

Helping Adolescents Own Their Solutions: Talking With Youth, Not at Them

Kenneth R. Ginsburg, MD, MS Ed, FAAP, FSAHM

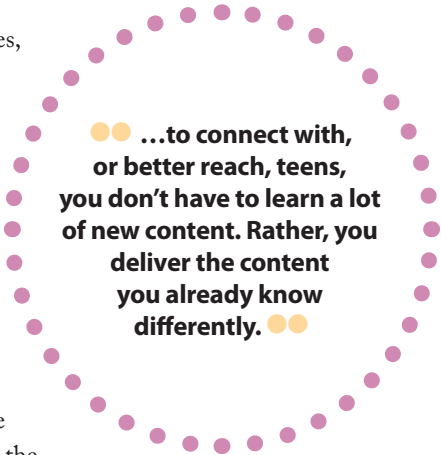
■ Why This Matters

If we are to effectively support youth to become their best selves, we must partner with them. We must encourage them to seek new knowledge and to choose for themselves healthy behaviors while avoiding risky ones. This stands in sharp contrast to telling them what to do, informing them of their lack of foresight, or highlighting their unwise decision-making skills.

Our goal has to be to guide teens to draw their own healthy conclusions. When teens own the solution, they will follow through on *their* conclusions rather than resist our directives. When we impose our solutions on them, we undermine their sense of competence. Without meaning to, we communicate, “I don’t think you can handle this,” or, “You lack the wisdom to solve this problem.”

Most adult guidance is offered through lectures. Our intentions are good, but lectures miss the mark because youth cannot absorb information when it is presented abstractly and reject it when laden with condescension. Lectures can make youth feel stupid or incapable, making them more than ineffective—they backfire.

Central to adolescent development is gaining increasing control. Core to trauma-sensitive practices is understanding that we need to restore control to people from whom it has been taken away. When we serve as facilitators to help young people make wise decisions, we offer them the gift of control. Perhaps above all, when they own their solutions, they do not rely on us for their ongoing progress. This magnifies the likelihood they will succeed when no longer under our direct guidance.



...to connect with, or better reach, teens, you don’t have to learn a lot of new content. Rather, you deliver the content you already know differently.

■ Supporting (Rather Than Undermining) Reasoned Thought

It is a mistake to see adolescents as incapable of reasoned thought. It is true that their “emotional” centers develop ahead of the rational centers that support reasoning. The strength of their emotional development, however, should not be interpreted as a lack of rational capability.

Although this chapter is technique driven, it is imperative to first understand that our tone with adolescents largely determines the effectiveness of our communication. The key to communication is that we not trigger the emotional centers to dominate thinking. We do so when our tone is condescending or angry. We may also do so when we make a young person feel incompetent. When we instead communicate calmly—even with a radical calmness—young people can reflect rationally, plan thoughtfully, and arrive at solutions (see Chapter 15, The Teen Brain, for a deeper dive).

■ Helping Youth Arrive at Their Own Conclusions

To appreciate why a typical communication strategy—the lecture—backfires, we must consider how adolescents think. Children and early adolescents think concretely; as they grow, they become more capable of understanding abstract concepts.^{1,2} In simplest terms, concrete thought is about seeing something exactly as it is, without complexity. Think of a piece of concrete—what you see is what you get. Concrete thinkers neither think through long-term consequences nor understand complex or nuanced behaviors or motivations. As they develop, they become capable of abstractions—imagining the future, recognizing how choices they make in the present lead to different outcomes, and grasping complexity. Most in middle to late adolescence are abstract thinkers, but some people of below average intelligence never get there. It is also critical to understand that *all* people think concretely during times of extreme stress.³

Now let's break down a typical lecture.

What you are doing now, let's call it behavior A, will very likely lead to consequence B. And then consequence B will go on to consequence C, which then leads to D happening! At this point, you'll likely lose control, making it much more likely consequence E will happen. [If it is a parent lecturing, add here, "Look at me when I'm talking to you—I'm not talking for my own good!"] Then, depending on several factors likely out of your control, consequence F, G, or H will happen. I might even happen. Do you know what happens if I happens? You die is what happens!

We lecture because we hope for them to reach their potential. We lecture because we understand danger and want to spare young people from experiencing it. We lecture with the best of intentions because we don't want young people to learn through painful life lessons. The problem is they don't understand information delivered in this manner.

Map out the lecture into its mathematical structure. The typical lecture has an algebraic structure—variables affect outcomes in mysterious ways. Algebra isn't taught to preadolescents or those in early adolescence because their brains can't think in abstract mathematical terms. Algebra is never taught to some people with limited intellectual potential because they never reach abstract thought. And people in crisis can't be contemplating algebra because they want to be running from danger. Bottom line: when we lecture young people, they become frustrated because they can't follow our thoughts. They hear our concern but don't grasp the content of our message, all while absolutely sensing our condescension. Lectures take control away, and that undermines a growing sense of competence. In fact, all this can push a young person into crisis as his head spins in frustration at his inability to understand what you are saying while absorbing your frustration. Remember, frustration and powerlessness lead to stress, and stress drives negative or worrisome behaviors.

Our challenge is to offer information in a way that youth can figure things out themselves. When we do this right, the lesson is more likely to be long-lasting and will reinforce their motivation to follow through on *their* plans.

Those in early adolescence (and people in crisis) can better absorb information if it is delivered with a concrete mathematical structure—such as $2 + 2 = 4$; add another and then you get 5. They can better follow our logic and reasoning if instead of a string of abstract possibilities (A to B to C to D), the lesson is broken down into small concrete separate steps. *"I appreciate your desire to do A, but I am worried A might lead to B. Do you have any experience with something like that? Tell me about that experience. What might you do to make sure that doesn't happen to you?"* Then allow the young person to reflect and absorb the lesson of B. Only when they really get B do you bring up C. *"Do you see how B might lead to C? Have you ever seen that happen? What are your plans to prevent that happening here?"* We acknowledge their existing wisdom and reinforce their thought patterns and plans that could contribute to their safety and health. We pause at each step as they figure things out that they had not previously considered. *They are the experts in their own lives.* The wisdom exists within them. We are only the facilitators. We guide them as they get it, get it, get it, got it—own it—controlling their own destiny.

This approach increases competence because we're asking youth to consider possible consequences step-by-step with their own thoughts, by using their own experiences, rather than through scenarios we dictate. They may better learn the lessons because they have figured them out.

Following are specific techniques and strategies you might try to guide adolescents to recognize consequences and generate their own solutions. All examples share a concrete, simple mathematical structure—adding one thought at a time to gain more knowledge. Note that every example delivers the same information that a lecture would. This is great news because to connect with, or better reach, teens, you don't have to learn a lot of new content. Rather, you deliver the content you already know differently. Once you get used to breaking information down this way, it will begin to feel natural. Remember, it is not dumbing down the information; the content is all there. Quite the opposite than being condescending, it is honoring the intelligence youth have by guiding them to draw their own conclusions.

This respectful delivery of information that occurs while drawing out existing youth wisdom and insight is useful for all youth. But we must underscore here that it is particularly critical for youth who have been through traumatic or toxic stressful events and/or young people currently in crisis. First, it restores a sense of control. Second, the lecture is often delivered frenetically or with an angry undertone. Merely, the action of needing to map out your information in a concrete mathematical cadence will slow down your thinking, make your delivery style more intentional, and therefore allow you to maintain that radical calmness critical to de-escalation and to creating a healing environment. (See Chapter 41, Radical Calmness.)

Choreographed Conversations

Choreographed conversations are the most casual way to teach problem-solving and build competence. Like choreography, they should appear spontaneous but are thoughtfully planned. This technique was described in the previous section of this chapter, Helping Youth Arrive at Their Own Conclusions.

Role-playing

Role play allows youth to arrive at their own conclusions after coming close to real life by seeing how hypothetical actions or words can play out. It is important to move into a role play casually. If you suggest, “*Let's role-play,*” most young people will feel anxious and, rather than allow themselves to feel awkward, quickly seek an exit. Instead, be subtle and work “*What if...*” and “*What'll happen when...*” scenarios into your conversations. In response to their answers, you might say, “*Yeah, but then what if she said _____?*” Keep the tone light, and avoid confrontational dialogue. Don't jump in with answers. The role play is an ideal way to teach social skills, particularly those that allow somebody to avoid peer pressure.

For example, you might have learned that older kids have approached Julia, a 12-year-old, to try marijuana. Rather than tell her, “*Lets role-play what you should say,*” you might start with, “*Well, older kids sometimes try to influence younger kids, but if you are well prepared, you can handle it and still keep your friends. An eighth grader might come up to you and say, 'All the cool kids smoke weed, and you seem pretty cool for a sixth grader; have you tried it yet? I could get you some.' What might you say?*”

These kinds of role plays allow young people to practice real life without real consequences. They will own responses rather than have to think on their feet. It allows them to gain insights into others' motivations—in a safe setting—rather than have to learn painful lessons normally gained only after being hurt.

Decision Trees

Remember, we know where we are going. We have mapped it out in a simple mathematical sequence. Like choreography, our thoughts should flow spontaneously, in a way that hides how carefully planned they are. A decision tree allows you to transform the choreographed conversation onto a diagram on paper. It makes the lesson even more concrete and allows the young person to leave the office with lesson in hand.

The decision tree can be used with a variety of scenarios, including “What will happen to you if you become pregnant?” “Where does putting a really good effort into school now lead?” “Where does using drugs lead you?” and “I know you're angry, but what will happen if you fight?”

The key in drawing out decision trees is to pause at each new branch point. You ask the question but allow the young person to fill in the answer. Young people should be doing most of the talking; you guide them by asking key questions, such as “*What would happen then?*” and “*Imagine where that might*

lead.” As they respond, you write down their conclusions and check in with them about the next logical step. If a young person is not getting to a needed insight, it is OK to facilitate with, “I worry that might cause _____ to happen; what do you think?” Don’t be surprised when young people don’t agree with the conclusions you hope they reach. Instead, they may see much rosier outcomes to poor choices than you had imagined. Remember never to be shocked or condescending. Instead, respond with, “Hmm...I could see why that would seem like something great that could happen, but I am worried that _____ may be just as, or even more, likely. What do you think?”

Finally, wrestling or resistance can be good. This gives you the opportunity to help the young person think things through. It also better positions you to deal with the barriers to positive action because they will be revealed as youth actively voice their struggles with the issues they are thinking through.

CASE 1. A 14-year-old girl presented with blood on her eye to a school-based clinic. She had been in a fight the day before with a classmate who first criticized her appearance and then insulted her mother.

Before she could leave the office, she needed to be assessed for safety. When asked what was going to happen next, “Are you safe?” and “Is the fight over?” she responded, “I’m going to kill her; that’s why I brought this knife [which she had in her pocket] to school.”

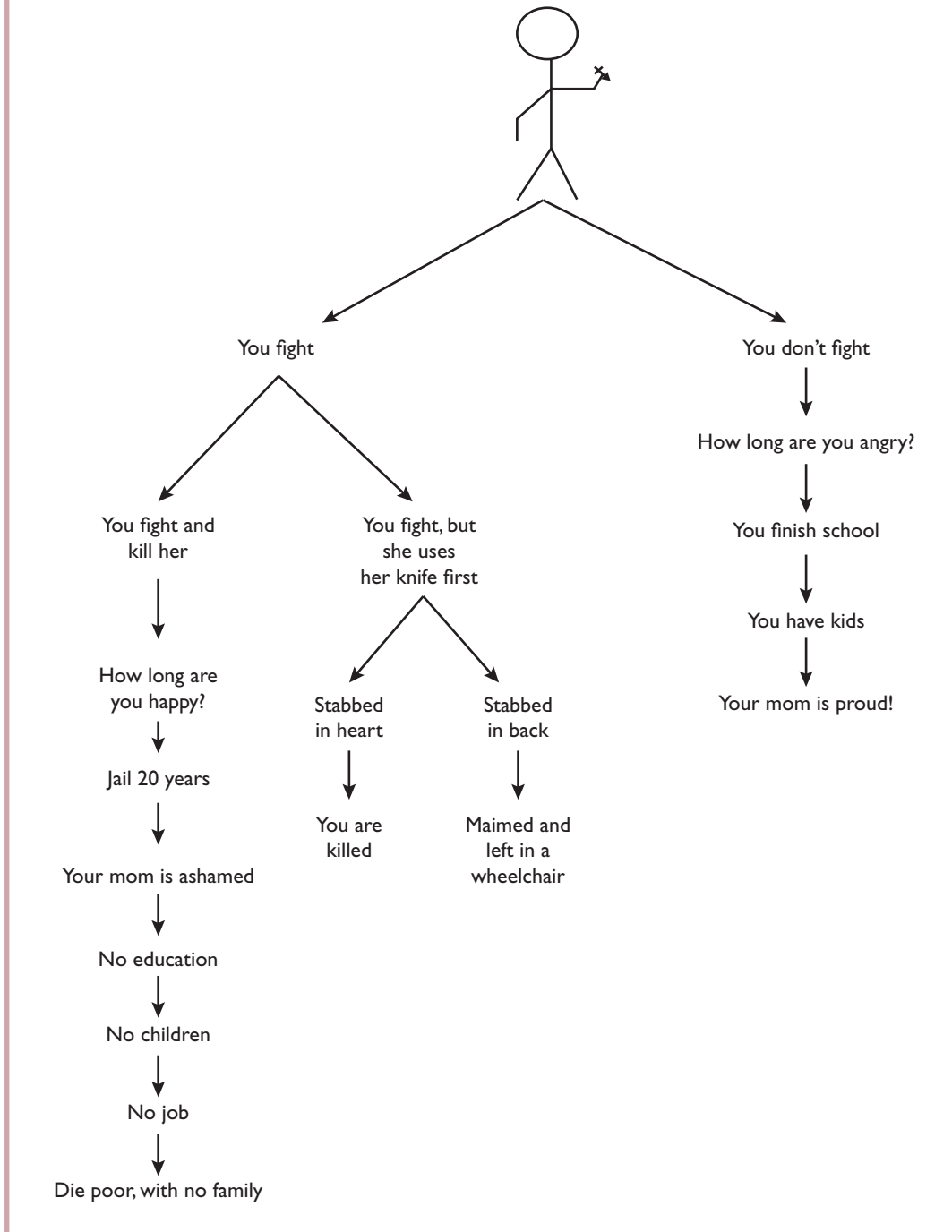
- A lecture may have backfired and possibly created a hostile exchange between the physician and this patient wielding a knife. The last thing you want to do with a person who feels angry and ashamed is make her feel incompetent or foolish, because that can activate her emotions. Therefore, the physician reminds himself to stay radically calm as the first step of de-escalation. This assures he can work with a calm youth rather than trigger reactive emotions that put him into danger. Therefore, she was calmly requested to keep the knife in her pocket and to role-play the possible scenarios with a marker substituting as a knife. At each point, her responses generated an evolving decision tree. He asked short questions and allowed her to respond thoughtfully and at her own pace.
- At first, she was guided to walk through various scenarios to grasp that the knife could be turned on her with serious consequences.
- Then she was allowed to imagine that she had successfully killed the intended target. When asked how that would make her feel, she responded, “Happy!” When asked how long she would feel happy, she responded, “All day!” She was then guided to consider how her actions would affect her mother, because she was getting into this fight to defend her mother’s honor. The next steps in this path are illustrated on the accompanying decision tree (Figure 48.1).
- Finally, the girl was asked to consider how she would feel if she did not get into the fight. She responded, “Angry!” When asked how long she would feel angry, she responded, “All day!” When she realized that this path led to children, an education, and making her mother proud, the choice became clear.

This girl needed a technique that would allow her to contemplate future consequences in the safety of an office, rather than the realities of the street. It convinced her to engage in a process of conflict resolution. She owned the solution and wanted to follow through on her plans. Please note here that this decision tree contains no information that most adults would not have known. It may have saved 2 lives. *But, it is not brilliant.* It merely delivers all the information that would have been included in a lecture. The difference is that it was delivered calmly, step-by-step, in a way that the young person could understand— $1 + 1 = 2$, a simple mathematical structure.

When people understand things, they gain a sense of personal power—of control. Few things are more effective strategically in de-escalating a situation than having someone gain insight and feel the calm that comes from control.

Again, young people reject adult guidance they don’t understand and rebel against advice that makes them feel incapable. When they own their solutions, they want to follow through on *their* plans.

FIGURE 48.1
A LIFESAVING DECISION TREE



■ Gaining a Sense of Control—One Step at a Time: The Ladder Diagram

Sometimes a decision to move toward a new positive behavior seems so overwhelming or a goal so elusive that young people convince themselves they have no choices. They believe outside forces determine their destiny—they have an external locus of control.⁴⁻⁷

The ladder diagram offers a relatively brief intervention that may help youth get past the mental block that serves as a major barrier to considering action. This technique helps revisualize a problem into manageable steps they take one at a time. Once they experience a moment of competence, even just in their decision to consider action, they may experience enough control that they will gain the power to consider further steps.

It Is Stressful to Feel Powerless

Remember, powerlessness increases stress. Some of the most effective stress-reduction strategies are those that are problem focused, because they help an individual address, manage, and hopefully diminish a problem.

In the 10-point stress-reduction plan offered in Chapter 50, *Stress Management and Coping*, *point 1 is to “Identify and then address the problem.”* The key is to clarify a problem and divide it into smaller pieces, by working on only one piece at a time. This decreases the powerlessness one feels when overwhelmed and increases one’s sense of control. This is about helping people revisualize problems from being mountains too high to be scaled into just a series of hills placed on top of each other. As they stand atop each hill, conquering a piece of the problem, the summit appears more attainable.

The ladder diagram can be used with adolescents who never believed they could succeed in school or never thought they could become healthier by losing weight or exercising. It’s been used with young people addicted to drugs and those trapped in gangs. They all share feeling “stuck.” This strategy helps them focus on one step at a time so that they can revisualize problems from being too large to manage into ones that can be tackled.

Many teens can consider only one step at a time and may need to consider next steps another day. In fact, a teen trapped in powerlessness may not even be able to imagine the very first step. Engage enough with her by noticing her strengths so that when you invite her to come back, she returns because it felt so good to be noticed—to be seen as she deserved to be seen. Caring. Motivated. (See Chapter 44, *Focusing and Building on Existing Strengths*, for a primer on connecting with young people more effectively by focusing on their strengths.) Even if she returns still unable to imagine the first step, you can reinforce that just the act of returning is a bold, important step. Acknowledgment that she has chosen to move forward can unblock her sense of powerlessness, releasing the creative juices that will allow new problem-solving ideas to flow.

- **Step 1.** When you sense the adolescent is too stuck to even consider the possibility of change, explain that all people get overwhelmed and have moments when they can’t imagine anything would make a difference.
- **Step 2.** Help the teen think about where he is presently. Draw that present state as the base of a diagram; it can even just be called “Today.”
- **Step 3.** Tell the teen that you don’t have the answers, but you believe that he can find them himself, if he allows himself to draw from the wisdom he has gained just from living his life.
- **Step 4.** Tell him that after listening to him, you see a couple of different possible futures for him. Write them at the top ends of 2 separate ladders leading to 2 distant realities. One is the positive, hopeful future and the other is the destiny he hopes to avoid. This is not a threat; in fact, the positive future should precisely reflect his stated goals. Use all the strengths you have seen in him to help him grasp that you have faith in his potential to reach that goal.
- **Step 5.** Repeat that while you don’t have the solutions, you know that each ladder has several rungs along the way, precisely so that people can climb it one step at a time. Often, people don’t even look to the top; they just know that if they hold on, as well as steady themselves, they can find their balance and then reach for the next step.
- **Step 6.** Ask the teen to suggest what steps will lead to the destiny he hopes to avoid. Because he’s feeling overwhelmed and powerless, he may know precisely which steps lead to the negative outcome, as he has played them over and over again in his mind. He may even feel he has mastered those decisions and actions, and that is why he feels so certain the negative destiny is predetermined.
- **Step 7.** Challenge him to imagine even the first step on the positive path, and ideally, help him achieve mastery over that first step.

- **Step 8.** As he fills in the steps toward the positive end point, reinforce how much easier it is to divide difficult tasks into many small steps. Guide him to remain motivated, by keeping his eye on the future dream, but to focus on only one step at a time to avoid feeling overwhelmed.

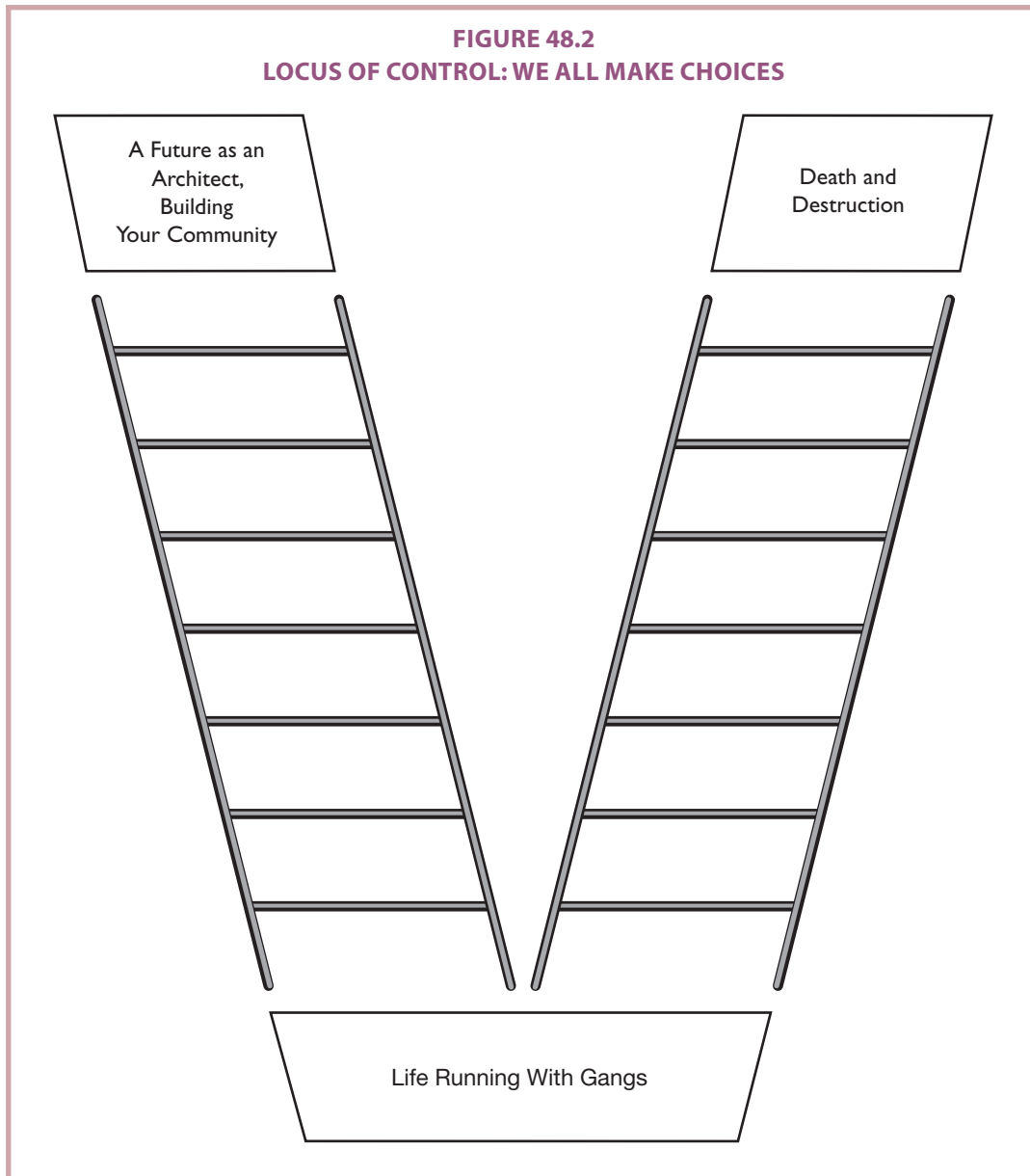
CASE 2. Mateo is an 11-year-old boy who has morbid obesity and is unable to be on the team because he is unable to keep up with his peers. His parents have obesity as well but nag him to lose weight, and his peers tease him. He desperately wants to lose weight, but he looks at the floor when he admits that, until the conversation he is having with you, he has never even talked about how much he wanted to lose weight. Instead, he also becomes angry when people bring up weight: “I don’t care. Why should you?” He shares that he’s failed repeatedly to lose weight. He doesn’t want to try; he knows he will fail.

- The clinician sketched out the 2 ladders and asked what steps Mateo could take that would lead to continued weight gain. He knew exactly what habits were leading to his obesity and wrote each on different rungs.
- Then he was asked to name only one step he could take toward a healthier path. He was assured that once he mastered one step, the next would seem easier. Mateo struggled at first to come up with a single step, explaining with each option what would get in the way, why he would fail. This allowed the clinician insight into the self-talk that served as barriers to action and therefore positioned her to work through some of the barriers with Mateo. He eventually decided that he could stop drinking sugary drinks and replace them with water flavored with lemons and other fruits.
- When he returned a month later, he had lost 4 lb (2 kg)! He realized that food did not control him; rather, he had choices about what he ate and drank. He realized he could follow through on a decision. This gave him the confidence to consider and accomplish his next step. He began walking to school.

CASE 3. Tori is a 14-year-old girl trapped in a gang run by her 16-year-old female cousin. She is a bright, engaging girl who is too overwhelmed to escape her dangerous circumstances. She wants to become an architect when she gets older because she hopes to build buildings in her community to keep neighborhood children off the streets. Every piece of advice offered by the clinician is met with resistance. She states, “You don’t know what you are talking about—that’s family!” This resistance is not about anger; it is just stated with a pervasive sense of hopelessness.

- The ladder diagram allowed Tori to visualize her different futures. She knew precisely which steps would continue to lead her toward trouble and maybe even death.
- The ladder technique allowed the abstract concept of “you need to turn your life around” to be divided into much smaller concrete steps. Nevertheless, on her first visit, she was unable to even name the first steps on the positive ladder. She agreed, however, to return for a check-in the next week.
- She returned and voiced her embarrassment that she couldn’t think of even one right step. She told the clinician, “I failed you; I took this out every night and all I could see was me headed down the wrong path.” She was told that just returning was a very positive step. This simple truth allowed her to realize that she had made a vital choice and proved that she had some control over her decisions. This instantly changed her belief that she was powerless, trapped in the gang with no options.

The same girl who spent a week unable to come up with any ideas immediately freed her creative energy and began imagining solutions. She needed her mother to help her leave the gang. Her cousin loved and respected her mother (that was family too!) and would allow Tori to have that relationship.



Tori's mother was engaged in the plan by using a strength-based approach. In a *"just blame me"* conspiracy, Tori would call her mother when she was in a potentially dangerous gang scenario. Her mother would recognize the code word and demand that she come home, making up one excuse or another. Her cousin, out of respect to her aunt, would say, "You better go and listen to her; she's family." Ultimately, they moved a couple of miles away, enough of a distance to be out of gang territory. Tori was able to leave the gang and later attended college.

■ Putting On Those "Ruby Slippers"

There is a critical reason that must be underscored as we consider why youth must own their solutions. We speak throughout *Reaching Teens* of safe, secure, and *sustained* relationships. One way of interpreting the word *sustained* is the longevity of our personal relationship with youth. Perhaps a more important consideration is the longevity of our impact. When we hand youth solutions, they become ours. Youth rely on our presence. This can backfire badly, as youth might self-sabotage when they know they are soon to leave our programs, because they cannot imagine doing it on their own. And when they are on

their own, they might not trust their capacity to continue all that they have learned...to be their very best selves.

It is about seeing the authentic best in all youth (discussed in detail in Chapter 44) and then guiding them to their own inner wisdom, as discussed here. As we enter and retreat from their lives, they must know that they will always have themselves. Much as Dorothy realized at the end of *The Wizard of Oz*, she never really needed the Scarecrow or even the Wizard himself; she needed only to access what was already in her possession. *The goal here is to have all young people recognize and celebrate their own “ruby slippers.”*

■ Final Thoughts

Remember, we can help young people experience competence as they review or practice action choices. Even a brief experience with success may give a youth enough of a sense of control to continue to move forward.

One more point—following the type of strategies presented in this chapter may be key in stemming our burnout. It is important that we sometimes see progress in front of us. That can be a relatively rare event because we are often just planting seeds. These techniques will allow you to witness “aha” experiences in front of you and see adolescents shift toward wiser choices. It will reinforce for you that what you do really matters. Furthermore, taking the stance that all people are the experts in their own lives and that you are only the facilitator frees you from the counter-therapeutic rescue fantasy that says it is all up to you. Believing that we hold all the answers is a burden that weighs heavily on our ability to maintain the healthy boundaries so critical to our ability to serve over a lifetime.

Related Video Content

- ▶ 28.0 Facilitating Adolescents to Own Their Solution: Replacing the Lecture With Youth-Driven Strategies. *Ginsburg*
- ▶ 28.1 Teens Told What They “Should” Do Will Lose the Ability to Learn What They Can Do. *Rich*
- ▶ 28.2 Helping a Young Person Own Her Solution: A Case of Using a Decision Tree to Prevent Violent Retaliation. *Ginsburg*
- ▶ 34.2 Guiding Parents and Teens to Understand the Shifting Balance Between Parental Control and Teen Decision-making. *Sugerman*
- ▶ 29.0 Gaining a Sense of Control: One Step at a Time. *Ginsburg*
- ▶ 31.2 Stress Management and Coping/Section 1: Tackling the Problem. *Ginsburg*
- ▶ 37.0 Delivering Upsetting News to Parents: Recognizing Their Strengths First. *Ginsburg*

References

1. Piaget J. *The Child’s Conception of the World*. London, England: Routledge & Kegan Paul; 1951
2. Pandit A. Developmental pediatrics. In: Bhat SR, ed. *Achar’s Textbook of Pediatrics*. 4th ed. Hyderabad, India: Universities Press; 2009:66–87
3. Horowitz MJ. Cognitive response to stress and experimental demand. *J Abnorm Psychol*. 1971;78(1):86–92
4. Schwarzer R, Fuchs R. Changing risk behaviors and adopting health behaviors: the role of self-efficacy beliefs. In: Bandura A, ed. *Self-efficacy in Changing Societies*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press; 1997:259–288
5. Rotter JB. *Social Learning and Clinical Psychology*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall; 1954
6. Rotter JB. Generalized expectancies of internal versus external control of reinforcements. *Psychol Monogr*. 1966;80(1):1–28
7. Lefcourt HM. Internal versus external control of reinforcement: a review. *Psychol Bull*. 1966;65(4):206–220

Group Learning and Discussion/Personal Reflection

You do not have to learn new content to improve on the wisdom and advice you have been sharing. Your challenge is to change the delivery style so that young people figure things out by themselves (aided with your facilitation), so that they own the solutions.

In a group setting, recall some cases in which you needed to guide a young person toward safer behaviors. Try to remember situations when a person felt powerless and needed to gain a sense of control. Then, break into pairs and practice using choreographed conversations, role plays, decision trees, or ladder diagrams to facilitate youth thinking through problems a step at a time. A first step is to discuss which technique might best fit the scenario.

If you prefer, you can use the following cases:

1. Liza is a 16-year-old who wants to get pregnant. She states, “I am so ready to love my baby. My boyfriend will make the best father. He loves me. My mother had me at 17, and she may have struggled, but she is a great mom and has given me everything I ever needed.”
2. Hector was in a fight yesterday. He got jumped by a bunch of guys. He knows that they will get him again until he proves he’s not a punk. He is thinking about getting even. But he’s not going to be unprepared. He knows where to get a switchblade or a gun.
3. Josiah is 15 and hates school. He can’t wait until he turns 16 so that he can drop out. He’ll just get a job. No one at school cares about teaching. They don’t teach what he needs anyway. He wants to be a car mechanic, and he’s great with his hands and can take things apart and put them back together easily. (FYI, you live in a midsize city with several high schools, including one that focuses on vocational technical education.)
4. Emily is a 14-year-old girl who has tried “everything” to lose weight but has never succeeded. She has even gained weight after every effort. She thinks that is because she eats more when she is frustrated.
5. Caleb has never done well in school. When he was 16 years old, he dropped out as soon as it became legal to do so. He “lived the life” for a while but wants to be able to have a family one day and make his kids proud. He would love to be a mechanic. He can’t imagine going through the applications or even getting started. He had one teacher who said that he had attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, but he never told his mom.
6. Maria was always a very good student. She got straight As, volunteered in a neighborhood animal shelter, and had dreamed of becoming a medical doctor. Her parents want her to get her education, but they were never able to receive theirs. They push her at home, but they have never gone into a school meeting. She is in 11th grade and her friends are applying to colleges. She has a meeting with her school counselor in 6 weeks. She says it is “all stupid anyway” and tells you that her cousins are doing fine in the family business. Her grades are dropping. She says she doesn’t care.
7. Ivan is 14 years old. His 2 older brothers have been in a gang. One was shot and killed. The other has warned him not to join up. He is getting pressure from some other gang members to be a man and join “the family” to honor his older brother’s life.
8. Caitlyn is 15 years old and is so happy that the boy she has long liked now seems to be noticing her. She knows that he is very popular with other girls, and her close friend had sex with him because he told her it was the best way of showing how much they cared about each other. She doesn’t know if she is ready.
9. Jamal is a 17-year-old fine student. He has been friends with Paul since they were small. Paul had always been an excellent student until a few months ago, when his father left home. He has begun to smoke marijuana and even huff glue when he doesn’t have enough money for the weed. He tells Jamal that they have always stuck together, and he resents being looked down on when he is high. A real friend would “have fun” with him.