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Editorial Comment

Something Special

Heather Modlin

The week before Christmas I, along with a former colleague, went on our annual visit to a young person we worked with in group care over 30 years ago (this "young person," Tony, is now in his mid-forties). As usual, most of our time together was spent reminiscing about "the good old days" in the group home. Over the years, Tony has been consistent in identifying his five years in our group home as the best time of his life, and he credits his relationships with us (and other group home staff) for saving his life (he gives us much more credit, in this regard, than we deserve). On this particular evening, we shared stories about the day he walked out of the house with our VCR in his backpack (and my colleague, unknowingly, assisted him with the theft), the time he was placed in a foster home because he was "too good" to remain in a group home, and the year he spent proving how "not good" he was to get back with us (he did). He talked about his family, the other boys in the group home, and the antics they shared (there were many).

Tony's girlfriend was present and engaged in parts of the conversation. Tony proudly showed us pictures of his children and shared their accomplishments with us. While we were chatting, people were coming and going through the house and Tony explained that he often opened his doors to people in need, and in turn others helped him when he was struggling.

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Before we left, he snuck next door to retrieve gift baskets he had paid his neighbor to make for us.

In child and youth care practice, particularly in out-of-home care, we do not always get the opportunity to see the long-term results of our labour. We experience the moments of connection that can lead to long-term change. If we're lucky, we see the short-term progress that can be made when young people's needs are met in our programs. But often we are working on blind faith. We keep going, we persevere, we hang in because we believe in what we are doing and we believe in the potential of each young person – even if our first 256 shifts involve colourful language, squirting ketchup, holes in walls, stolen petty cash, and flying plates (Tony engaged in all of this).

Tony provides an annual reminder, to me, of the power of the work that we do. Tony's life is not perfect. He has experienced challenges, like all of us, and there are many things he would like to improve. However, he is a kind, compassionate individual who helps others and has healthy relationships with friends, a partner, his children, and neighbors – and we helped facilitate that.



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Child and youth care practitioners change lives. When we underestimate the importance of the work we do, we sometimes don't try hard enough or hang in long enough – and this deprives the young people and families of opportunities for transformative experiences.

Tony once wrote an essay about me (I can't remember why) and one of the lines in the essay said "Heather thinks there is something special about me. I don't know why. I think there is something wrong with her."

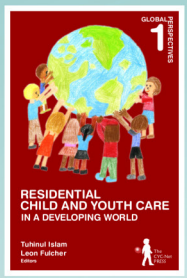
I'll take that.

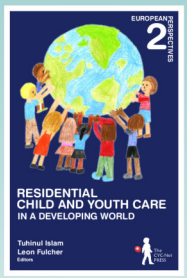
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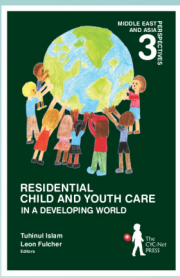
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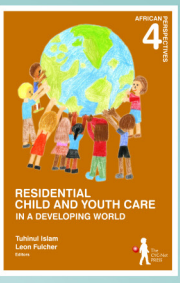






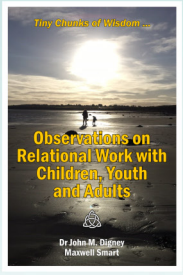


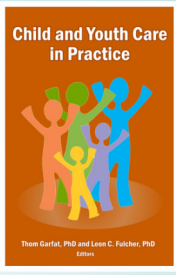


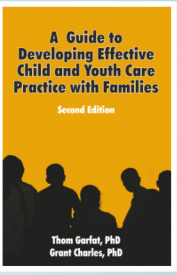


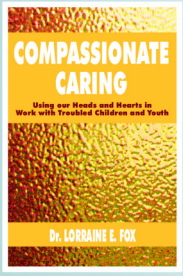


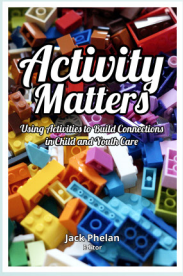






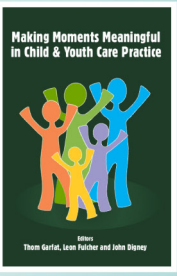


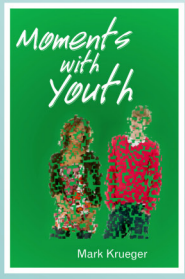


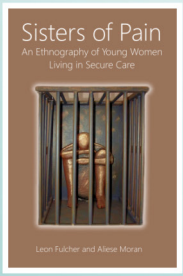


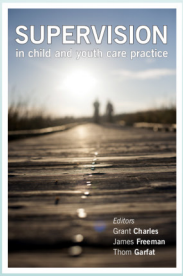


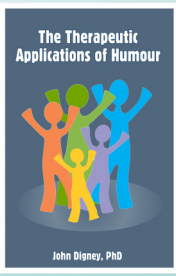


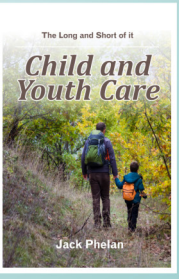












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Can We Put the Group Back in the Group Home?

Kiaras Gharabaghi

Welcome to another year! We are transitioning into this one under the worst of circumstances, with the full knowledge that children and youth in many parts of the world are experiencing enormous violence and trauma. Worse than that, they are experiencing these things knowing that the world is watching and either intentionally or inadvertently supporting this. It will be a year of reckoning. Our collective morality has hit rock bottom, with genocide and war now firmly embedded as at least of debatable value, if not altogether acceptable. I don't want to write about this in CYC Net columns, but I can't write about anything else without at least acknowledging that as I write this and you read it, a few more kids were murdered by soldiers who are themselves youth. This gives a whole new meaning to child and youth work, doesn't it?

Back to the child and youth care practice we are more comfortable with.

Over the course of the past few years, debates about the merits of group care have intensified almost everywhere. Although there continue to be defenders of this structure in the care system as one of several possibilities and opportunities for young people and their families,

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overwhelmingly the policy and regulatory context of care across most child welfare systems has ruled either firmly against group care, or has reinvented group care as a form of individualized care that is to unfold in physical proximity of multiple individualized care processes for children and youth sharing a single house or building. In fact, the distaste for group care has taken on such absurd dimensions that children and youth placed in group care settings have become subjected to processes and expectations that are completely outside of the norm for young people outside of formal care systems. Outside of these care systems, young people don't have individualised care and treatment plans, individualized goals that are reviewed regularly and assessed against achievement criteria, and structured routines that are specially constructed to fit exactly who they are as individuals, targeting only their strengths, and avoiding at all costs inconvenience, discomfort, and vulnerability.

This level of individualization comes from good intentions. It is meant to recognize that every young person is an individual on their own, with their own characteristics, identities, and strengths and weaknesses. More importantly, it comes from the recognition that every young person has their own story, and the further development of that story must therefore be tailored to their context and their way of being in the world. All of this sounds great, and I would not want to argue against such recognition. The operationalization of this recognition, however, is achieving the exact opposite of what is intended. Here is why.

As Aristotle argued quite some time ago, we are, by nature, social animals. By this, he meant not merely that we seek out social interaction (in fact, not everyone does, and this would probably be an ableist construction of the phrase), but that our individuality exists only in a social context. In other words, we are individuals because we are social. Similar kinds of ideas are expressed in other cultures and epistemological traditions,

including, for example, the African spirit of ubuntu, in which 'I am because you are' (please forgive the simplification of ubuntu here), or the Indigenous mantra 'all our relations' (with variations across the diversity of Indigenous nations and groups). The implication is that we cannot develop our individual sense of self separate from our sense of group, how we belong in group, and how group shapes our way of being in the world.

Individualization does not mean individualized pathways to development and growth. Individualization means growing within a group and developing simultaneously a sense of belonging and connection within group and a sense of autonomy as an individual contributor to the group.

Although in practice, group care across many jurisdictions, and notably in North America, has been a resolute failure and probably done a great deal of harm (especially to Black and Indigenous young people, but also to young people identifying as LGBTQ2S+ and/or as having disabilities), in theory, group care offers opportunities that are unique, transformative, and potentially healing in ways that other forms of care, including family-based forms of care, cannot offer. Group homes offer groups. They offer a social context, guided and carefully supported by child and youth care practitioners whose core training is about 'all our relations', in which young people can find autonomy in their connections to groups. This, I would argue, is not merely an important side-feature of group care, but it is in fact the ultimate life skill and the ingredient that enables young people to move with confidence across social contexts, which often are precarious, unstable, and transitional.

In order to benefit from the group care structure and social process, we have to move away from individualizing every young person's care plan and actively and intentionally reducing the influence of the group. If that were the goal, then placement in group care is entirely inappropriate and can only be justified by economic criteria of offering service at scale (and no one

wants to make that argument). Instead, we ought to center the group dynamic, both in its positive and its negative manifestations. Groups of young people placed in group care settings are often characterized by a great deal of negativity, including peer to peer violence, racism, gender normativity and associated bullying, as well as behavioural contagion factors. This is part of the reason why we have moved away from group-based work in group homes and instead embraced individualized care plans. The message to young people is 'you are placed in a group home not to pay attention to the group, but to separate from the group and mind your own business, pursue your own goals, focus on your own set of familial and other connections'. It is an absurd message. No teenager wants to live with others in order to ignore them.

What we need instead is a focus on the group, and a direct engagement of the dynamics of the group in an effort of supporting the collective of young people to find ways of constructing a healing social environment. Our efforts ought not to focus on avoiding racist incidents by separating young people into their individualized lives (which is a hopeless undertaking from the start). Instead, we ought to work through with the group of young people how racism shapes their collective and their individual lives. Restorative practices can be helpful in this context, largely because they centre impact on the social context of everyone's life over individualized pathologies of wrongdoing. None of this is particularly radical or new. There have been repeated efforts to develop evidence-based, group-centering approaches to group care, including, for example, Positive Peer Culture (PPR), restorative practices, and adventure-based therapy where group interdependence is at the centre of learning and growth. None of these, however, have succeeded in becoming the norm in group care, and none are supported beyond the walls of the group care setting. Social work, child welfare case management, clinical practices, and even trauma-informed

practices continue to fragment groups and disallow the exploration of autonomy within social contexts for young people. The demand for individualization is quite total – it is made at the expense of the social, and even *against* the social.

Interestingly, the antidote to groups in group care has been articulated as 'treatment'. Today, treatment approaches for young people placed in group care are laden with anti-social values, largely driven by the idea that successful treatment outcomes are those that allow any one young person to rise above the others around them. The message of treatment is that 'your success is measured by the failure of others' (this is literally the case as most treatment outcomes are measured using standardized instruments that compare individual scores to group score averages). 'Don't be like your peers in the group home'. 'Be better'. 'Ignore them and focus on yourself'.

These are strange messages to impart on young people, who will, without question, face the challenge of living in groups for many years to come once they leave the group home. Such groups will invariably be precarious and ever-changing, whether they are familial groups, kinship groups, or groups of strangers. From my perspective, training young people to work based on their strengths is not very useful when they will be confronted with the unpleasantries and undesirable features of future groups in their lives. Quite to the contrary, I think young people must learn to engage with groups to generate collective efforts from within the group to create healing environments. This will undoubtedly require living with and working on vulnerabilities and weakness. And it will undoubtedly require capacity to confront harm in ways most of us cannot, including the harms of explicit or nuanced racism that appears across most groups, or the harms of invalidation and dismissal.

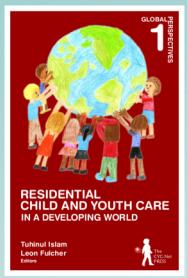
Group homes are places that allow young people to explore different ways of being while being with others. They allow young people to benefit

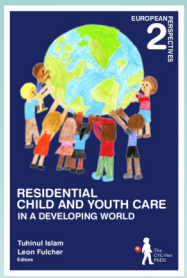
from what groups have to offer while at the same time learning to battle the harms emanating from groups. Group homes mirror the lives of young people post-care much more so than other settings, including family-based care settings that often are far more removed from the everyday reality young people are facing or will be facing soon enough. But for group homes to be useful and to generate the kinds of opportunities that are embedded in this structure, we must return to centering the group and we must abstain from the well-intended but short-sighted individualization hype we have been fanning for some time now.

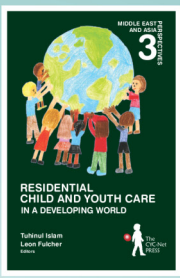
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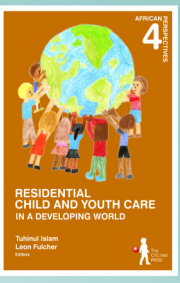






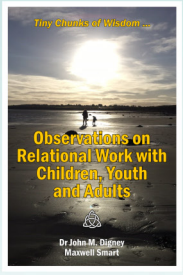


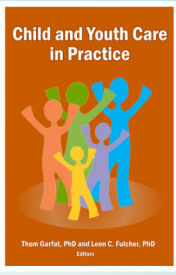


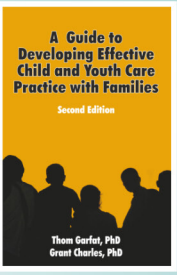


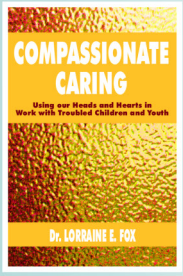


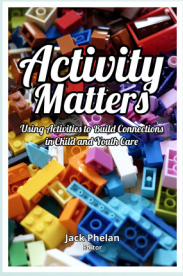






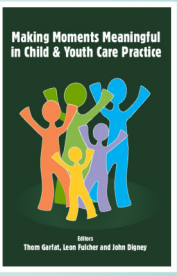


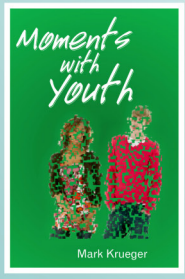


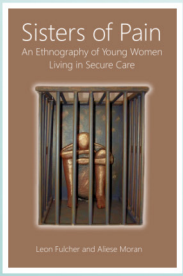


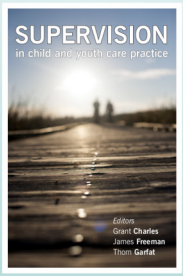


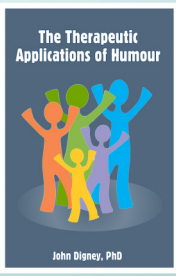


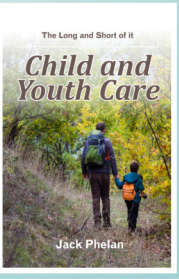












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Relational Child and Youth Care Practice: What it Means to Us

Thom Garfat, Christine Gaitens, Jessica Hadley and Andy Leggett

Curiosity is one of the permanent and certain characteristics of a vigorous intellect

Samuel Johnson, 1751

Relational Child and Youth Care practice (Garfat et al, 2018) evolved from the field's continuing focus on relationship. Yet, as we are learning everyday, there are important differences between *relationship-based* practice and *relational* CYC practice (Garfat, 2008). As Fewster (2001) said, there is a difference between having a relationship and being in relationship. Relational CYC practice involves 'being in relationship' with other. And 'being in relationship' suggests there is a space, a place, called relationship; not a 'thing to have' but a 'place to be', a place we call the 'in-between between us' (Garfat, 2008).

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Relational Child & Youth Care practice is an approach to Child & Youth Care which is centered on the interpersonal interactions, in a context of acceptance and wonder, between self and other with an intense focus on the characteristics of the space which is the in-between between us (Garfat, 2008). This is markedly different than a relationship-based approach in which the focus is on the characteristics of the participants themselves (e.g., I am the worker, she is the client). In relational practice the worker is constantly wondering about the *characteristics* of the in-between and the elements of context (e.g., the balance of power, location, history, etc.) which are impacting on the interactions that create this in-between between us. For example, as Munroe says, the worker's engagement, "cannot be looked at as being reciprocal without understanding how this power dynamic is being deployed" (Munroe, 2021, p. 39) and experienced. As Gharabaghi (2014, p. 8) stated, relational practice "shifts the focus from the actors engaged in some form of interaction to the experience of interacting regardless of the specific actors". In focusing on the in-between, the worker attends to the experience of self of both participants with the intention of co-creating an in-between of safety and trust where the other (and, often the worker) is willing and able to take the risk to try new ways of being in their world.

In relational practice the worker sees I to I with the other, encountering each other in direct perception and shared felt experience (Austin & Halpin, 1987). The worker begins the process of engagement by "responding to and initiating *bids to connect* in ways that benefit and support others in their own growth" (Freeman, 2019, p. 4). With the goal of inviting the other to engage in the in-between, it is there that we find transformative potential (Modlin & Phelan, 2021) and context for healing. With an ongoing focus on needs of other and self, interpretation, and contextual awareness, and in the co-created conditions of acceptance, safety, and engagement, the in-

between becomes what Mann-Feder called the place of 'us' (1999). It is here, in this space, where 'connected experiencing' (Garfat, 1998) and the co-creation of relational reality (Peterson, 1988) occur. Here, mutual influence is sought and experienced as "meaning emerges within the 'space between' the individual, family, or community" (Bellefeuille and Jamieson 2008, p. 38).

Relational practice, whether it be in direct care interventions, in training, in education, or any other encounter, is an ongoing process of interactions within which the worker is constantly wondering, in a context of self-reflection and active self-awareness, 'how will what I am doing, or thinking of doing, impact on the in-between between us?' For, as Maier (1992) stated, the in-between is constantly recreated by mutual interactions between self and other.



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As the engagement with other continues, the helper lets their own needs recede (Phelan, 2023) and focuses more on those of the other. Once safety and trust are established, the worker gradually introduces the idea that there may be different, more satisfying, and perhaps less painful ways for the other to act in their world. While doing so the worker maintains their focus on the in-between, engaging to support it in continuing to be a place of safety and trust, and now, too, as a place of greater awareness, learning and risk-taking. The constant focus on the characteristics of the in-between between us, ensures that there is an ongoing emphasis on co-creating a context of development and change, while supporting the growth of personal autonomy, decision making, and agency of the other and the power between worker and other becomes more balanced. Throughout, the worker maintains a position of curiosity, security, and support as the other experiments with adopting a different perspective and way of being. The in-between becomes even more of a co-created space where each is impacted by the encounter with the other.

Relational Child and Youth Care interactions, based on the characteristics of contemporary Child and Youth Care Practice, attend constantly to the co-constructed, reciprocal in-between of self and other. It is a CYC way of being in the world and being in relationship. As Fewster (2005, p. 3). said, relational practice "is not only a very different perspective; it is a different pathway, across a very different terrain, in search of a very different destination".

It is this which, for us, distinguishes relational practice from the more traditional relationship-based practice.

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Intentionality

Travis Sampson

Child and Youth Care is a fickle field of practice. Sometimes, it can seem like we, as a field, are talking out of both sides of our collective mouths. Good practice involves creating thorough and detailed programs and intervention plans! Good practice also involves being flexible and willing to modify, switch out or abandon those plans altogether! Best practice for creating safety means creating a set of routines and consistent expectations in the programs that we work, but good Child and Youth Care Practitioners also consider the individual needs and developmental contexts for each young person they work alongside (Freeman, Fulcher, Garfat, Gharabaghi, 2018). Child and Youth Care Practitioners must be comfortable with this ambiguity. We must flow between firm plans and expectations, and individualized, flexible approaches seamlessly. Intentionality, as a characteristic of practice, challenges us in the same way.

When we are reflectively and reflexively engaged in our practice, very little of what we do should be 'off the cuff.' Our actions, language choices, physical position in a room, and so many more elements of day-to-day relational engagement should be done with a purpose, with intentionality (Freeman, Fulcher, Garfat, Gharabaghi, 2018). But what about spontaneity? Some of the most impactful moments in any relationship, and learning

experiences are spontaneous in nature. So, again, a large part of good Child and Youth Care practice is navigating the complexities of being intentional in almost everything we do, while also allowing room for the spontaneous nature of human relationships in our engagement.

Jack Phelan (2007) identifies Child and Youth Care Practitioners as 'experience arrangers.' I believe this term is perfect when considering the intersection of spontaneity and intentionality. It gives room for the practitioner to recognize the individual needs, suggestions, or developmental levels of the young people we support, but also to use this information so that we can create structured and *intentional* activities that support development and relational engagement. The story below is intended to be an illustration of just this. The practitioners in this story arrange experiences that they didn't structure days or weeks in advance, but in the exact moment the young people in the story present them with the opportunity. Their ability to intentionally recognize opportunities that are spontaneously presented to them by young people, results in interventions that support belonging, mastery, independence, generosity, and connection in a developmentally appropriate way.

Muffins & Munchies

"Nothing to eat in this house," Hiktok complained loudly from the kitchen.

"Wesley just made muffins, dude. Grab one of those," I shouted from the dining room while throwing a card down onto the deck in front of me. Wesley, Karla and I were playing Crazy-8s in the kitchen.

"Nah," Hiktok responded, and I heard the fridge door close after he had decided there was nothing worth eating in it. He walked into the dining

room and stood over our card game. “Never buy enough munchies,” he stated.

‘Munchies,’ meant chips, pre-made boxes of cookies, and other highly processed snack foods. We were above the Arctic circle in Nunavut. So, not only were we living in a group care program, where there were certain expectations to maintain a menu with a limited amount of ‘munchies,’ but none of those kinds of foods benefit from a government subsidization and are incredibly expensive as a result.

“It’s the weekend, dude,” Karla, my teammate working the floor for the next 3 weeks, reminded him. “Go do your room clean, and a few extra chores, you can stock up on some munchies with the 20 bucks you make.”

Hiktok didn’t offer a verbal response but furrowed his brow and scrunched his nose up to demonstrate his disagreement with that idea. “Old enough to pick my own groceries, anyway. I’m almost ready to get my own place.”

Hiktok was sort of right in that regard. He was 17 and would be 18 in about 6 months. He had a part-time job at the grocery store in town that could be full-time as soon as he didn’t have to work around his school hours, and he, his social worker, and his older sister (who had been his primary caregiver for years prior to him moving in with us), had discussed a plan for him to get on the housing list and move out on his own in a year or so.

Karla took her attention away from the card game on the table and turned to Hiktok. “You know,” she said, “you make a good point.” Karla gave me an I-think-I-have-a-good-idea-follow-my-lead look that I had come to recognize given we had been working and living together for a couple of weeks now.

Hiktok raised his eyebrows in response to Karla's statement, but spoke to Wesley, whose turn it was to play. "Got any 2's? She'll have to pick-up 4 if you play one."

Wesley grinned. He pulled two cards out of his hand and played a pair of 2s. "Pick up 6," he said.

Karla rolled her eyes through a smile. "Thanks, Hiktok."

"I already saw it," Wesley stated defensively.

"Yeah, yeah," Karla said while pulling 6 cards off the top of the deck. Before she had them all organized, she pulled one from her hand and threw it on the discard pile. It was another 2. "Pick up 8, Francis."

I groaned.

Hiktok laughed. "Harsh, eh," he said.

Karla was still putting her handful of cards in order but went back to the conversation about groceries. "We need to go grocery shopping today, and you *are* right, you'll be moving out of here before long, and into your own place. You'll need to know how to budget and buy your own food. How about this trip, you get $150 to buy your own food for the week. Suppers will still be included on the house list, but you buy your own breakfasts, lunches, and snacks."

"Can buy whatever I want?"

Karla hesitated, looked at me. I think she was in a little bit deeper than she expected to be when she let this idea out into the world. I gave her a we-came-this-far shrug.

"Whatever you want," she said.

"Iiiiii," Hiktok exclaimed, "let's go then!"

"Room cleans first, then we go," Karla directed.

"I'll get the vacuum," I said, and got up to make myself useful.

* * *

The sun was hot and high in the sky. It felt like the kind of heat I would expect in the summer, but the folks who lived in town assured me it wasn't normal heat. Our Suzuki 4x4 SUV was kicking up a trail of dust while we cruised back into town on the airport road. The airport road was the only place you could (legally) get going faster than the 30km/h speed limit in town, so we ripped out on it anytime we could manage it. As we rolled back into town, we got stuck behind one of the street spraying trucks. These were a new concept for a Southerner like me. They had an external sprinkler system hooked up to the rear of the plow trucks (if you're from the South like I was, picture the salt spreader, but it spreads water) and they drove around town dosing the roads to keep the dust under control. I wondered if they were *really* necessary when I first had them explained to me, but after a couple days when the drivers were on vacation and they couldn't cover their shifts, I figured out that they were. Experience is the best teacher, after all.

Anyhow, Karla, Wesley, Hiktok, and I hopped out of the Suzuki when we arrived at the store and slammed our doors in semi-unison.

"Going to look at the LEGO," Wesley announced and bolted to the toy aisle before all of us were even inside.

Hiktok grabbed his own cart. "Hundred fifty bucks?" He confirmed.

"Hundred and fifty bucks," Karla repeated with a nod.

"See you at the check-out," Hiktok told us wheeling towards the produce immediately to the left of the entrance.

"You need a calculator, a pen and paper to keep track?" Karla called out holding up a calculator from the 90s she had pulled out of the office drawer before we left.

"It's good, Karla," Hiktok said, shoving his hand into his pocket, pulling out his iPod, and waving it at us without turning around.

"They grow up so fast," I chirped, grabbing a cart and some cardboard boxes the store left up front for customers to carry out their haul.

Karla grinned at me. "Hopefully this works," she said.

"Tell me what 'works' looks like," I probed.

"Well," Karla started, "I *was* going with the flow when I threw this out there."

"Of course," I said. "The best interventions are often a little spontaneous."

"And yet," Karla reminded me, "an intervention isn't an intervention unless it's intentional."

"Fair," I agreed. "So, then. What was your intention when you offered Hiktok a hundred and fifty bucks from the grocery budget without consulting with Jean back home?"

Jean was our Program Manager, and Karla, being the ultimate professional, I knew her to be, would (maybe not) appreciate my teasing around acting before consulting. And, true to form, she gave me an oh-please look of annoyance.

To be fair to Karla, it was one of the advantages of working on the floor in the high Arctic while your Program Manager worked at a distance back down South, it was much easier to implement the easier-to-ask-for-forgiveness-than-permission approach.

"Well, I was intending for it to be a learning opportunity in a couple of ways. First, it's going to give him an opportunity to master some budgeting and grocery shopping life skills."

"Nice one," I offered. "I was assuming as much there.":

"Right," Karla went on. "Second, I figured it would support his sense of independence. I mean, He's not wrong that he's at least close to moving out on his own. He might as well get used to it."

"OK. Nothing I hadn't interpreted back in the kitchen," I said, keeping up.

“Lastly, and to be honest this one is more about us, I was …”

I interjected. “Hoping he’d see why we buy the things we buy, limit ‘munchies’ in the grocery budget, and we’d have to listen to less of his bellyaching?”

“Bingo,” Karla confirmed as she threw a bag of oranges and a bag of apples into our cart.

“Francis, come!” Our conversation was interrupted as Wesley beckoned to me from the toy aisle.

“You good?” I asked Karla.

“All good,” she said.

I headed to the toys and when I rounded the corner, Wesley was holding a LEGO set in his hand. He noticed me approaching and held it up towards my face.

“Captain America: Civil War LEGO,” He proclaimed proudly.

“Deadly,” I affirmed. “You’ve been waiting on that to get into town.”

“40 bucks…” Wesley said, leaving the words to hang expectantly.

“How much you got?” I asked him, dodging the implied request for us to buy it for him.

“Just the 10 bucks from room clean,” he said.

“You can do 5 more chores when we get home then. That’ll be twenty,” I reminded him, knowing before the words left my mouth, they were not what Wesley wanted to hear.

“Still need 20 bucks more,” he said, staring back at the box in his hand and flipping it over and back again. “There’s even 4 figures in it,” he said, “usually only 2 in a set this size.”

I wasn’t sure about the facts on LEGO sets, but I had come to understand that Wesley was an expert on the matter.

“So, if you do your extra chores this week, and next, then you can come back next weekend and get it.”

“Might be gone by then,” he said.

“Might be,” I said.

He looked back down at the box. If I was being honest, I’d have loved to have told him to do his extra chores, pay for half and we will cover the other half, but I knew for sure that was not a therapeutic intervention and more about my need to make someone else happy.

Wesley looked back up at me. “I got an idea, but you guys are probably going to say ‘no.’”

“Try me,” I challenged him.

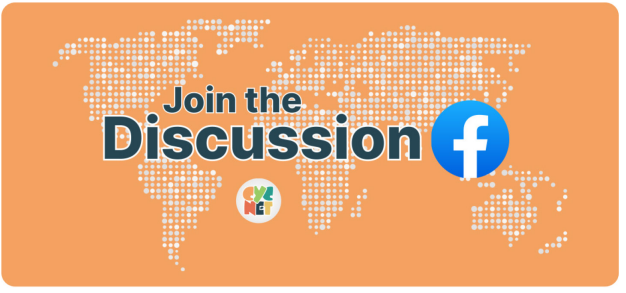
“Could sell muffins at the field tomorrow. Everyone will be there for the Nunavut Day concert.”

In a rush of inspiration from Karla’s on-the-fly intervention back at the kitchen table, I rolled with it. “OK. Are you thinking the same kind of muffins you bake for the house?”

“Yeah,” Wesley said. “I could even use the ones we baked yesterday! There’s still 20 or something left!”

“Hold on. Those are the house muffins. Those belong to everyone else. You can’t sell other people’s stuff.”

“OK. Then I’ll make another batch when we get home,” Wesley didn’t miss a beat.



I thought for a second, and figured he could be pushed a little bit harder to make this a more meaningful intervention. “Those ingredients were still bought from the house grocery money, dude. I don’t think that’d be cool to sell that stuff either. Can you think of another way to get the ingredients you need?” I was thinking Wesley could use his allowance to buy the ingredients himself and make his own muffins to sell, but I wanted to give him the opportunity to get there.

He furrowed his brow and looked down at the LEGO box in his hand again. He reached into his pocket with a grin and pulled out his 10 bucks. “Could use this to buy the ingredients. I can make 24 muffins. If I sell them for 5 bucks each, I’ll have way more than 10 bucks anyway.” Ten dollars was not even close to enough money for the ingredients he would need, but I figured a 12-year-old spending every dollar of his allowance to purchase the ingredients was meaningful enough.

“I like it,” I said. “Let’s go find Karla, she has the cart.”

Wesley put the LEGO box back on the shelf, but moved all the other boxes and hid the one he wanted way back behind them all. “Hopefully no one will find it before I get the money,” he said. We strolled down the end of the few aisles in the grocery store, peeking down each one, until we saw Karla and Hiktok looking at the toilet paper. Hiktok was setting a 12-pack of the stuff back on the shelf.

“What’s up?” I asked.

“Hiktok was just wondering if he needed to buy his own TP for the week as well. I told him we could still cover toiletries.”

“Good thing,” Hiktok said. “Expensive!”

I chuckled. “Yeah, and do you plan on living with your girlfriend?”

Hiktok raised his eyebrows.

“Does she wear make-up?”

“Yeah.”

“Then you better double the amount you’ll need, dude.”

Karla chuckled. “He’s right,” she said, “but that’s a problem for another day. We ready to check-out?”

“Almost,” I said, “Wes, has a plan he wants to run by you.”

Wesley told Karla his plan to make and sell muffins.

“Awesome!” Karla exclaimed. “I grabbed some frozen blueberries and the other ingredients already, so you can just give Charlotte the 10 bucks at the cash when we pay.”

“I’m going to get chocolate chips, too. That way my customers can have a choice of which muffin they want.”

“Savvy,” I told him with a fist bump. “Go grab them and meet us at the cash.”

Hiktok placed his haul on the belt and waited for Charlotte to ring everything through. He was intently staring at the total as it climbed up with each *beep.*

‘Looking a little nervous,” I teased him. “Weren’t you keeping track of how much you spent?”

“Might’ve stopped counting halfway through,” Hiktok said, his eyes not leaving the screen.

“Might’ve?” I said.

“Did,” he admitted.

“186.84,” Charlotte announced.

“Ohhhh,” Karla razzed him, “so close.” Then she spoke to Charlotte. “He had a $150 budget to buy his own food for the week.”

“What’re you going to put back, bud,” I asked him.

Hiktok was looking over his order. “4 bags of chips,” Charlotte noted. “Really trying to munch out, eh?” Karla and I shared a glance at Charlotte’s words and smirked at one another. Hiktok ended up taking two bags of chips back and the 2nd pack of bacon he had grabbed.

“This might be going just how you intended,” I whispered to Karla as Hiktok came back from returning the items to their proper shelves.

“OK,” Charlotte said, “147.91.”

Hiktok grinned.

“Just under,” Karla said. “Nicely done.” After Charlotte confirmed Hiktok was under his $150 limit, I loaded the rest of our order onto the belt, and Hiktok put all of his things into his own carboard box to keep them separate. We rang everything through, Charlotte put the order on our company credit account, and everyone started grabbing boxes to pack up the Suzuki. As I grabbed the last box, it hit me that I should check with Charlotte about Wesley’s plan.

“Charlotte, Wesley wants to make and sell muffins at the field for Nunavut Day tomorrow. That’s not, like, disrespectful or anything is it?”

“Not even,” Charlotte said. “People bring stuff to sell every year. Usually set up tables around the edge of the crowd.”

“Perfect,” I said. “And he doesn’t need a vending license or anything to do that, eh?”

Charlotte scrunched her nose at me and chuckled in response.

“That was a Qallunaat question, wasn’t it?” I asked.

Charlotte raised her eyebrows and smiled at me, while I carried the last box of groceries out to the Suzuki. “Koana, Charlotte!” I called as I left the store.

* * *

The next day, Wesley had baked his muffins, and had them ready to go in two containers. He had a dozen blueberry muffins and a dozen chocolate chip. He also had spent his time before bed the previous evening making a sign to advertise what he was selling and what the prices were. He had

originally planned to sell the muffins for 5$ each, but after I shared some rudimentary financial information, he decided 2$ would make it more likely to sell all of them, and still get him the 40 bucks he needed for his LEGO set. His two buddies showed up at the door just as the opening acts were hitting the stage for the concert, and all three of them headed out.

It wasn't quite 10 minutes later when Wesley showed back up and asked if we could open the storage room so he could take a folding table out to the field. I got up to open the door for him, but Karla interjected and stopped me.

"We're going to need a deposit for the table, bud," she told him.

"What's a deposit?" He asked.

"It's like a promise," I explained, keeping up with Karla, "that you won't damage the table and you'll bring it back when you're done. So, you give us some money now, and you get the money back when you bring back the table safe and sound."

"Fuck sakes," Wesley said. "Too many rules, just get me the table."

"This is how businesses work, dude," I told him, choosing to ignore the harsh tone and language.

"How much?" He asked.

Karla and I looked at each other. "How much you got?" Karla prodded.

"I got a toonie upstairs on my dresser."

"2 bucks works," I said. "Go get it and I'll grab the table for you."

I leaned the table against the wall by the back door before Wesley returned from his bedroom and sat back down at the table with Karla and Hiktok to finish our game of cards. Wesley bounded down the stairs in a flurry and threw his toonie across the table so that it rolled and flew off the other end.

"There's your stupid deposit," he said. He turned on his heel without another word and headed for the back door. I could hear him struggling

with the table but decided to let him figure it out on his own and, after a cacophony of metal and plastic banging, the door closed, and it was quiet again.

"Jeez," Hiktok said as he tossed a card down on the pile between us, "Really grumpy."

"It's stressful running your own business," I said before slamming down a queen of spades. "Now pick up 5, Karla!"

Wesley came back about an hour later, change rattling around an old plastic yogurt container he had brought out to his table with him. "30 bucks already," he announced when he entered the kitchen.

"Deadly, Wes," I congratulated him. "But that's only 15 muffins, you had 24, where are the rest?"

"Daniel and Wade are selling at the table for me," he explained. "I gave them 2 muffins each that they can eat or sell. That way I can take a break in here, and I'll still have 40 bucks when they sell the rest of mine."

I couldn't help it and let out a single guffaw. "The next Mark Cuban," I said.

"Who?" Wesley asked.

"Never mind," I told him.

"I'm going to have a snack, then we should head out," Hiktok proclaimed. "The Jerry Cans are going to be on soon." Hiktok stood up from the table and went into the kitchen. There were some rummaging sounds and the crinkle of a plastic bag. He returned with two bowls of chips. "Got you some munchies from my stash, Wes." They both sat down and started quickly shoving chips in their mouths.

I pulled out my phone and discreetly texted Karla: *Looks like the grocery shopping intervention also offered a chance for Hiktok to show some generosity. Just as you intended I'm sure.*

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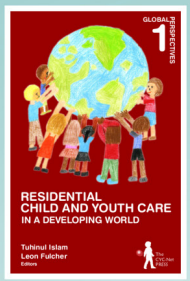
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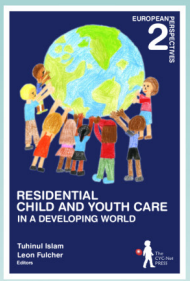
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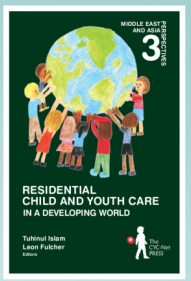
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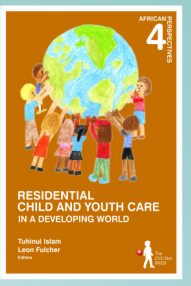






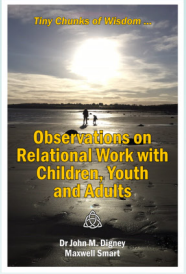


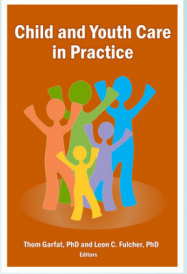


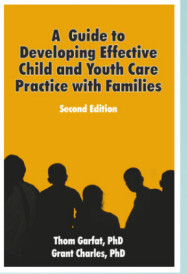


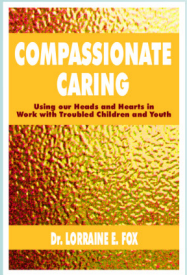


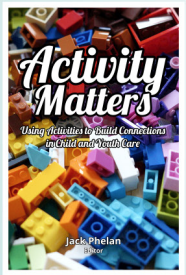


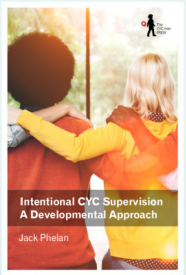




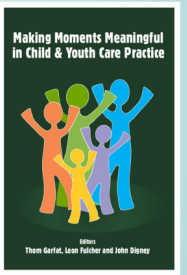


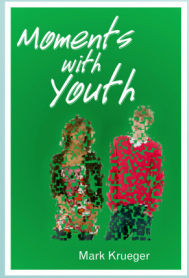


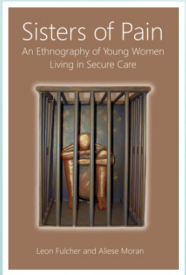


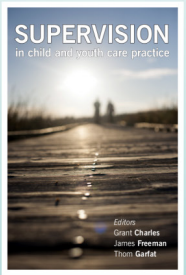


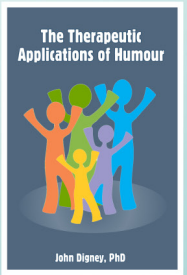


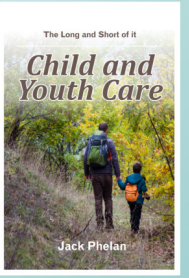












CYC-Net PRESS

As we enter 2024 ...

Hans Skott-Myhre

2023 was a horrible year for far too many children and young people around the world. So many of them were subject to violent deaths, assaults, erasure, food scarcity, homelessness – the list goes on. And so, as I enter 2024, I am a bit jaded and more than a little worried about what we, as adults, are doing to make this upcoming year different. My sense is, that whatever we are doing, it is too little, too late. And I hope that I am very wrong about that. Perhaps, we adults will experience an awakening that will radically shift the way we think, and who we are, in such a way that we will open our capacity to affirm life over death, love over fear, and kindness over brutality. But I am more than a bit dubious about that happening anytime soon and most probably not in the upcoming year.

That said, of course there are innumerable small acts of love and kindness between young people and adults every day all over the world. There are adults who are deeply and profoundly committed to affirming life in their encounters with children and youth. There are political and social movements that are working diligently to affirm the right to existence and affirmation for young people, both in the center and the margins of our increasingly global society. The good news is that sometimes they win and our children are able to exercise their right to life, health, political expression, cultural affirmation, and the dignity of bodily sovereignty.

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On the other side regrettably, since the beginning of the 21st century, despite powerful movements, demonstrations, acts of resistance and courage, the lived experience of young people's sovereignty has lost more than it has gained. Of course, this is not unique to young people. Adults have also experienced an erosion of political force when it comes to pursuing the right to a pluralistic society where acceptance, love, and justice are valorized and made a practical reality.

We should note however, that this pattern of struggle is not unique to the 21st century. The contestation between greed and care is ongoing, but the fight for the dignity of all life tends to intensify during times of massive transition between one way of life and another. And make no mistake, the shift to an economy and way of life founded on virtuality and cyber capitalism is just such a transition.

It is in this context, as the social moorings of the past century slip, and life is thrown into open flows of possibility, that there are reactionary political formations which attempt to force life back into familiar channels. For example, we have the global reassertion of forms of fascism and dictatorship centered on a mythical social and cultural purity premised in fundamentalist forms of religious belief. We can see this in Russia, Hungary, India, Israel, Afghanistan, and the United States to name a few. In these instances, the movement is to mobilize the political power of the state to enforce moral imperatives upon the citizenry of the nation.

Such movements impact the freedoms of young people in terms of who can attend school and what they can learn, the ability to express pluralities of gender or sexuality, the capacity for minority cultural expression, the right to bodily sovereignty, the ability to speak freely, and the right to dress and hairstyle (as an expression of culture or personal preference). These reactionary political and social formations very probably have no long-term

viability, because history does not move backwards and the reassertion of a world past cannot stand against the pressing force of the future.

That said, reactionary forces can exact a tremendous toll, even in a short period of time. Nazi Germany only existed for 12 years, but killed and enslaved millions in their effort to reassert a mythical Germany that never really existed. So, in saying that contemporary political formations can't be sustained over extended periods, I am not saying they cannot have severe and horrific impacts. They already are.

As frightening as the emerging threat of reactionary fascism might be, there is an even more threatening political formation that is emerging as we enter 2024. That is the call for a move away from democracy to a system of technocratic rule. This movement is potentially more dangerous, because it is firmly founded on the developments in technology that are rapidly and comprehensively changing the world in which we live. There are some thinkers and leading capitalists who are proposing that democracy has run its course and we should move to a system where we are ruled by an elite council of technocrats who understand the emerging world of things like AI, global technology, and virtuality. Rather than be governed by "the people" who cannot seem to manage their affairs without falling into descension, warfare, and paralyzing government dysfunction, technocrats would be rule, guided by the emerging wisdom of virtual intelligence and scientific innovation. This is a frightening possibility, because it builds on the world of the future, which is coming to be with a speed that is difficult to comprehend.

If this kind of governance gains force, young people would be marginalized based on their humanity. The fundamental precepts of relational engagement, living encounter, and even love which are central to the CYC project would lose significance in the face of a technology centered future. Of course, the fact that 2024 will undoubtedly encompass

significant innovations in the growth and spread of technology is inevitable. The question is, does that mean that the messy world of living things is necessarily increasingly subordinate to those developments. I think that it is more than a resistance premised in nostalgia to argue for an ongoing assertion of subordinating technology to the necessities of life, rather than the other way around. I am always extremely dubious about groups of experts who get in charge of things and even more so with the narcissists I see emerging out of Silicon Valley, who are proposing to take control of our lives and ways of being.

So, as we enter the new year of 2024, the stakes are high for the young people we encounter in our work. The specter of a dystopic future, politically, economically, or ecologically weighs heavily on their minds. I don't believe, that at a fundamental level of existential intuitive comprehension, they have any faith in the false comfort of a system that promises them mental health in the face of unconscionably deteriorating systems of care for all living things. They live in the world and they can see firsthand the ways in which adults are neglecting to create reasonable and sane responses to the escalating crises of our world today. Young people's epidemic rates of depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, and peer to peer violence seem to me to be obvious responses to a world in which what is happening to their lives doesn't seem to matter to those in charge.

This is not to say that young people don't seek a quick fix in the world of counseling, mental health, and psychopharmacology, just as they seek escape in the comforts of getting high, virtual worlds, and the allure of entrepreneurship. Two centuries ago, in a similar time of transition into industrial capitalism, Karl Marx said that religion was the opiate of the people. While there are many ways to read that statement, in our context, I would suggest that what he may have meant was that in the face of a system that appears to be violently impervious to our needs, we might seek

solace in a rituals and beliefs that promise some personal comfort. In our age, certainly religion could be seen for some as still holding that kind of comfort, but too often religious belief these days is also one of the sources of violence and oppression young people experience across the world.

Perhaps, then the opiate for the 21st century is not so much religion as mental health. The promise that somehow we can surmount the turmoil of our times by adjusting our thoughts and behaviors so that what is happening around us doesn't interfere with our sense of purpose or well-being. That we can seek comfort in a form of an internalized politics, where we don't have to change the world, we just have to change ourselves.

Under this logic, we learn that we can't really even begin to change the world until we have taken care of ourselves first. We are taught that self-care must precede our ability to care for others. Our needs come first and then whatever is left over can be shared with others. I would argue that this is a dangerous fallacy founded in a certain kind of privilege. The pursuit of mental health as an economy of self-valorization is profoundly limited when it comes to the millions of children living on the knife edge of the survival all over the world. For such children, there is no space of respite from misery that allows for a psychological or psychopharmacological remedy. The solution to suffering is utterly material.

While there are any number of things I don't care for in the way Maslow's hierarchy of needs is often used and interpreted, I do believe that he got it right when he foregrounded physiological needs, such as the ability to breathe, have shelter, water, food, clothing and sleep, followed closely by the need for safety and then love and belonging as essential components of human well-being. It is important to note that all of these come as necessities before even considering self-esteem as the premise for mental health. For millions of children and youth these basic necessities are at risk on a daily basis, even in the wealthiest of nations. From my perspective this

cannot be disentangled from our collective emotional and psychological well-being as a people. True mental health is not an individual issue. It doesn't originate from within any one of us. Our ability to be whole individually is a collective issue and any social discourse that gives the impression that we can separate ourselves from the suffering of others is the worst kind of delusional propaganda.

To shift the trajectory of social and ecological disaster that could well be the future, I would argue that such delusional thinking has to be avoided at all costs. If there is the beginning of a remedy to the dystopic projections I have been delineating as we enter 2024, it might well lie in our ability to shift from a model of internalized individual models of well-being to a model of collective care. We have the capacity for such a shift within the core principles of CYC if we just adjust our viewpoint a little.

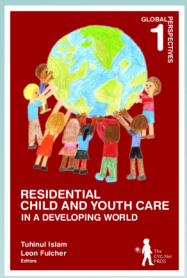
Instead of reading our core principles as referring to the dyad of the worker and the young person, we could widen the scope so that we see our interactions as an extension of collective care. We already have conceptual models of the milieu within residential care. What if we cast the net beyond the walls of our programs and began to conceive of our work as a community endeavor. How about the possibility that life work is not just the activities we do with the young people in our programs, but could become activities we and the young people do to engage with the communities that surround us. We know the satisfaction and even joy that can come from doing things together successfully within the milieu. Can we begin to explore what might happen, if we began to work with young people to work together to take action to change the material conditions in their communities, or to mobilize politically to bring about a change that is important to them and those they care about, or to provide outreach to other young people in need.

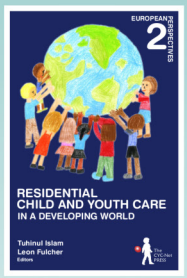
I am well aware that some of these actions would threaten certain kinds of funding. But how long will we in CYC continue to make ourselves dependent on the very system that is harming our young people to begin with? Is it time to declare a new form of independence that would allow us to think outside the box and create new systems of collective care that could better meet the needs of young people in 2024 and beyond.

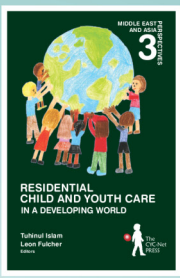
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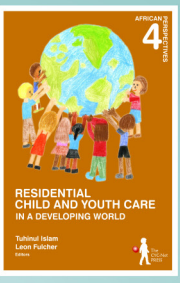






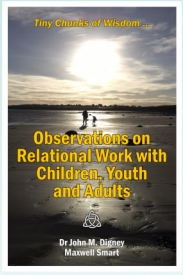


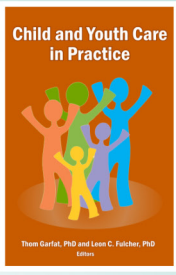


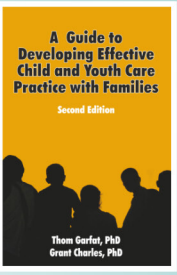


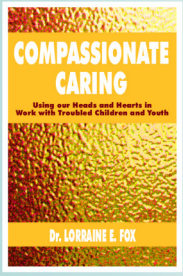


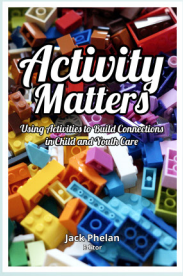






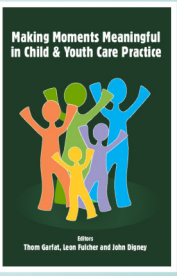


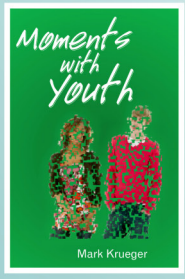


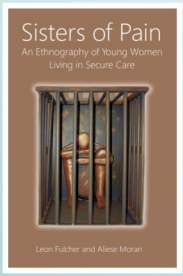


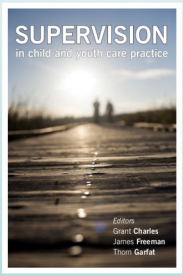


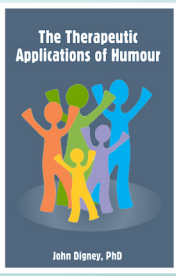


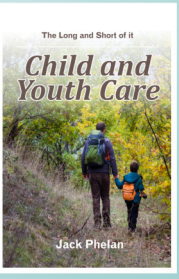












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Phones, Social Media, and Compulsion: Mental Health in the Digital Era

Padraic Gibson

Not all addictions are rooted in abuse or trauma, but I do believe they can all be traced to painful experiences. Pain is at the centre of all addictive behaviours. - Gabor Maté

In an age where digital devices and social media are integral to daily life, especially for adolescents, understanding their impact on mental health is crucial. The surge in internet usage among adolescents worldwide is remarkable, with 79% of those aged between 15 and 24 being active users. This demographic spends an average of over six hours daily on screens, engaging in activities ranging from social media to gaming.

There is a mixed and contradictory picture emerging, however. Large-scale studies in the UK and the US have found the link between screen time and mental health to be minimal. Yet a comprehensive 2023 review of 50 articles highlighted significant associations between screen exposure and mental health issues in adolescents, especially regarding smartphone use on weekdays and its correlation with reduced mental well-being. The

impact of social media is also complex, with certain users, particularly girls, showing a higher risk of depression linked to its use.

The addictive potential of smartphones and the internet has become a growing concern. Phone addiction is not a diagnosis in the DSM-5. Still, indicators of compulsive use include a preference for the virtual world over real-life interactions, negative reactions to being offline, and neglecting important responsibilities. The transformation from pleasure to compulsion in the digital realm is akin to substance abuse and neurochemical reactions. The release of dopamine plays a crucial role.

Compulsion often begins with the pleasure derived from online activities but can evolve into a harmful dependency, particularly when it begins to control behaviour and daily life. In the digital age, we find ourselves in a world where the internet reigns supreme. It's a realm where pleasure knows no bounds. Hours spent scrolling through social media, binge-watching TV, or simply clicking through cat videos may seem harmless at first. But for many, these activities can transform into compulsions, driven by the relentless pursuit of pleasure. Neuroscience seems to shed some light on the paradoxical relationship between pleasure and control; it demonstrates that when we try to restrain ourselves from these digital indulgences, it often intensifies the craving, creating what's known as the "forbidden fruit" phenomenon. Our brains are wired to seek pleasure, even when we know it might not be in our best interest.

The Power of Pleasure

Dr. Anna Lembke's dopamine theory in her book *Dopamine Nation* demonstrates that the pursuit of pleasure, mediated by the neurotransmitter dopamine, can lead to addiction when this pursuit disrupts the brain's natural balance between pleasure and pain. She explains that

engaging in activities that release dopamine can result in a compensatory increase in pain sensitivity, creating a cycle where more dopamine-inducing activities are sought to offset this discomfort.

This theory highlights the delicate equilibrium between pleasure and pain in the brain's reward system and how its disturbance can underlie compulsive behaviours. Pleasure is an enigmatic force that we all experience, but do we truly understand how it influences our behaviours and decisions? Pleasure is a fundamental aspect of human existence, one that has captivated philosophers, psychologists, and neuroscientists for centuries.

From Use to Abuse

From the moment we're born, pleasure-seeking is hardwired into our DNA. Think back to your childhood—those endless hours of play, exploration, and laughter were central. Renowned psychologist Abraham Maslow said that once our basic needs like food and shelter are met, we embark on a quest for higher-level needs, including the pursuit of joy. Play, in all its forms, becomes our gateway to pleasure.

Ancient civilisations understood the importance of play in a person's life. Take ancient Greece, for example, where various forms of play were celebrated as essential to every citizen's well-being. Whether it was sports, theatre, or philosophical debates, they recognized that these activities provided not just pleasure but also a sense of purpose and belonging.

Pleasure doesn't just stop at play; it also acts as a soothing balm in times of distress. When life throws its curveballs, we turn to actions that bring us comfort and relief. Neuroscientists have explored the brain's reward system, unveiling the connection between pleasure and self-soothing. Even in the scenario of self-harming behaviours, such as cutting or scratching,

these actions may have initially served as a way to alleviate psychological pain, yet over time, they can take a surprising turn, offering not just relief but intense pleasure. It's a perplexing phenomenon, one that reveals the complex interplay of our brain's circuits.

Dependency

The transition from regular use to problematic use occurs when pleasurable experiences become compulsive, leading to a loss of control. At the heart of pleasure lies the brain's reward system, governed by neurotransmitters like dopamine and endorphins. Pleasure motivates essential behaviours such as eating and mating, and dopamine is released through the brain's reward pathways, which reinforces beneficial activities and influences learning and memory. Endorphins, another group of neurotransmitters, reduce pain and boost well-being, are often released during stress-relief activities. The interplay of these neurotransmitters in brain regions like the nucleus accumbens and prefrontal cortex underpins the multifaceted nature of pleasure.

Addiction arises when the absence of pleasurable experiences triggers withdrawal symptoms, only alleviated by resuming the behaviour. Anticipation of pleasure initiates a cascade of neurochemical events. Adrenaline intensifies excitement, leading to endorphin production, and makes challenging tasks seem easier. Addiction hinges on these neurochemical processes, and I believe highlights the profound role of pleasure in shaping everyday human behaviour. Understanding this relationship is crucial for addressing compulsion and developing effective intervention strategies.

The Individual Behind the Screen

The role of individual vulnerabilities and real-life social experiences in shaping one's relationship with social media is vital. Psychologist Lucy Foulkes emphasizes that those who are particularly anxious about likes on social media often have pre-existing concerns about appearance and social approval. Additionally, the vast majority of young people who experience cyberbullying may also face bullying in real life. Therefore, understanding the individual behind the screen is essential in comprehending the true impact of social media on mental health. Despite concerns about its impact, social media has undeniable benefits, especially highlighted during the pandemic as a crucial tool for communication and connection. It plays a fundamental role in modern socialising, particularly for young people, facilitating self-identity exploration and offering opportunities for positive interactions. The challenge lies in balancing these benefits against potential risks and understanding the nuances of individual user experiences with these platforms.

Combating Compulsion

Ultimately, successful recovery from compulsive online and smartphone use necessitates more than just behavioural change. It requires a profound transformation in the individual's relationship with their digital habits. Reducing screen time is insufficient; there must also be a shift in how individuals understand why they excessively use digital devices and how they relate to the digital world. In essence, when addressing compulsion, it becomes evident that this issue extends beyond the individual and is significantly influenced by various systems and factors in our 'digital era'. Just as a healthy relationship with the digital world depends not only on the individual but also on the societal, cultural, and technological environment,

addressing online and smartphone compulsion requires a comprehensive approach.

Therapy has shown effectiveness in addressing online compulsions (Portelli and Papantuno, 2017) and effective therapy focuses on helping individuals recognise their compulsion and regain control over their usage. Techniques include interval training to delay responses to notifications and reducing app use to foster healthier habits. Effective therapy emphasizes the importance of understanding the individual's needs and motivations, guiding them towards reclaiming a life beyond the digital realm. The relationship between screen time, social media, and mental health in adolescents is a complex and evolving issue. It requires a nuanced understanding of individual experiences, vulnerabilities, and the socio-digital environment they navigate. While acknowledging the potential risks, it's equally important to recognize the benefits these digital platforms offer, especially in fostering connections and aiding in identity formation during crucial developmental stages.

Key Points

- Adolescent screen time raises concerns about teen mental health.
- Studies on exactly how screen time impact mental health have had mixed results.
- Social media use may be associated with increased depression risk, particularly in girls.

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“If I could supervise my supervisor…”: A model for Child and Youth Care workers to “own their own supervision”

Frank Delano

Abstract

The current “workforce crisis” in the Child and Youth Care profession highlights the importance of quality direct line supervisors. In recent years much more attention has been paid to providing more training and support for direct line supervisors. Yet, although this has begun to move in a positive direction, the inherent nature of Child and Youth Care work makes it clear that many supervisors are still significantly undertrained and ill-prepared to provide the necessary supervision to direct line workers. This article presents a working model for Child and Youth Care workers to better “own their own supervision” and to significantly add to their process of being accepted as a professional.

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In the early 1990s part of my role as the associate director of Hawthorne Cedar Knolls, a large residential treatment centre near New York City, was to coordinate the in-service training program for child care staff at Hawthorne and other residential centres of the Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services. As the training classes progressed I became acutely aware of a very interesting phenomenon taking place. Any attempt to focus on conceptual issues was met with persistent questions from the group to bring the issue back to their own kids and their own daily work situations. On a few occasions we paid a handsome fee to bring in trainers from outside the agency with significant expertise in a particular area. Most of those trainers walked away very frustrated as the group tried to get them pinned to dealing with specific kid and case issues.

Fighting the temptation to simply label this group of child care workers as non-academically inclined, or “resistant” to learning about conceptual material, I began talking with the group to take a look at their perceptions of the issue. One of the child care workers from a different division in the agency met with me and shared a thought that confirmed my own sense of the issue. She suggested that although I thought I was doing “training,” I was really providing “supervision” to a group that clearly sensed they weren’t getting enough. As trainers we are very aware of the differentiation that is necessary between training and supervision, but I found myself struggling to meet a need that seemed to be being expressed by the actions of the group yet keep the structure and boundaries of our training program intact. The child care worker who raised the question with me was a bright, young, energetic worker who began to deal sensitively with her perceived needs by raising the specific issues less in class but by arriving early and staying later after class to get “advice” on concrete situations with kids.

A positive professional relationship was developing between us, and one day she called with a dilemma that led to a very important learning experience. She had just received her performance evaluation from her supervisor and was extremely upset. She asked if I could help her write a formal reply to the evaluation. Concerned about potential boundary issues, role issues in the agency (her supervisor was not in my program but I did vaguely know who he was), and potential ethical issues, I called the director of her program and asked if he felt it was appropriate that I help her with the reply. The director was comfortable with the idea, and the child care worker and I met to compose the reply.

When this worker met with me I looked at her evaluation and, making a classic mistake, said, "It looks like a pretty good evaluation to me." Curtly she replied, "But it is not *your* evaluation!" As we looked at the evaluation together it became clear that, although everyone wants to be perfect, she essentially did not object to the content of the evaluation other than the lack of specific examples of some of the points her supervisor was making about her work. What she was strongly reacting to was the process. It turned out that the supervisor stopped his "group supervision," which in practice resembled a team meeting structure, with about 15 minutes left and gave out performance evaluations to each of the seven child care workers in this unit. He asked the group to read them, saying he was reserving the last five minutes of the meeting in case someone wanted to discuss their evaluation with him – stressing that they had to be signed and returned by the time the meeting ended. As we kept talking I learned that the program was being audited in a short time and the supervisor was required to get all the evaluations in the file before the audit. Our continued discussion painted the picture of a generally competent and concerned supervisor. However, the nature of residential work with children led him to fall into a number of the classical "traps" that haunt the supervisory process

for Child and Youth Care workers. Given valid “program issues,” he cancelled nearly 90 percent of his scheduled supervisions with this worker. Many of the 14 child care workers he supervised directly reported the same level of cancellations. He almost always used “group supervision” time to cover necessary administrative issues. He often was perceived as “meddling” in issues with the workers and children when he was on-floor in the unit – likely a reaction to the fact that he himself was formerly a child care worker in that program. He was still struggling with the ability to “delegate” decisions to people he viewed as less skilled than himself – even though he had now been in the supervisory role for a number of years. He was so overwhelmed with daily tasks that he fell far behind in getting his performance evaluations done on time. When pressured to do them in a quick time frame he was resentful and unsure about his ability to do the evaluations in a thorough and professional way – resulting in the process this worker experienced. As we discussed these issues the frustrated child care worker blurted out, “If I could just supervise my supervisor, I would help him deal with these things.” A little startled at first, we then chuckled, realizing we probably had the basis of a workshop that might be very useful to Child and Youth Care workers.

If I could supervise my supervisor ...

As we developed the workshop we decided that we wanted to a create a forum for Child and Youth Care workers to better understand the complex and difficult nature of supervision in residential settings for children, to better understand and empathize with the issues their supervisor was facing, and to develop strategies to better “own their own supervision.” We were very clear that if Child and Youth Care workers simply wait for “good supervision” to come to them, the many factors working against this

happening in most agencies would likely lead them to much frustration – and for many of the more talented and knowledge-thirsty ones, on a road out of the field of Child and Youth Care. We wanted to provide a model for Child and Youth Care workers to pro-actively take responsibility for their part of the crucial supervisory relationship, and to feel comfortably empowered in doing so. However, in order to enact that process we felt it important to let some of the feelings drain. So we began the workshop with the provocative thought referred to above. Participants were asked to write down their responses, which were then read out loud (as anonymously as possible) as a way to begin the workshop. Some of the common themes and more poignant replies to *If I could supervise my supervisor I would …*

- Tell them not to take out their frustrations on me
- Start supervision on time and have no interruptions
- Help them learn to be more empathic
- Ask them to learn the difference between supervision and therapy
- Tell them to do more direct supervision of me and less of their opinions about other workers
- Ask them to realize a mistake is just a mistake and not personal
- Empower my supervisor to attend several supervision trainings to better supervise me
- Teach them better time management techniques – they are always late for our session
- Demand they prepare for supervision
- Ask them not to take phone calls during supervision
- Limit discussion of “bread and butter” administrative stuff – do it through memos or team meetings

- Insist they give their supervisees a list of their duties so they know what is expected of them
- Always say something positive before something negative
- Actually have supervision “what is it?
- Ask them to allow me to vent after a crisis
- Ask them to be more caring and less confrontational
- Provide more feedback – positive and negative
- Try very hard to keep their personal beliefs to themselves
- Point out how a negative attitude is contagious
- Ask her to trust me more
- Ask why he says yes to everything I ask
- Suggest the relationship be more professional than being a “buddy"
- Have them explain exactly what this agency is supposed to be doing with kids – if they know
- Tell her to guide, not judge
- Give them a big raise – for putting up with me
- Give more informal perks for jobs well done
- Tell them I don’t always need an answer – sometimes Ijust need an ear
- Tell them to do a better job of getting what we need from top administration and the system
- Talk more about my feelings about my work
- Tell them to listen attentively and with empathy
- Work part of the holidays with me – I need support – it is hard to be away from my family
- Just be respectfully honest with me.

What begins to emerge from these types of answers is just what a large volume and complicated set of expectations are placed on supervisors in the Child and Youth Care field. More importantly the concept of supervision as a "relationship" between two people and not just a part of an organizational, hierarchical structure begins to be seen rather clearly.

So, what exactly is supervision?

A crucial part of the process to enable Child and Youth Care workers to better own their own supervision revolves around them getting a better understanding of what supervision entails. One of the stated goals of our workshop was "to give the worker a chance to understand what good supervision is, to be able to recognize it when they are getting it." The premise here is to suggest that workers may be getting more, and better quality, supervision than they think and to introduce their responsibility to recognize it and seek it out. An interesting dynamic of this workshop has been that although it was originally geared to direct care Child and Youth Care workers the percentage of supervisors taking the course rose to nearly 50 percent of each workshop over time. The workshop is most useful when supervisees and supervisors are brave enough to attend together. However, I think the significant increase in attendance by supervisors more closely reflects the lack of basic training most supervisors are exposed to. The quality of supervision can only improve when both members of the relationship are on the same page as to the definition of the relationship.

Robert Ireland defines supervision as "the process by which the goals of individuals are met and meshed to ultimately meet the needs of the agency. It is primarily an administrative tool concerned with quality assurance and quality control in the delivery of the agency's services" (Ireland, 1994, p. I-1). When this definition is introduced, it often evokes a lukewarm response

from Child and Youth Care workers. They point out it sounds too “cold.” Ireland goes on to say, “Supervision is a link in the agency through which the chains of accountability must pass. It is primarily concerned with getting work done through others” (p. 1–2). It is crucial for the Child and Youth Care worker to understand that this is a relationship in which the supervisor is accountable for the supervisee’s work – ultimately as it connects to service to children. It should help supervisees see that they must be seen as “trusted” enough for the supervisor to delegate the work to. They must earn and own that respect.

Alfred Kadushin's work is extremely important in helping the Child and Youth Care worker to get a better grasp on concretizing what is involved in this relationship. Kadushin believes effective supervision is made up of three tracks: (a) administrative, (b) educational, and (c) supportive (Kadushin, 1985). In Child and Youth Care work the administrative tasks are crucial to allowing the worker to do their work. They include:

- scheduling
- evaluations
- distribution and interpreting policy and procedures
- assurance that logs and paperwork are completed in a timely fashion
- time sheets
- program scheduling
- resource distribution to staff and children.

The implications here are enormous on a very basic level. The schedule of many Child and Youth Care workers has a dramatic impact on their lives. They are already working odd and long hours and have to balance their

work schedule with family life, second jobs, further education, and a reasonable social life outside the agency (I am not including after-work socializing with peers as "social life" here). What can be more basic than getting the time sheets in on time? Yet, not getting them in affects when that usually much needed overtime pay shows up on the Child and Youth Care worker's cheque. The Child and Youth Care worker may then better understand why the supervisor seems to take up so much of supervision time with administrative issues. It is also a beginning to the understanding of how sensitive the concept of power is in this relationship. An undesirable schedule, or not getting overtime pay promptly, can dramatically affect a Child and Youth Care worker's life in a number of ways – and make it tempting for the worker to interpret the supervisor's "mistake" as personal, or a misuse of power, when it may just be a mistake.

The educational track includes:

- teaching skills
- providing opportunities for training
- developing an "educational diagnosis" for the supervisee
- creating an atmosphere in which honest mistakes are OK and offer opportunities for learning
- using evaluation as a teaching tool – with measurable goals.

These expectations can also place a great strain on the relationship. The supervisor is expected to "teach skills" "providing they have them! The Child and Youth Care worker must be able to accept that the supervisor may not have skills in a particular area. The supervisor must accept that the worker may have better skills than the supervisor in some areas. The issue of

allowing for “mistakes” as a way to learn gets entangled with the part of the definition that speaks to accountability.

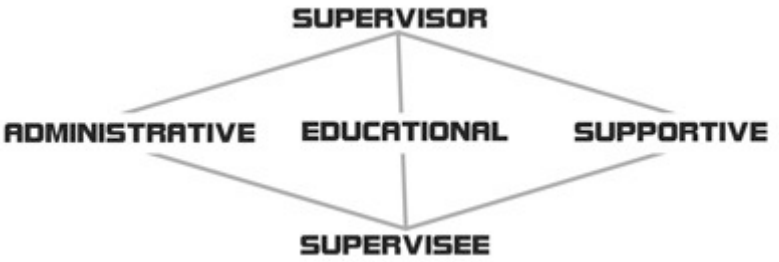
The supportive track includes:

- encouragement
- empathy
- backing “reasonable” decisions
- "hands-on help"
- investment in growth – personal and professional
- lifestyle considerations
- evaluations that are perceived as supportive.

The supportive tasks, while least definable concretely, probably play the most important role in determining whether or not the worker perceives the supervision as “good.” We all know the old adage: “Everyone wants a hands-on supervisor – until you get one!” The supervisor and supervisee must come to some balance on where the delicate line is between availability / on-floor support and “interference” with the worker’s role with the kids. It is probably among the most difficult things a supervisor must assess. The workers always want to have their decisions backed by their supervisor – but what if the supervisor assesses the decision as against the best interests of the child or the program? Again, that delicate line is a very difficult assessment for a supervisor.

By now it is hoped the Child and Youth Care worker is getting a strong sense of what a far-reaching set of expectations is placed on a supervisor and how intricate and complicated the relationship with their supervisor is. Even more important is the worker’s understanding that Kadushin's model is recreated through all the levels of the agency – including their relationship

as “supervisor” to the children (supervisees). In this model the “supervisor” is also a “supervisee” in another relationship, so the expectations are recreated up and down the agency organizational ladder.



To get the most from “supervision” the Child and Youth Care worker has to understand that supervision is not just a relationship between two people. It is a relationship that is intricately linked with many others in the agency and that must function in an incredibly complicated and stressful set of situations. The Child and Youth Care worker should be clear that one person alone has little chance of managing a relationship like this. The supervisor cannot be the only one responsible for ensuring good supervision “the worker must be willing to own their own part of that equation.

Power

I remember sitting in a meeting a few years ago where a large number of sophisticated professionals were trying to devise an outline for a curriculum for training for supervisors. Ten minutes passed as people tried to think of an alternate word for power. Finally, I couln’t take anymore, pounded my fist, and said there is no better word for power! The supervisory relationship

is laden with power, and despite the inherent discomfort with that word in the values of the caring professions, any attempt to have a positive and productive supervisory relationship must deal with that power. The most obvious thing about power in this relationship is that it is structured to favor the supervisor. The supervisor:

- has “assigned authority” – when the going gets rough they can pull rank
- mediates the “image” of the worker, both inside and outside the agency
- has a key role in firing, promotions, and salary increases
- has more access to agency information
- has an expectation for the supervisee to “reveal” more about themselves
- has power and influence that extend indefinitely into the future.

The potential impact of power in this relationship is staggering. In regard to agency information at a very basic level, the supervisor can look into the supervisee’s personnel file. The supervisee certainly has no such reciprocal right. A supervisee may want a day off and is told that it has to be denied because of program needs. In an effort to convince the supervisor the request is “important,” the supervisee may start to reveal things about their personal life as a reason for the day off. Even if the technique works, the result is usually a worker who is angered at the vulnerability the experience presents. I have always defined the impact the supervisor can have on the supervisee’s image as “real” power. For instance, in my role at Hawthorne it would be very normal for me to be in a lunch meeting with the agency’s director of human resources, or other central office executive staff.

Between bites, it might be very tempting to simply drop into the conversation, “By the way that worker, Mr. X, is a real jerk.” It is “real” power because of the informality and the lack of accountability for the statement. Nothing is written, no action is requested, and there is limited flow of information – yet it creates a very important “image” of the worker in the agency. Of course, the real power is compounded when it goes outside the agency (usually in the form of informal references or discussions at events) ,and with the realization it extends into the future, including when the formal supervisory relationship ends. Two years ago I received a call from an agency in Atlanta, Georgia, asking for a reference on a woman I had supervised for two months while she was in college *12 years ago*. The power a supervisor has was brought home very vividly with that call.

So, how can a relationship with such an unbalanced structure in regard to power ever hope to succeed? The Child and Youth Care worker can hold the key. The first step is to digest the fact that power is usually only negative in a negative relationship. Power can also be used very positively. The supervisor can create a positive image as easily as a negative one. One of the biggest sources of satisfaction I have as a supervisor is being able to write recommendations for people I have supervised to help advance their careers or enrich their lives. The Child and Youth Care worker must resist the temptation to “take” the power in a negative way. The most common form of this would be for the worker to “hold back work” to show the supervisor who “really” has the power. This is especially tempting in settings with acting-out children. How many Child and Youth Care workers have never thought to themselves, “Just let those administrators have to manage these kids for a day or two”? The obvious problem is that no one benefits. At best the worker doesn’t grow and creates a negative view of themselves. At the most destructive end, service to children, or safety, suffers.

So, what can Child and Youth Care workers do that is constructive? They can accept their responsibility to develop pro-active strategies to balance the power through the development of a more positive and balanced relationship with their supervisor and by putting themselves in a position of demanding the accepted ethics in the supervisory process in a constructive way.

Dealing with the "games"

Much has been written about the "games" that go on in the supervisory process. Far too often the assumption is that the supervisee plays the games. However, supervisors play games in supervision, too. In her article "Games Supervisors Play," Lillian Hawthorne (1975) divides these game into two categories.

Games of abdication:

- "They won't let me" – The supervisor passes the buck to higher management. I would like to, "but *they* won't let me." It is an extremely self-destructive game for supervisors, because it denies that part of their role is to convince the agency to let them.
- "Poor me" – The supervisor justifies not meeting expectations by emphasizing how overwhelmed they are.
- "One good question deserves another" – The supervisor avoids giving direction or advice by putting the question back to the worker: "What do you think will work?"

Games of power:

- "Remember who is boss" – The supervisor gives constant subtle, and not so subtle, demonstrations of their assigned "power."

- "I'll tell on you" – The supervisor uses the threat of "writing up" the worker. Often attached to the game statement, "I don't want to do this but they are insisting".
- "Father / Mother knows best" – The supervisor doesn't use their competence or knowledge to support a point or decision but uses their assigned role in a patronizing way.

Child and youth care workers must realize they cannot simply stop a supervisor from playing these games. One thing they can do is to focus on the reason for these games in the context of the relationship. The supervisor who plays games of abdication is likely uncomfortable with their responsibility and is attempting to avoid demonstrating it. The supervisor using games of power is likely perceiving a threat to their authority. The worker should, to the extent possible, make a conscious effort not to end up "trapped" in these games. Given the understanding that they cannot "control" the games supervisors may play, Child and Youth Care workers must be extra careful to own their responsibility not to initiate the games that are so tempting for supervisees to play. Kadushin (1968) divided the games supervisees tend to play into two basic categories:

Games to lessen demands:

- "You are the best supervisor!" – The supervisee handles the relationship by "yessing" the supervisor to death and never missing an opportunity to publicly compliment the supervisor.
- "Protect me / treat me" – The supervisee attempts to avoid responsibility by sharing personal issues with the supervisor as a way to get the supervisor to provide "therapy" and redefine the relationship.

- "Evaluations are not for friends" – The supervisee tries to become, or remain, socially friendly with the supervisor in hopes of compromising the hierarchical structure of the relationship. This is particularly effective with supervisors promoted from within who may be wrestling with their changing role with former peers. Remember "friendly" is different than "friends."
- "You remember, don't you?" – In the fast-paced world of Child and Youth Care the worker tries to get the supervisor to believe the issue has already been dealt with, hoping the supervisor will be so overwhelmed they will not remember.
- "What do you really know about the front line (anymore)?" – A dangerous (few easier ways to evoke a supervisor's ire!) but effective game with supervisors who are not comfortable in their new role but were excellent direct care workers.

Games to control the situation:

- "Head it off at the pass" – When there are uncomfortable issues to deal with, the supervisee floods the supervisor with current "crises" to respond to.
- "What you don't know won't hurt me" – The worker constantly says things are fine, not willing to risk raising questions or concerns about the program or their work.

It is crucial that the Child and Youth Care worker be aware of these games and the natural tendency to fall prey to them. Although the workers carmot "control" the games a supervisor may engage in, they do have a great deal of control over what games they initiate. The workers should realize that engaging in these games is tempting because they often have a

perceived, or real, short-term benefit. However, the workers need to accept that in the long run these games will not allow for growth in their work or in the relationship with their supervisor. The games are meant to redefine the relationship, not to add depth to it. Avoiding these games is a true test of Child and Youth Care workers' investment in owning their own supervision.

Managing your "boss"

Gabarro and Kotter (1980) defined supervision as a relationship between two fallible human beings based on mutual dependence. It is an important definition for Child and Youth Care workers to add to their repertoire if they are to make the best use of supervision. Workers need to accept that the supervisor doesn't have unlimited time, information, knowledge, expertise, and resources. The workers need to use the supervisor's resources judiciously but to not expect good supervision to come magically. They need to be willing to be assertive and creative in seeking out the resources and to put themselves in the best position to receive the "goodies" that are available. It entails the Child and Youth Care worker understanding the supervisor is only half the relationship, and not the half they can best control.

The art of learning to "manage your boss" entails the supervisee making an effort to understand their supervisor's goals/ objectives, pressures, strengths, weaknesses, and preferred work styles. For instance, some supervisors prefer to receive information in writing as opposed to orally. Some prefer to hear non-critical but important information immediately while others may prefer waiting until the team meeting. The list may be endless, but the workers increase their efficiency by being aware of the preferred styles and meeting them where possible. The workers should also assess their own strengths and weaknesses, personal styles, and

predisposition to authority. The Child and Youth Care worker should then work hard to develop and maintain a relationship that:

- accepts it is normal for each person's needs and styles to be different and tries to mesh them when possible.
- functions on mutual expectations and responsibilities – each person in this relationship significantly needs the other.
- keeps the supervisor informed. Remember that your supervisor is ultimately responsible for your work and also has a supervisor to report to.
- is based on honesty and dependability. It will lead to the delegation of responsibility and independence you seek in your work. It is also the basis of virtually all positive relationships in life.
- selectively uses the supervisor's time and resources.

No doubt the average Child and Youth Care worker may say, "Why should I have the responsibility to manage my supervisor? Managing is their job – and they are paid for it!" However, more sophisticated workers will hopefully be able to see the benefits of this approach and appreciate how much it can simplify their job – and contribute to their professional and personal growth. If Child and Youth Care workers are to complete the journey to be accepted as professionals, they must be able to accept more responsibility and a more pro-active and fully integrated role in all aspects of the profession of caring for children.

A model to "own your own supervision"

When Jill Goldstein and I (1992) first developed the workshop "If I Could Supervise My Supervisor..." we knew it was important to go beyond the

process of having Child and Youth Care workers identify what they would do if they could change roles with their supervisor. We felt the workers needed to better understand the concept of supervision and get a better understanding of what their supervisor was supposed to be doing. They needed to understand supervision enough to have a better sense of what they should be receiving. Most importantly, we felt that if Child and Youth Care workers were to move along the line of professionalism they had to be expected to accept responsibility for their role in getting the appropriate supervision. Over the years the following model has emerged as a guideline for the Child and Youth Care worker to "own their own supervision."

1. *Ask! Ask! Ask!* – The most direct and efficient way to get information is to ask questions. Child and youth care workers must be willing to ask the questions, and develop the skill to do so in a positive way, for the information they need. For example, I have often heard Child and Youth Care workers complain they don't like the jargon that psychiatrists use in team meetings. This model suggests the worker is responsible to politely stop the psychia- trist and ask for a definition of any jargon they don't understand. Conversely the worker should invite other team members to ask about terms the Child and Youth Care worker may use that others don't understand. Asking some- one his or her opinion is flattering. Every supervisor claims they would like energetic, idealistic, inquisitive supervisees who want to learn. Test that standard. The crucial piece to all this is building the relationship necessary for "asking" to be comfortable.

2. *View supervision as a way to grow personally and professionally and not as a threat* – The Child and Youth Care worker needs to be willing to "risk" to grow. The mind set has to be that supervision is good, not merely a monitoring device.

3. *Seek out "supervision" anywhere you can and from anyone willing* – This is tricky and potentially dangerous because it has the potential to contradict agency structure to be threatening to your assigned direct supervisor. It is a process that must be done in the true spirit of redefining "supervision" for yourself. The worker should see supervision as a natural part of all aspects and relationships in their work. Just as the child care worker in our agency used in-service training to get more "supervision," the worker should take advantage of all opportunities to grow while not damaging the formal supervisory relationship. Another example of this might be a worker who sees an open door to a psychiatrist's office, or a social worker's office, and asks to come in and chat about a couple of the kids for a few minutes.

4. *Remember to ask the two "magic questions"* – There are many times when a Child and Youth Care worker is frustrated by a decision or intervention the supervisor may make. The worker is sure the decision or intervention is a bad one. The decision may well be a mistake, but before concluding that and allowing frustration to creep in the worker should ask:

- "What information do they have that I don't that will help me to understand this better?"
- "What information do I have that they don't that will help them see it my way?"

5. *Learn and be willing to practice the art of constructive confrontation with your supervisor* – Confrontation is often uncomfortable. However, if done respectfully and constructively it can add crucial depth to a relationship. Rather than sit angrily with an issue, try to find a way to constructively confront your supervisor about it. Keep in mind that constructive

confrontation entails dealing with behaviour and its effects and not "attitude." Remember that a successful confrontation should get the desired change but also preserve the self-esteem of everyone involved. Be willing to accept this as a valid process if your supervisor confronts you.

6. *Bring an agenda to supervision* – Direct the flow of your own learning. One way to help structure the consistency of individual supervision is to bring an agenda each time. Try to contract the "one-third" model with your supervisor. Supervisory sessions will be one third your agenda, one third the supervisor's agenda, and one third current or hot issues. Give your agenda to your supervisor at least one day in advance so there are no surprises. You are establishing yourself as a thoughtful professional invested in learning and building trust with your supervisor.

7. *Participate in "group supervision"* – Whatever form "group supervision" takes in your program, be willing to talk and participate. It is sometimes tempting to "hide" and not risk this process, partially because most direct line supervisors are not very skilled or comfortable doing group supervision. Often when they start to overcompensate with too much focus on administrative tasks your appropriate and constructive questions help can them get back on track.

8. *"Insist" On an evaluation, and use your option to respond* – All agencies have structured times for evaluations to be done. Learn when your time is due and respectfully remind your supervisor you are looking forward to getting it. If you are a new worker, ask for a blank copy of an evaluation so you are aware of what you will be evaluated on. If you receive an evaluation you are uncomfortable with, use your option to respond. However, ask for

an appropriate, objective person to help you with the response so you keep a balance on your emotions.

9. *Training: take all you can and be seen as one who will* – Your supervisor is not an endless source of knowledge and skill. Use training as a way to help yourself grow in areas not covered in supervision. Create an image of yourself as a "thirsty learner." It enhances your growth and helps establish you as a professional. You also increase your opportunities to get "supervision" from peers in your classes.

10. *Establish a "teaching diagnosis" of your supervisor* – Supervisors are trained to be responsible to develop a "learning diagnosis" for supervisees. That is, they have an obligation to assess how a supervisee best learns and then attempt to teach that way. But most supervisors, particularly under stress, revert to teaching in the way they are most comfortable. Make an assessment of what that style is and try to better learn that way. For example, a supervisor may not be very skilled at explaining concepts in an individual supervision session but is very good at direct practice with children. Watch them on the floor and then, in supervision, say, "Hey, I watched you do this with Johnny. It really seemed to work. Can you tell me about why you handled it that way?" It is also flattering and will likely open doors to more discussions.

11. *Be empathic with your supervisor's issues and pressures* – Supervisors are people too! Besides, you may be in their spot one day soon.

12. *Learn to "manage your boss"* – Buy into the idea of going against traditional top-down management. Rise above seeing this as "apple-polishing." It is your best chance of creating a relationship in which you feel

empowered. You are not going to change your supervisor – but you certainly can develop the skills to better manage your relationship.

13. *Remember: It's a relationship!* – Like any other relationship in life it is not perfect, nor is it an "answer" to your problems and needs. Be honest, consistent, and dependable, and work hard to build trust. You will have to work together to make it successful – and be patient and understanding during the process.

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Postcard from Leon Fulcher

A Holiday Season Postcard from New Zealand



Holiday traffic leaving Auckland, New Zealand's biggest urban area

Kia Ora Koutou Katoa and warm greetings everyone, whether surviving the cold season in Northern Hemisphere homes, or in full-on summer holiday mode for those of us in the South. Wherever you are, Seasons Greetings! I hope this finds you able to give thanks for a peaceful place to live and work, when sadly, so many are suffering from no work, hunger, and pain.

I confess to having grown up in a place where it is cold, there is snow, and one sang Christmas Carols on street corners at this time of year. But I am forever grateful that New Zealand let me come live in a South Pacific country where we sing at the beach. I get it that at this time of year, many

New Zealanders get into motor vehicles and travel somewhere for the school holiday.

Post-Covid and rebuilt highways after Cyclone Gabrielle saw most New Zealanders on the move for the 2023-24 holidays. We managed to catch traffic moving into the Coromandel Peninsula where many Aucklanders spend their holidays. Then, travelling east on our homeward journey, we encountered young people moving in droves to Gisborne's popular Rhythm and Vines Festival that operated for 3 days before New Year.



Auckland Motorway traffic as the Christmas-New Year holiday begins



The Rhythm and Vines Rock Concert offered East Coast opportunities

Rock concerts and festivals hosted elsewhere north of Auckland and the South Island both celebrated with a youthful determination to start the new 2024 year with joy and festivities around them regardless of rain and mud. The Northern Bass Festival held near Mangawhai from 29-31 December

was hit by 114 millimetres of rain, leaving 10,000 revellers in a quagmire. Youth Workers may be interested to learn that New Zealand has been able to provide free and legal drug testing this year at each of the rock festivals scheduled for the summer.



Northern Bass music festival dampened by rain, mud, flooded tents

Closer to home, there is much happiness around re-opening the Lake Waikaremoana Great Walk. The 42 km walk around the natural beauty of this Lake was substantially battered by Cyclone Gabrielle in February 2023. It has taken the combined efforts of Ngai Tuhoe, keeper of the Urewera lands and the Department of Conservation that have shared responsibility for the lake and the former Urewera National Park. The Ngai Tuhoe people sought and gained legal recognition of their Urewera as



The Lake Waikaremoana Great Walk re-opens after Cyclone Gabrielle Repairs

having its own persona. Visitors to the Land of the Long White Cloud gain special learning opportunities through doing The Waikaremoana Great Walk.



Opportunities for peaceful reflection and calm add much to a summer holiday

It has taken nearly a year to complete repairs on the Lake Waikaremoana Great Walk. 2023 saw the heaviest rainfalls in recent history, with at times, the lake 3-4 metres above it normal foreshore. One of the Great Walk huts has had to be decommissioned as the Great Walk had to by-pass land and hut vulnerable to flooding. We look forward to hearing news of the opening.

After a year of heavy rains and flooding, we look forward to some peaceful, sunny days on the lake, ready for fishing, picnicking – and away from the rain, for a few days anyway. Surely there will be opportunities for preparing a fly line



Then there are dreary weather moments that create opportunities for reading

for trout fishing, preparation for heat smoking with manuka sawdust before sharing with family and friends. What about *Trout Pate*, eh?



This year the Holiday Road Toll was 20; 1 less than last year; 15 more than 2022!

All up, 2023 was a memorable year, maybe because it seems to have zipped by very quickly. Is it just me getting old or does anyone else think that our attitudes towards time moving faster may be heavily shaped by the Covid Pandemic, exacerbated by wars in Europe and Palestine?

Drive Carefully in 2024, and may you live carefully and peacefully with those around you!



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