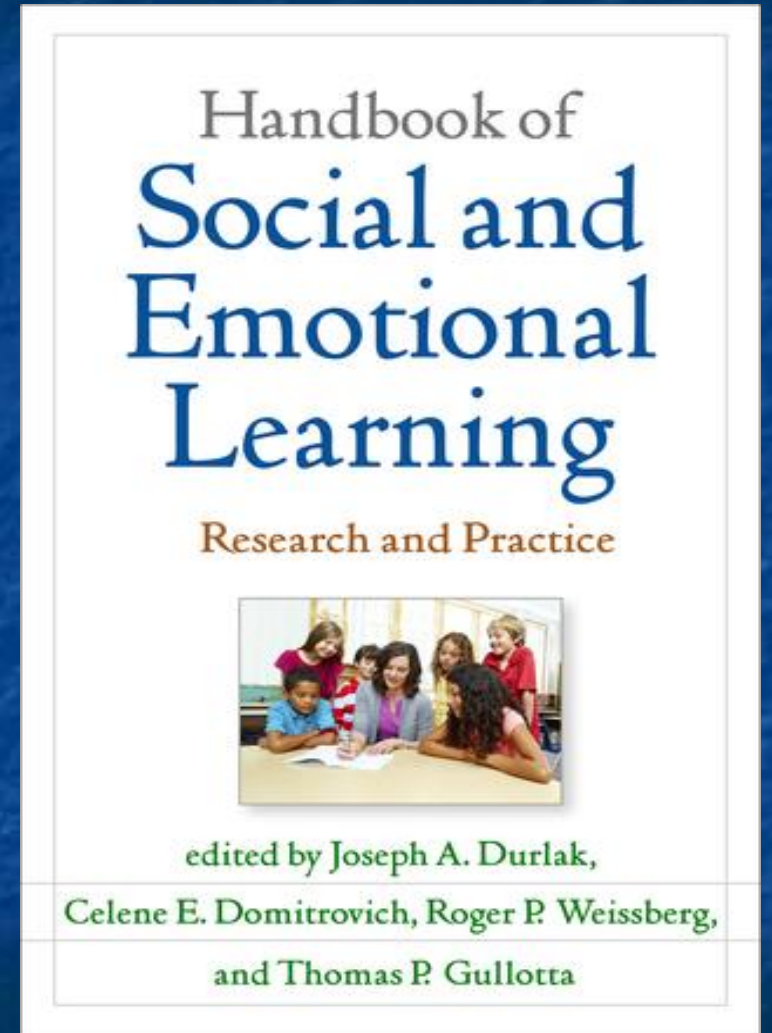
The Circle of Courage



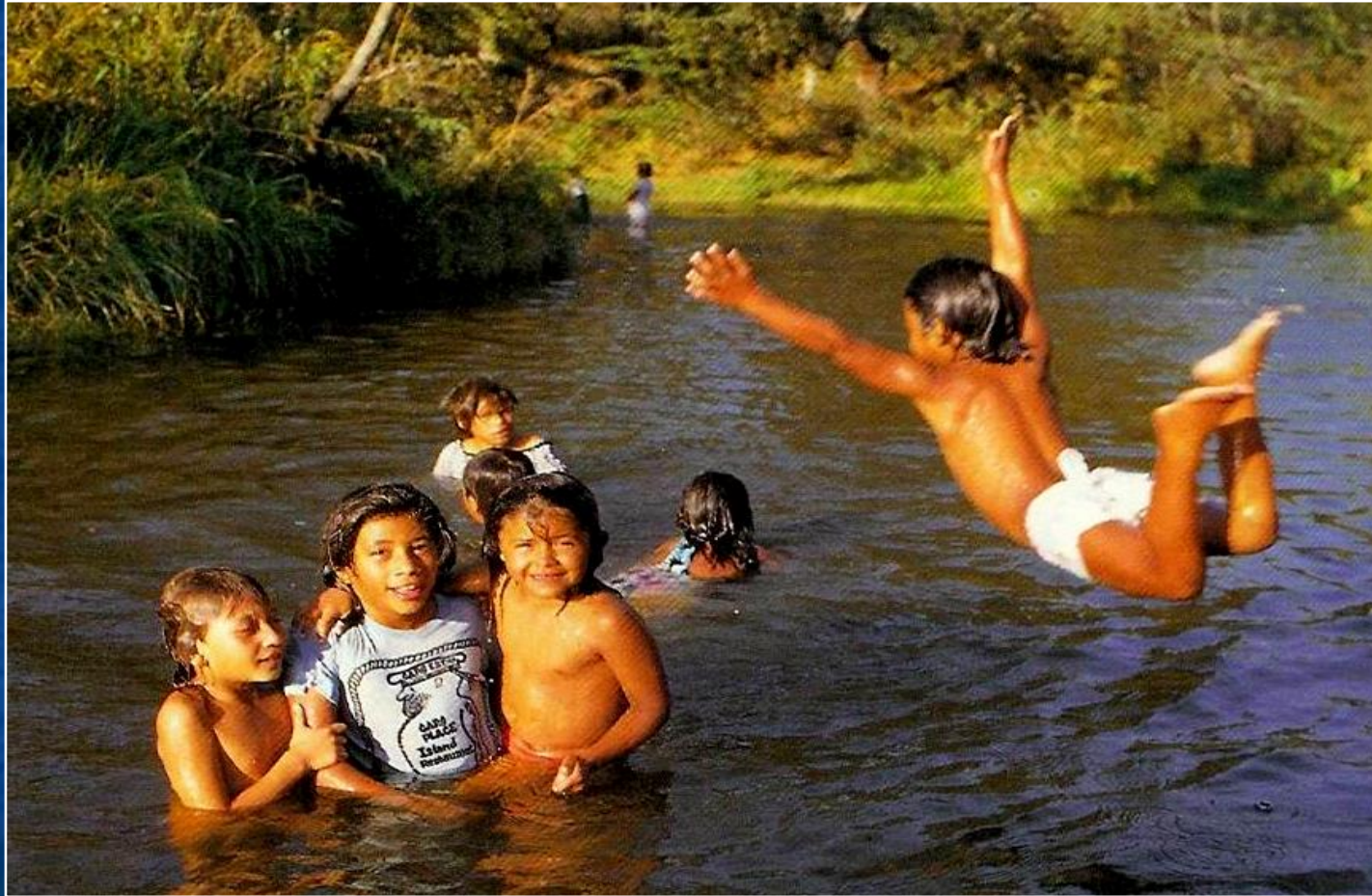


The Circle of Courage
Presaging Positive
Youth Development

MAURICE ELIAS ET AL.



Peer Relationships in Cultures of Respect



I was taught that when I was the oldest in a group of children, it was my responsibility to protect and care for those younger.

MARTIN BROKENLEG



Peer Mentoring

In Indigenous cultures, older children teach and protect their younger relatives in daily activities.

Adults teach values and skills to youth who then teach younger children.

MARTIN BROKENLEG

Peer Relationships in Cultures of Domination

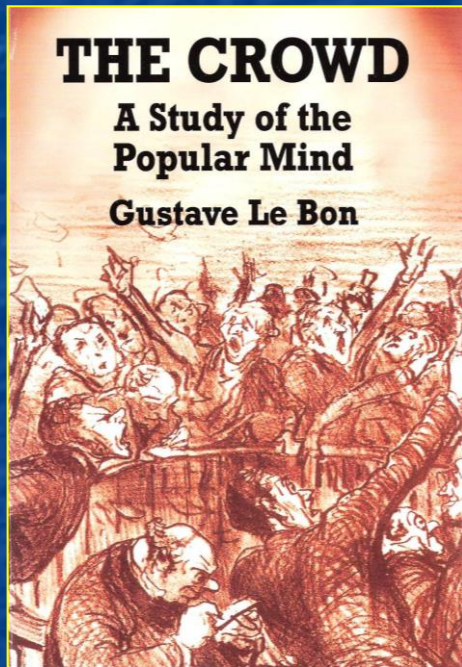


I would be ashamed to be less vicious than they as they bragged of their beastly wickedness . . .

We delighted in doing ill, not only for the pleasure of the act, but even for a desire of praise.

CONFESSIONS OF ST. AUGUSTINE
400 AD

Danger in Groups



The reasoning brain shuts down and the brainstem takes over.



Performing for Peers

How many things which for our own sake would we never do, do we perform for the sake of our friends.

MARCUS CICERO
Circa 50 BC

Safety in Groups



In human evolution, survival has depended on acceptance in a group.

DAN MCADAMS



The Prosocial Gang offers camaraderie, pride, identity, support, excitement—normal adolescent goals.

ARNOLD GOLDSTEIN
& BARRY GLICK



The Antisocial Gang
also can meet needs:

Safety and Belonging
Economic Achievement
Power and Thrills
Loyalty to Friends

GREGORY ACEVEDO



Group Contagion

Joining in a group triggers genetic brain instructions to surrender self-control to the call of the crowd.



A Global Youth Culture

Art by a boy in a Russian orphanage celebrates his hero, rapper Eminem.



EMINEM



Peers Replace Elders

The loss of parents and adults in the lives of youth is filled by the peer group.

URIE BRONFENBRENNER



Alienation of Youth

Disconnected from elders, the need for belonging is at the whim of peers.

URIE BRONFENBRENNER



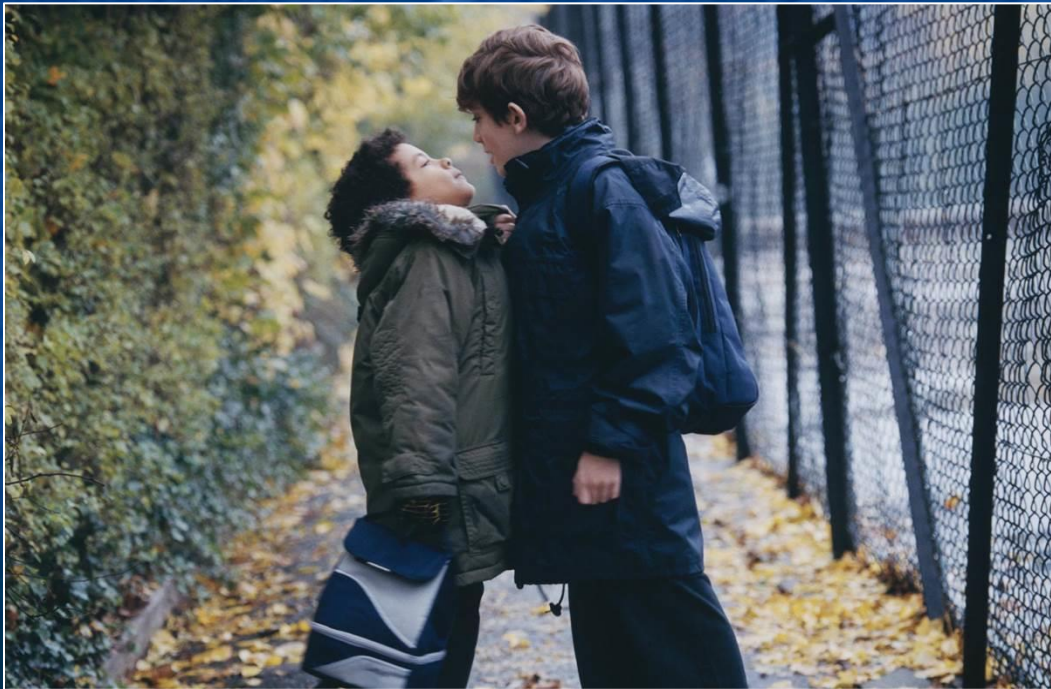
Bullying:
Physical or verbal abuse in relationships which have an imbalance of power.
Preventing bullying requires changing peer relationships.

Two Types of Bullies

Bull-Vics were abused and now hurt others.

Bull-Recs bully to gain status and popularity.

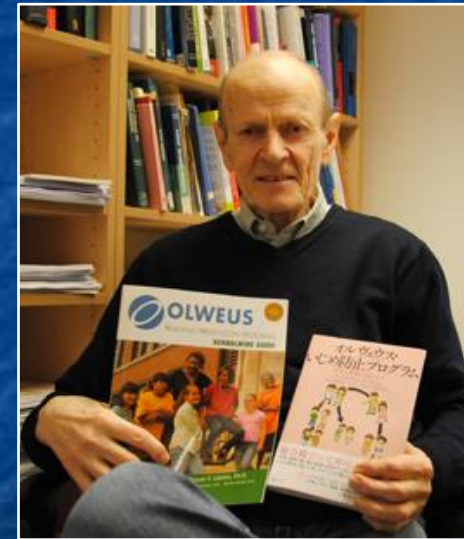
Many bully prevention programs do not work because they target bullying behaviors but do not change the culture of the school or the values of the students.



Why Bully Prevention often Fails

JAANA JUVONEN & SANDRA GRAHAM

Norwegian research focuses on democratic group climates.



DAN OLWEUS



Youth Voice Project

13,000 students in 31 schools

STAN DAVIS & SHARISSE NIXON

Students Rate What Works

- T F 1. Use humor.
- T F 2. Tell them to stop.
- T F 3. Use I messages.
- T F 4. Conflict mediation.
- T F 5. Tell a teacher.
- T F 6. Tell parent.
- T F 7. Tell a friend.
- T F 8. Tell the person how I felt.
- T F 9. Stand up to bullies.
- T F 10. Have friends confront bullies.



What Works: Support from Peers

Peers listened, spent time with the peer in school, and provided encouragement.

STAN DAVIS & SHARISSE NIXON

Countering Peer Mistreatment



Connections

Even if mistreatment persists, this is not as traumatizing with relational support.

Coping

Help youth learn new ways to respond. Overcoming problems builds resilience.

Growth Mindset

Discourage labels like victim and bully. These imply people have fixed traits.

STAN DAVIS & CHARISSE NIXON



Restorative Practices

Schools are beginning to implement social and emotional learning such as this restorative circle.



A Curriculum of Caring

For some years I have been advocating the introduction in our schools, from the earliest grades onward, of what I have called a *curriculum of caring*—not to learn *about* caring but to engage in it.

URIE BRONFENBRENNER

Antidotes to Alienation

URIE BRONFENBRENNER
Making Human Beings Human



Involve adults directly in the life space of youth rather than let peer groups dominate development.



Involve youth in finding solutions to problems rather than growing up without contributing to others.

Cross-generation Service Learning





Helping those in need and contributing to the community give proof of one's worth – being of value to others.



VOICES OF YOUTH

Positive Peer Support

You're not the only person who had this issue. If you mess up, they're not jumping on your back. They tell you what's best for you and that makes me feel like being honest.



Labels and Scripts

Language reflects the values of a group.

Those who control the scripts shape the culture—for better or worse.



Problems Sound Cool

Teen slang expresses values influencing modern youth.

Smash: casual sex

Turnt Up: high or drunk

Crunk: both high and drunk

Drama: conflict and bullying

The Teen Slang Dictionary for Parents



Slang insults sound cool.

Cancel: Reject a person

Crashy: Crazy and trashy person

Creeper: Outcast “creepy” person

Ghost: Ignore a person on purpose

Throw Shade: Give a dirty look

The Teen Slang Dictionary for Parents

What is the purpose of insults?

To attack another's self-worth.

To make yourself feel superior.





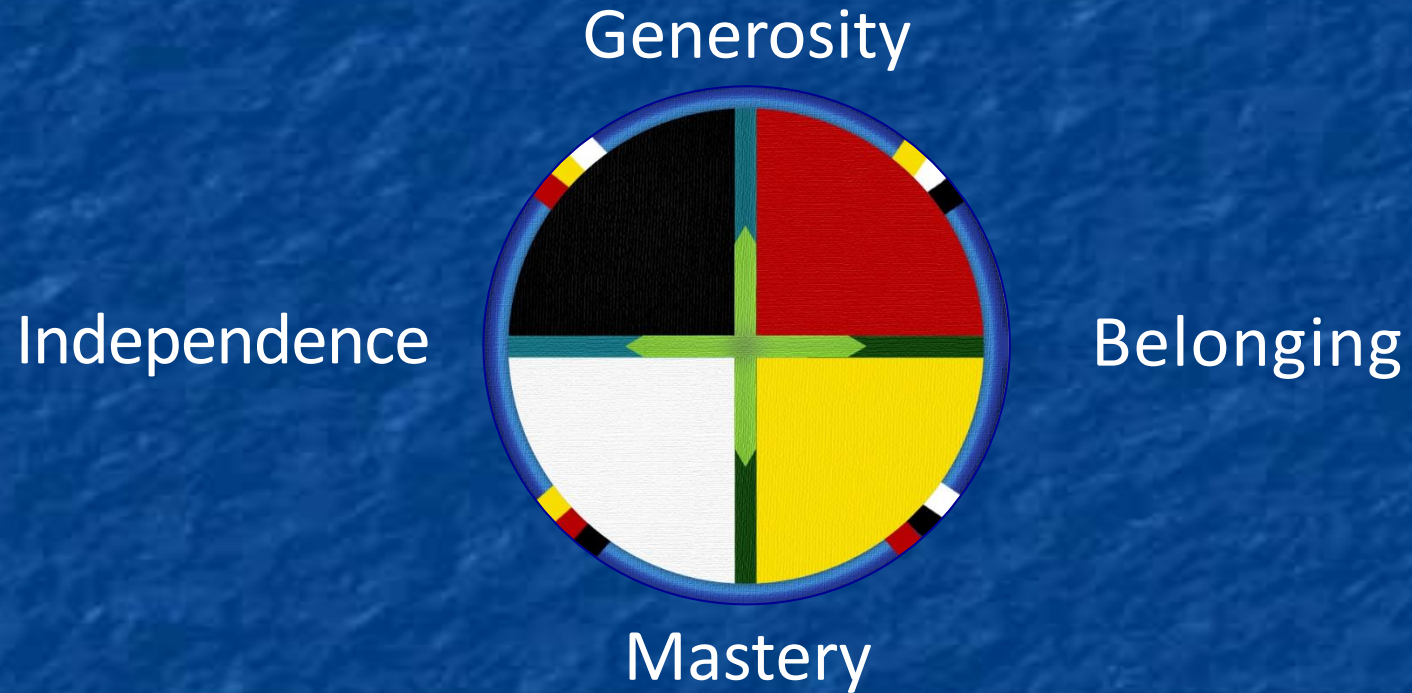
Using Scripts to Build Values

Scripts are brief labels or phrases that influence thinking and action.

A good script is simple, direct, and does not need discussion.

The brain stores easily understood ideas so these sound bites can be more potent than long discussions.

Using Circle of Courage Scripts to Develop Strengths in Youth



BELONGING Scripts

We make all feel welcome.

We support one another.



We include all in the group.

We have a great group.

MASTERY Scripts

That's a great job!

Failure is feedback.



Work hard to get smart.

Solving difficult problems.

INDEPENDENCE Scripts



Making mature decisions

Taking responsibility

Keeping calm under pressure

Thinking for yourself

GENEROSITY Scripts

We care for one another.

We help people in need.



We respect one another.

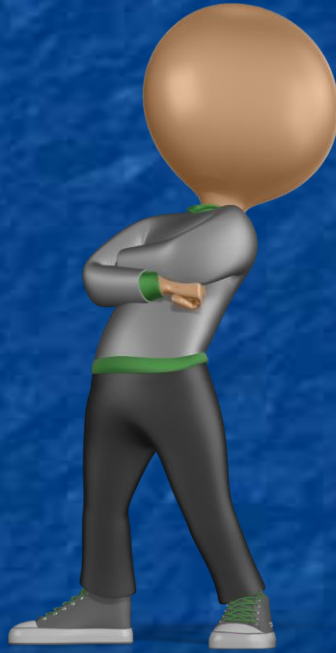
That showed real concern.



Caring is not cool with kids who need to act “tough.”
Antisocial behavior is often seen as cool and strong.

Scripts to Make Caring Fashionable

Caring is Devalued



I take care of number one.

Caring is Valued



It takes strength to help others.

Truth in Labeling

Labels that make
bad behavior cool.

Nobody messes with me!



Problem behavior
is acting immature.

Having temper tantrums.

Relabeling

Harmful Behavior

Immature

Thoughtless

Easily Misled

Helpless



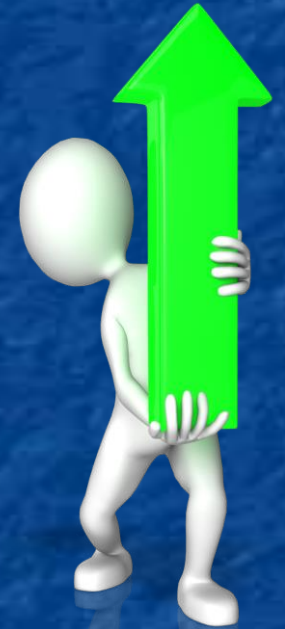
Helpful Behavior

Mature

Thoughtful

Thinks for Self

Helpful



Labels should only apply to BEHAVIOR, not the person—

That was very immature behavior for someone as clever as you.

INSIST or ENLIST

If you bully this new student, there will be consequences.

How can the group make sure that every student feels welcome?

~~Adult
Confronts
Youth~~

Adult
Enlists
Group





RAP

Restorative Action Plans



CONNECT for Support

When trust is built, the youth is more receptive to receiving help.

CLARIFY Challenges

Reflect on how behavior affects self and others and set goals for growth.

RESTORE Respect

Strengthen belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity.



Groups use reflective questions to help their peers think clearly.

Can you tell us what you were thinking when you decided to hurt him?

What do you suppose she was feeling when you made fun of her?

How would you want others to treat you?



Families as Lifespan Experts

Parents know more about their child's development than any other informants.

THOMAS ACHENBACH



Parents as Team Members

Few professionals have the skill to work with parents as team members. Our methods are frequently demeaning and insulting with the tendency to blame parents.

WILLIAM C. MORSE



Professionals as “Experts”

Viewing families as the problem

Diagnosing deficits of the parents

Treating supposed flaws of families

Families as Life-span Experts

Viewing families as the solution

Utilizing the strengths of families

Partnering to meet needs of children



When Peers Matter More than Parents

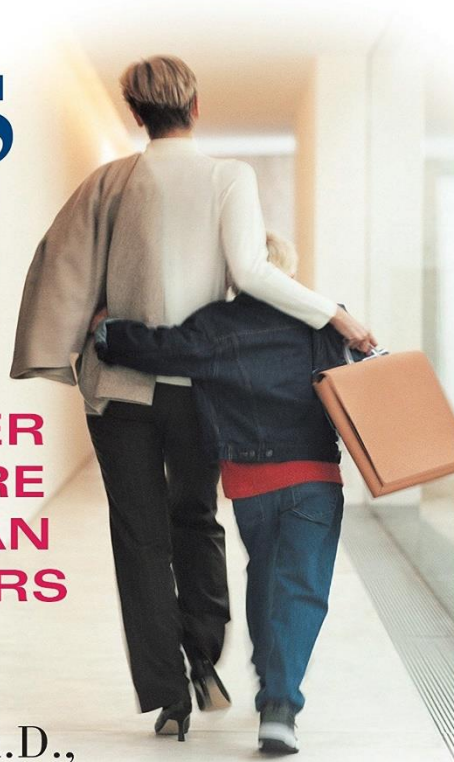
Youth weakly bonded to adults desperately seek peer approval.

Hold On to Your Kids

**WHY
PARENTS
NEED TO
MATTER
MORE
THAN
PEERS**



Gordon Neufeld, Ph.D.,
and Gabor Maté, M.D.



- Families look for opportunities for friendly and fun engagement.
- Parents give evidence of warmth including physical expressions.
- Dependence builds independence. Youth need adult support to thrive.
- As youth mature, the parent is still a compass and wise guide.

Positive Staff Teams Produce Positive Youth Cultures



Teams that respect and empower young people
have the most positive peer group cultures.



Effective Teams

1. Team cohesion
2. Team involvement
3. Belief in program success
4. Optimism on youth success

Positive Staff and Peer Cultures

We need a unifying theme.





Belonging

We feel safe and secure when connected with family, friends, our community, and nature.



Mastery

We gain skills to solve challenging problems and discover hidden talents and strengths.



Independence

Self-control and making responsible decisions build futures of promise.



Generosity

By showing care and concern for others we develop self-worth and purpose in life.

Building Positive Peer Cultures

Youth have powerful influence on one another and can be enlisted in peer helping.



Positive Peer Cultures in Action

Immigrant Youth in Adelsheim, Germany

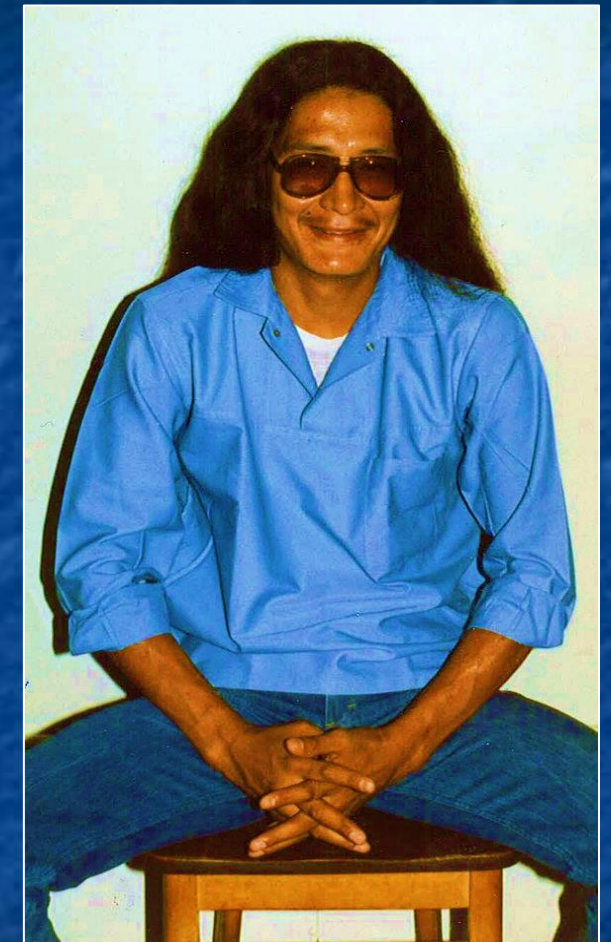
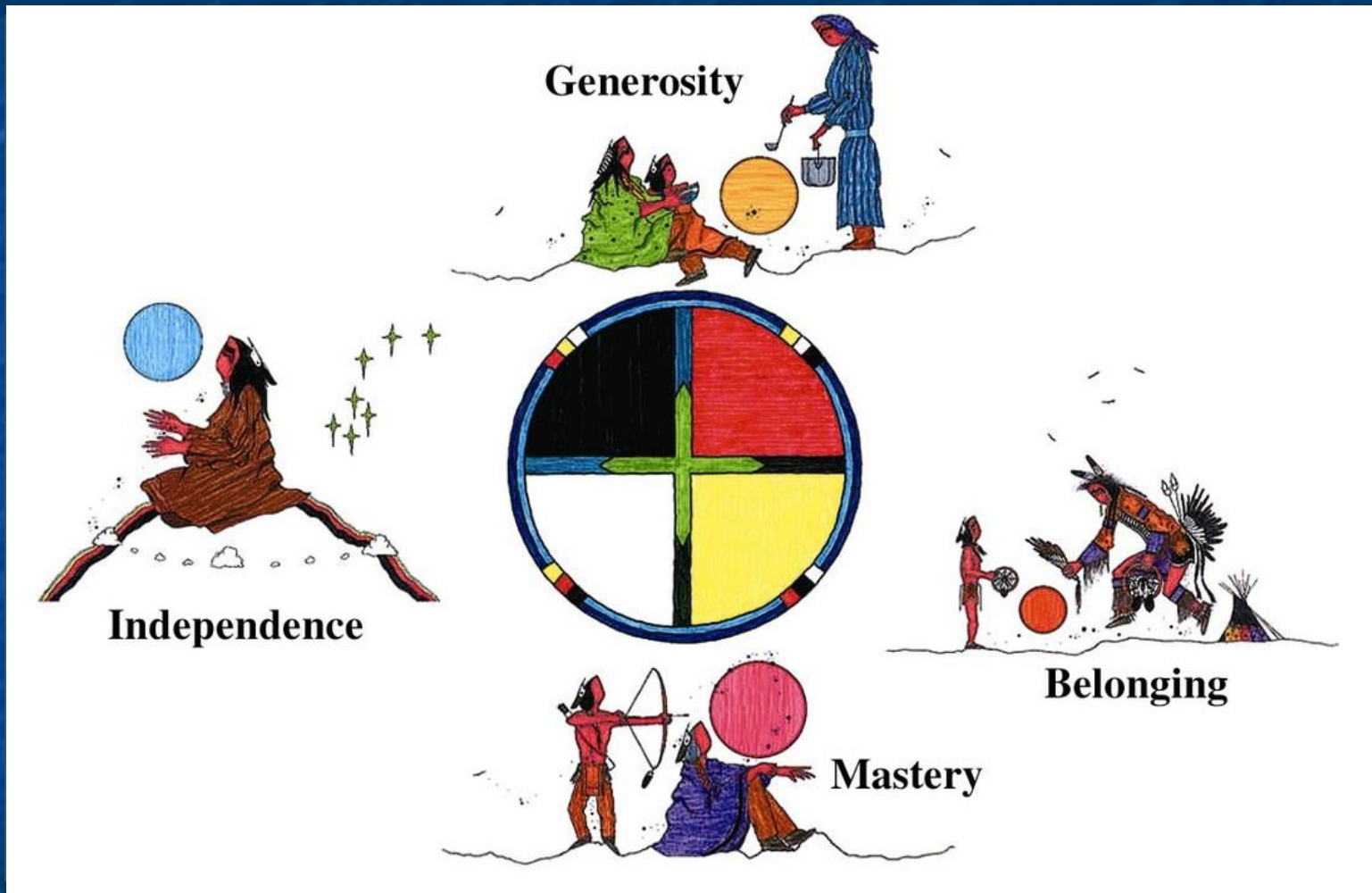




We treat each other with respect.

We help others if they have problems.

We reject all physical or psychological violence.



GEORGE BLUEBIRD
Lakota Artist



We used to have fights every day, but now we never fight—we have learned to treat one another as human beings.

Youth in PPC Group

Many staff used to call in sick because of all the stress of this job—but now we enjoy coming to work.

Corrections Officer



YOUTH FROM ADELSHEIM Cultures of Respect

Violence includes humiliation and depreciation of the other person.

When we engage in violence, we want to make the other “small” and ourselves superior.

That stands in bold contrast to showing respect to one another.



Changing School Cultures

From Conflict to Cooperation
Respect among adults and students.

From Alienation to Connection
A positive bond with at least one adult.

From Peer Harassment to Helping
Supporting fellow students in distress.

From Code of Silence to Openness
Able to share concerns with adults.

From Coercion to Problem Solving
Discipline without shame or retribution.



EDDIE BELLEROSE
Cree Elder

The Purpose of Life

I asked my grandfather, “What is the purpose of life?” He thought for a while and then said:

Grandson, children are the purpose of life. We were once young, and someone cared for us and now it is our time to care.



Positive Staff and Peer Cultures: Key Principles





1. Family Strengths

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2. Supportive Peers

B
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3. Bonds of Trust

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4. Problems as Opportunity

M
A
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E
R
Y





5. Talent Hunts

M
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S
T
E
R
Y





6. Engaged in Learning

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R
Y





7. Paths to Responsibility

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D
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N
C
E





8. *Overcoming Adversity*

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D
E
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C
E





9. Developing Self Confidence

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D
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C
E





10. Service Learning

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R
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S
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11. Hooked on Helping

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12. Lives with Purpose

G
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