



Improving Communication with Clients from Diverse Socio-Economic Backgrounds*

Presentation to Judicial Council of Georgia Court Improvement Program March 18, 2022

***Based on the Bridges Out of Poverty Philosophy
Developed by Ruby K. Payne & Phil DeVol**

Improving Communication with Clients from Diverse Socio-Economic Backgrounds*



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STORY PEOPLE STORY OF THE DAY



Lets not get
Started on how
messed up
everything is.
Actually, nevermind.
Let's.



La La La
everything
is on fire.

"talking about the problem"
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story by gabe! andrews
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Presentation Context for the Role of Parent Attorneys

Georgia Ethics and Professionalism Rules

- RULE 2.1 ADVISOR
- In representing a client, a lawyer shall exercise independent professional judgment and render candid advice. A lawyer should not be deterred from giving candid advice by the prospect that the advice will be unpalatable to the client.



...[2] In rendering advice, a lawyer may refer not only to law but to other considerations such as ***moral, economic, social and political factors*** that may be relevant to the client's situation. Advice couched in narrowly legal terms may be of little value to a client, especially where practical considerations, such as cost or effects on other people, are predominant. Purely technical legal advice, therefore, can sometimes be inadequate. ***It is proper for a lawyer to refer to relevant moral and ethical considerations in giving advice.***

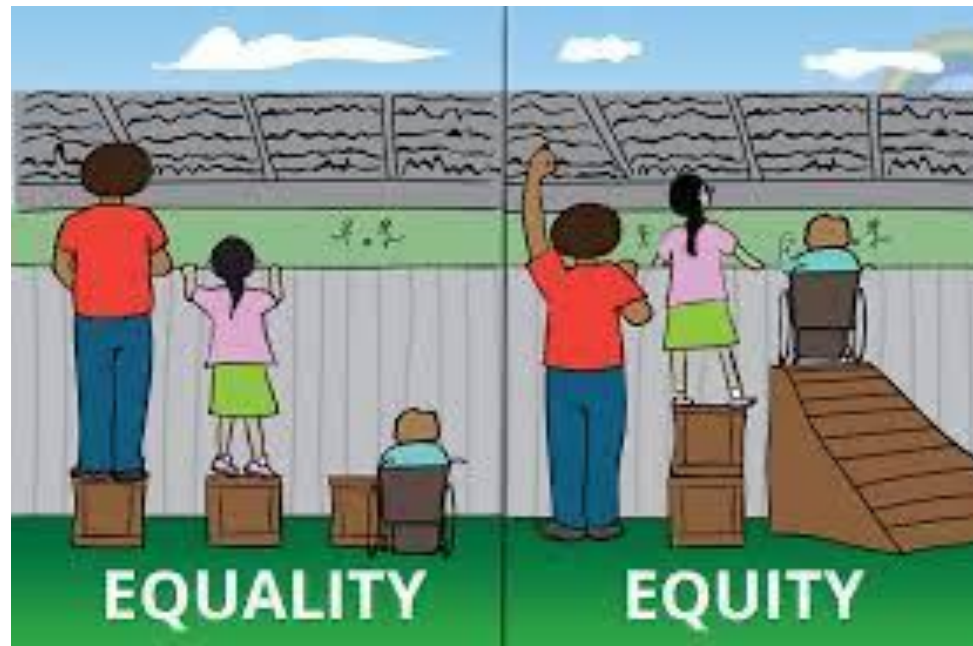


American Bar Association

- Standards of Practice for Attorneys Representing Parents in Abuse and Neglect Cases (2006)
- With regard to the Relationship with the Client:
- ...15. Act in a ***culturally competent manner and with regard to the socioeconomic position of the parent throughout all aspects of representation***
- Action: The parent's attorney should learn about and understand the client's background, determine how that has an impact on the client's case, and always show the parent respect. The attorney must understand how cultural and socioeconomic differences impact interaction with clients and must interpret the client's words and actions accordingly.

For additional context consider these definitions

the state of being equal, especially in status, rights and opportunities



the quality of being fair and impartial; referring to fairness and justice

And, Inclusion:

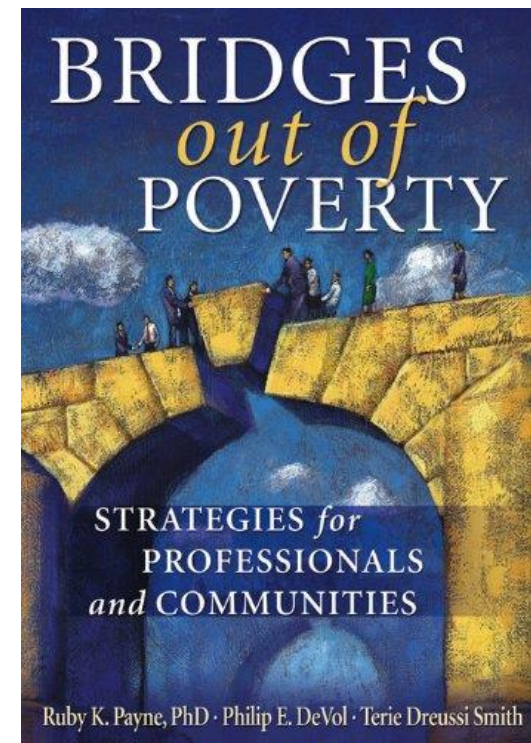
1. the action or state of including or of being included; feeling respected and feeling like you belong and are valued
2. giving equal access to opportunities and resources for people who might otherwise be excluded or who have previously been excluded





**So. . .with these professional rules
along with a few clarifying definitions. . .**

**Considering aspects of the
Bridges Out of Poverty Constructs
may prove helpful as parent
attorneys interact with clients**



- Key Constructs of Bridges Out of Poverty Philosophy
 1. Use the lens of economic background of your client to understand and take responsibility for your own societal experience while being open to the experiences of others.
 2. At the intersections of poverty with other social disparities (racial, gender, physical ability, age, etc.), address inequalities in terms of ***access to resources***.
 3. Define poverty as the extent to which a person lives without certain resources.

4. Build relationships of mutual respect.
5. Base case plans on the premise that all people are problem solvers and need to be at the decision-making table when it comes to matters affecting their lives.

- **Bridges Out of Poverty is a philosophy that looks at individuals through the lens of Economic Class not Social Class. . .**
 - **Social Class is based on opinions and is judgmental**
 - **Economic Class is based on facts and is non-judgmental**
 - **You either have or you do not have**
 - **And for those that do not have, they are. . .**

under-resourced

For the purposes of this presentation, we will look at the *three economic classes*:

- **Poverty/preferable Under-Resourced Class**
- **Middle Class**
- **Wealth Class**

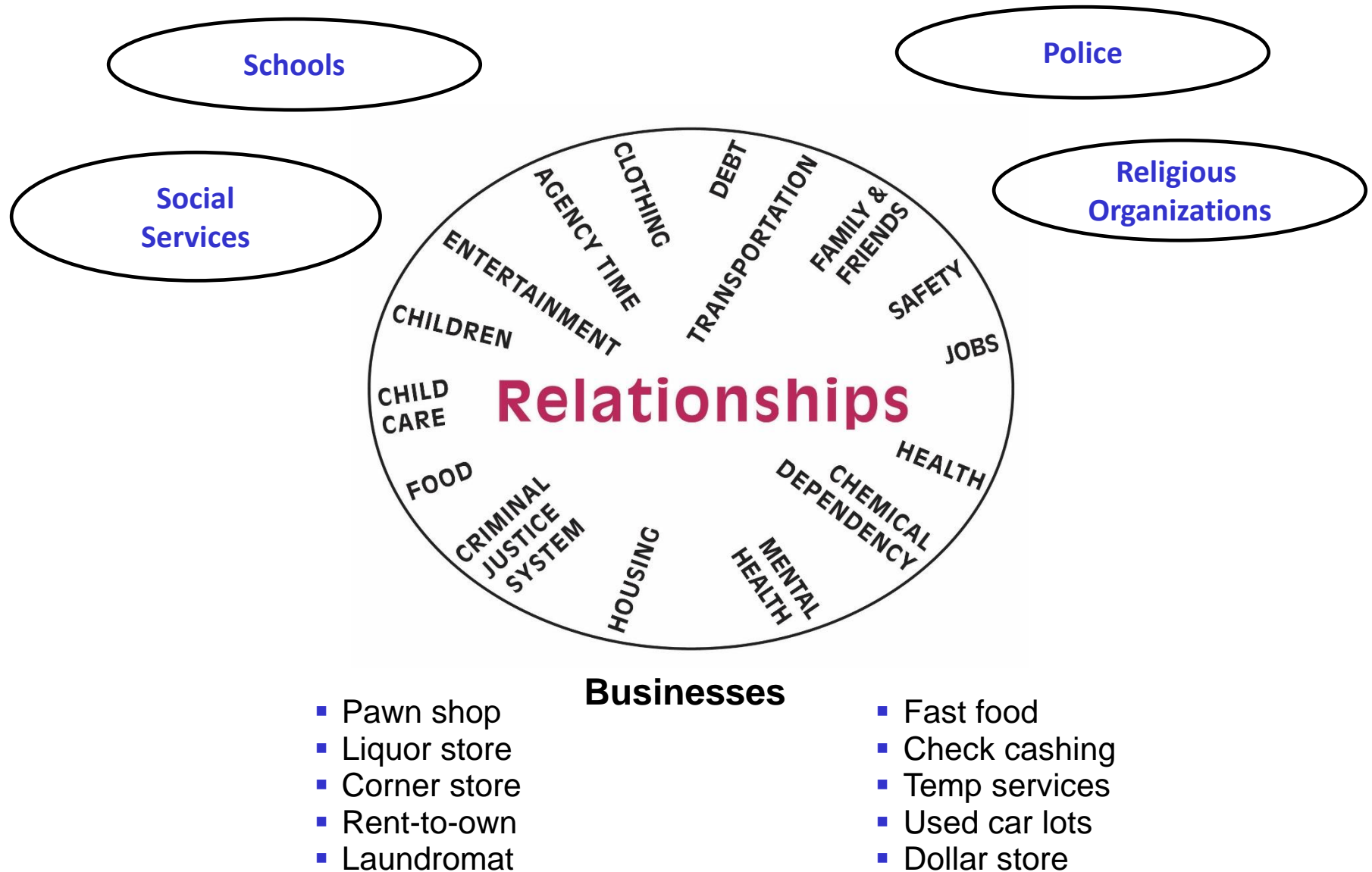
And we will do this through Mental Models

Using Mental Models

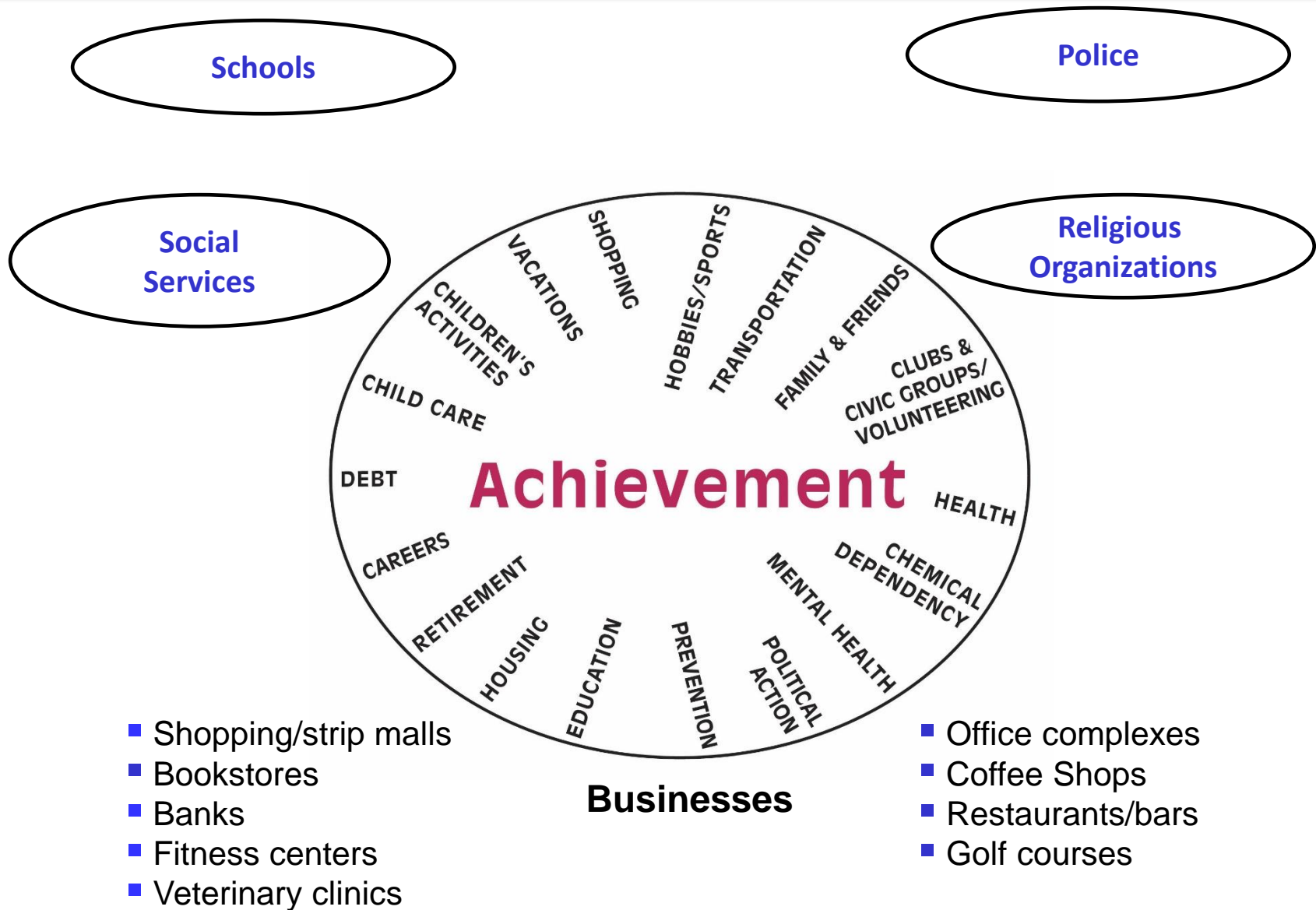
PURPOSE

Pictures, diagrams, illustrations that help us understand complex (or hard to understand) ideas and concepts; to move from abstract (in our mind, but cannot touch with our hands or see with our eyes) ideas to concrete plans (things you can see and touch).

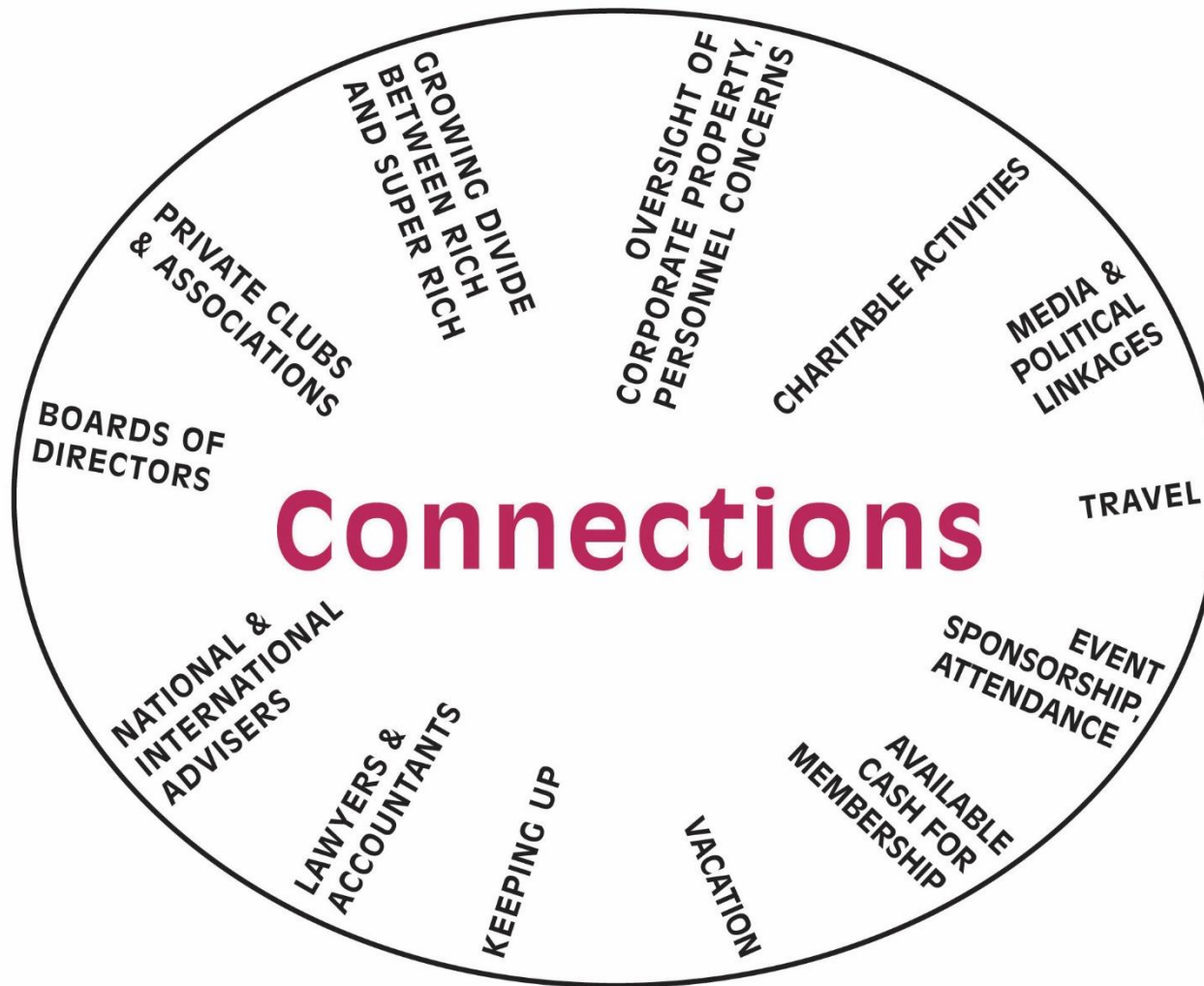
Mental Model for Under-Resourced



Mental Model for Middle Class



Mental Model for Wealth



Developed by Ruby Payne (2005)

- **For those of us in Middle Class who work with under-resourced individuals in poverty, changing our perspective or the lens through which we look at our clients is helpful to not only our client, but our own selves**
 - **Therefore, if we view our clients as being “under-resourced”, once we help them connect to the resources they need, success is more likely,**
- however. . .**

**No significant
learning (change)
occurs without a
significant
relationship.**

“The R Rules” Formula

Adapted from Bridges & Getting Ahead

$$\mathbf{R - R - R = R + R}$$

**Rules - Relationship – Respect =
Rebellion + Resentment**

$$\mathbf{R + R + R = R + R + R}$$

**Rules + Relationship + Respect = Resources
+ Rigor + Results**

**Relationships of Mutual Respect Produce
Resources, Effort and Results**

Think About This:

**People who are in poverty/under-resourced,
are laser-focused on the present:**

- **How do I put food on the table—TODAY!**
- **How do I pay my bills—TODAY!**
- **How do I take care of my family—TODAY!**

They become trapped in the. . .

“Tyranny of the Moment”

They have no future story. . .

Think About This:

**Having a Future orientation
(viewpoint or perspective)**

Gives you

Choice and Power

over your life

What is your future story?

Elain's Experiential Theory

**If I feel I have no future story,
i.e. nothing to lose, no hope,
Then, I have little motivation
to do better & punitive
measures are not an effective
deterrent.**

Experiential Theory

However. . .

Walking along side such a person in a mutually respectful relationship, helping instill in them that they can have a future story through learning new skills, gaining resources and making better decisions will get positive results.

$$\mathbf{R + R = R + R}$$

**Rules plus relationship equals resources
plus rigor (effort)**

**No significant
learning (change)
occurs without a
significant
relationship.**

Definition of Hidden Rules

A "***hidden rule***" is a method of interacting that is common to a group of people. Unwritten, unspoken cues of a class or culture.

Why They Are Important to Know

Understanding how hidden rules of class can be used helps you to access resources

TIME

POVERTY

Present most important
Decisions made for the moment
based on feelings or survival

MIDDLE CLASS

Future most important
Decisions made against
future ramifications

WEALTH

Traditions and history most important
Decisions made partially on basis of
tradition/decorum



POWER

POVERTY

Power linked to personal respect
Ability to fight
Can't stop bad things from happening



MIDDLE CLASS

Power/respect separated
Responds to position
Power in information and institutions

WEALTH

Power in expertise, connections
Power in stability
Influences policy and direction

MONEY

POVERTY

To be used, spent



MIDDLE CLASS

To be managed

WEALTH

To be conserved, invested

WORLDVIEW



POVERTY

Sees world in terms of local setting

MIDDLE CLASS

Sees world in terms of national setting

WEALTH

Sees world in terms of international view

DRIVING FORCES



POVERTY

Survival, relationships,
entertainment

MIDDLE CLASS

Work, achievement,
material security

WEALTH

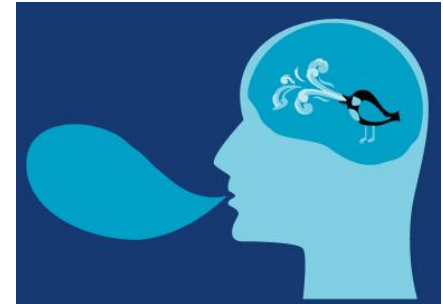
Financial, political, social connections

LANGUAGE

POVERTY

Casual register

Language is about survival



MIDDLE CLASS

Formal register

Language is about negotiation

WEALTH

Formal register

Language is about networking

Tones / Voices

Child

Defensive, victimized, emotional, whining, losing attitude, strongly negative non-verbal

- Quit picking on me.
- You made me do it.
- I hate you.



Parent

Authoritative, directive, judgmental, evaluative, win-lose mentality, demanding, punitive, sometimes threatening

- You shouldn't do that.
- Life's not fair. Get busy.



Adult

Non-judgmental, free of negative non-verbal, factual, often in question format, attitude of win-win

- In what ways able to resolve?
- What are choices in this situation?



Language

OBJECTIVES

1. **Our use of language can affect heavily how we are looked at by other people and influence our relationship with them**
2. **Understanding the differences about language will help us communicate better with all people regardless of their socio-economic status, culture, race, ethnicity**

REGISTERS OF LANGUAGE


REGISTER	EXPLANATION
FROZEN	Language that is always the same. For example: Lord's Prayer, wedding vows, etc.
FORMAL	The standard sentence syntax and word choice of work and school. Has complete sentences and specific word choices.
CONSULTATIVE	Formal register when used in conversation. Discourse pattern not quite as direct as formal register.
CASUAL	Language between friends and is characterized by a 400- to 800-word vocabulary. Word choice general and not specific. Conversation dependent upon nonverbal assists. Sentence syntax often incomplete.
INTIMATE	Language between lovers or twins. Language of sexual harassment.

Adapted from the work of Martin Joos

Research About Language in Children, Ages 1 to 4, in Stable Households by Economic Group

Number of words exposed to	Economic group	Affirmations (strokes)	Prohibitions (discounts)
13 million words	Welfare	1 for every	2
26 million words	Working class	2 for every	1
45 million words	Professional	6 for every	1


Source: *Meaningful Differences in the Everyday Experience of Young American Children*, (1995), by Betty Hart and Todd R. Risley.



Learning Task


Using a recent experience with someone, ***describe*** the use of ***language registers***, ***discourse pattern***, and ***story structure***.

Discuss what ***changes*** you may need to make to ***improve relationships*** and ***outcomes*** with people from different backgrounds.



Learning Task

Can You Code Switch?



Learning Task

Definition: The practice of moving back and forth between two languages or between two dialects or registers of the same language.

Why would this be useful?



What Can You Do to improve You and Your Family's Language Skills?

Language, Story Structure, and Cognition

1. Honor the register a person uses when you are meeting someone for the first time or have to interact with them, i.e. job interview, co-worker, child's teacher.
2. Try to avoid nonverbal communication.
3. Don't be put off by **middle class "noise"**, ask more questions if you don't understand something.
4. Talk frequently to your children, help them expand their vocabularies (remember: birth to five years of age, very critical)
5. When you realize the use of casual register has put someone off, try to restate your words to resolve the conflict that may have resulted.

DEFINITION OF RESOURCES

To better understand
people in poverty,
the definition of poverty
we will use is:

***“the extent to which an individual
does without resources.”***

The resources are the following ...

DEFINITION OF RESOURCES

FINANCIAL

Being able to purchase the goods and services of that class and sustain it.

EMOTIONAL

Being able to choose and control emotional responses, particularly to negative situations, without engaging in self-destructive behavior. Shows itself through choices.

MENTAL

Having the mental abilities and acquired skills (reading, writing, computing) to deal with daily life.

SPIRITUAL

Believing in (divine) purpose and guidance.

DEFINITION OF RESOURCES – Cont'd

PHYSICAL

Having physical health and mobility.

SUPPORT SYSTEMS

Having friends, family, and backup resources available to access in times of need. These are external resources.

RELATIONSHIPS/ROLE MODELS

Having frequent access to adult(s) who are appropriate, *nurturing*, and who do not engage in destructive behavior.

KNOWLEDGE OF HIDDEN RULES

Knowing the unspoken cues and habits of a group.



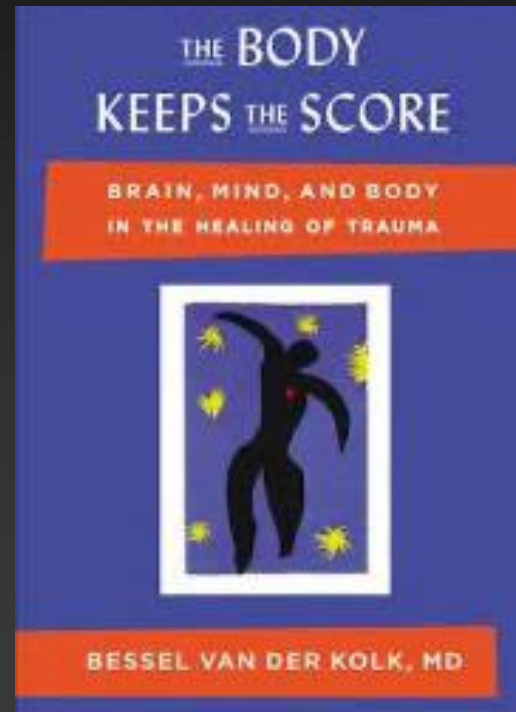
Some Louisiana Lagniappe. . .

**(Definition: something
given or obtained gratuitously
or by way of good measure;
any extra or unexpected
benefit.)**

Trauma & Your Clients

Required Reading: The Body Keeps the Score - by Bessel Van Der Kolk

- Also visit:
www.besselvanderkolk.com
- Difference between “PTSD” and “childhood trauma”
- Normal stimulus, exaggerated responses
- Impacts on daily functioning (present and future)
- Ways to address it



Sources of Trauma

It's more (and less!) than what you think

- Physical abuse - direct violence/sexual conduct
- Exposure to physical abuse of others
- Verbal/Emotional abuse - aggressive and passive/apathetic
- Exposure to verbal/emotional abuse of others
- Neglect - physical and emotional
- Instability - uncertainty can be just as traumatic as any action
- Check out ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences) for more info

Shaking the Snow Globe

(Glennon Doyle Melton)



And Then This Collides with Raising Children



Connecting the Dots

Practical Application of Clinical Concepts

- Trauma responses - fight, flight, freeze, fawn
- Important to note that almost always the behaviors don't originate CONSCIOUSLY although they may occur INTENTIONALLY in the moment
- Some of these are more acceptable or off-putting than others
- Some are really frustrating but not immediately dangerous to others
- All of them are understandable once you understand
- Doesn't mean they shouldn't be addressed
- Doesn't mean they won't be held accountable in the case



“Hey, takin’ on a challenge is a lot like ridin’ a horse. If you’re comfortable while you’re doin’ it, you’re probably doin’ it wrong.”

- Ted Lasso



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Thank you for attending.