

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



## Core Verbal Interventions for Engaging and Forging Connections

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## 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: \_\_\_\_\_

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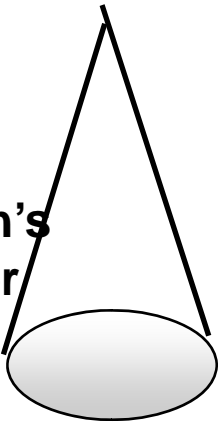
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# The Affect Scale

Out of Control



Youth's Anger



Adult's Affect



In Control

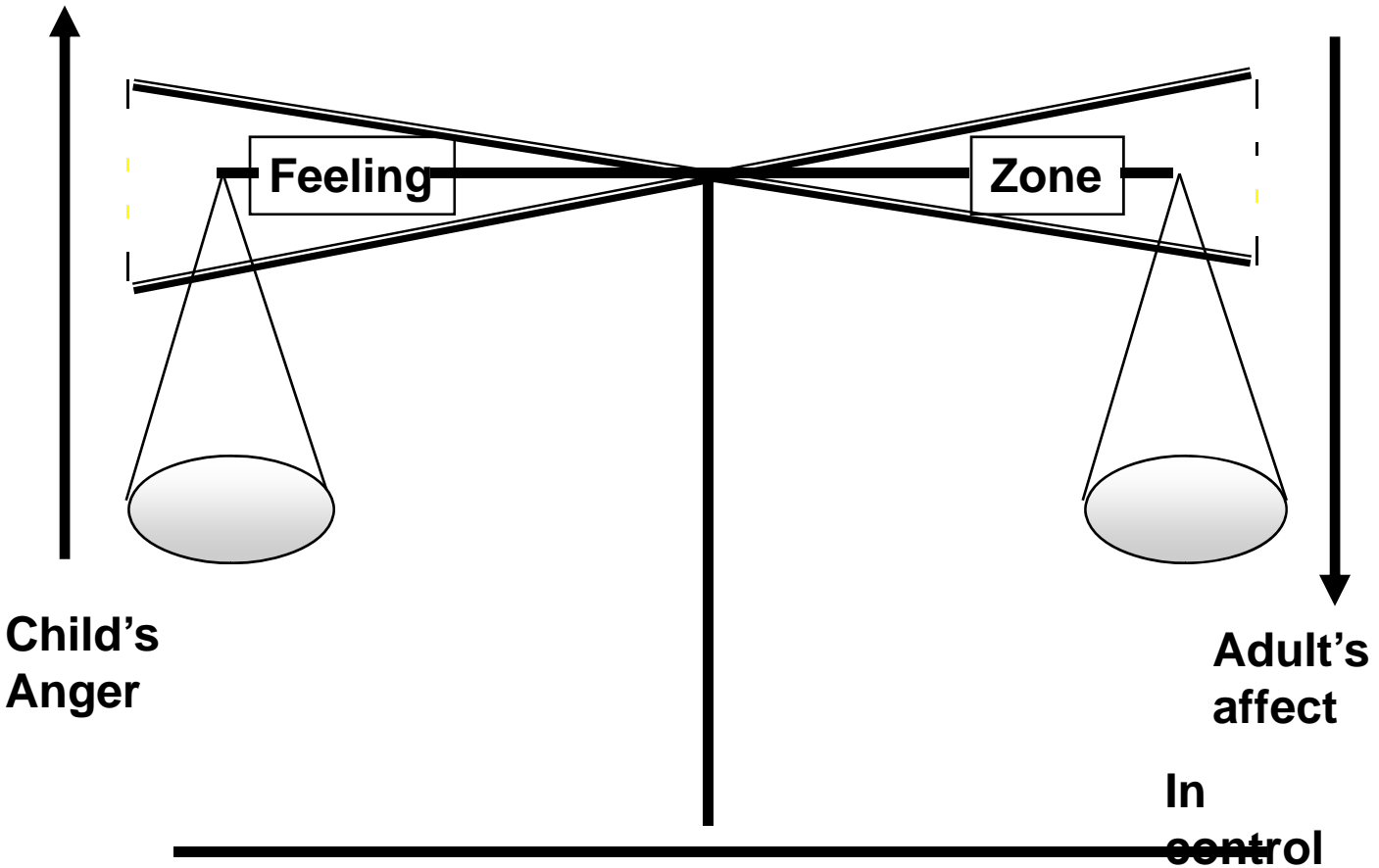


**Key: Establish inverse relationship**

*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.

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## 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