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### IF THAT WEREN'T ENOUGH...

- Few teen-specific approaches
- Most therapists lack teen-specific training or experience
- Get treated like *big kids* or *little adults*
- Reactance
- Therapists/programs sometimes fail at balancing *autonomy* and *expectation*

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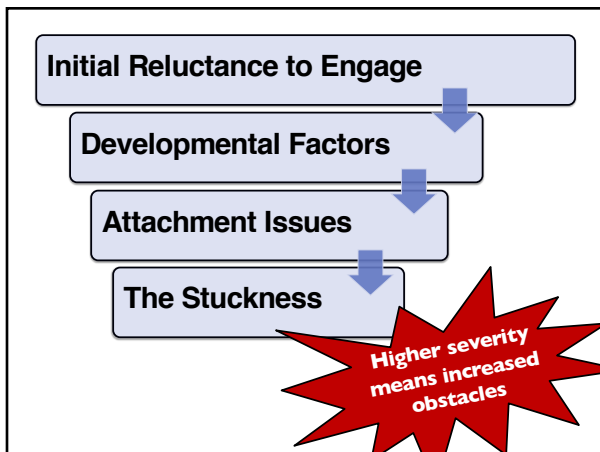
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## A DEVELOPMENTAL LENS

### Ambivalence

Adolescence is a transitional state; nostalgic for the comforts of childhood, but wanting the privileges of adulthood

### Abstract thinking

Starting to think abstractly which means existential concerns are common, especially with depressed teens & trauma survivors

### Gray matters

The teen brain is a work-in-progress; impulsivity & poor problem solving are common, especially when under stress

### Identity formation

A person's mental representation of who they are; components include a sense of personal continuity & uniqueness from others

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## Address Attachment

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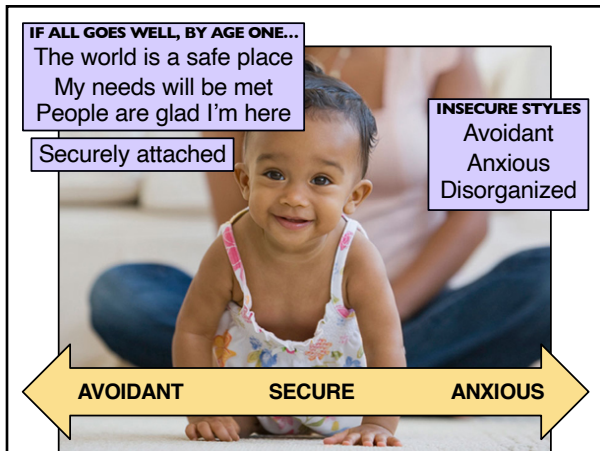
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**AVOIDANT TEENS**

- Often labeled resistant, oppositional or non-compliant
- Expect treatment interfering behaviors
- Present as highly independent
- Lack trust
- Empathy can seem insincere or even threatening

25%

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### ANXIOUS TEENS

- May over-perform in therapy or strive to please you
- Self-sabotaging behaviors are common
- Often hyper-emotional
- Very small comfort zones
- High frequency of learned helplessness

15%

16

### DISORGANIZED TEENS

- May fear primary caregiver
- Behavior may not make sense
- Struggle with empathy & trust
- Often highly controlling or caregiving
- Desire to be attached conflicts with desire to be safe

< 2%

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## Understand the Stuckness

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### ABOUT THE STUCKNESS

- Stuck teens usually know they're stuck
- Stuckness leads to more stuckness
- Inherently existential

**SOURCES OF STUCKNESS**  
 Minority stress  
 Learned helplessness  
 Maladaptive task completion

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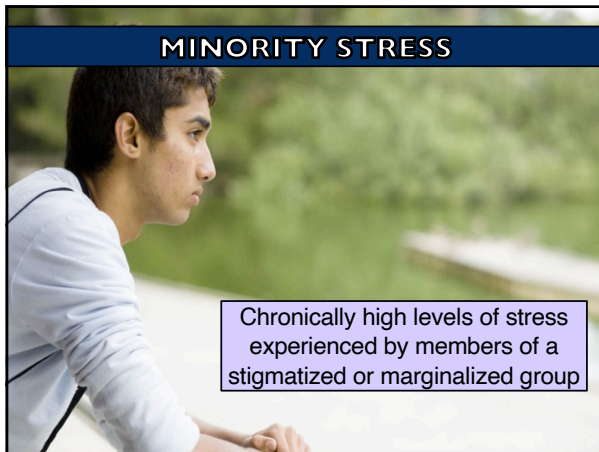
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### **MORE ABOUT HELPLESSNESS**

- Often a history of abuse, neglect &/or parents with SMIs
- Trauma-like symptoms common, but trauma not reported or even denied
- Low motivation & limited follow through
- Most likely anxiously attached
- Higher someone's helplessness, lower their insight

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### **MALADAPTIVE TASK COMPLETION**




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### **MORE ABOUT TASK COMPLETION**

- Intention is appropriate, but execution is flawed
- Reactance + developmental debt
- Common among adopted teens
- MTC behaviors are often oppositional
- Frequently performative

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## The Role of Trauma

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2/3 of Americans report at least one traumatic event by age 16  
SAMSHA, 2020

Defined by survivor

Trauma leads to more trauma

Survivor vs. surviving

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### TYPES OF TRAUMA

#### Acute

One-time experience that causes severe emotional distress

#### Chronic

Multiple traumatic events, not necessarily connected

#### Complex

Ongoing, interpersonal, known perpetrator

#### Developmental

Complex trauma that impacts early developmental tasks

#### Intergenerational

Trauma impacts transmitted through generations

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### SHORT TERM IMPACTS

- Overwhelmed and helpless
- Emotional extremes
- Can't process the experience
- Memory becomes fragmented

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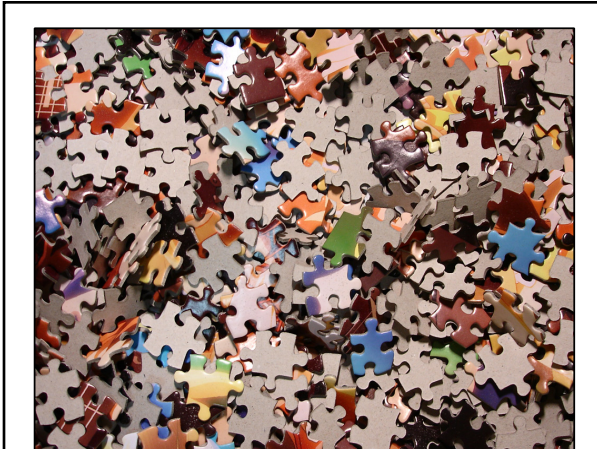
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### LONGER TERM IMPACTS

#### Hyper-arousal

Vigilance, anxiety, sleep problems, trouble concentrating

#### Intrusion

Flashbacks, nightmares, unintentionally re-enact trauma

#### Constriction

Attempts to avoid intrusion, withdrawal from the world

In what ways might these impacts  
lead to treatment reluctance?

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## The Role of Substances

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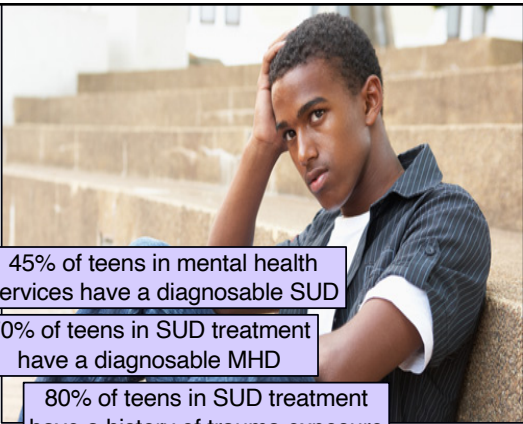
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45% of teens in mental health services have a diagnosable SUD

70% of teens in SUD treatment have a diagnosable MHD

80% of teens in SUD treatment have a history of trauma exposure

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### STUCK ON DRUGS

- Teens with MHDs start using earlier than their peers
- Don't start using to "fix problems"
- Using exacerbates MHDs
- Using can cause problems even when teen doesn't meet diagnostic criteria

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### STAGES OF USE

- No use ever
- Experimental use
- Occasional use
- Regular use
- Misuse / abuse
- Addiction

These aren't clinical terms

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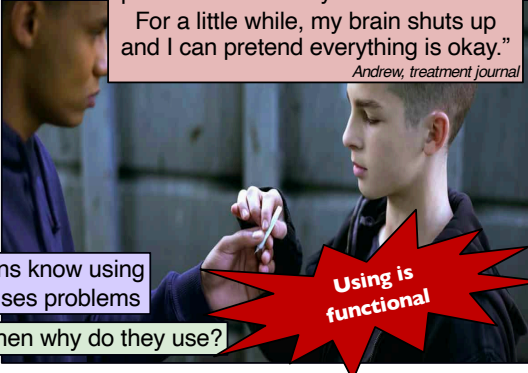
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"When I'm high, I don't think about the past and don't worry about the future. For a little while, my brain shuts up and I can pretend everything is okay."  
*Andrew, treatment journal*

Teens know using causes problems

Then why do they use?

**Using is functional**

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### TALKING ABOUT DRUGS

- Abandon your Abstinence Agenda
- Share stories of past clients' struggles & successes
- Start with pros; end with cons
- Stop – Less – Same – More
- Hold them capable
- Expect rigid thinking

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In small groups, complete  
*Andrew's Backpack*

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### SKILLS AREN'T ENOUGH

- Most treatment approaches focus on symptom reduction
- This is important, but means we might overlook the [bleep]
- Lasting change requires that we address the [bleep]




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## Cultivate Rapport

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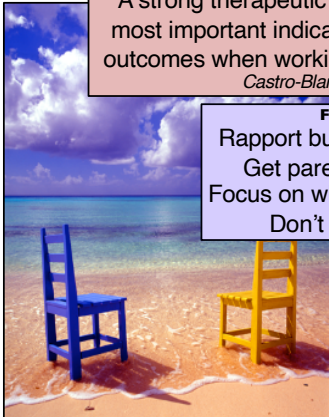
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**“A strong therapeutic alliance is the most important indicator of positive outcomes when working with teens.”**  
*Castro-Blanco and Karver, 2010*

**FIRST MEETINGS**  
 Rapport building, not diagnosing  
 Get parents out of the room  
 Focus on what teen is willing to do  
 Don't hard sell therapy

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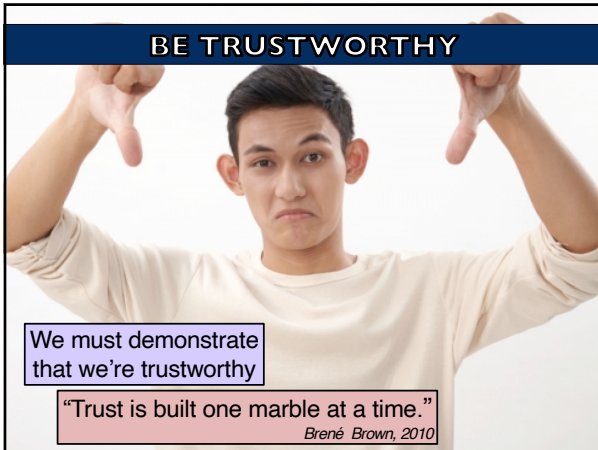
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**BE TRUSTWORTHY**



We must demonstrate that we're trustworthy

"Trust is built one marble at a time."  
*Brené Brown, 2010*

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**THE MARBLES**  
Authentic  
Consistent  
Non-judgmental  
Useful  
Transparent

In small groups, complete  
*Trust Marbles*

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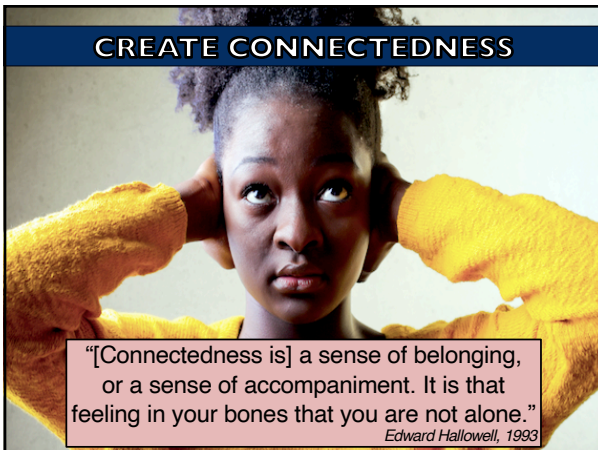
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**CREATE CONNECTEDNESS**



"[Connectedness is] a sense of belonging, or a sense of accompaniment. It is that feeling in your bones that you are not alone."  
*Edward Hallowell, 1993*

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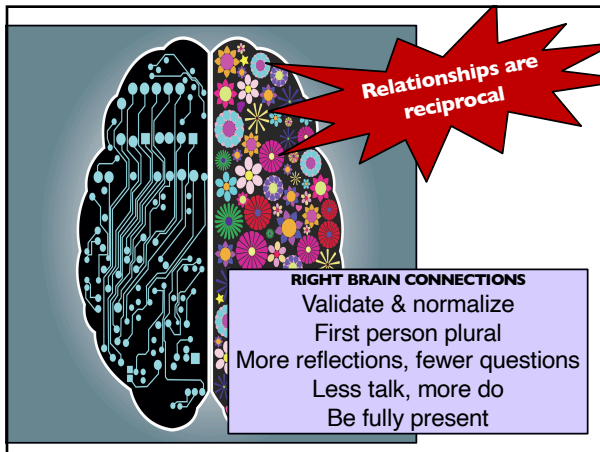
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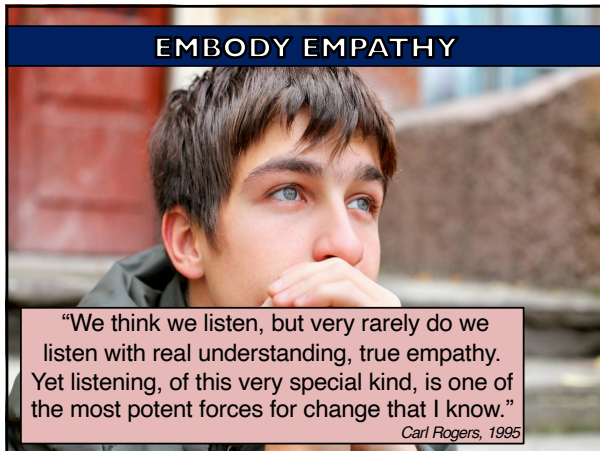
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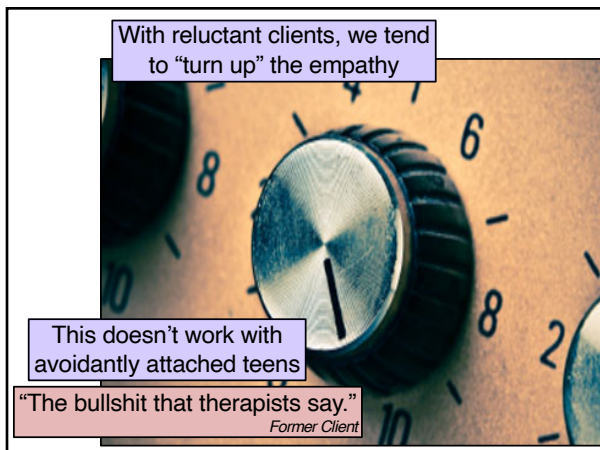
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# Facilitate Change

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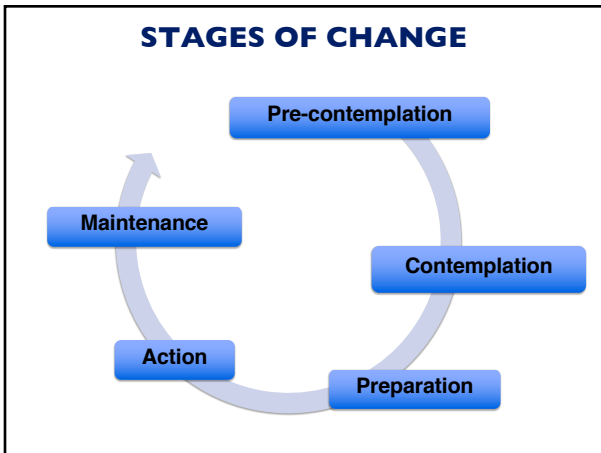
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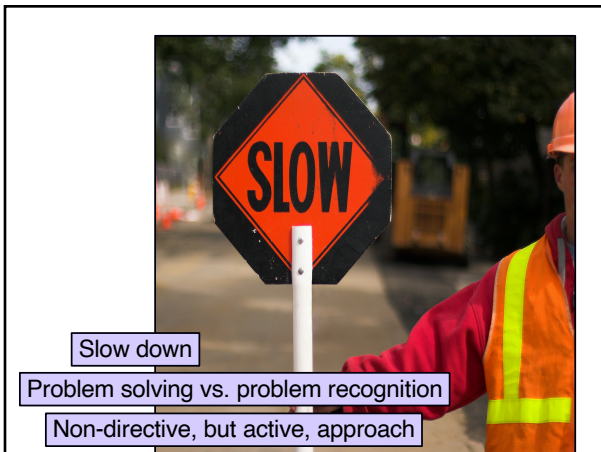
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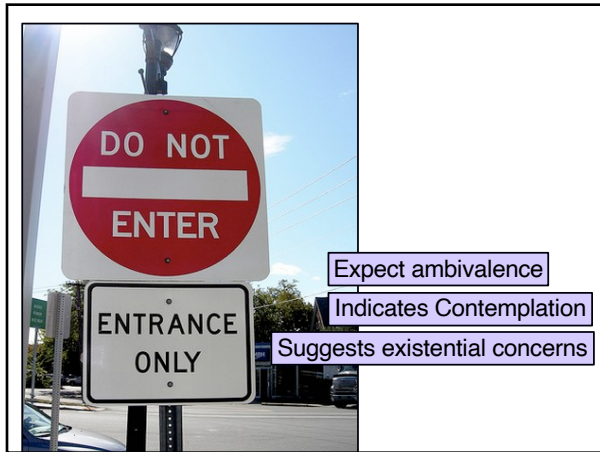
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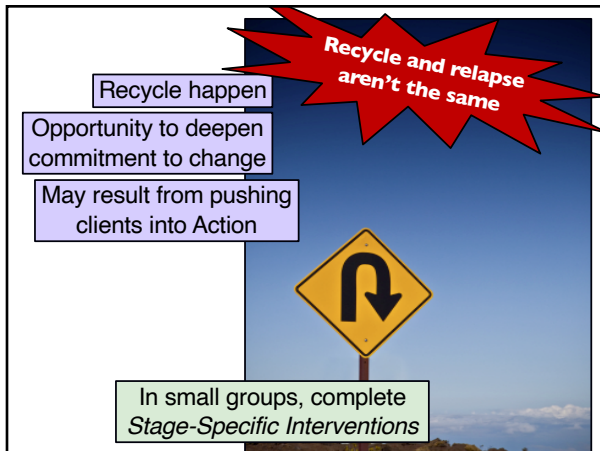
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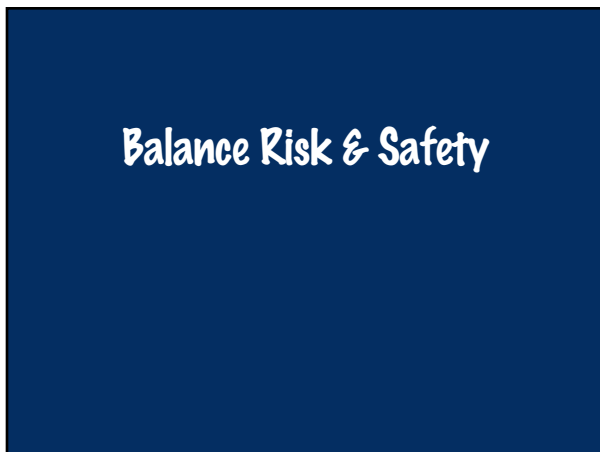
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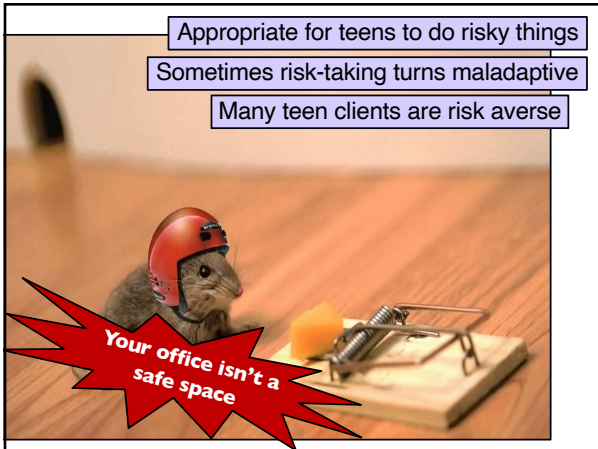
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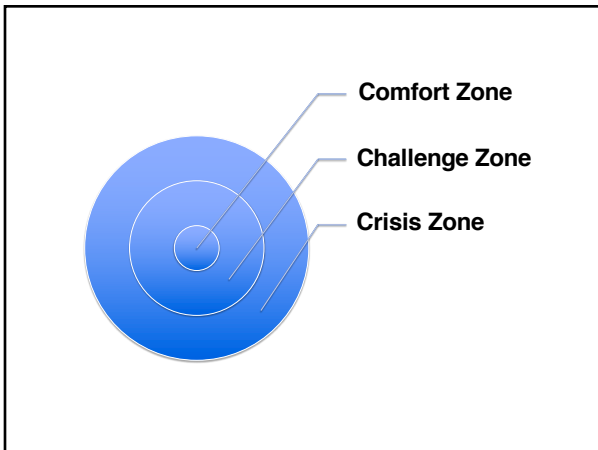
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### RISKING CHANGE

- Acknowledge the physical, emotional & social risks involved in change
- Explore good risks & bad risks
- Provide opportunities to practice healthy risk taking
- Use your hard-won therapeutic alliance to confront risk averse behaviors

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### Nurture Thoughtful Choices

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All teens make bad choices

**A FEW REASONS**  
 Brains in progress  
 Lack decision making experience  
 Choice means responsibility

Presenting issues may impact decision making

**Don't punish teens for the reasons they're in therapy**

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## HOW TO BE MORE THOUGHTFUL

- Don't make things worse
- Least bad choice
- Take time to think
- Effective, not "good" or "bad"
- Feelings aren't facts
- Disrupt the cycle

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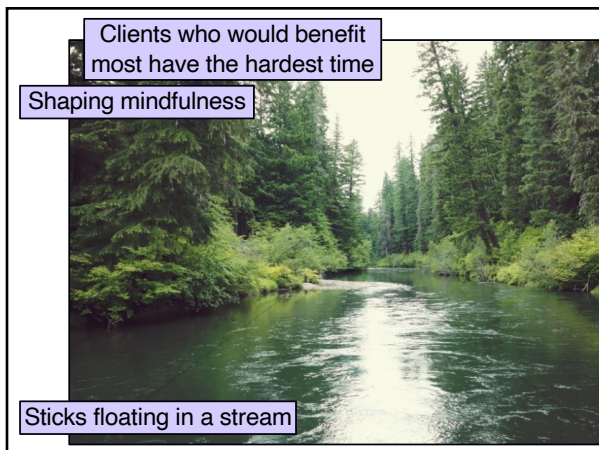
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Web: [www.davidflack.com](http://www.davidflack.com)

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## Teens & the Pandemic Blues

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