



**Improving Communication with Clients from  
Diverse Socio-Economic Backgrounds\***

**Presentation to  
Judicial Council of Georgia  
Court Improvement Program  
August 12, 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.  
Lets.



La La La  
everything  
is on fire.

"talking about the problem"

story by gabriel andrews



## **Presentation Context for the Role of Juvenile Court 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 Parent Attorneys 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 juvenile court attorney should learn about and understand the client's background, determine how that has an impact on the client's case, and always show their clients respect. The attorney must understand how cultural and socioeconomic differences impact interaction with clients and must interpret the client's words and actions accordingly.



## **O.C.G.A. § 15-11-203**

### **Right to attorney**

(c) A child's attorney owes to his or her client the duties imposed by the law of this state in an attorney-client relationship.



## **Best Interests Considerations As GAL for the Child**

O.C.G.A. § 15-11-105(b)

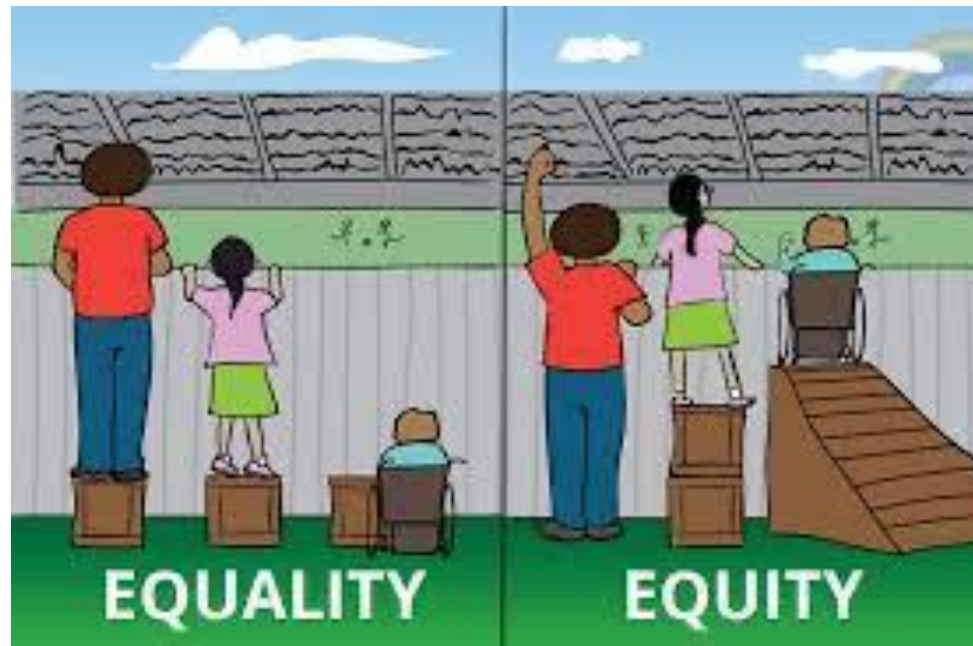
(4) Such child's background and ties, including familial, cultural, and religious;

(5) Such child's sense of attachments, including his or her sense of security and familiarity and continuity of affection for the child;



## 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:

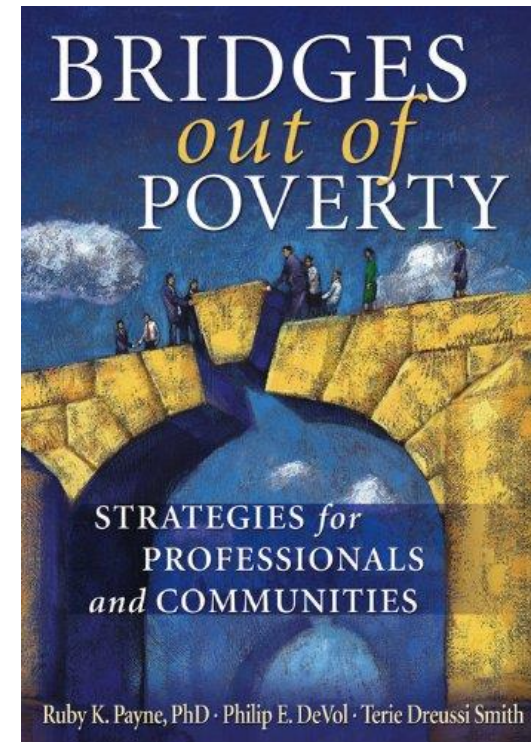
1. the action or state of including or of being included; feeling respected and feeling like you belong and are valued
2. giving equal access to opportunities and resources for people who might otherwise be excluded or who have previously been excluded





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

**Considering aspects of the  
Bridges Out of Poverty Constructs  
may prove helpful as Juvenile Court  
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**

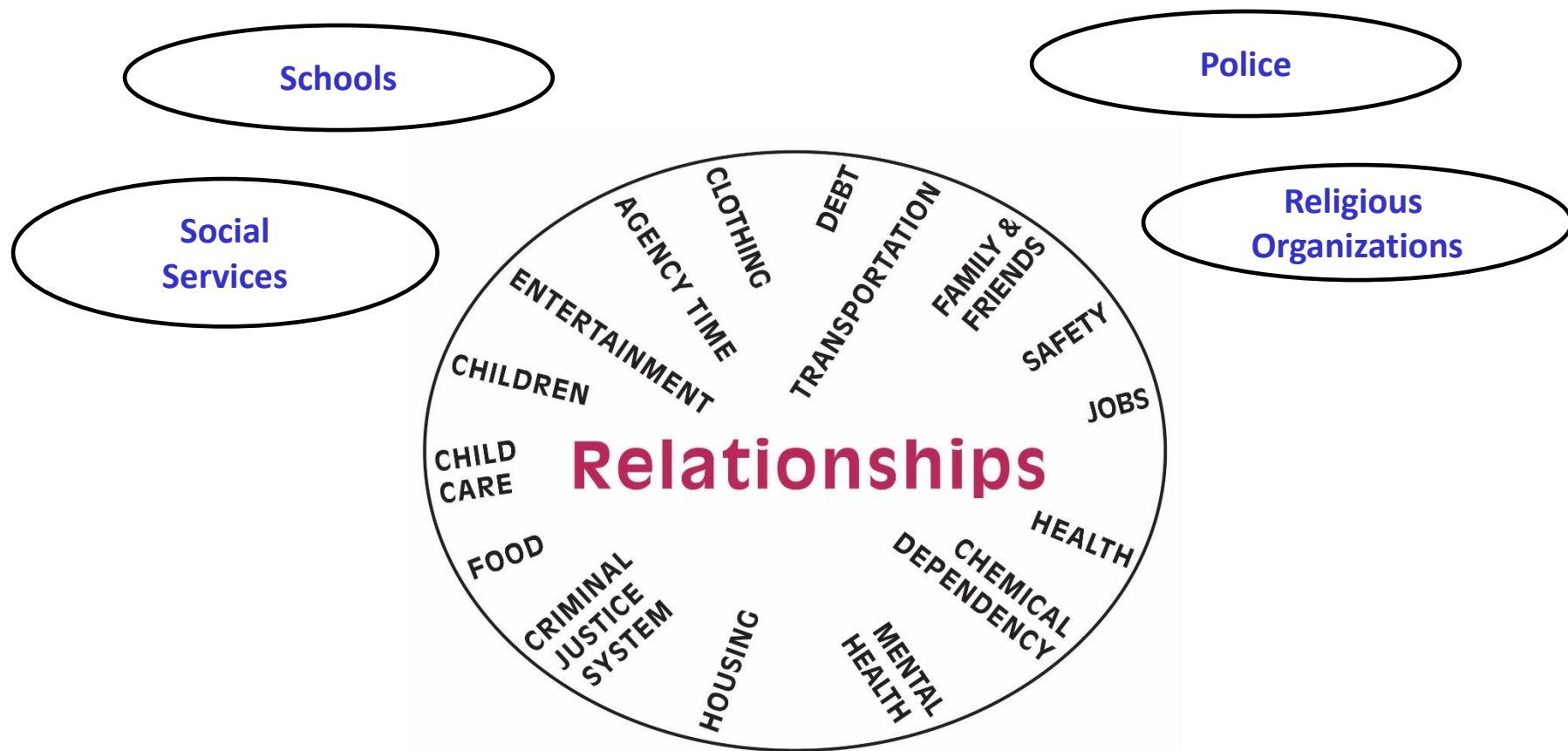
# Using Mental Models

## 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).**



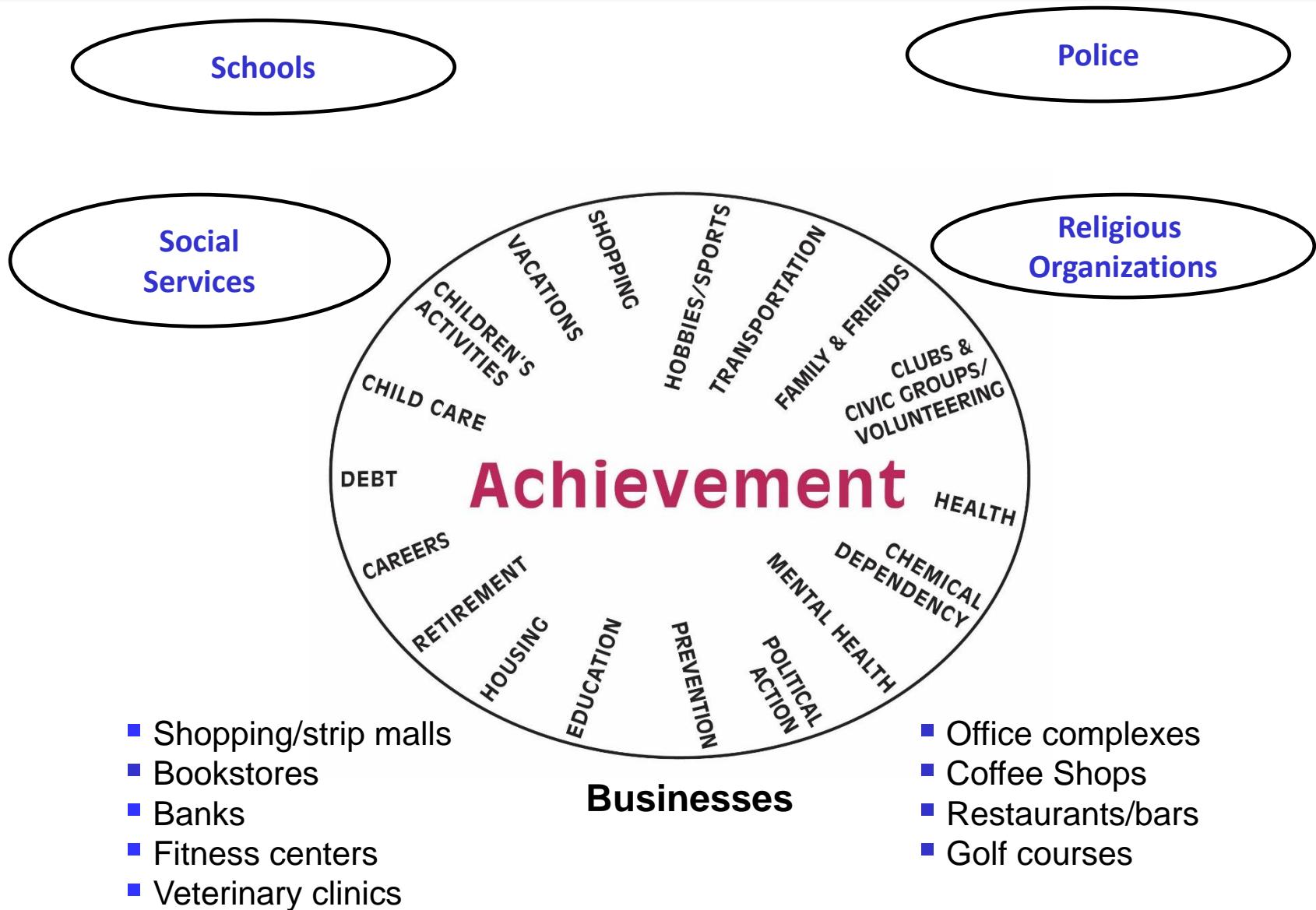
# Mental Model for Under-Resourced



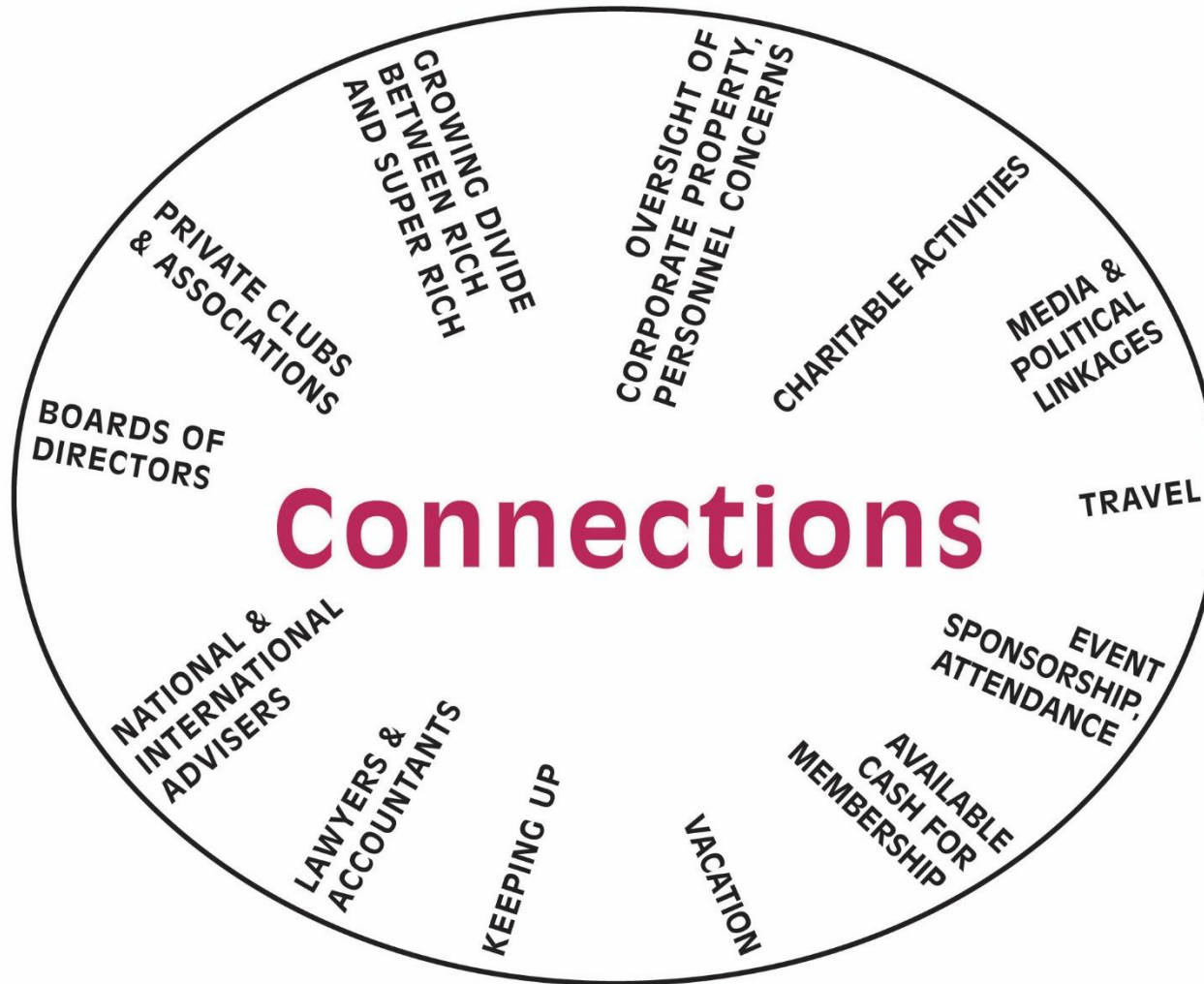
## Businesses

- Pawn shop
- Liquor store
- Corner store
- Rent-to-own
- Laundromat
- Fast food
- Check cashing
- Temp services
- Used car lots
- Dollar store

# 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

$$R - R - R = R + R$$

Rules - Relationship - Respect =  
Rebellion + Resentment

$$R + R + R = R + R + R$$

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.**

**R + R = R + R**

**Rules plus relationship equals resources  
plus rigor (putting forth 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**

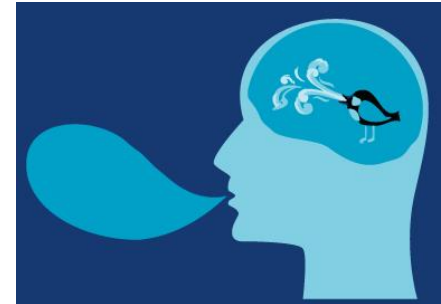
Financial, political, social connections

# 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
<b>FROZEN</b>	Language that is always the same. For example: Lord's Prayer, wedding vows, etc.
<b>FORMAL</b>	The standard sentence syntax and word choice of work and school. Has complete sentences and specific word choices.
<b>CONSULTATIVE</b>	Formal register when used in conversation. Discourse pattern not quite as direct as formal register.
<b>CASUAL</b>	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.
<b>INTIMATE</b>	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

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

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



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.



Can You Code Switch?





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.



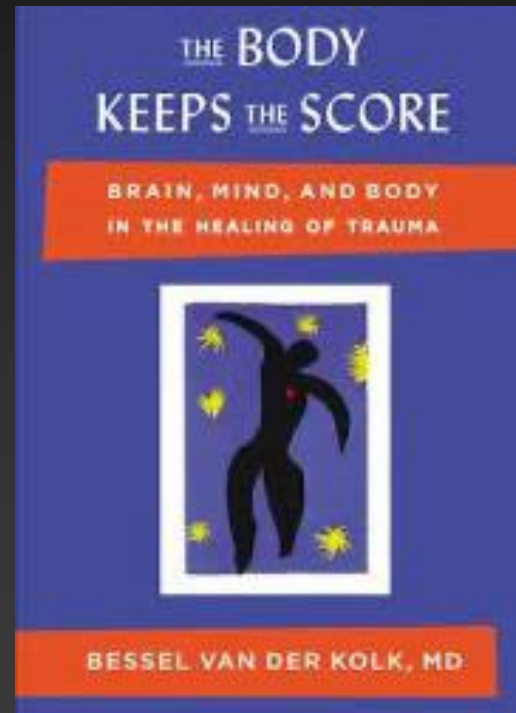
## Some Louisiana Lagniappe. . .

**(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](http://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



## **Improving Communication with Clients from Diverse Socio-Economic Backgrounds\***

# **Thank you for attending.**