

No Such Thing as a Bad Kid: Understanding and Responding to Kids with Emotional & Behavioral Challenges Using a Positive, Strength-Based Approach

Study Questions

Chapter 1.

Understanding Challenging Behavior Using a Positive, Trauma-Informed, Strength-Based Perspective

1. The research is irrefutable: Positivity enhances brain function and performance. What steps can you take to create and sustain a more positive, strength-based environment in your (classroom) setting? What is the lifeblood, heart...of a positive, trauma-informed, strength-based setting? (Hint: Starts with R)
2. What would your life be like if you had no meaningful friendships? Kids at-risk are often friendless. What can do to ensure the students you guide all have the tools and opportunities to make and sustain friendships.
3. People occasionally read the title of this book and query: "What about the kid who kills? Or commits horrendous acts of violence? Or the sadistic bully? Are they good kids?" How would you answer such questions?

Chapter 2.

Misbehavior A Coded Message

1. There is a powerful dictum that resonates through the first two chapters of this book: No child likes acting out. Behavioral is always a message; a call for help and understanding. What should you be thinking about any time a student or group misbehaves?
2. Some people believe it's disingenuous for adults to fake they are in good moods when in fact they are not; students will see through this causing a lack of trust. What do you think?
3. We all have different personality types. How important is it for an educator to continually analyze how their personality-type does or does not mesh with the personality characteristics of his/her students?

Chapter 3.

Responding versus Reacting and the Importance of Managing Number One

1. Talk about McDonald's and what this reference has to do with managing your behavior first?
2. Do you believe childhood experiences influence (positively and negatively) the way teachers interact with their students? If yes, what are the implications and strategies for working with a mind that is "clear?"
3. Educators often display a tendency to give more than they receive, and lack of support leads to more punitive actions. Discuss the eco-map on page 75. Do you believe that educators do enough, in general, to boost their numbers as opposed to accepting the status quo? Discuss.
4. How effective and active is your observing ego? (e.g. it's an injury and it will heal, respond vs. react)
5. Discuss the term "success" in the context of a troubled student or group. This chapter postulates a different way of defining the term (think bricks!)

Chapter 4.

Relating Empathically

1. Think of the most difficult student you've ever taught or worked with. If you had seen a videotape of his/her worst 10 minutes of life prior to meeting this student, would it have changed the way you responded to this young person? If yes? Why? And how will this exercise inform your work in the future?
2. It's critical for educators to empathize with their students, especially around the issue of power and control. Many students who react negatively to authority figures have experienced power misused against them – and are hypersensitive to this - particularly trauma victims. As a result, school personnel at every level should be hyper attentive to responding to students in ways that are fair, calm, and dignified. To help in this regard, please list any and all ways that power (big and small) is often misused in a school setting?
3. Why do pejorative labels (e.g. manipulator, attention-seeker, rude, oppositional, etc.) have such a deleterious effect on students? And what are the repercussions when staff members use these labels to describe students to each other?

Chapters 5 & 6

Developmental Considerations

As an educator, it's helpful to possess a developmental perspective when guiding students who may in fact have unmet developmental needs. Review each developmental period described in this chapter and discuss actions teachers can take to be more developmentally-friendly based on the needs of each period.

For example, the first year of life is all about bonding and unconditional love. How can teachers and other school personnel demonstrate unconditional love and enhance bonding in age appropriate ways with the students they guide?

The First Year:

The Second Year:

The Third and Fourth years:

The Fifth Year:

Adolescence:

Chapter 7.

Interpersonal Splitting

1. What are some of the key thought processes and strategies to employ to prevent and/or mitigate interpersonal “splitting?”
2. Can you recall a situation where interpersonal splitting was highly problematic? Thinking back, what could have been done differently (by you and the others) to resolve the splitting (i.e. tensions/conflicts)

Chapter 8. Collaborating with Parents

1. What are the four stages of parental involvement?
2. What can educators do to better “engage” parents, particularly during the early months of a school year?
3. This book advocates using a positive (trauma-informed), strength-based approach with kids and in particular those with emotional and behavioral challenges. Are there any techniques or principles you’ve read about that don’t apply or can’t be used with the parents of your students?

Chapter 9. Enhancing Self Esteem

1. How well do you provide opportunities for success each day for your students – and especially the ones who struggle with low self-esteem? What can you do to improve in this area?
2. How well do you trumpet successes? (e.g. Send congratulatory post cards home, post work on walls, make phone calls, send emails, praise, etc.) What steps could you take to do even better in this regard?
3. How well do you explore and amplify the strengths, interests, and talents of your students? What steps could you take to do even better in this regard? (e.g. Have students fill out a “This is Who I Am” questionnaire at the beginning of each year, listing hobbies, likes, dislikes, talents, etc.)
4. This chapter introduced a myriad of options for providing success opportunities (i.e. building self-esteem and enhancing cohesion) for students (e.g. the dice roll). Pick five such options that you might be inclined to use with your students and explain why you chose them?
5. What steps can you take to better promote a growth mindset in your classroom/setting? (i.e. normalizing mistakes, encouraging effort, etc.)

Chapter 10. The Role of Consequences

1. Why are consequences more effective than punishment? (Consequences are related to the behavior in question, punishment isn't) Why are consequences important?
2. *"Don't smile until Christmas!"* These words are often relayed to rookie teachers prior to the start of their first year of teaching. Discuss these words of advice. Agree? Disagree? Why? Given the positive, strength-based nature of this book, do you think these words of advice are consistent with the views expressed within?
3. What are some of the key factors an educator should be considering before setting limits with a student or group?

Chapter 11. Asking the Right Questions

1. The best way to deal with problem behavior is to prevent it. List some of the key steps teachers can employ to systemically reduce problem behavior. (i.e. Be more proactive)

Chapter 12. Troubleshooting Misbehavior in Advance

1. Problem behavior rarely occurs once. Discuss the term *Pattern Identification* and whether more effort should be directed towards exploring the: the antecedents of “predictable” problem behavior, and interventions that lessen or eradicate it.
2. Present a student who struggled behaviorally last year. Brainstorm strategies that might have been implemented to reduce this student’s difficulties.

Chapter 13. The Power of Humor

1. It is the author's opinion that every time an educator tells a student or group to do something they don't want to do, the first thing that pops into the minds of these students is: *Who just told me to do this?* If that person is a solid, trustworthy, and *humorous* individual, the students are more likely to comply. Agree or disagree?
2. This chapter contains a host of humor techniques. Which ones might you weave into your "bag of tricks?"
3. "Sarcasm is veiled hostility?" Discuss.

Chapter 14. Teaching Kids Self Management

1. "The brain is designed to change in response to patterned, repetitive stimulation." (Perry)
Discuss the importance of this finding and its implication for teaching kids to use better self-talk and -management skills. Which techniques described in this chapter best align with this neurological fact?

2. Create 3 cues (one-line raps) for a student or group you work with?
They should rhyme and have a beat.

3. "Guys, we're getting off track."
"Hey, people are being rude and there's too much annoying, distracting behavior, please knock it off."

Discuss the value of using inspirational metaphors. There were many metaphors introduced in this chapter. Which ones do you feel most comfortable about using?

4. Outline and discuss strategies that help students to better self-regulate their actions?

Chapter 15. The Essence of Communication

1. The three pillars of sound and effective strength-based communication are:

- Strict adherence to using the Affect Scale
- High cognizance of the Content and Message of all communication
- Proper use of Body Language

Discuss all three and how knowledge and practice of them is a major foundation piece for creating and maintaining a positive, strength-based culture in your setting.

2. The responsive classroom creators believe it's wrong to state a request in question form, such as: "Could you please move to another table, thanks." They believe doing so creates ambiguity and confusion. They prefer: "John, please move to another table, thanks." (Not sure they would even add "thanks".)

The author disagrees with their view, preferring the former request. Could you please give your opinion and why, thanks!?

Chapter 16. Core Strength-Based Verbal Interventions

1. What are some of the key factors an educator should be pondering prior to talking with a disgruntled student, group, parent or colleague?
2. Review the core verbal interventions highlighted in this chapter. Which interventions seem most beneficial to begin using with your students (or use more often)...and why?

Chapter 17: Strategic Verbal Interventions

1. Think of some of the difficult interactions and behaviors you have encountered this year. How could you have used reframing to mitigate some of those situations?
2. What are some of the predictable behavior issues that occur on a regular basis. How could they be reframed? For example, a student who calls out a lot without raising his hand: *I LOVE the fact that you want to give the answer and participate. That's awesome. Being assertive will get you places in this world. But if you don't raise your hand first, then I can't be fair to the other students. Hand raising allows me to call on different kids and get them all involved. Doesn't that make sense?*
3. It's imperative (and evidence -based) to talk with students about their futures. What steps can you take to weave more future imagery into your daily work (e.g. positive predicting, etc.)
4. Solution-focused questions are highly effective words to use with students. Review the questions listed in this chapter and discuss the steps you can take to use more of these questions in your daily work. Are there particular questions that seem most important to use (more often)?

Chapter 18: Relationship-Based Limit Setting

1. The most critical factor teachers should consider prior to setting limits with a student, group or parent is the “sanctity of the relationship.” Behaviors come and go but it the positive, trusting relationship a teacher establishes with her students that will be the true fuel that energizes them. Limits set without factoring in the dignity of the recipient, distances teachers from the students in questions and retards growth in the classroom.

Discuss. Do you agree with the above statements?

2. Discuss the issue of “context” when setting limits with students.
3. How important is it for teachers to involve their students when devising a limit setting plan for the year ahead (i.e. how important is it to empower them in the process)?

Chapter 19. The Role of Incentives in Motivating Kids with Emotional & Behavioral Challenges

1. Discuss the rationale for strategically using incentives with students who may have suffered trauma in their lives?
2. What are some of the key principles to consider when creating an incentive plan for a student or group?
3. The author prefers to use the term “celebrate” as opposed to “reward” when talking to students about incentive plans and what “success” will bring. Why? Do you agree? Discuss.