

The Art of Communicating with Children and Youth Presenting with Emotional and Behavioral Challenges



Core Verbal Interventions for Engaging and Forging Connections

Charlie Appelstein, MSW

charlieap@comcast.net

www.charliea.com

Pre-Talk Considerations

Number One Goal: Engage!

Listen, empathize, paraphrase, offer help, apologize, repeat,
offer hope...HOOK 'EM in!

- Don't be defensive. Anticipate negative comments
– don't take them personally...

"It's an injury and it will heal."

- Expect *displacement* (i.e. anger directed at you that is meant for someone else.)
- Assess your relationship and feelings toward the child or youth.
Think PIE (i.e. everyone deserves an equal slice) "*The kid who is pushing you away the most, is probably the one who needs you the most*" (*The Gus Chronicles, Appelstein, 1994*)
- Practice the talk in your head. Longer discussions generally have a beginning, middle, and end phase.

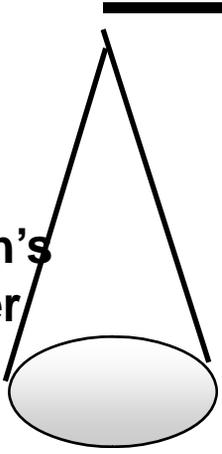
Other considerations: _____

The Affect Scale

Out of Control



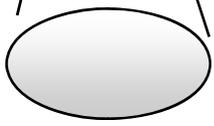
Youth's Anger



Adult's Affect



In Control

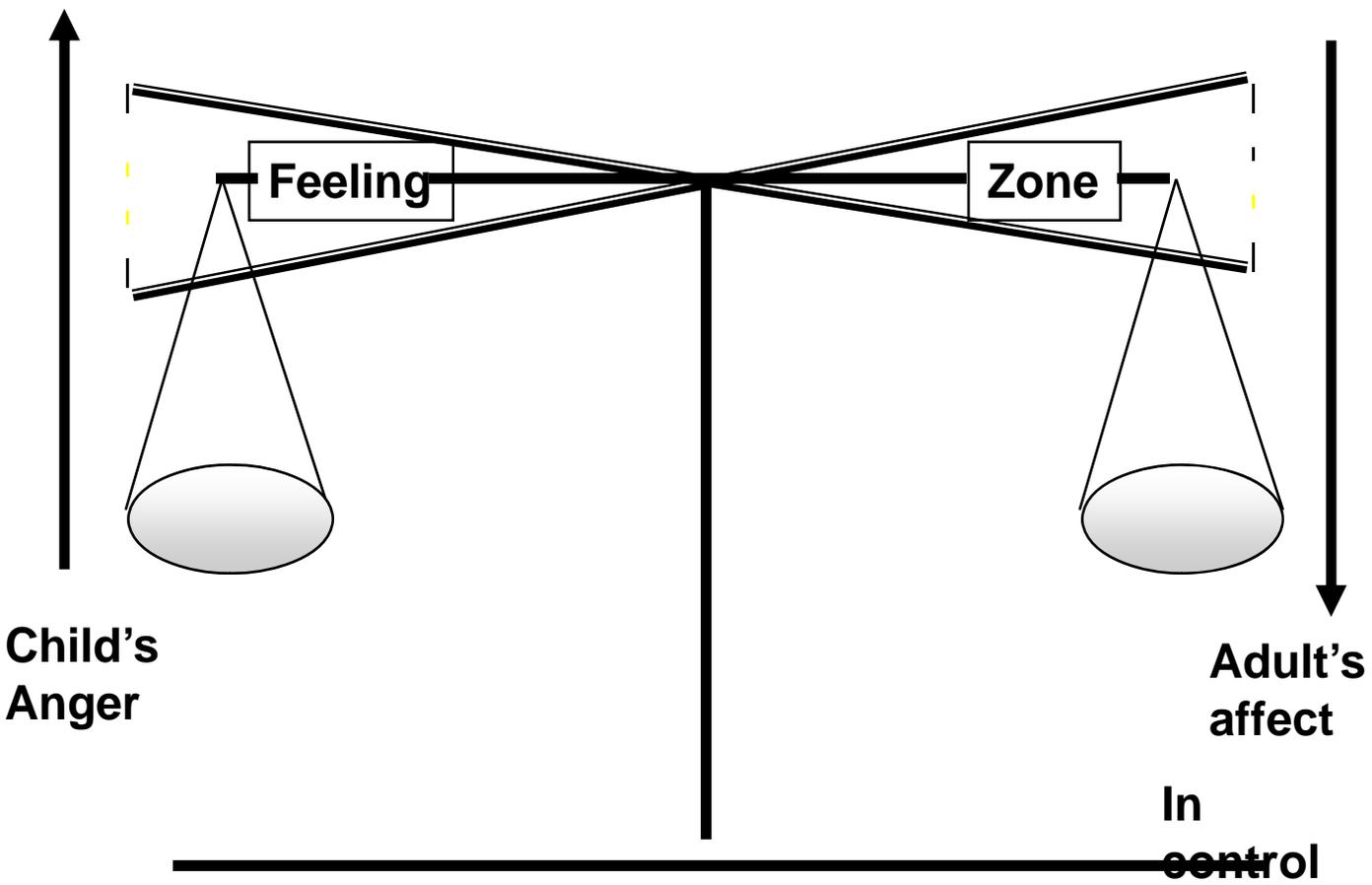


Key: Establish inverse relationship

As they get louder, you become more quiet

The Affect Scale

Loss of Control



Child's Anger

Adult's affect

In control

Inside the “feeling zone” there is room to model affect-laden content.

Said in a controlled, but somewhat expressive manner:

“John, I’m really upset about the choice you just made.”

“Mary, I’m angry about that...”

Key: If the child escalates through the zone, the adult’s affect should grow more muted.

Content vs. Message



“You won’t be around next week?”

2 weeks later...

“*You...won’t* be around next week.”



Use “I” or “We” instead of “You” and start requests with “Please” and finish with “Thank you.” Proper language sends supportive messages.

Body Messages



“C’mon dude...let’s get it done, and then we can boogey. NBD brother.”

NBD = No Big Deal!

VS.

“You need to get it done now!”

Speak to children and youth at eye level or below. Approach them in a calm manner. Be careful about your pace, posture, facial expression, hand movements and body position.



Core Verbal Interventions

Supportive Interventions

"You seem really upset!" "This stinks!" "How can I help?"

Repeating or Paraphrasing w/qualifiers

Youth: "I hate this place."

Worker: "You're saying you hate this place *right now*." (Use qualifiers: yet, at the moment, right now, etc.)

Feelings Update

"How do you feel about that?"

Sandwich Approach

"You made a bad decision to knock over the plant, but I'm *really pleased* about how you walked away from the area."

Praise and Encouragement

"Way to go!" "That was fantastic!" "I like the vocabulary you selected" (praising the action versus the child)

Humor

To a fifteen-year-old: "You're acting just like a teenager!"

Apologizing

"I'm sorry for raising my voice to you."

Reasoning Responses

"What if we let every kid...."

Connecting Statements

"It's not me against you. I'm on your side. I don't like having to keep you back."

Empowering Interventions

"What could you have done differently?" "What do you think we should do"

Surface Clarifications

"Let me make sure I know why you're upset."

Explorative Responses (psychological)

"You don't usually get this upset. Could something else be bothering you?"

Explorative Responses (historical)

"Have you ever completed such a difficult assignment?"

"Have you ever got this angry and not hit someone?"

Explorative (reflective)

"Is that behavior working for you?"

Plan Making

"Can we make a plan to handle this situation better next time?"

Humor in the Lifespace

Role of Humor

Forms a bridge between adult/child world (i.e. counters resistance)
De-mystifies individual persona/reduces power messages
Enhances relationship building
Tension reducer
Provides effective modeling
Improves self-esteem
Enhances identity formation (e.g. niche theory)
It's FUN!!!
It's reflective of the environment
Demonstrates caring

Rules:

Try! But give up quick
Do not view the use of humor as an *extra*; it should be an integral communication technique.
Make no assumptions about who can or can't be humorous - for everyone is capable!
Avoid sarcasm

Forms:

Self-Deprecating
Slapstick
Joke Telling
Grandiose Praise
Humorous Games
Musical Expression
Poetry



Transitional Objects & Humor

Sustain "humorous" moments via:

The written word Photos Recordings Videos