

**Court-Ordered Intervention for High
Conflict Families:
*Reportable Therapy, Parent
Coordination, Early Systemic
Intervention***

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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?*

Considering the possibilities can be overwhelming...



In these families...

- Multiple, conflicting, often unclear allegations
- Focus on blame
- Inability to modulate
- Poor response to child's distress
- Buzzwords and armchair diagnosis
- Resistance to problem solving

Most of these families need
SOLUTIONS
before they need
ANSWERS

Services Multiply

- Investigation
- Children's Contact Centres
- Support groups
- Parent education
- Behavior change programs
- Counseling

Often with little coordination or communication

What are the effects of fragmented intervention?







Impacts on Professionals



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...

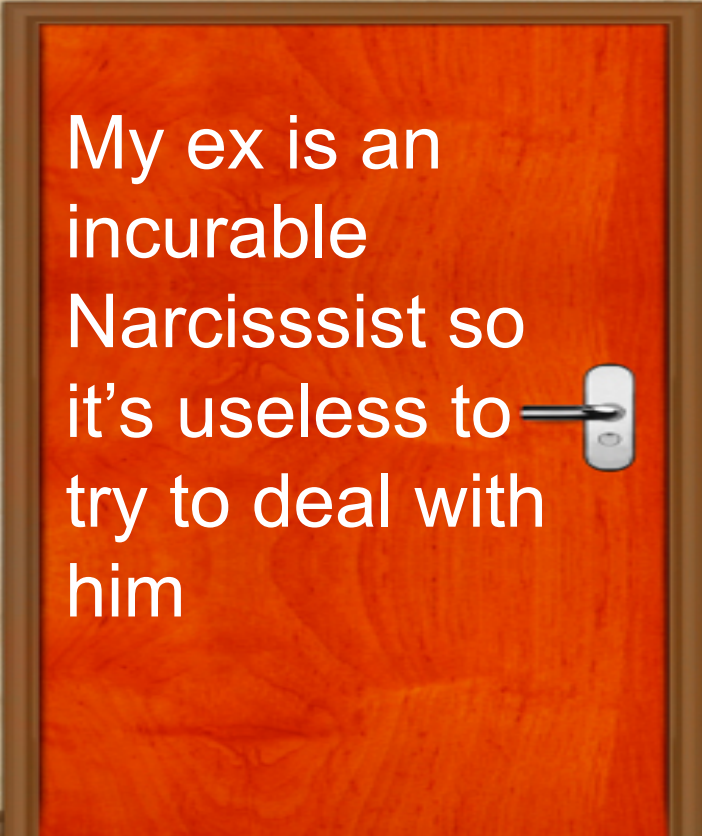


- “I know my client is litigating custody, but (s)he would never lie or distort information”


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

Appeal of sole custody or compartmentalized decision making

Allows timely decisions when necessary

Appears easier to external professionals (although may be at the cost of bias)

Reduces opportunities for further conflict

Reduces Litigation

But What About The *Next* Day?

Problems with “picking a winner”

Both parents may have essential contribution



Critical perspective lost, single-hypothesis thinking



Marginalization of a parent



External professionals start engaging with only one parent



Less collaboration and information sharing



Resentment on both sides

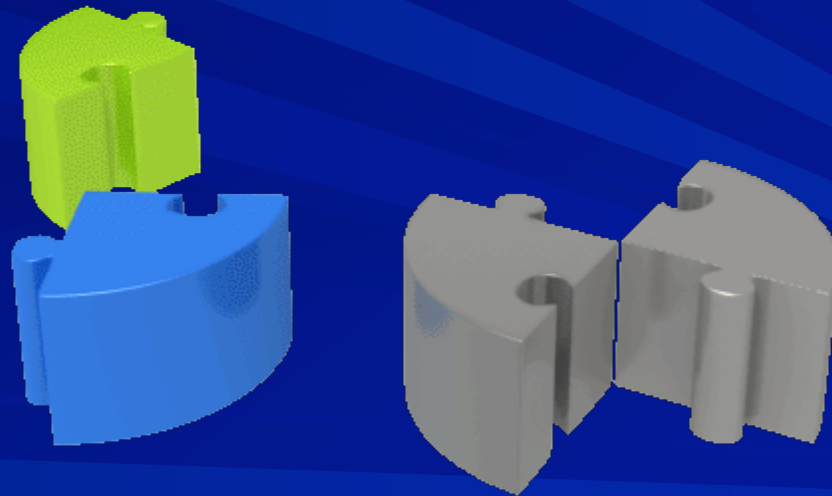


Gatekeeping



Stress, fatigue, respite issues

Chaos doesn't work – these families need *coordinated, integrated plans*



The Case for Early Systemic Intervention

Risks of delay

Difficulties of
intervening when
problems become
entrenched

Initial treatment goals
surround universal
issues

Opportunities to send
clear, early messages
to parents and follow
them up if litigation
continues

Available tools in
children's activities
and daily routines

Focus on Behavior

- Targeted interventions
- Early intervention to protect children
- Clear opportunities, tight agreements
- Cognitive and practical strategies
- Accountability
- Clear data for decision-makers

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

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



“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.”



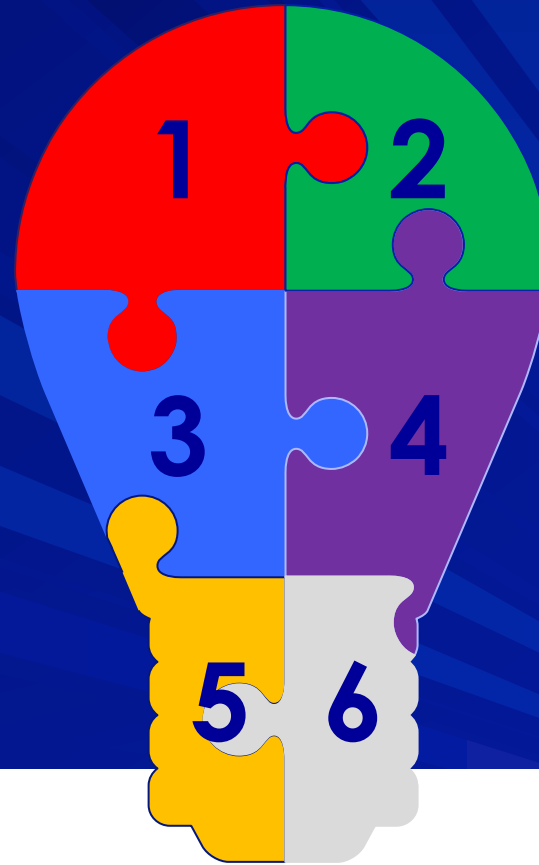
Cooperating
with the
therapist is
your best way
of proving
that what
you're being
accused of
isn't true...

Models for Intervention

- Court-ordered “reportable” therapy
- Parenting coordination

Essential difference: Decision-making authority

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

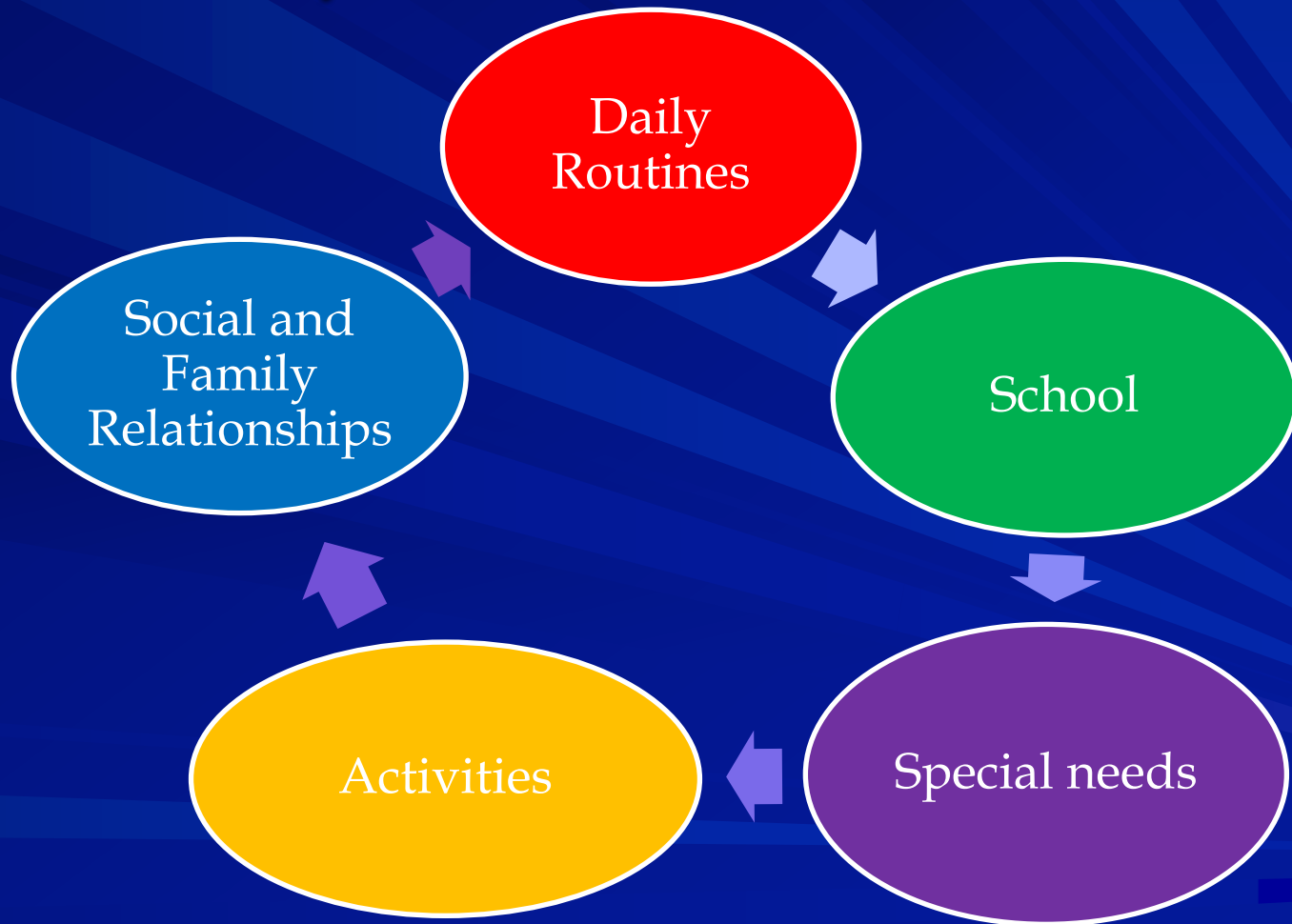


Essential Elements

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.”

What are they doing when they aren't with us?



Daily Impacts

Stress, Fatigue

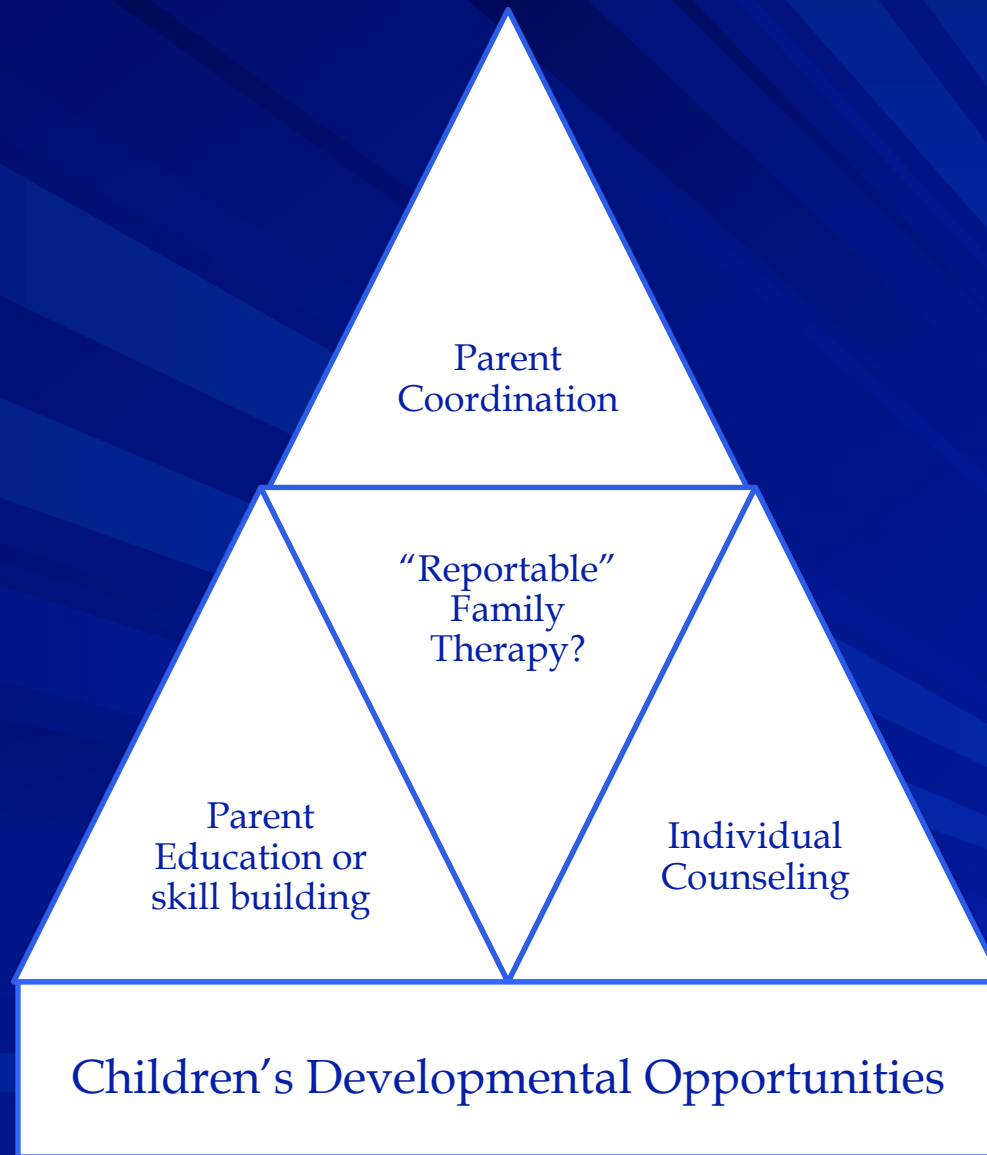
Consistency

Adaptability, Flexibility

Communication

Family Relationships

Marginalization



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

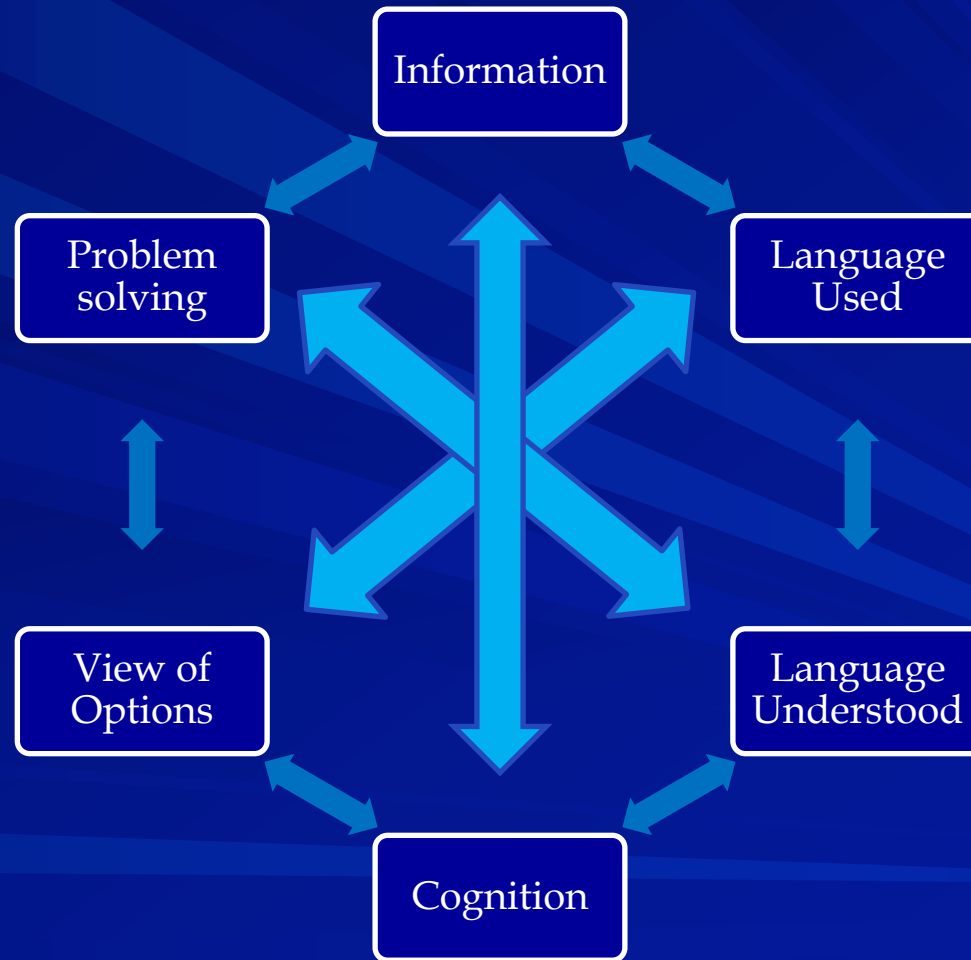
Systematic Intervention Planning (cont.)

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

Precautions

- Role differentiation
- Consent and due process procedures

Communication Connections



Professionals, Roles and Boundaries

Knowledge gaps between legal and mental health professionals

Informed Consent, Respect for legal process

Role Boundaries and Ethical Issues

What can the coparenting counselor do?

Identify Communication Patterns

Clarify Language and Definitions

Assist information gathering

Facilitate Discussion of Options

Teach Skills for Shielding the Child from Conflict

Assist with real-life practice/application

■ little girl on the stairs

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, resolving relationship issues

■ Toddler reaction to mild adult conflict

Let's Talk About Confidentiality...

“Reportable Family Therapist”

- CCCT Model
- Child’s therapist with systemic focus
- Or designated family therapist
- Engage all parts of family system
- Interact with other therapists, systems, professionals

“Reportable” Therapy



Clear, structured consent
Child-centered
Discretion to therapist
Behavioral data
Tiered information system
Managed sharing of information

Clear, structured consent

Child-centered

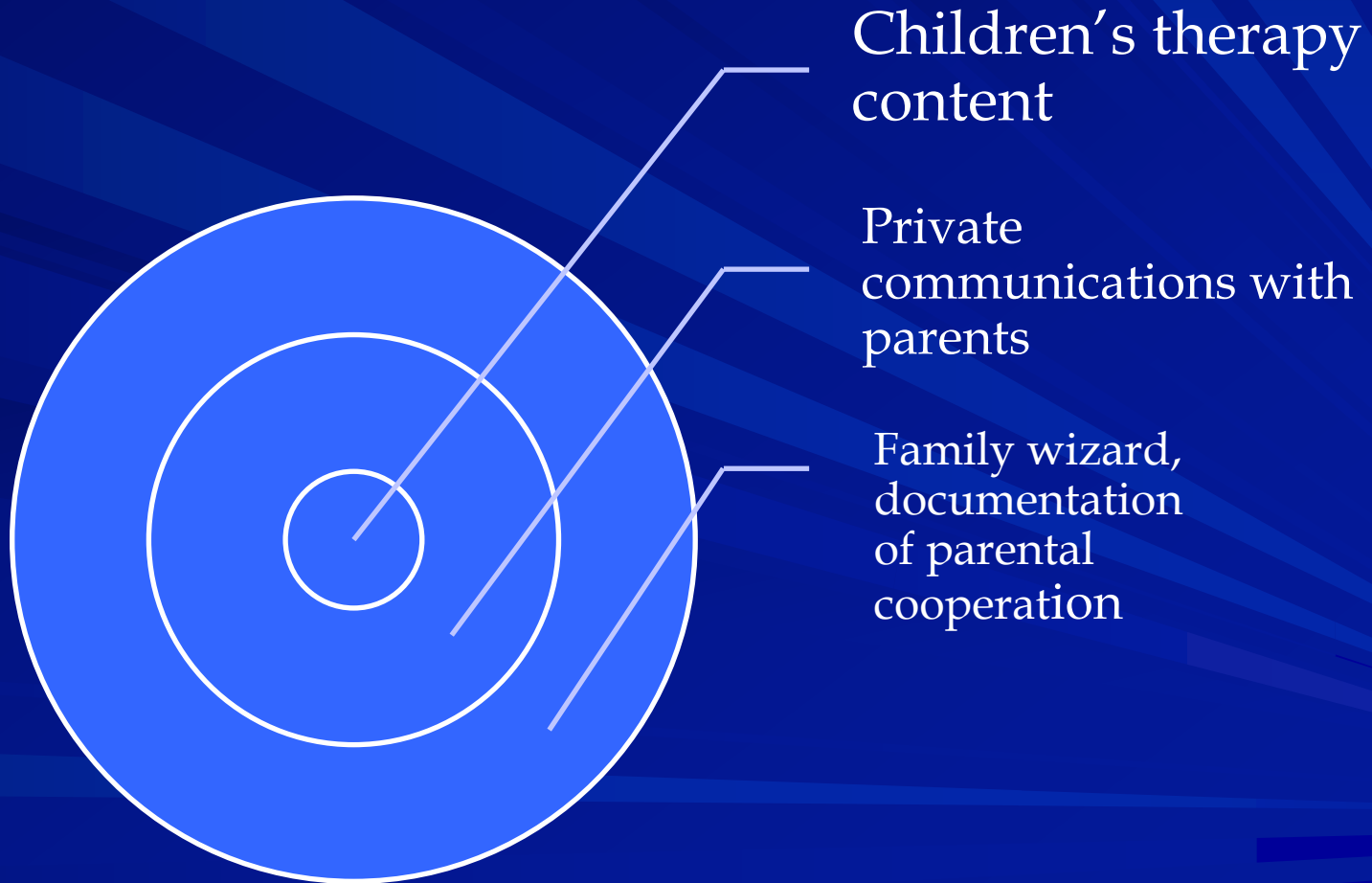
Discretion to therapist

Behavioral data

Tiered information system

Managed sharing of information

Tiered information system



Therapist Can't...

Make parenting plan recommendations

Make determinations on disputed issues

Express opinions on unseen people or relationships

But What if Decisions Are Needed?

Parenting Plan Coordinator Can...

Direct Information Gathering Steps

Engage Coparenting and Problem-Solving Steps

Issue orders to resolve disputes within scope of authority

Requires Stipulation

Other Potential Providers, System Actors

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

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

Skill Set

Knowledge of Case-
relevant issues

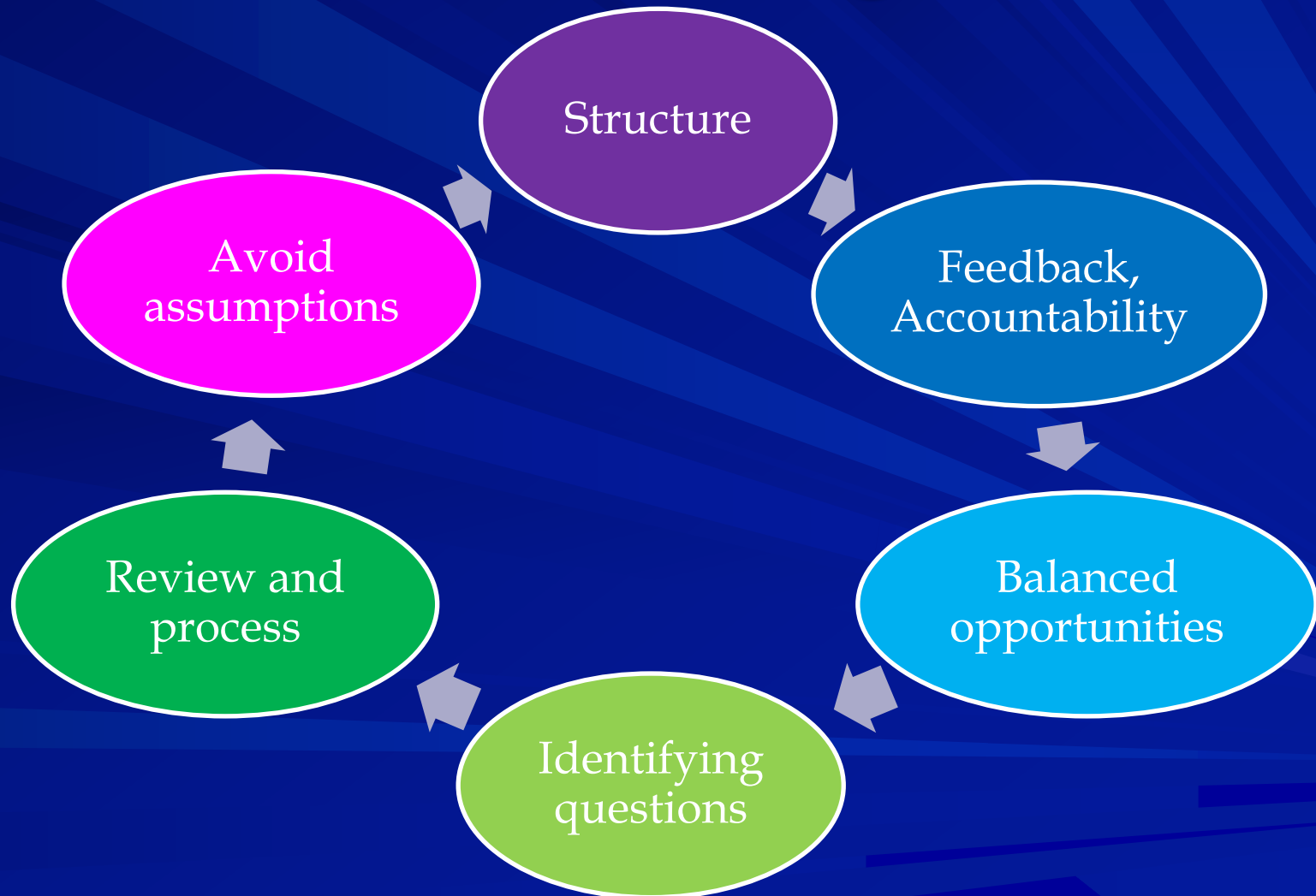
Attention to
Detail

Clear
Procedures

Knowledge
of Resources

Ability to Engage with
Other Systems,
Professionals

Structured Information Gathering



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

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

What About Trauma?

Trauma Impacts...

- Perception
- Memory
- Development
- Health
- Emotional/behavioral control
- Coping ability

How we Engage with the World....



How we interact..



How Children Perceive Themselves...

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

How Children Perceive Themselves...



I'm a great swimmer

I get good grades
because I'm really smart





I'm a Victim

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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.**

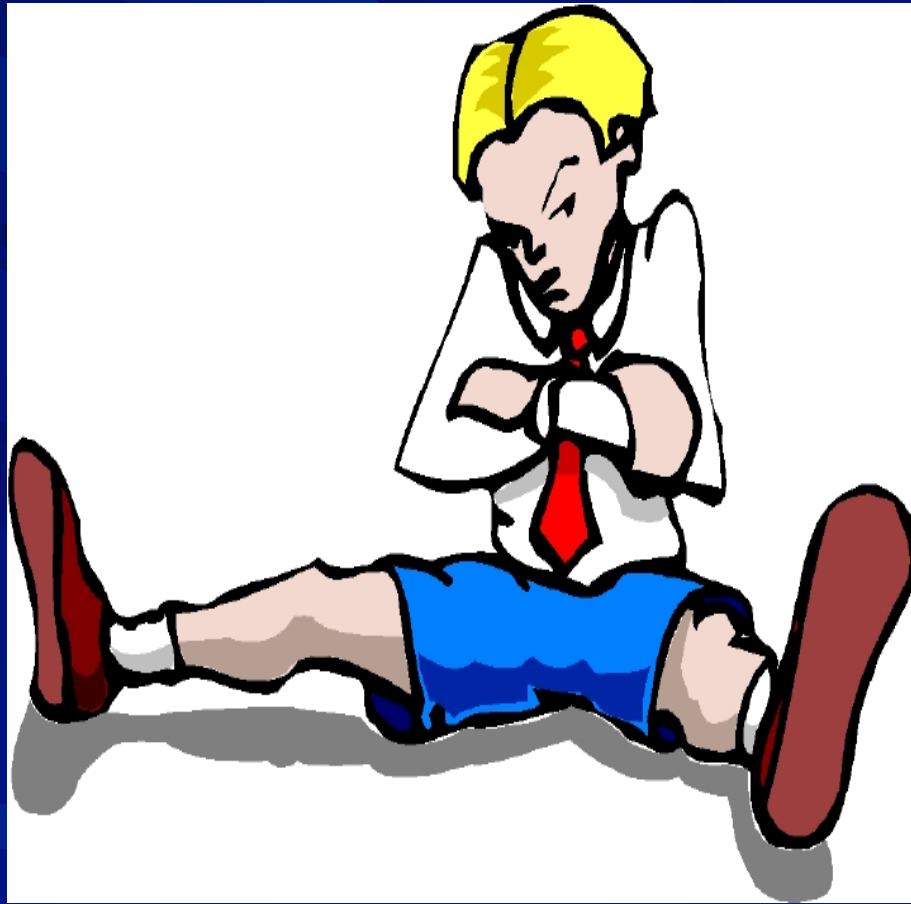




“She hurt me
so I will be
angry
forever.”

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





One step at a
time

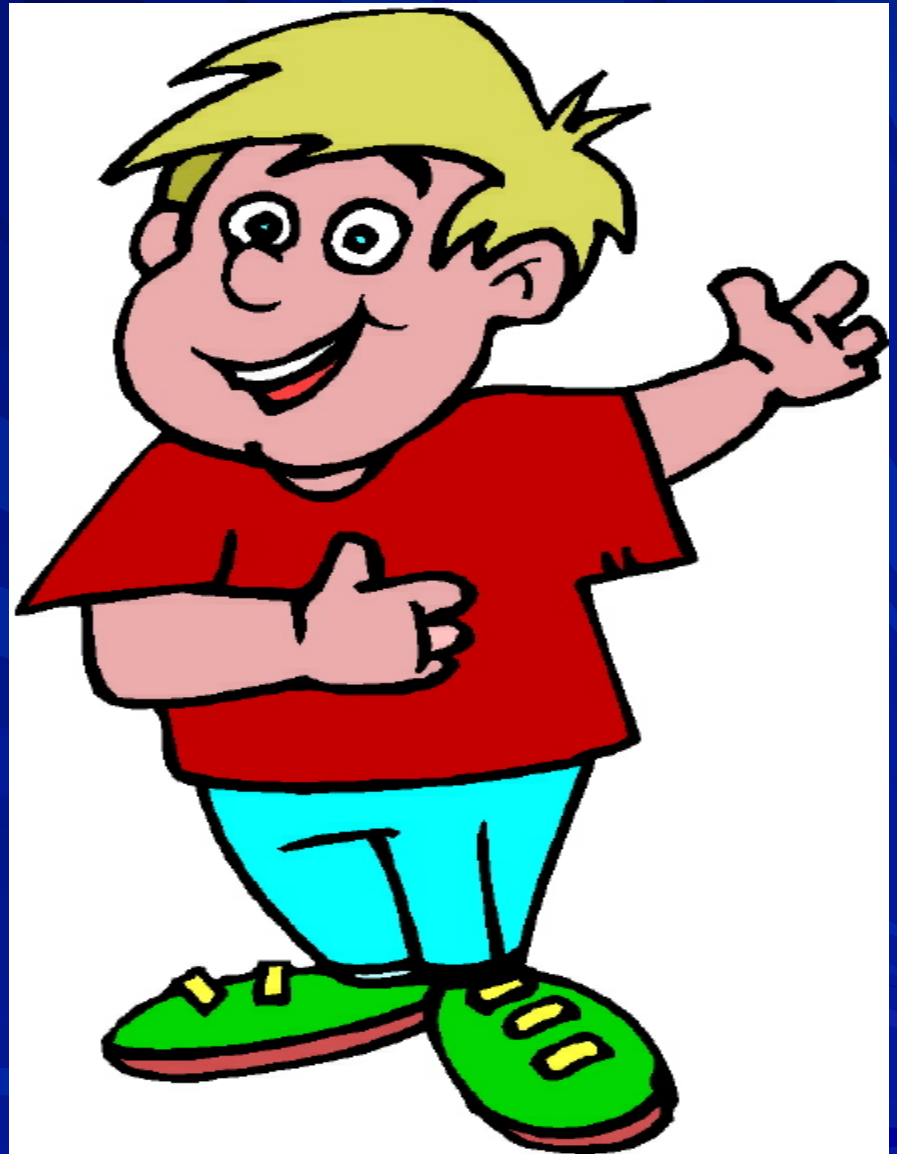
It's ok to
have fun
with....



I CAN DO HARD
THINGS



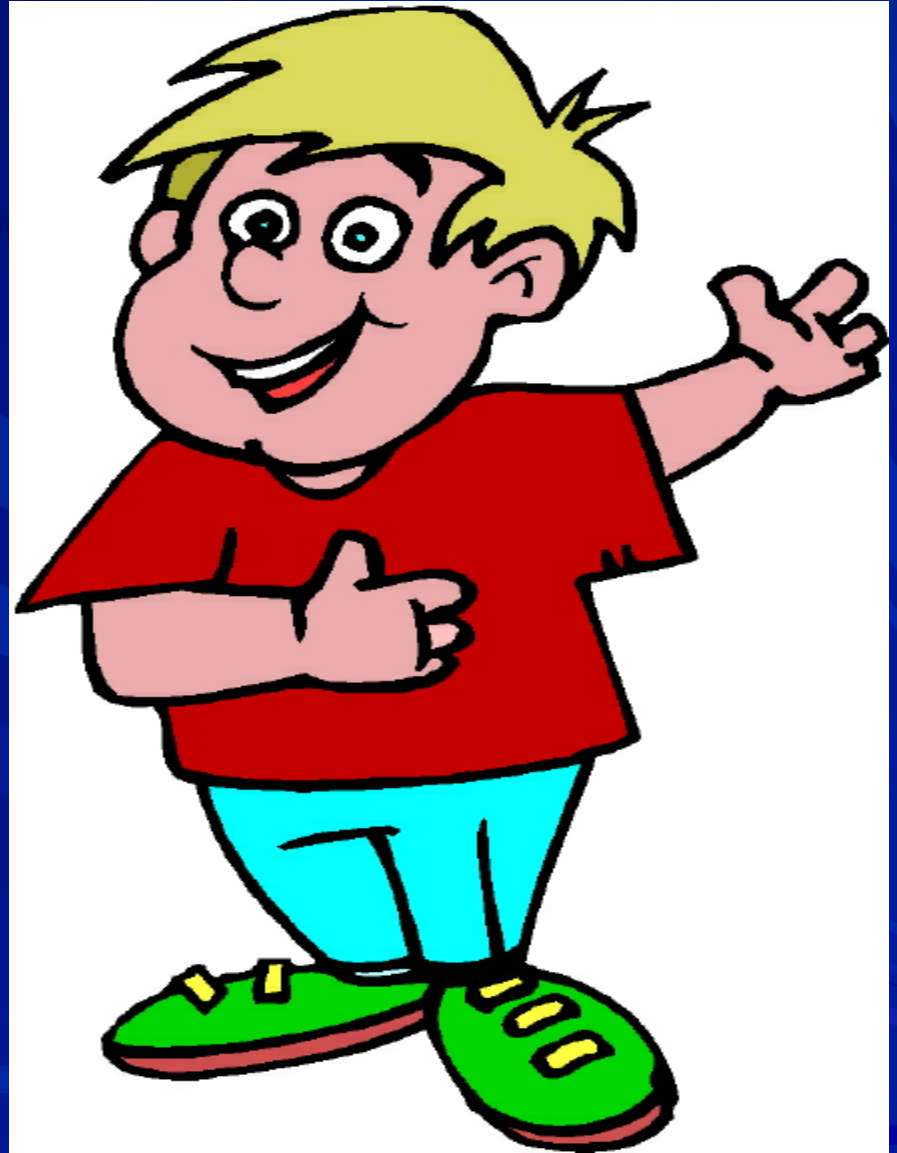
**“When I get
scared or
nervous I
can...”**



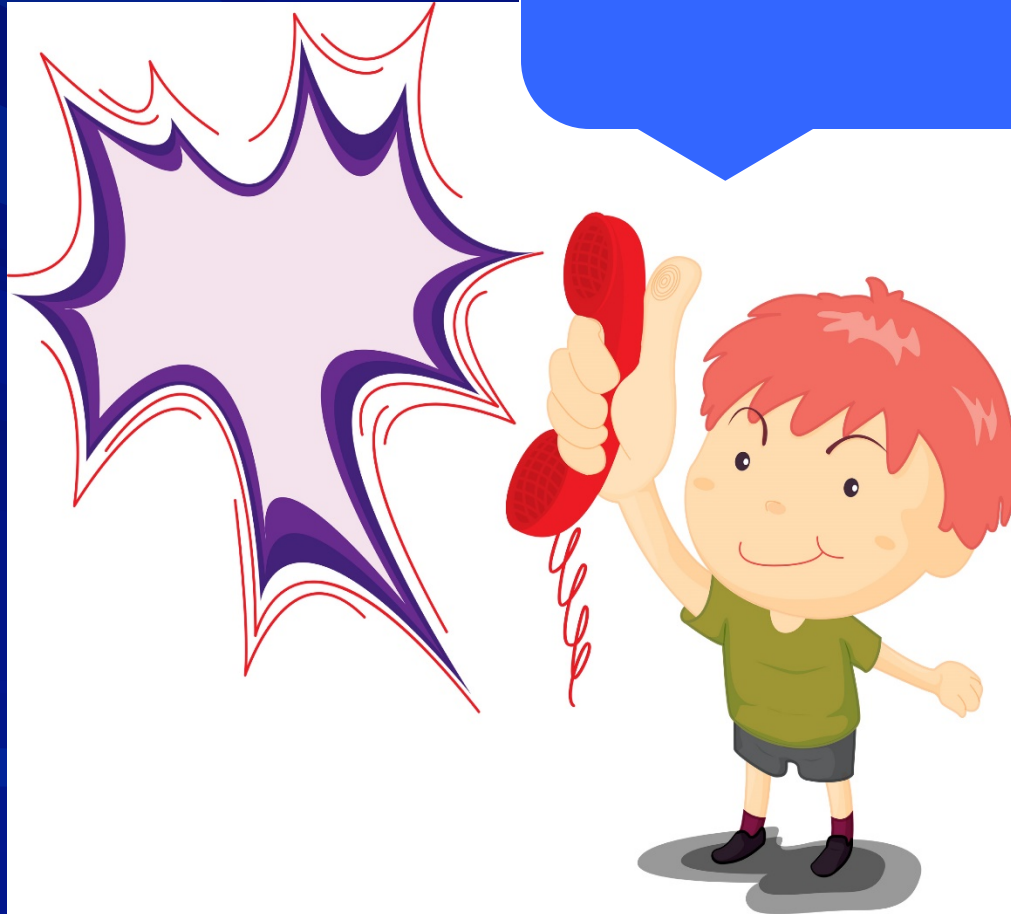


I can learn new
things

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



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



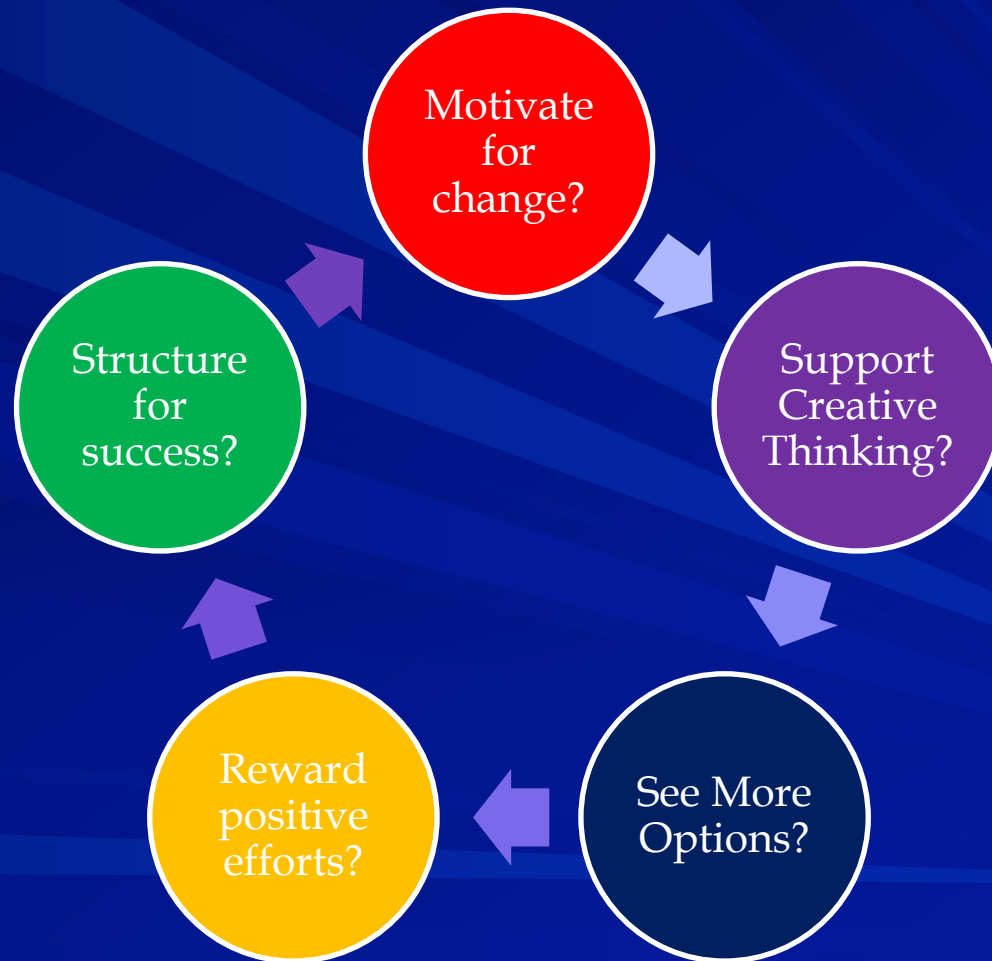


I can say,
"let's take
that to Dr.
Lyn"

Everyone makes
mistakes



So how do we...



Presenter Contact Information

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