

# Engaging with Parents: Building Relationships in an Adversarial System

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## About us

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## Who is in the room?



GALS? Parent Attorneys? Judges?  
Social Workers? Case Workers?



How many years of experience?

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## Purpose of the Workshop



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# What is the Role of a GAL?

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Represent the best interests of a child

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Recommendations to the Court

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Multiple sides of situation

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Make sure that children are getting what they need

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A “go-between” different parties of the child welfare case

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Question:

What else is part of your role as a GAL?



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# A shift: Relational Advocacy

Primacy of Relationships: strengths and challenges on relationship between children and their families

Purpose of engaging is to learn about the person and family

Foster care is viewed as the intervention of last resort

Resiliency building

Proximate

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## Proximate

Civil rights attorney Bryan Stevenson teaches us there is only one way to change our mindsets. He writes that by being proximate with families — that is, only if we're *"willing to get closer to people who are suffering"* — will we *"find the power to change the world."*

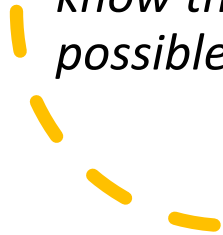
*"Proximity requires us to listen. It necessitates that we are willing to learn. It mandates that we are always open to changing our minds."* Vivek Sankaran, University of Michigan Law

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*“Can we view families as sources of strength, rather than collections of deficiencies? Can we view foster care as an intervention that should be sparingly used only in the most serious of cases? Can we view relationships between children and their families as the most precious commodity we know that must be safeguarded whenever possible?”* -Vivek Sankaran, University of Michigan Law



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Every professional is there to give parents and youth the space to tell their stories

To be  
proximate  
means

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Understand strengths and challenges they face

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Allowing space to acknowledge the structural inequities — including racism, sexism and disablism — that have contributed to the family’s predicament.

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## Reframe of the Role of the GAL

To build bridges

To proximate,  
consider the primacy  
of relationships and  
connections

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### Barrers to Relational Advocacy with Parents

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Opposing counsel

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Differing views

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Parent understanding the role of the GAL

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Noncooperation

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Suspicion

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Mental Health

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Anger/Defensiveness

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Comments/questions?

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## Relational Advocacy

### Guiding Principals

Trauma informed

Transparent

Compassionate

Relationships are crucial

### Direct Skills



Pay attention



Suspend judgement



Empathetic statements



Resiliency building questions



Reflective listening

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## Guiding Principles

Trauma Informed

Transparency

Compassionate Engagement

Relationships are paramount

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## What is Trauma? a: The 3 E's

Individual trauma results from an **event, events, or circumstance**

**Experienced** as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening

Lasting adverse **effects**



**SAMHSA**  
Substance Abuse and Mental Health  
Services Administration

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# Trauma Responses

Anxiety/panic	Depression/sadness	Attachment problems=>relationship problems	Changes in world view: world is dangerous, not to be trusted	Changes in sense of self: questioning self-worth, place in world, goodness of self	Hypervigilance
Hyperarousal	Vulnerability to triggers/re-experiencing	Avoidance/emotional numbing/dissociation (psychological absence)	Irritability	Anger	Poor concentration and memory
Mood swings	Sleep disturbance	Emotional outbursts	Hopelessness	Sense of Helplessness	Drug use and addiction
	Minimizing	Guilt	Exhaustion and other physical problems		

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## Trauma informed care means...

Realize Impact

Recognize Signs of Trauma

Respond

Resist re-traumatization



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## Principles of Trauma Informed Care

1.Safety

2.Trustworthiness and Transparency

3.Empowerment, Voice, and Choice

4.Collaboration and Mutuality

5. Peer Support

6.Cultural, Historical, and Gender Recognition

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What is one thing you have done during a meeting or conversation a parent that falls under trauma informed care?

Comments/Questions about Trauma informed care?

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# Transparency:

**Making your purpose and position clear**

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**BENEFITS?**

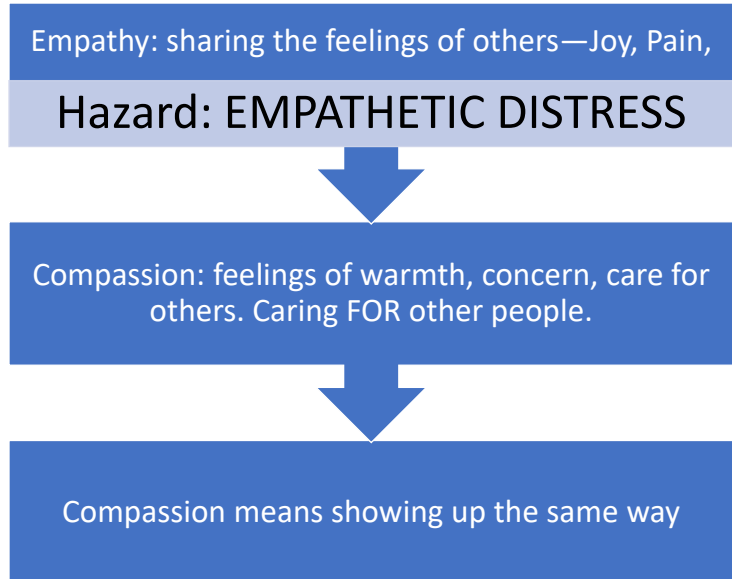


**LIMITATIONS?**

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## Compassionate Engagement



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## Relationships are paramount

- Form a relationship
- Consider relationships between parents, children, system, larger structures
- Preserve bond between parents and children

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## Direct Skills



Pay attention



Suspend judgement



Empathetic statements



Resiliency building questions



Reflective listening

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## PAY ATTENTION



**Allow time and create space**



**Set your intention**

Listener and learner  
Connect to understand

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## Pay Attention to



WORDS YOU USE



EYE CONTACT

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SUSPENDING  
JUDGEMENT

Hear	Hear ideas
Accept	Accept perspectives
Avoid	Avoid arguing or selling your point of view

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## Empathic Statements

- That sounds really hard
- I can't imagine what it's like to be in your shoes
- I can see how difficult this has been
- The whole thing sounds so discouraging
- I can totally see why you would be upset
- I can't believe how well you're holding up, considering how much stress you're under

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## Resiliency Building

"Building resilience — the **ability to adapt well to adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or even significant sources of stress** — can help manage stress and feelings of anxiety and uncertainty," according to the American Psychological Association (APA)

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# Resiliency Building Questions with Parents\*

\*Brad Ward Lundahl, University of Utah

Before all of this happened

- What did a perfect day look like for you and your kids?

I believe that you love your child:

- Tell me what you love about \_\_\_\_\_

I believe you want the best for your child

- Tell me about times you feel like you were a good parent to \_\_\_\_\_?
- What have you given up to make sure \_\_\_\_\_ has what they need?

I believe you are important to this child

- What is a special thing only you can give them?

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# Resiliency Building Questions: Relationships and Connections \*

\*Brad Ward Lundahl, University of Utah

When you need something,  
who do you look to for help?

Who is the person besides you  
that knows your kids best?

Who can you count on, no  
matter what?

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# Resiliency Building Questions: Strengths \*

\*Brad Ward Lundahl, University of Utah

What part of being a parent do you enjoy the most?

When are you at your best as a parent?

What would \_\_\_\_\_ say is the best part of having you as a parent?

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# Resiliency Building: efficacy and mastery \*

\*Brad Ward Lundahl, University of Utah

What would you like to improve on as a parent?

What's one thing you want help with to be a better parent for \_\_\_\_\_?

What part of being a parent would you like to copy from a friend or family member?

What would a friend or neighbor say you are good at?

What are you proudest of?

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## Question

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Which of those questions resonated the most?

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Additional  
Comments/Questions?

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# Reflective Listening

Be a mirror

Use paraphrasing—a brief, periodic recap of the other person's key points—to confirm your understanding

A way to show that you hear and may understand

Don't assume that you understand correctly

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## Examples of Reflecting

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"What I'm hearing is..."

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"Let me make sure I understand what you're saying..."

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You seem to think that...

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It seems to me that you are ...

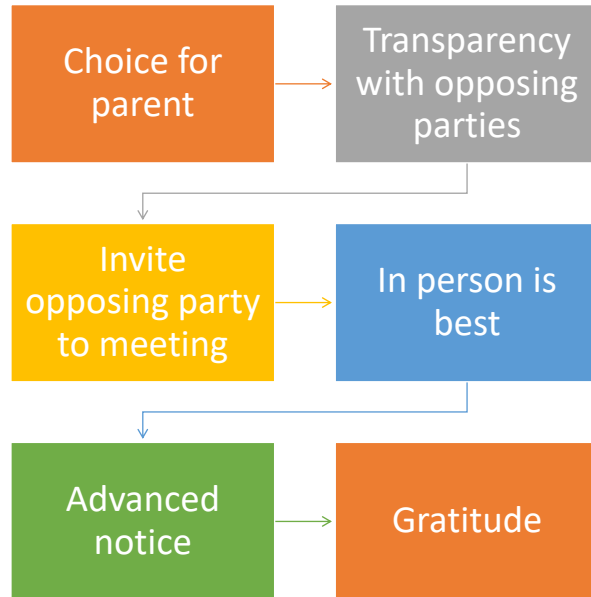
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It sounds as if you're feeling...

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## Tips for parent visit



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Build in self care

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# Relational Advocacy

## Guiding Principals

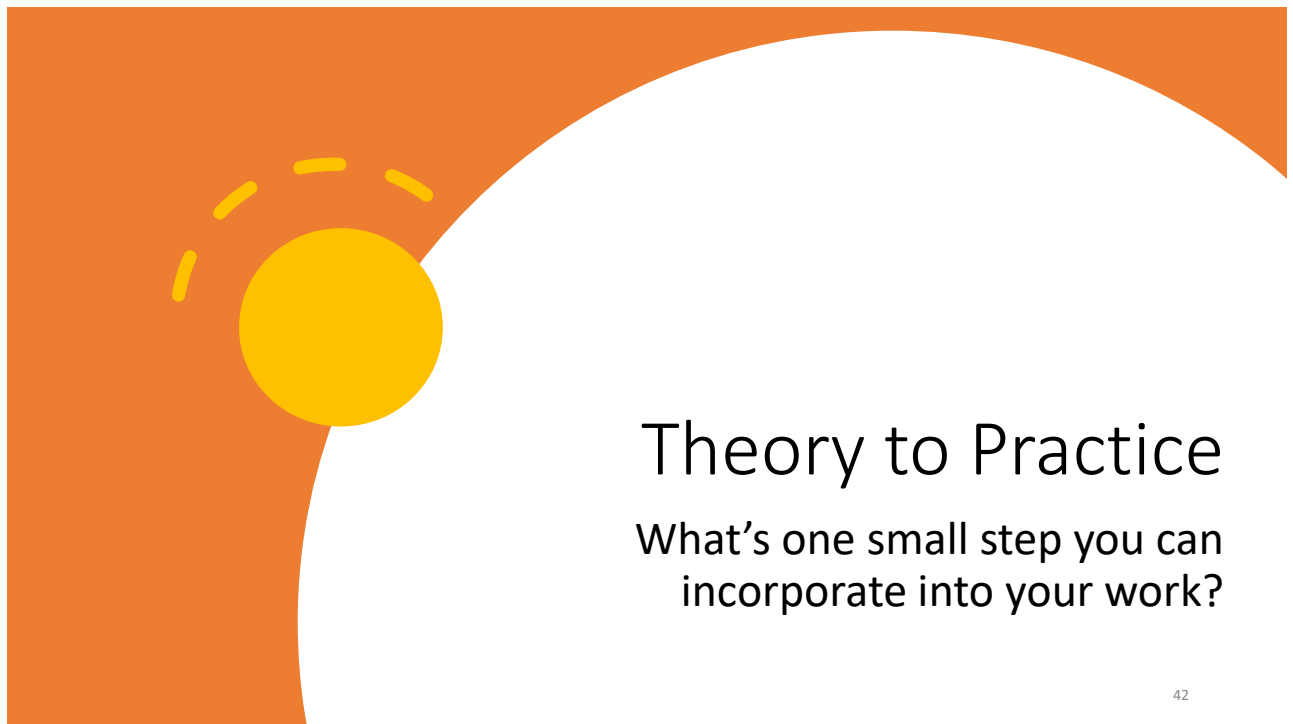
- ☐ Trauma informed
- ☐ Transparency
- ☐ Compassionate
- ☐ Relationships are crucial

## Direct Skills

-  Pay attention
-  Suspend judgement
-  Empathetic statements
-  Resiliency building questions
-  Reflective listening

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