

Building on The Strengths of Young People Who Have Endured Hardships

Mental Health Connection of Tarrant County

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Mission

Preparing Adults to Become the Kind of People
Young People Deserve in Their Lives

Breathe



The Parable of the River

(Adapted from Rolbeiser. The holy longing. NY: Doubleday; 1999)

An Inflection Point in Human History

Childhood Trauma May Affect:

The Body

The Brain

Behavior

Genetics

A needed course correction . . .

An Integrated Model that includes all we've learned from

- ✓ Positive Youth Development
- ✓ Resilience Building Strategies
- ✓ Trauma-sensitive Practices
- ✓ Restorative Practices

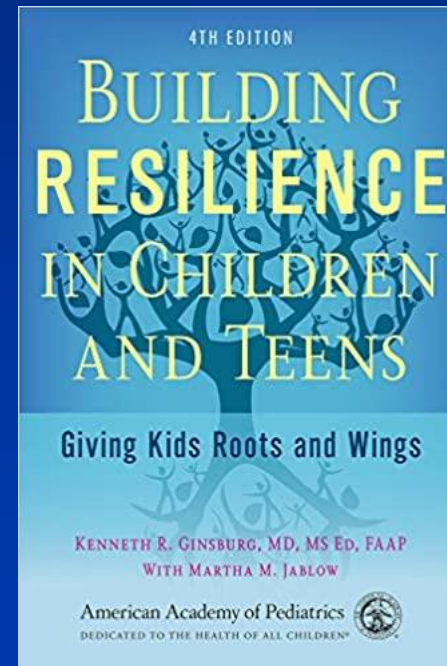
A model that acknowledges pain, but sees the best in people.

A model that recognizes structural racism and the undermining forces of low expectations, but that prevents a new label from being applied to already marginalized communities. In sharp contrast, it must recognize the inherent strengths of individuals, communities, and cultures.

An Integrated Model that includes all we've learned from:

Positive Youth Development
Resilience Building Strategies
Trauma-Sensitive Practices
Restorative Practices

And From YOU!!!!



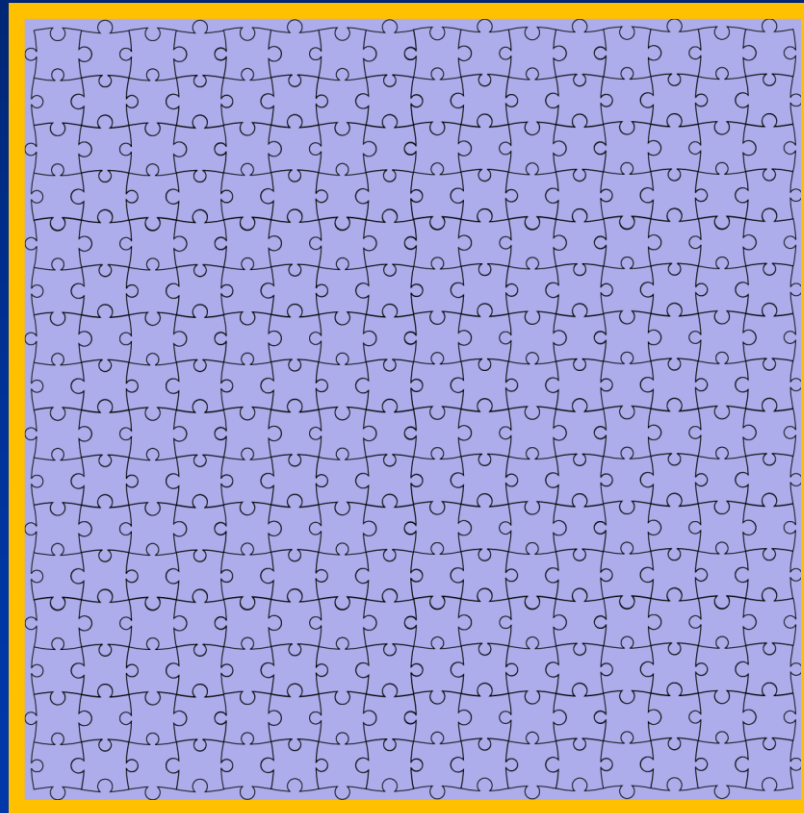
At the root of all models is the primacy and power of human relationships both to build strong, successful youth and to heal those who have endured hardships

Seeking the “Sweet Spot”

We know young people need **safe, secure, sustained relationships** to thrive. We even know that such relationships can allow them to heal from hard pasts. We must guide them so they are accountable to being their best selves. When we do so, they must know that our high expectations are rooted in our caring. Ideally **our efforts at accountability must enhance, rather than disrupt, our protective relationships.**



Where can the greatest progress be made with adolescents, but especially for those with the hardest lives?



Youth Development 101

**How do we define success for
ALL Young People?**

Problem Free . . .

. . . is NOT Fully Prepared!

Karen Pittman

From “Fixing” Deficits to Building Assets

While the positive youth development (PYD) approach recognizes the existence of adversities and developmental challenges that may affect children in various ways, it resists conceiving of the developmental process mainly as an effort to overcome deficits and risk. Instead, it begins with a vision of a fully able child eager to explore the world, gain competence, and acquire the capacity to contribute to the world.

Dr. William Damon

The Fundamental Questions of Adolescence

- **Who Am I?**
- **Am I Normal?**
- **How Do I Fit In?**

We Matter...

more than the buildings or the programs.



Kids come for the **content**, but the **context** is what heals youth.

Core Principles of PYD

Young people need to feel valued. When we see them as the experts on their own lives, youth learn to believe their opinions matter.

Youth are often the best teachers and role models for other young people.

Core Principles of PYD

Adults can be instructive and supportive, but children should choose and carry out activities as independently as possible. Nothing discourages mastery more than an adult who steps in and says: *“Let me do that for you.”*



“Children have never been very good at listening to their elders, but they have never failed to imitate them.”

– James Baldwin

(slide from Ameen Akbar, YouthBuild Philly)

Being Pro-Development

The Fundamental Question Adults Have about Adolescence

- **Do I Still Matter?**

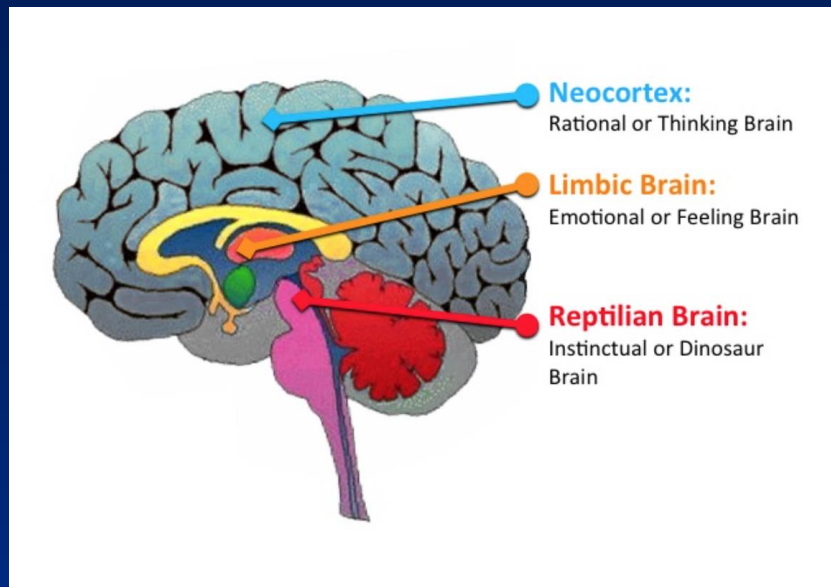
Flipping the Script

Shifting adolescence from a time to be survived to a
time to be celebrated

Myths and Misunderstandings that Disempower Parents and Professionals

- Infants aren't paying attention
- Adolescents:
 - Think they are invincible
 - Are wired for risk
 - Don't care what parents think
 - Can't be reasoned with
 - Don't like adults
 - Are self-centered

Brain Development for Communicators



Emotional centers develop first

Development is a process not an event

Reasoning ability ALWAYS exists, but is solidifying

The **WRONG** Way to See It

Why do most 16-year-olds drive like they're
missing a part of their brain?



BECAUSE THEY ARE.



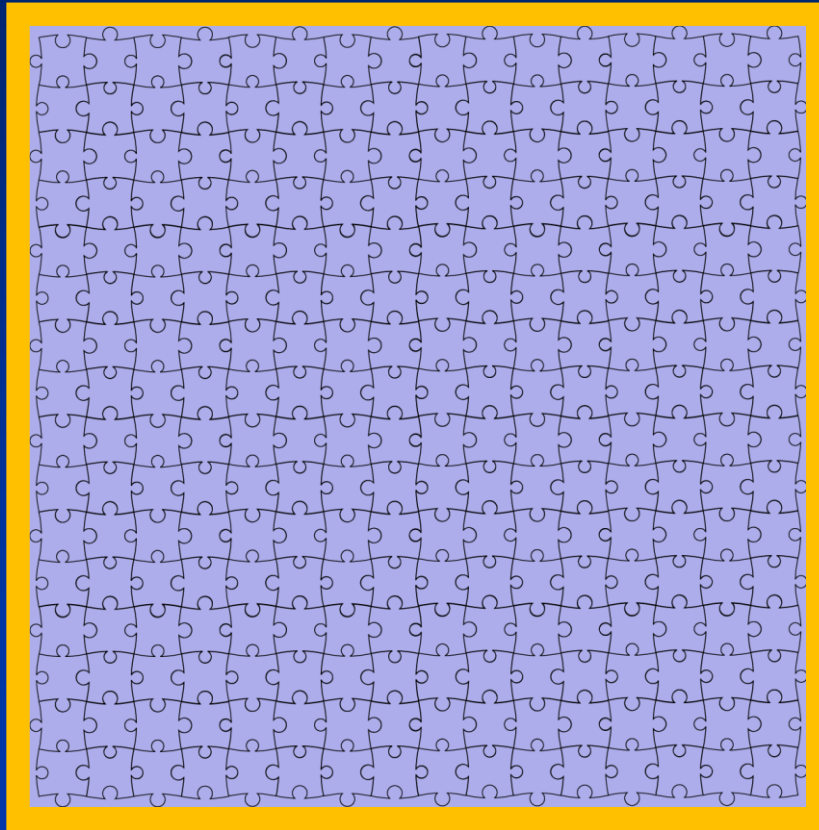
The **Right** Way to See It:
A Critically Important Opportunity to Shape the Future



Enrichment and Protection

- Adolescents are super-learners
- Experimentation is a necessity, it is our job to create enriching, exciting, **safe** opportunities for growth.
- It is also our job to protect from harm

Why super - learners must push the edges. And, our role.



Communication for the Developing Brain

(Which incidentally is inside of a person)



Resilience

Resilience



The ability to overcome adversity

The diagram features two light blue arrows pointing in opposite directions, one to the left and one to the right, which overlap in the center. The left arrow contains the text 'The ability to overcome adversity' and the right arrow contains 'The capacity to bounce back'. The background is a solid dark blue.

The capacity to bounce back

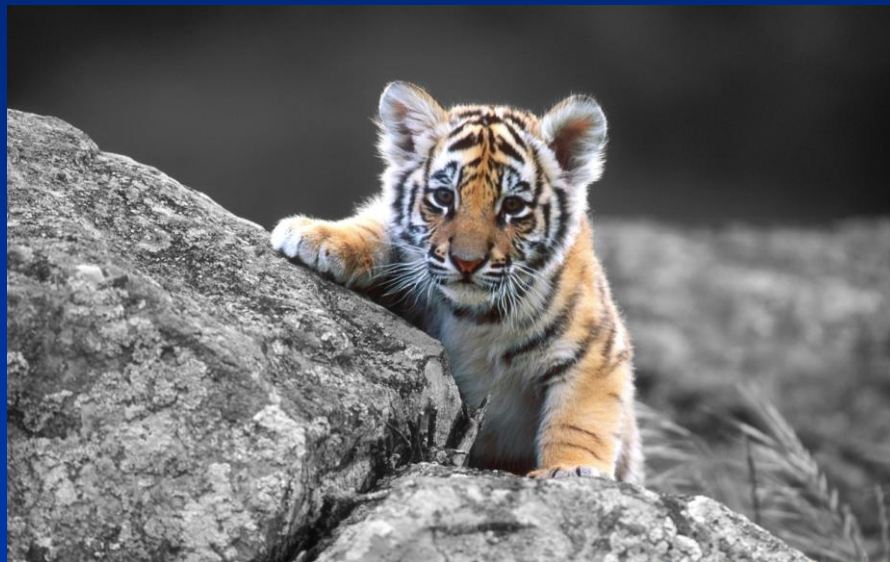
Resilience



To survive
difficult times

To thrive in the best
of times

Resilience is a Mindset





Where's the tiger now?

Uncertainty may be the greatest challenge to our
sense of security

The Bottom Line

- Young People will be more resilient if the important adults in their lives believe in them unconditionally and hold them to high expectations
- Young People live up or down to the expectations we set for them

Resilience

is

NOT

Invulnerability

When Resilience Reaches Its Limits

Physical symptoms

Fatigue

Disinterest

Dropping grades

Sad mood

Irritability/anger

Substance use

Building Resilience in An Age of Uncertainty

Shared Strategies for Young People and Adults

Corona Virus

- This unsettling time will leave a generational mark on young people.
- How can we adults shape the impact it leaves?

Racial Justice

- This time is an awakening for many and an affirmation of reality for too many.
- How can we raise a generation of future adults who will build us a better world?

Every earned emotion creates an opportunity
for building resilience

Young people build resilience through
practice AND observation. . .

. . . Taking care of yourself is a strategic act of good
adulthood

. . . Modeling how you work through complexity is the
way to build thinkers and problem-solvers

Common Emotion: Resilience Lesson

“I feel like I am failing”:

Learning Self-forgiveness

Common Emotion: Resilience Lesson

“The kids are frustrated, and so am I”:

Learning to Empathize

Common Emotion: Resilience Lesson

“I don’t know how to handle how I feel”:

Acknowledging, Processing, and Releasing Emotions

Common Emotion: Resilience Lesson

“I need a time out”:

Being a Calming Presence for Others

Calmness Amidst a Chaotic Reality

- Co-regulation
- Self-regulation is a skill to be developed

Common Emotion: Resilience Lesson

“My mind feels out of control”:

Maintaining Physical Health Strengthens Emotional Health

Common Emotion: Resilience Lesson

“I keep thinking about the worst-case scenario”:

Stay Present and Live in Reality

Common Emotion: Resilience Lesson

“I feel helpless”:

Finding What You *Can* Do

Common Emotion: Resilience Lesson

“I can’t do everything”:

Learning to Let Go

Common Emotion: Resilience Lesson

“I am so disappointed”:

Find Joy and Maintain Purpose

Common Emotion: Resilience Lesson

“I had so many plans that aren’t working out”:

When You Can’t Change Things, Adapt

Common Emotion: Resilience Lesson

“Will things ever be the same?” :

Hope

This unsettling time will leave a generational mark on young people.

Common Emotion: Resilience Lesson

“I miss my family and friends”:

“I am feeling vulnerable, frightened, insecure”:

Relationships Strengthen Us

Above all . . . human connection



Restorative Practices at a Glance

Adults support young people to reach their potential by offering corrective guidance when they stray from being their best selves.

Punitive actions or punishment are ineffective, and potentially harmful, means of holding young people accountable.

Restorative practices work when all parties understand expectations and are solidly rooted in a cohesive culture in which everyone benefits from respectful interactions.

Once these healthy cultures are mutually valued, when someone (young person or adult!!) needs to be held accountable, they can be invited in a genuinely caring and transparent manner to return or restore themselves to their place as an integral community member.

Trauma Sensitive Practices

Trauma Does Not Break Us . . .

- Predictive is Not an Absolute Determinant
 - What is relative risk?
- Results do not go in both directions
- Its all about being deserving of focused attention and extra protective forces
- A Different Kind of Credential

Felitti VJ, Anda RF, Nordenberg DF, Williamson DF, Spitz AM, Edwards VJ, Marks JS.

Relationship of childhood abuse and household dysfunction to many of the leading causes of death in adults: **The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) study**. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 1998;14(4):245-258.

The Household Adverse Childhood Experiences

- Emotional Abuse
- Physical Abuse
- Sexual Abuse
- Neglected
- Exposure to Substance Abuse in Household
- Exposure to Mental Illness in Household
- Exposure to Domestic Violence in Household
- Parent(s) Sent to Prison
- Were Parents Divorced or Did You Experience Parental Abandonment?

The Environmental ACEs

Adverse Childhood Experiences of Low-Income Urban Youth

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KEY WORDS

child abuse, children of impaired parents, domestic violence, nominal group technique, poverty, sexual abuse, spouse abuse, substance abuse, urban

ABBREVIATIONS

ACE—adverse childhood experience
FPL—federal poverty level

Dr. Wade conceptualized and designed the study, coordinated



WHAT'S KNOWN ON THIS SUBJECT: Adverse childhood experiences have been shown to have long-term impacts on health and well-being. However, little work has been done to incorporate the voices of youth in understanding the range of adverse experiences that low-income urban children face.



WHAT THIS STUDY ADDS: Study participants cited a broad range of adverse experiences beyond those listed in the initial adverse childhood experience studies. Domains of adverse experiences included family relationships, community stressors, personal victimization, economic hardship, peer relationships, discrimination, school, health, and child welfare/juvenile justice systems.

Childhood Trauma May Affect:

The Body

The Brain

Behavior

Genetics

UNLESS



The Effect of ACEs on the Brain



The Effect of ACEs on Behavior



How Do We React to Behavior



Trauma Does Not Break Kids Nor Does it Cause Brain Damage

- A Different Kind of Credential
- Having a “Protector’s Brain”
- Having a Brilliant Amygdala

How Do Hard Lives Make People Experience Transitions Differently?

Every new opportunity is a chance to be rejected entirely

- Where's the tiger?
- Am I safe?
- What if I am judged? Will I be rejected?
- Should I pretend I don't care?
- Should I fail fast to maintain my control?
- Should I choose to fail, so at least I'll control my destiny?

Key Principles of Trauma Sensitive Practices

1. Knowing what is about you and what is not about you
2. Changing your lens from “What’s wrong with you!” to “What happened to you?”
3. Seeing people as they deserve to be seen, not based on labels they’ve received or behaviors they’ve displayed
4. Giving control back to people from whom control has been taken away

To enable all young people, especially those who need us most, to reach their full potential as productive, caring, responsible citizens.

- Youth who need us the most are often those who push us away
- Youth who need us the most are often those who push our buttons
- Youth who need us the most may raise uncomfortable feelings in us
- Youth who need us the most often don't give us the feedback we crave

Nobody dared go near the tower. A fearsome dragon sat on its top.

Until one day, a knight rode up. "Do you need help to get down?"

"Please."

**Tying it Together:
Developing Strengths, Addressing Risk, and
Acknowledging Trauma**



Strength-based Communication

Strength-based Communication is not about praise for the sake of praise

- It is about listening until genuine strengths are revealed
- It is about joining someone's team
- It is about highlighting and elevating their strengths
- It is about facilitating the recognition and celebration of their strengths
- It is about planting seeds
- It has to be real!

Strength-based communication is essential to promoting positive behavioral changes

Behavioral Change 101

(Forward and Backward Movement)

What Does it Mean to Have Somebody's Back?

Behavioral Change 101

(What they're missing)

The Five Steps of Behavioral Change

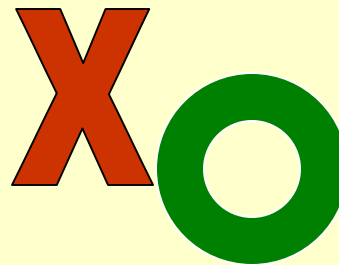
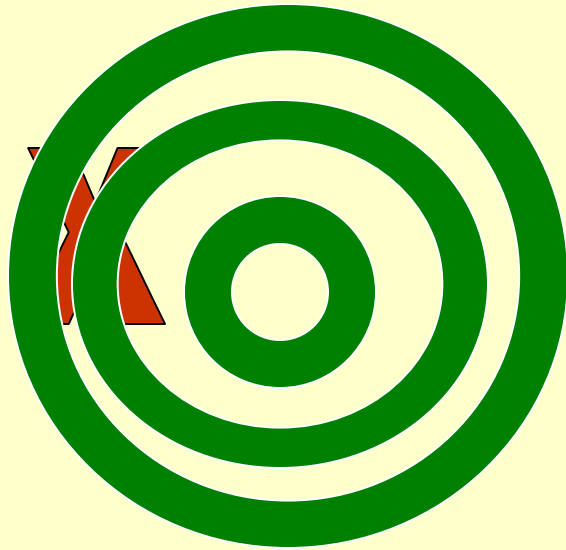
1. Awareness
2. Motivation
3. Skills
4. Trial and error
5. Maintenance

? Pre-contemplation ?

Confidence gets it started . . .

**. . . and shame and
demoralization prevent action**

Finding Competence Building Confidence



“Love is seeing someone as they deserve to be seen, *as they really are* , not through the lens of the behaviors they have sometimes needed to display.”

Secure?

- Knowing that the person is not going anywhere
- Knowing that you are not reliant on their presence

Secure and Sustained





Giving Youth Control Over Their Decisions

Offer radical calmness, even amidst a chaotic reality, as a first step to helping youth access their thinking powers and compassionate natures

- **Co-regulation**
 - Amygdala to amygdala communication
 - Key to de-escalation
 - Critical to anticipation
 - Key to allowing “Mother Teresa” to surface
- **Self-regulation is a skill to be developed**





Learning Not to Undermine Competence

- Talking in a way young people understand
- Recognizing the cognitive development of adolescence
- No more lectures!!!!!!
- No **hot** Communication

$$x = \sqrt[3]{2 + \frac{10}{3\sqrt{3}}} + \sqrt[3]{2 - \frac{10}{3\sqrt{3}}}$$

The World Happens to Me

or

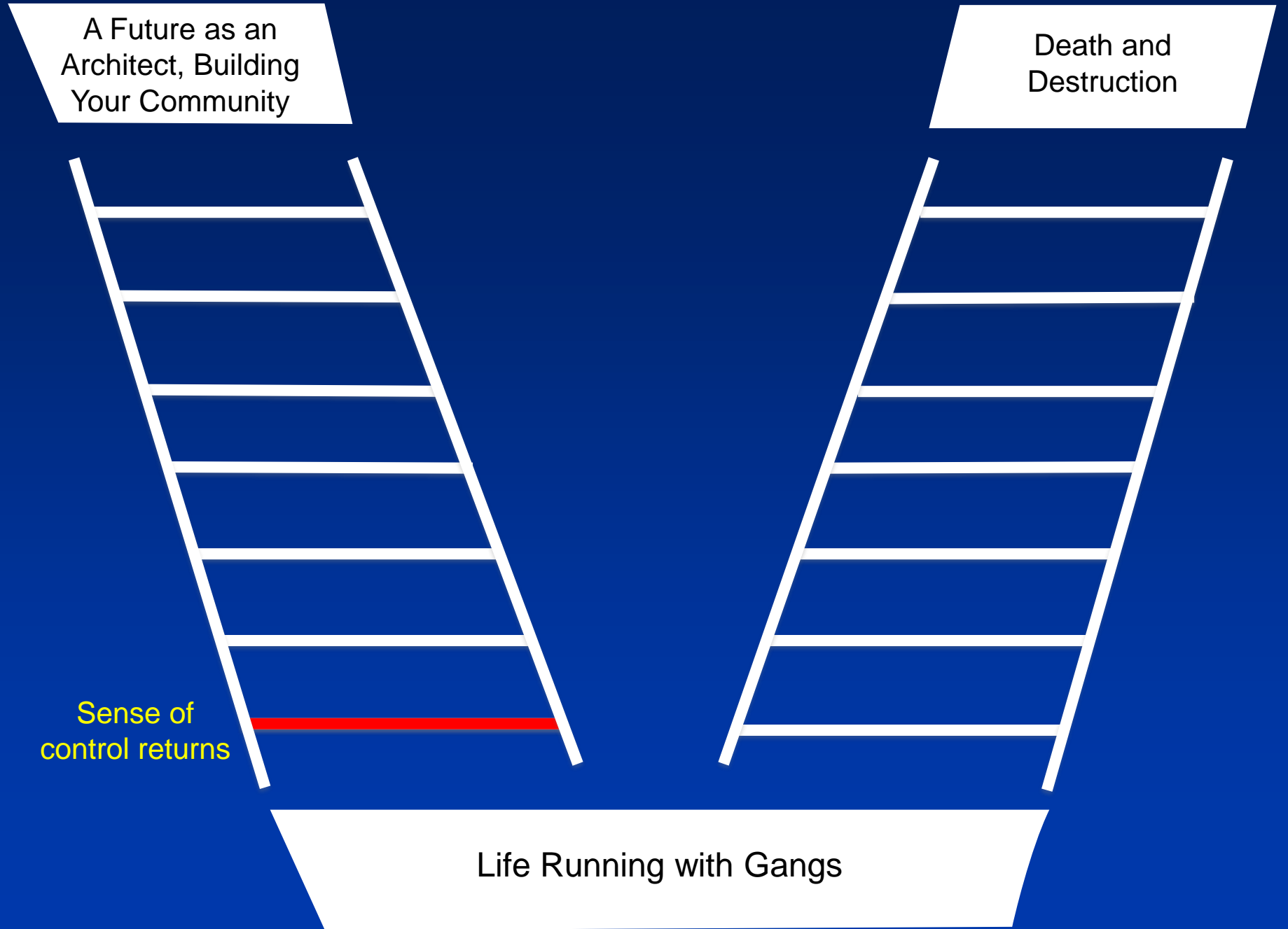
I control my Destiny

A Future as an
Architect, Building
Your Community

Death and
Destruction

Sense of
control returns

Life Running with Gangs



What we know about promoting self discipline
from the parenting research

Balancing Love, Warmth, and Monitoring

Parenting Style



Love, **warmth** and
responsiveness

Monitoring, **rules** and
boundaries

Rules



Warmth



↑ Warmth
↓ Rules
Permissive

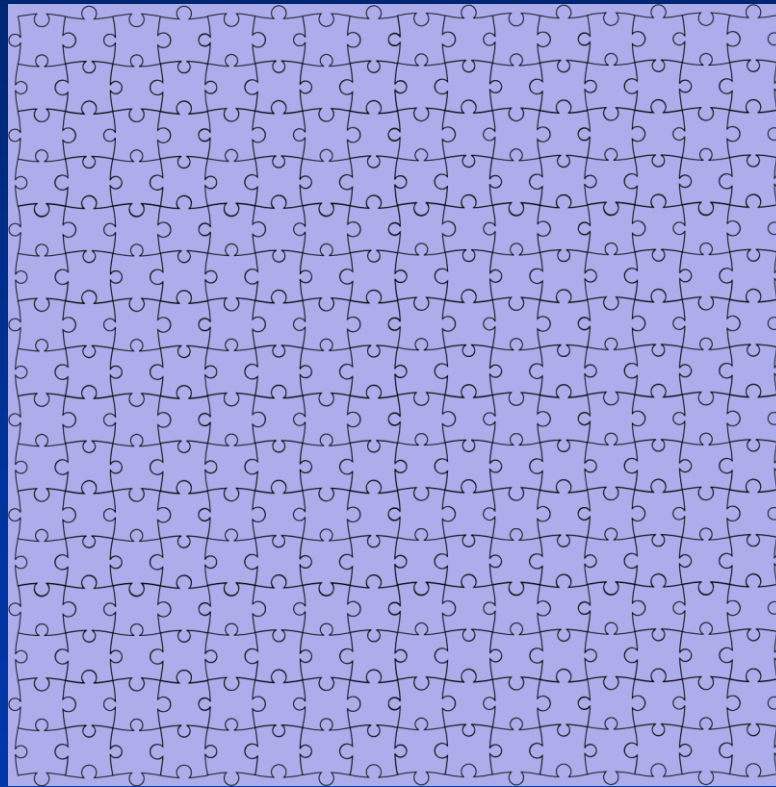
↑ Rules
↑ Warmth
Balanced

↓ Rules
↓ Warmth
Disengaged

↑ Rules
↓ Warmth
Authoritarian

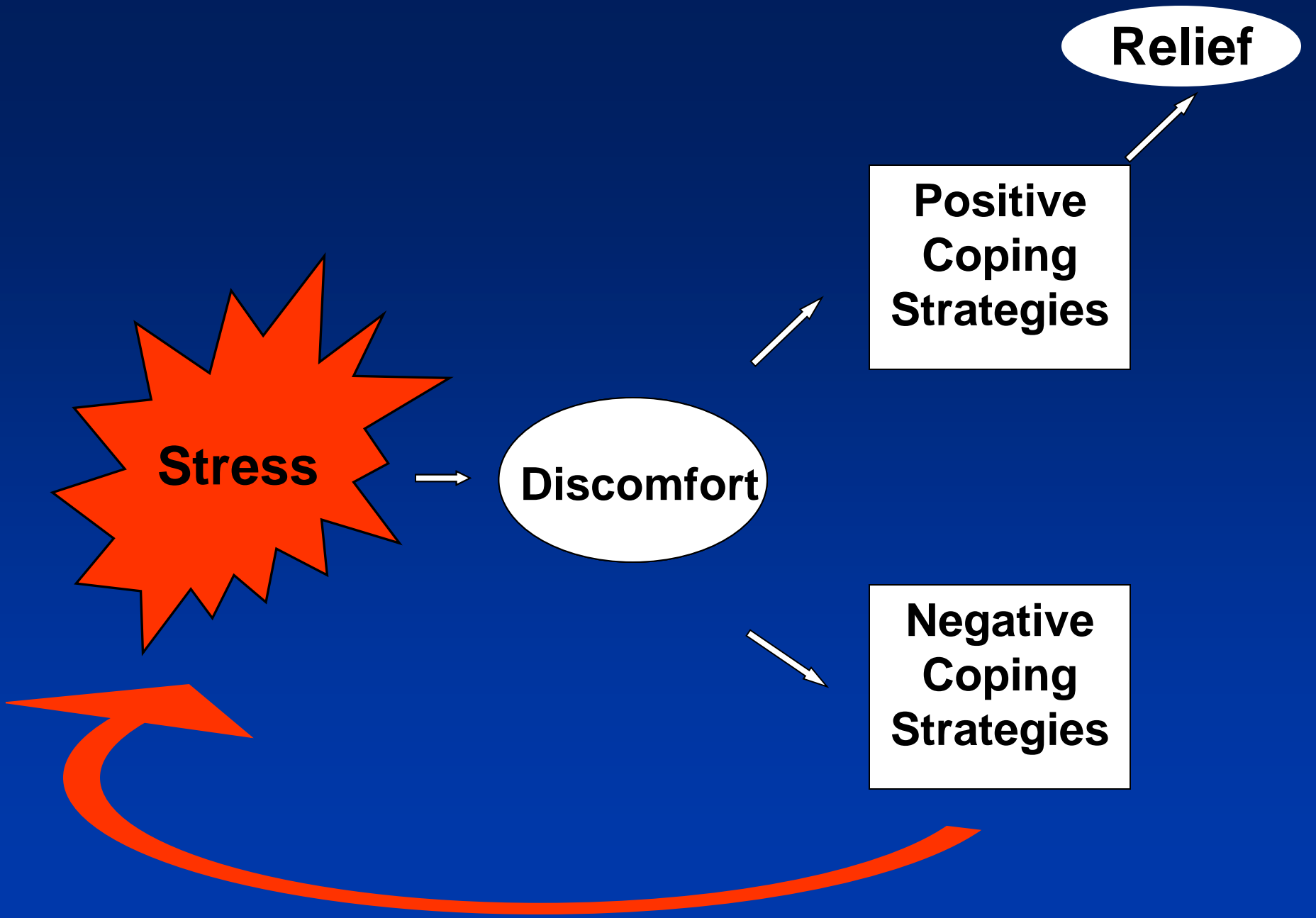
Effective Monitoring

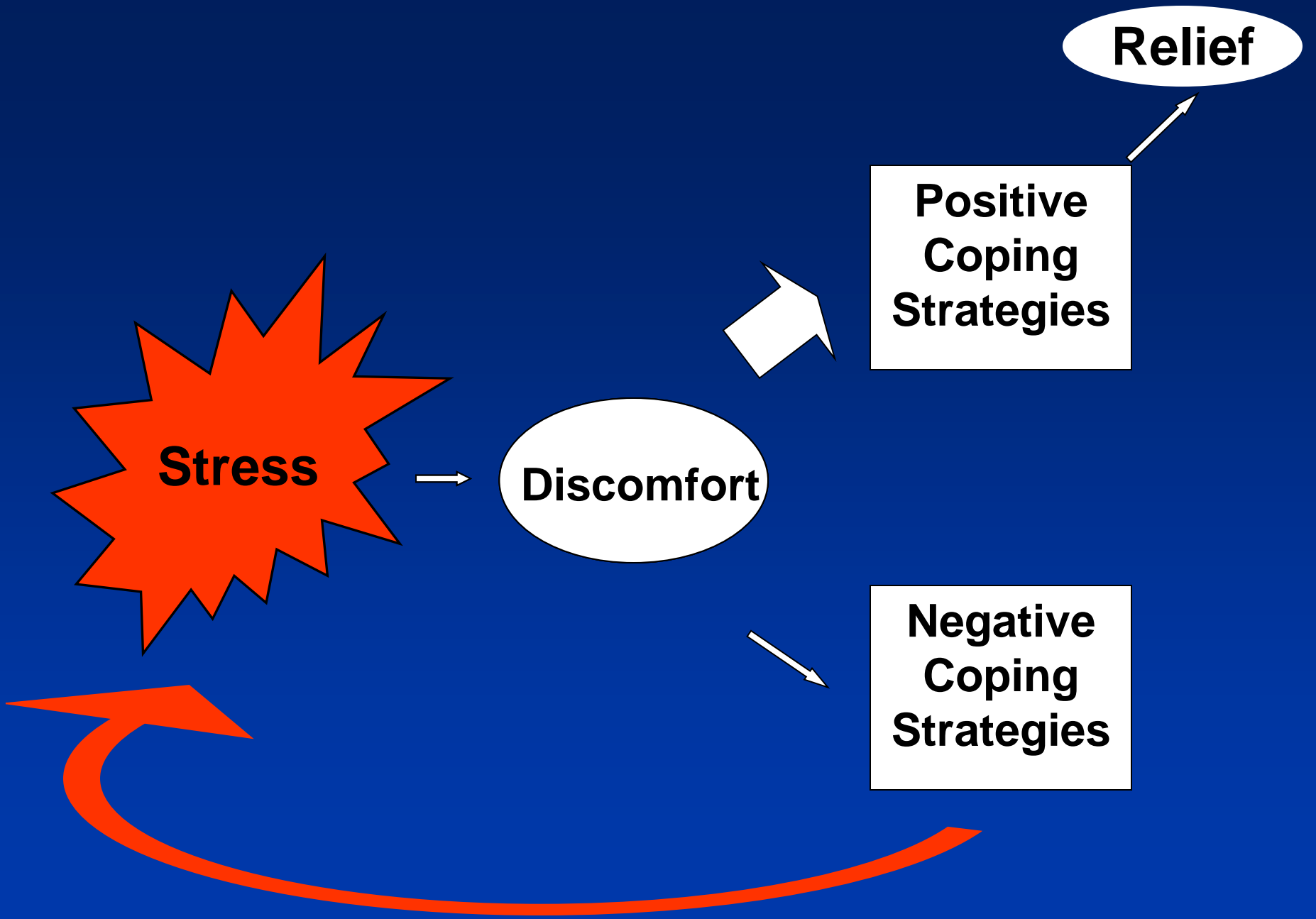
Knowing when to “jump in” and when to allow mistakes and recovery



Stress Management and Resilience

- Is about learning to cope, in a positive way with life's inevitable stressors
- We do our greatest good by equipping youth with a wide range of coping strategies
- People who can choose positive coping strategies gain control





Connection is the most important
coping strategy

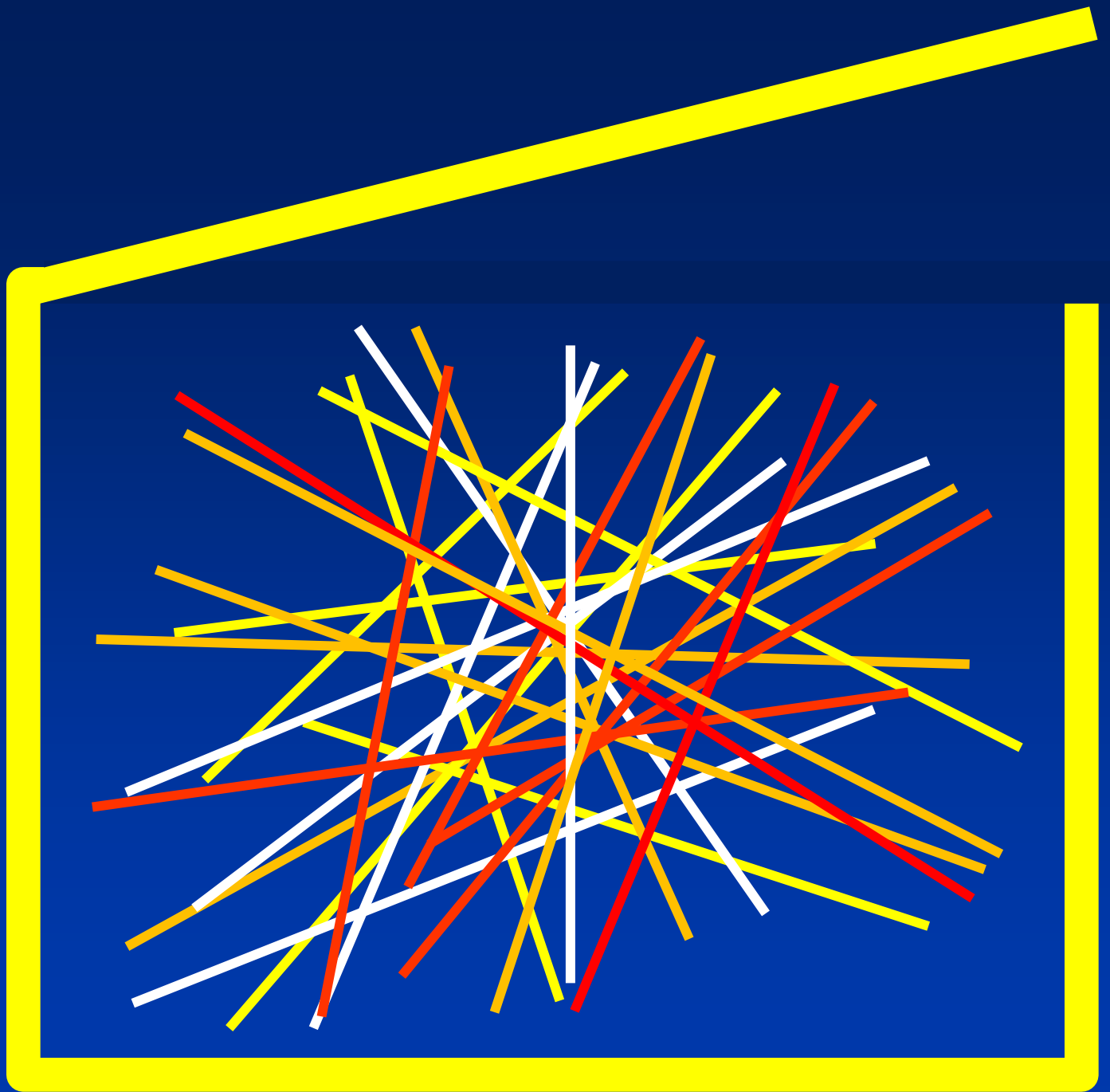
Defining the Stressor

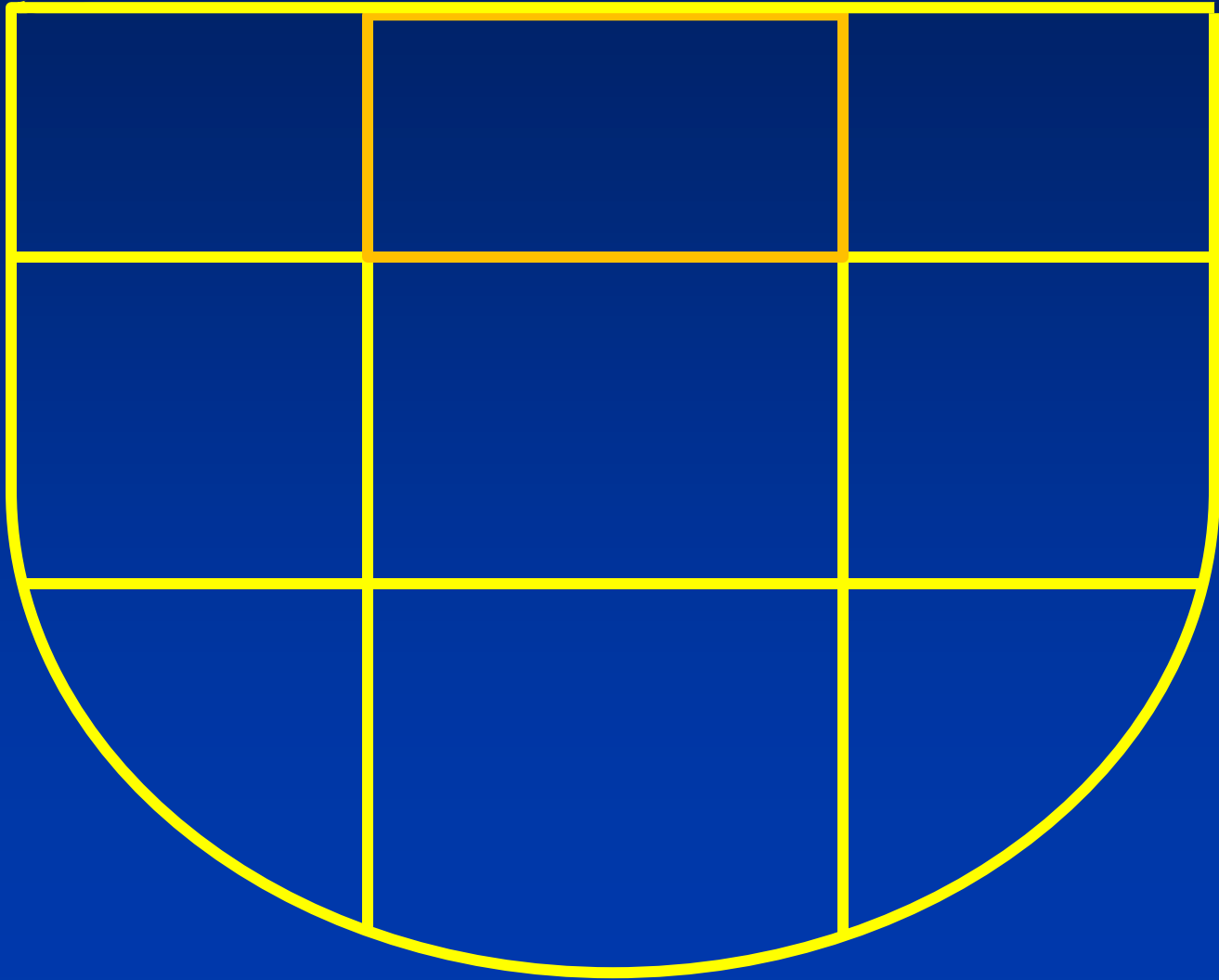
Distinguishing Paper Tigers from Real Tigers

Knowing When Bad Things are Temporary

Knowing When Good Things are Permanent

The Worst thing is not to be
stressed . . . it is to be **NUMB**







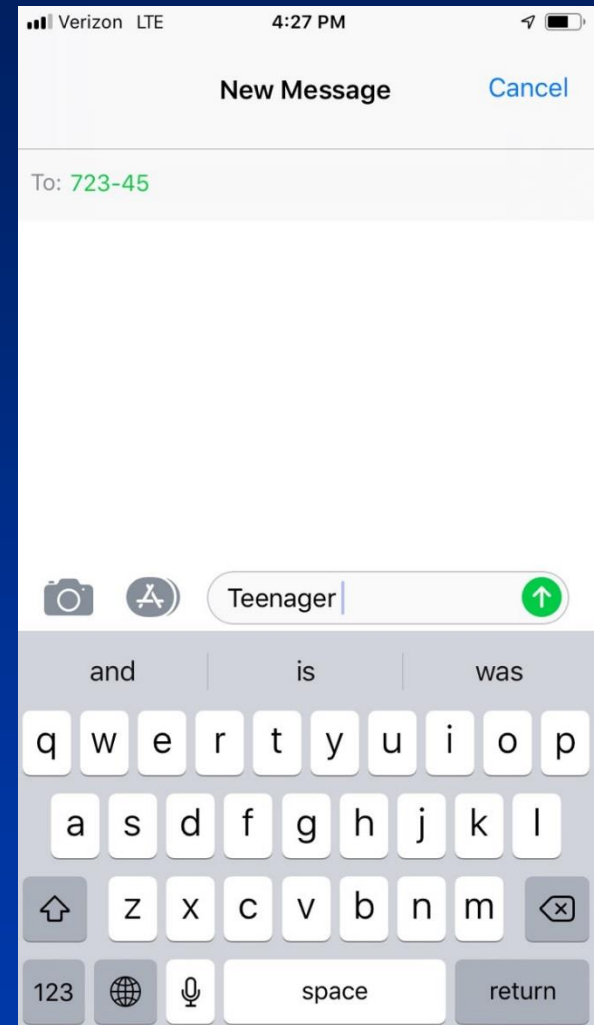
CENTER FOR PARENT & TEEN
COMMUNICATION
strengthening family connections

www.parentandteen.com

Join the movement. Act now!

**Text
teenager
to 72345**

**Together, we can change the way
society sees teens.**



Caring for the Caregiver

Protecting the Grandmas and Grandpas



Boundaries

Not the easy stuff. How do you love and still remain whole?

- Knowing our buttons
- Being trauma-informed
- Knowing who is the expert
- Avoiding the rescue fantasy
- Giving control back
- How much do we share?
- How much do we give to each youth?
- I or We?

One last breath . . .

“The little man’s almost done!”

How will we judge our success?

(not in ways that are easy to measure!!!)

- Through easy measurements: grades, jobs, graduations, suspension rates.
- By proving adolescents are capable of healing from trauma
- By helping our young people experience that people are worthy of trust
- By helping our young people know they are worthy of being loved

How will we judge our success?

- By making it so our young people can feel again
- By creating the kind of environment where staff never forgets how to feel
- By creating schools and communities that are *really* safer
- By launching **ALL** young people into adulthood knowing they are ok . . . Just the way they really *are*



Critical Thought

Even as we celebrate all that is good and right about people who have been through some of the greatest challenges, we must not imply that challenges are “good for you.”

Development occurs best in the context of safe, secure, sustained , and nurturant relationships. Our goal is to have every young person benefit from those protective forces starting at very young ages and lasting throughout their development.



