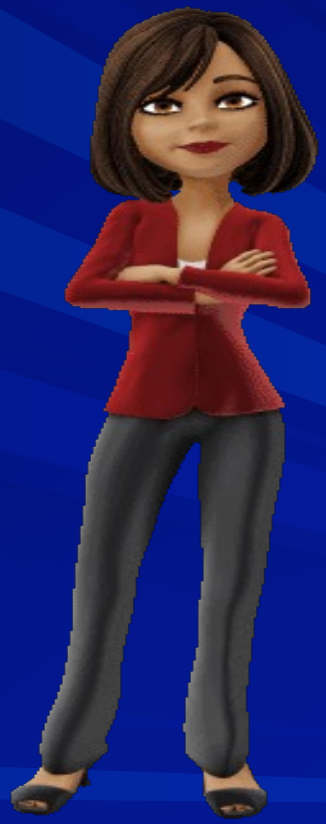
Coping Abilities Children need (And How to Ensure They Get Them)

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Can I really do any good here? How?



Core questions

- What abilities to children need to adjust successfully?
- What will help them get there?
- How is this relevant to my role?
- What can I do?

Focus on:

- What is the child learning about how to deal with the world?
- Is that lesson healthy?
- How can we promote the child's development?
- Is an expected benefit being poisoned or interfered with?
- *Almost anything can be poisoned*

Essential Relationship Abilities

- Understanding experiences accurately
- Identifying and expressing independent feelings
- Differentiating between own and others' feelings
- Healthy problem solving
- Resolution of past experiences

VIDEO



Courtesy: Ohio State University Extension 2012



"She hurt me so I will be angry forever."

Healthy Cognitive Abilities Include..

- Realistic appraisal of control
- Understandable connections between statements
- Ability to recognize danger
- Reality testing
- Ability to consider possibilities

I have lots of friends.
I'm in a club every day after school and next year I'm running for class President.



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I really hate my Dad because he won't let me move to New York with Mom…no, I won't miss my friends at all.



“Why are you asking me all these stupid questions? Don’t you believe me?”



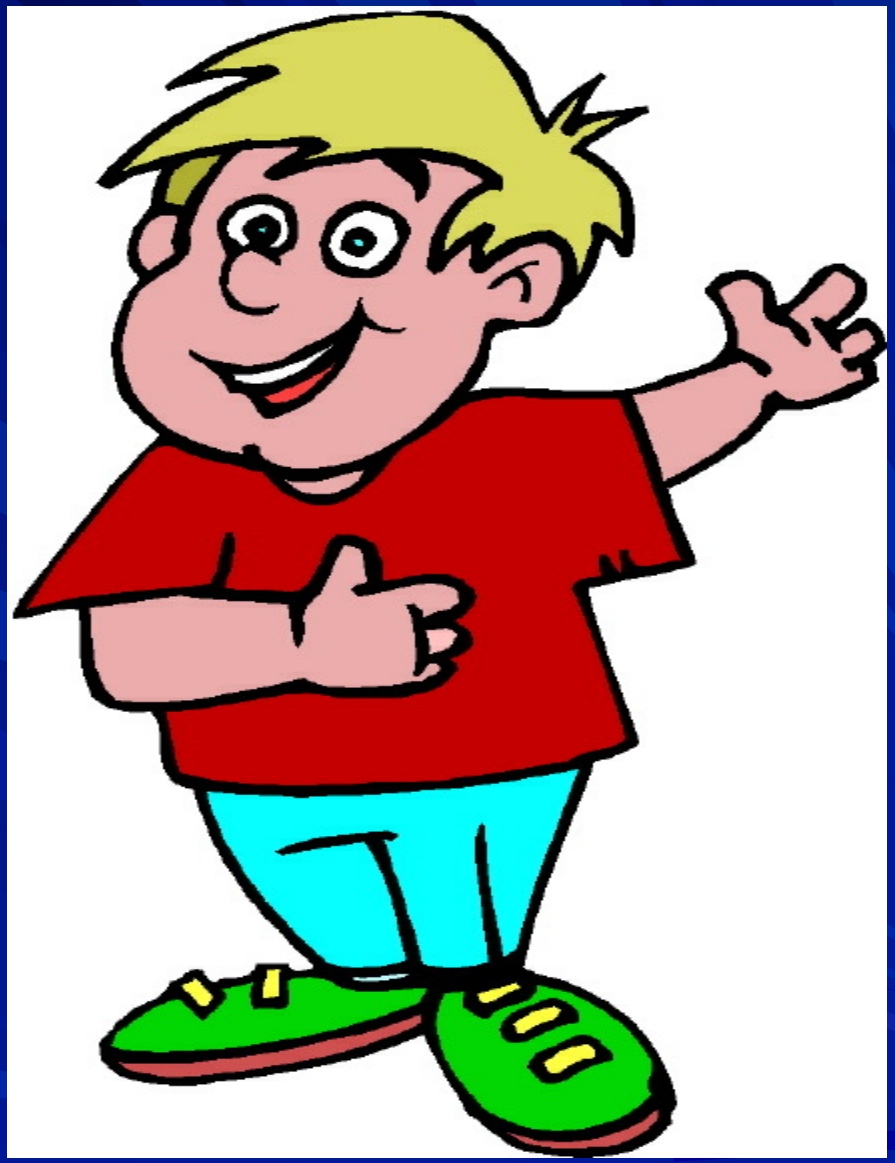
Managing Emotions and Stress

- Active coping
- Recognizing triggers and strategies
- Ability to ask for help
- Rule-governed behavior
- Dealing with parents' limitations and conflicting feelings
- Mind-body connections

My feelings are too dangerous to tolerate…



“When I get scared or nervous I can listen to my phone app.”



So What Do We Do?

- Reframing our focus
- If a problem/dispute comes to us, *ask what's being done about it*
- Attention to daily functioning
- The uber-reasonable request
- What happens when a solution is suggested?
- Resources from child's daily lives

For Example…

- Jeremy, age 11, has played soccer for four years.
- His parents, Jack and Dottie, separated 18 months ago.
- Both parents supported this activity in the past, although Dottie believes that Jeremy should also take music lessons as he has a talent for the guitar and is tired of soccer. Jack has been an assistant coach for the soccer team
- Jeremy's parents share custody on a 2-2-5-5 parenting plan

…For Example…

- Cooperation around soccer has become more difficult lately, as there are frequent changes in the practice and game schedule. Dottie agreed to Jeremy's participation last year but states that Jack signed Jeremy up for the current season without her permission and that Jeremy doesn't want to play soccer this year.
- Dottie feels that her parenting time is being infringed upon and has not taken Jeremy to all of his practices. She has signed him up for guitar lessons on her custodial days.

…For Example…

- Jeremy's soccer play has deteriorated in recent months, which Jack blames on the fact that Jeremy does not make it to all of his practices. The parents have had several arguments on the sidelines at practices and games
- Jeremy regularly tells his father that he likes soccer and wants to attend every practice. He tells his mother that he'd rather play the guitar
- Two of Jeremy's friends on the team have noticed his absences and asked Jeremy about them. Jeremy has stated that he wasn't feeling well on those days.

…For Example…

- At the urging of Jeremy's coach, the parents went to mediation and agreed that Jeremy would finish out this soccer season and that each parent would be present only at practices that fell on their own custodial days
- Jeremy continues to intermittently resist attending soccer games and practices. He has at various times said that he's no longer good enough for the team, that he's stopped enjoying soccer and only goes because his friends are there, or that he's not feeling well.

…For Example…

- Jeremy reports that he enjoys playing the guitar at his mother's house but doesn't have a guitar at his father's house
- Dottie has asked Jack to purchase a guitar for his home so that Jeremy can play it when he wishes; Jack has declined to do so as he feels that the activity is "not legitimate" because of how Dottie scheduled it
- Jack has been "drilling" Jeremy in soccer skills to "make up for" the missed practices
- Jeremy intermittently tells each parent that he dislikes his time with the other parent or doesn't want to go

…For Example…

- Jack believes it's very important for Jeremy to continue to participate in organized sports, and plans to sign Jeremy up for tackle football next year. He has volunteered to be the assistant coach.
- Dottie is strongly opposed to signing Jack up for tackle football. She states that Jack had a head injury when he was younger and "had his bell rung" after doing too hard of a "header" in soccer last year. She believes that Jack has overemphasized sports and that Jeremy needs an opportunity to develop in other areas.
- She is open to some athletic activity as long as Jack isn't the coach, which she perceives as Jack's need for "domination and control" over all aspects of Jeremy's life

…For Example…

- Jeremy is now contradicting himself constantlyack believes it's very important for Jeremy to continue to participate in organized sports, and plans to sign Jeremy up for tackle football next year. He has volunteered to be the assistant coach.
- Dottie is strongly opposed to signing Jack up for tackle football. She states that Jack had a head injury when he was younger and "had his bell rung" after doing too hard of a "header" in soccer last year. She believes that Jeremy has overemphasized sports and that Jack needs an opportunity to develop in other areas.
- Jeremy intermittently tells each parent that he dislikes his time with the other parent or doesn't want to go

…For Example…

- Jeremy's grades are slipping, and he is increasingly complaining of stomach aches and headaches before soccer practices and due dates for school projects.
- Each parent has filed an ex parte application seeking sole control of Jeremy's activities. The court has denied the motions as non-urgent, but has appointed minor's counsel…

Start with Some Basic Questions…

- What are the issues in this family?
- What are the risks to Jeremy's development?
- How is he coping?
- What resources are available?
- What would professional collaboration look like?
- Within my role, what can I do?

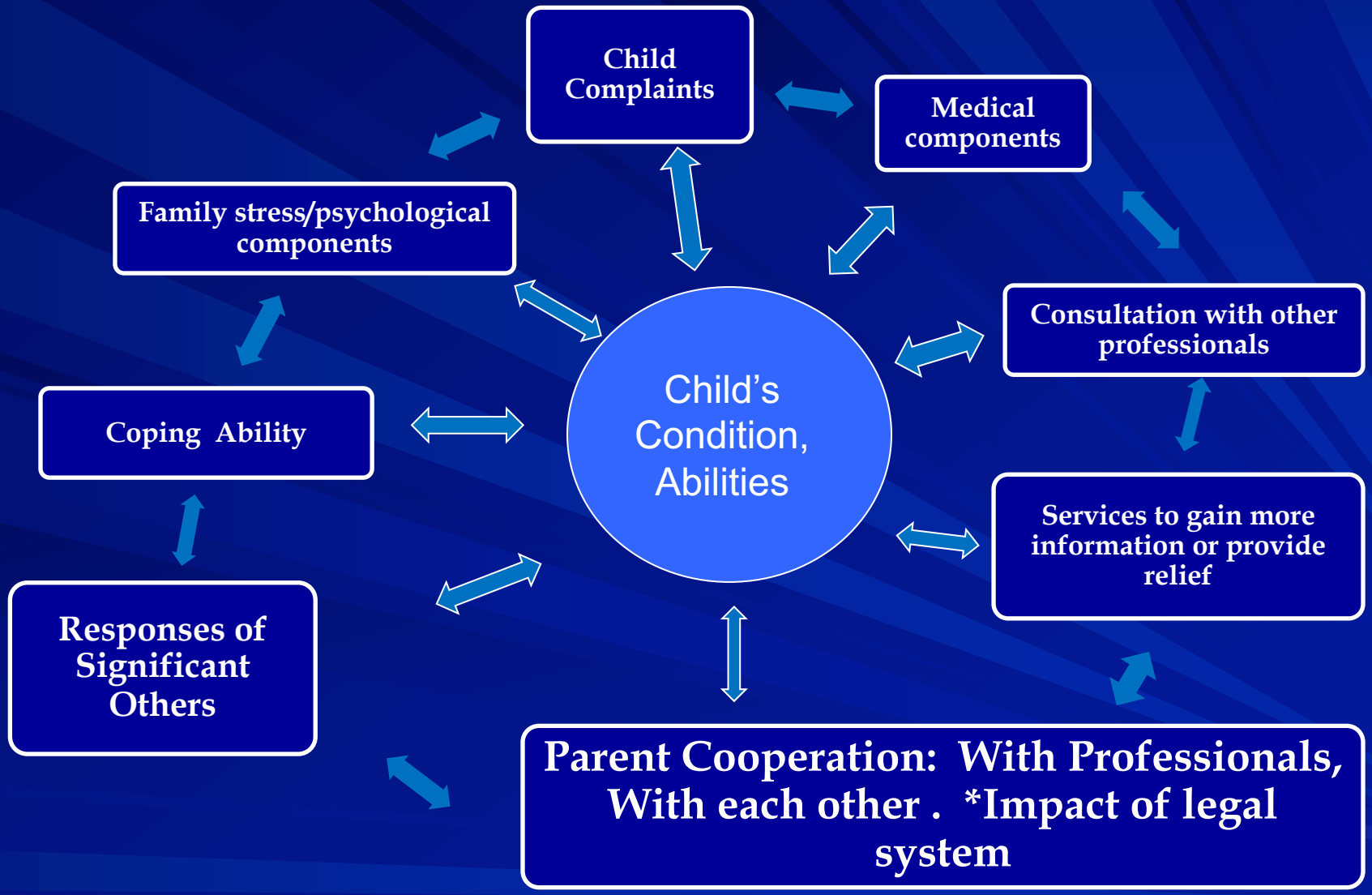
Implications for Interventions

- Almost anything can be weaponized
- Risks to interpersonal resources for the child
- How are problems being defined?



Courtesy of Benjamin Garber, Ph.D.


PAR A CONCERNS
PAR B CONCERNS


Child Complaints
Medical components
Family stress/psychological components
Consultation with other professionals
Child's Condition, Abilities
Coping Ability
Services to gain more information or provide relief
Responses of Significant Others
Parent Cooperation: With Professionals, With each other . *Impact of legal system

What Can The Court Order?

- Decision-making power: Health, Education, Religion, etc. (FC §3003)
- Custodial Schedule (FC §3004, §3022, §3100, et seq.)
- Contact with 3rd Parties (FC §3100, et seq., §6200, et seq)
- Therapy/Classes (FC §3190, ~ §3200)
- Counsel for the Minor (FC §3150, et seq.)

Role of MC

- The role is to gather facts relevant to the custody and visitation dispute.
- Counsel must provide independent representation for the child.
- They act as the child's advocate in proceedings.

What a MC must do

- Minor's counsel is required to meet with the child.
- They must assess information from various sources, including interviews with parents, relatives, and others.
- Counsel should review court files and other relevant records.
- They are to present factual evidence and legal arguments to the court.
- Counsel should also relay the child’s wishes to the court unless it's not in the child's best interests.
- They must participate in court proceedings and provide legal counsel to the child.

How to be MC

- Conduct an independent investigation
- Interview parties
- Review documents
- Present information to the court
- Relaying Preference
- Participate in proceedings
- ”Reporting to the Court”
- COLLABORATE WITH PROFESSIONALS

CRC 5.242(k)

Counsel is not required to assume the responsibilities of a social worker, probation officer, child custody evaluator, or mediator and is not expected to provide nonlegal services to the child.

CRC 5.242(k)(4)

Conduct thorough, continuing, and independent investigations and discovery to protect the child's interest, which may include:

- (D) Contacting attorneys for the parties and nonlawyer guardians ad litem, Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs), and other service professionals, to the extent permitted by local rule, for background information
- (E) Contacting and meeting with the child's parents, legal guardians, or caretakers, with permission of their attorneys
- (F) Interviewing witnesses and individuals involved with the child, including school personnel, child welfare caseworkers, foster parents and other caretakers, neighbors, relatives, coaches, clergy, mental health professionals, physicians, law enforcement officers, and other potential witnesses
- (I) Monitoring compliance with court orders as appropriate, including the provision for and effectiveness of any court-ordered services

Challenges with Legal Professionals

- Diagnosing clients
- Making unsupported recommendations
- Bias toward child
- Alignment with Adult
- Conflict with MHPs
- Bias toward the outcome

Designing Effective Orders

- Create context for the MHP
- Seek context-based orders
- Strictly monitor compliance.
- Mandate collaboration
- Create benchmarks


Development

Other Potential Providers, System Actors

Including, but not limited to….

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

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Which interventions?

- Parent education?
- Family therapy?
- Mediation?
- PC or Decision Maker?
- Individual therapy?

**Essential for evaluators to know strengths and weaknesses, professional collaboration critical

Systemic Therapy Goals

- Identify dysfunctional behaviors
- Provide tools
- Counter destructive messages
- Parent permission/responsibility process
- If you can't improve the dynamic
  - Help the child cope
  - Establish accountability

Seek Descriptions, Not Conclusions:

- Avoid asking children for conclusions, or to "keep score"
- Avoid "tunnel vision" on allegations
- Ask descriptive questions
- If the child volunteers conclusions, place them in developmental context
- Promote healthy coping abilities
- Realistic choices

Seek Descriptions, Not Conclusions:

- Anchor in information about daily routines and activities
- How are daily tasks accomplished?
- What are the rules?
- What's important that has nothing to do with the divorce?
- Watch for patterns

Key Elements

- Early Intervention
- "Relentless" focus on coping and adjustment
- Insist on connection between adult positions and child progress
- Education about the risks to the child and ways to reduce them

What Do we Want Children to Learn?

- *What do they think they're capable of?*
- *What possibilities do they see?*
- *What will they try?*
- *Do they believe their coping skills will work (efficacy) or help them?*
- *Attend to language*

How are they defining problems?

"I hate my Dad. He's making me visit him this weekend. Now I'm going to miss Amanda's party."



What Solutions do they see?

“No, I haven’t asked my Dad if he’d take me.”



He doesn't like Amanda. I think he's gaslighting me.



Everything Children Experience Sends A Message


I get good grades
because I’m really smart


I’m a Victim

I'm too traumatized to follow rules.





"If I'm not comfortable, I shouldn't have to do it."

OR..




I can use my words

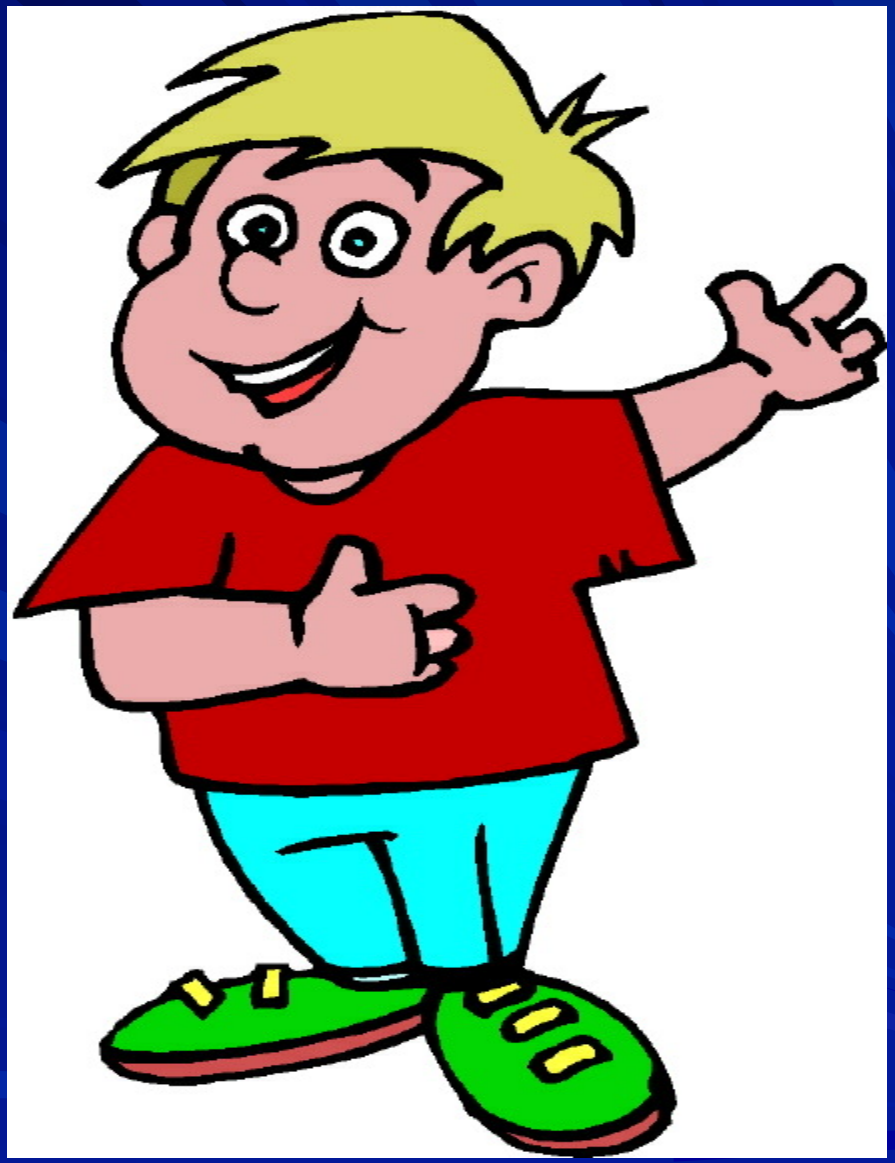

One step at a time


It's ok to
have fun
with….

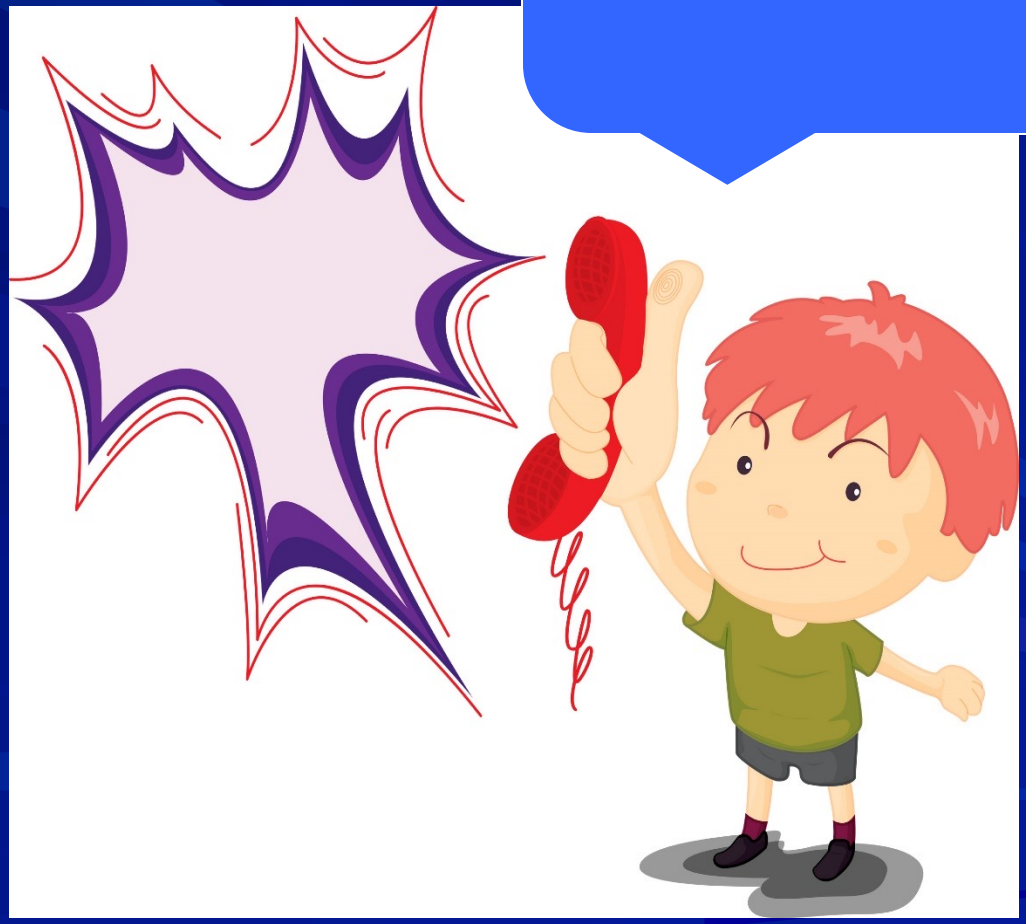

I CAN DO HARD
THINGS


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"

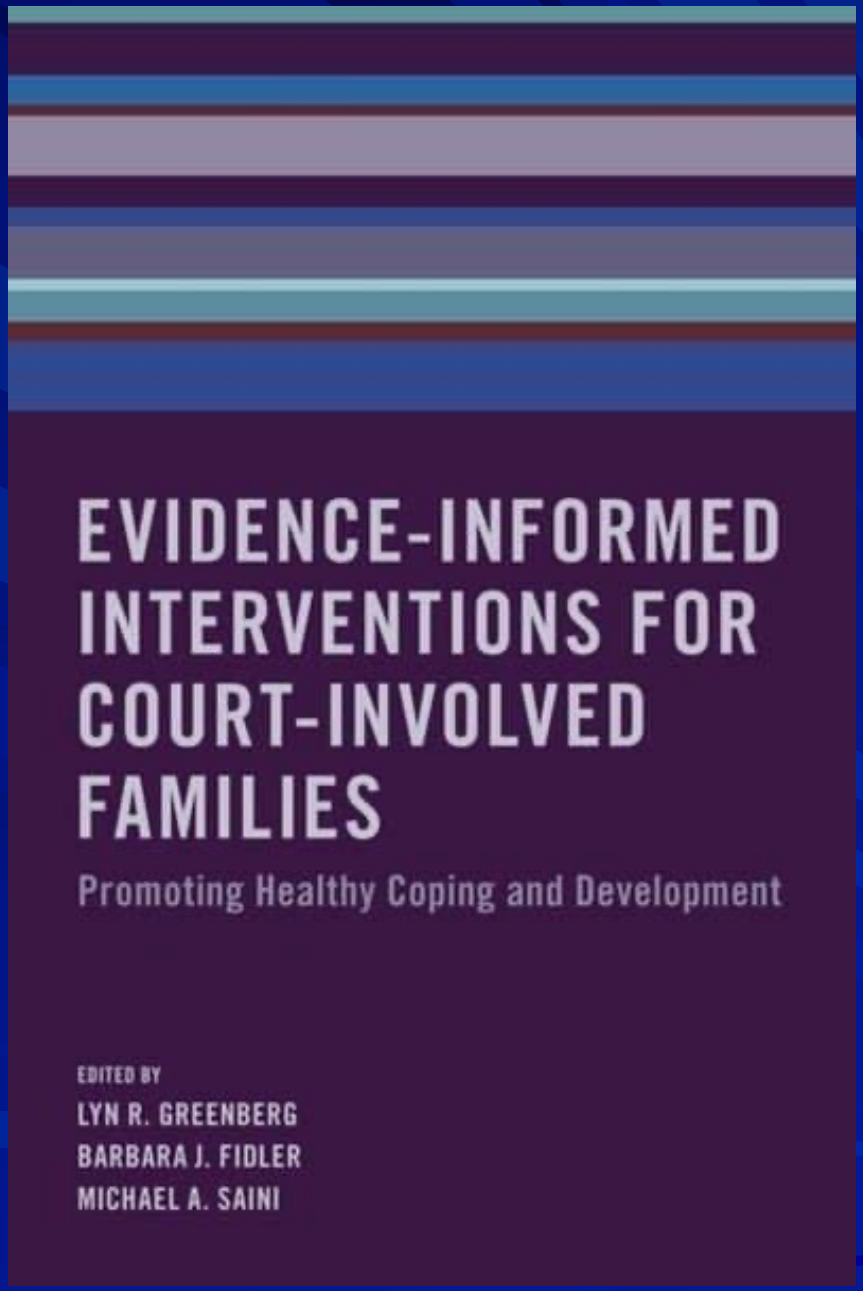

Everyone makes mistakes

Remember this picture…and watch what happens



Courtesy, University of Washington
Institute for Learning and Brain sciences


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& BRAIN
SCIENCES
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EVIDENCE-INFORMED INTERVENTIONS FOR COURT-INVOLVED FAMILIES
Promoting Healthy Coping and Development
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