

Response Ability

Pathways

A Training Course for Restoring Bonds of Respect



RAP™

Response Ability Pathways: RAP

What is RAP?

Response Ability Pathways – or simply RAP – is a training program that provides skills for working effectively with all youth and supporting them on pathways toward responsibility. RAP training is highly practical in design and can be provided both to mentors and mature youth. RAP builds positive connections among youth and with their elders to create a climate of respect.

What Challenges Face Today's Youth?

In early tribal cultures, children thrived when nurtured by caring relatives. But in modern society, the bonds between generations have been tattered. Children who are not attached to adults fail to learn the values of respect for self and others. Hungry for attention, they become prisoners of peer approval. Unattached to school, they fail to develop their potentials. Unmotivated in school, they fail to develop their potentials. Struggling for power, they challenge authority. Many youth mask their spiritual emptiness by reckless pursuit of pleasure. Their disruptive behaviors are signals of distress. Beneath their defiance, indifference, or reckless bravado, many of our youth are swimming in rivers of pain. But when their behavior bothers others, they are likely to be dealt more pain. These problems are not unique to impoverished communities but are found in the city, suburb, and rural community. Family instability, substance abuse, delinquency, school problems, racism, and alienated youth are all symptoms of broken communities. RAP addresses such problems by restoring relationships and building positive peer climates.

How Does RAP Work?

To succeed in the face of risk and challenge, children need concerned adults and peers who respond to their needs rather than react to problem behavior. RAP provides these “response-abilities” to all who deal directly with young persons experiencing conflict in school, family, peer group, and community. This training can include key adult stakeholders as well as youth who exercise positive influence among their peers.

RAP turns problems into positive learning opportunities. RAP is a system for communicating with youth. RAP uses a clear-cut problem-solving format: *Connect* ► *Clarify* ► *Restore*. This is the normal process for resilient coping found in all cultures. Thus, RAP taps the strengths and natural capacity kids already have to *connect* with others for support, *clarify* challenging problems, and *restore* respect.

- **Connecting:** A mentor’s first challenge is to create positive social bonds. While “building relationships” with reluctant youth may appear to be a daunting task, many meaningful connections can be made in a short period of time, both with individuals and with groups. Positive connections are built upon small acts of respect and kindness. Once youth connect, they are able to use that person for positive support.
- **Clarifying:** By helping a youth understand “here-and-now” problem situations, mentors support the development of resilient coping strengths. Youth learn to use strengths and overcome limitations to meet important life goals. Young persons need to learn to think clearly about their behavior in order to creatively solve problems, master difficult challenges, and meet their needs.
- **Restoring:** Interpersonal harmony involves respect for self and others. A restorative plan taps inner strengths and external supports to meet growth needs for belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity. Though complicated problems may not be resolved immediately, a young person can take steps on the pathway toward responsibility.

RAP starts with problems but searches for strengths and solutions. RAP provides whatever support the “teaching moment” allows, whether literally a moment or an hour. Sometimes a few short RAP interventions distributed over time have more lasting impact than a long session.

RAP training grew from the Circle of Courage model based on Native American philosophies of child rearing as described in *Reclaiming Youth At Risk* by Larry Brendtro, Martin Brokenleg, and Steve Van Bockern. The goal is to create opportunities for belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity. RAP is also grounded in research on resilience and brain science.

RAP training has been rated as highly useful by staff in education, treatment, juvenile justice, youth care, foster care, family support, law enforcement, and community and faith-based organizations. RAP enables youth to join in an alliance with adults to solve problems and cultivate respectful environments.

What is the Outline of the Course?

- I. RAP Foundations**
 - Foundational Concepts
 - Circle of Courage and Resilience Science
 - Rivers of Pain
 - Fighting Pain with Pain
- II. Connecting**

RAP Introduction
Disconnected Kids
Brain Science on Connecting
Strategies for Connecting

III. Clarifying

Coping With Challenges
Private Logic: The Inside Kid
Thinking Errors
CLEAR Thinking

IV. Restoring

Instilling Responsibility
Cultivating Respect
Restoring Social Bonds
Choosing New Pathways

How is RAP Training Organized?

RAP training follows principles of “universal design.” It is intuitive, jargon-free, and relevant across diverse cultural settings. Training is interactive and experiential and provides practical strategies for professional and lay persons as well as youth who are peer leaders. A RAP course is delivered over three days by certified RAP trainers. Outside readings support the formal training.

RAP trainers use brief lectures, audio-visual resources, discussion, and extensive role-playing of problem-solving scenarios. This is a very interactive course and participation in role-playing is organized to be as non-threatening as possible. The skills for these interventions are developed in sequence, first concentrating on Connecting, later adding Clarifying, and by the last day putting together Connecting, Clarifying, and Restoring.

Participants in RAP training receive the following training manual: *Response Ability Pathways [RAP]*. The co-authors of this text have over a century of collective experience developing programs for challenging young people:

- Larry Brendtro, PhD, president of Reclaiming Youth International and dean of the Starr Commonwealth Research Council.
- Lesley du Toit, MA, executive director of CYCAD South Africa.
- Martin Mitchell, EdD, president of Starr Commonwealth, Albion, Michigan.
- Herm McCall, EdD, chief operating officer of Starr Commonwealth, Albion, Michigan.

Research Foundations of RAP

RAP uses a philosophy of restorative intervention grounded in two major bodies of research. First, the Circle of Courage translates the mushrooming literature on resilience and positive youth development into a concise and understandable format. These principles are summarized in a recent publication by Research Press.¹ Secondly, RAP is an application of recent brain research in areas such as conflict, emotional intelligence, and pain-based behavior. RAP translates this knowledge into practical strategies for connecting with youth at risk, creatively solving problems, and fostering pro-social behavior.

RAP offers a practical guide for helping all children thrive and grow. The key landmarks on the journey to resilient outcomes are Belonging, Mastery, Independence, and Generosity. There is a close connection between the Circle of Courage and other research on strengths and resilience. The classic early study of strengths in children is *The Antecedents of Self-esteem* by Stanley Coopersmith.² He found that children build their sense of self-worth on the foundations of significance, competence, power, and virtue. These parallel the four dimensions of the Circle of Courage. Similar validation is provided by other leading studies of resilience.³

A theme running through all studies of resilience is the importance of meeting universal growth needs. We now have a formidable body of research on the crucial needs for attachment, achievement, autonomy, and altruism. These findings are briefly highlighted from the perspective of the Circle of Courage.

Belonging: Developing Attachment

An array of evidence shows that humans possess a fundamental need to belong.⁴ This is fulfilled by frequent positive interactions with at least a few persons who share mutual concern. Belonging creates positive emotions, particularly pride; rejection produces shame, among the most painful social emotions humans can experience.

The desire to form attachments is encoded in the human DNA. For example, the human brain has an area for reading emotions on the face which is different from perception of inanimate objects. Attachment behavior has been studied across the life span from infancy through the expanding relationships of childhood, adolescence, and adulthood.⁵

Contrary to early speculation that humans were inherently aggressive animals, it is now clear that we are innately friendly beings who are inclined to form strong, enduring, and harmonious attachments with others of the species – or as Harlow simply put it, to love them.⁶ It is no accident that love is the most frequently cited word in *Bartlett's Book of Quotations*.

Mastery: Developing Achievement

A central motivation behind much human behavior is the quest to become competent.⁷ Children can acquire a mass of knowledge, including an entire language code, without formal instruction. The human brain creates order out of chaos and solves the problems necessary for social and personal survival. The talents of young persons can only crystallize with the support of adult mentors or more skillful peers.⁸

Problem solving has been studied for a century since John Dewey first suggested that all goal-directed behavior begins with some “felt difficulty.”⁹ Practical intelligence is the ability to creatively solve problems and meet one’s goals by capitalizing on strengths and overcoming weaknesses.¹⁰ Successfully intelligent people defy negative expectations, such as low scores on tests. They do not let others stop them from achieving their goals. They find their path and pursue it, realizing that there will be obstacles along the way and that surmounting these is part of the challenge.

While all interventions in RAP are grounded in a solid theory and evidence base, individual sites are encouraged to evaluate the application of these principles to their unique settings. RAP has been piloted in South Africa, Canada, and the United States in a range of educational, residential group care, and youth development settings. Evaluations of participants has been very positive.

Independence: Developing Autonomy

All young persons desire to control their lives and influence events in their social world.¹¹ Some act as pilots, setting the course toward personal goals. Others are more like robots who react automatically to events which surround them.¹² Psychologists use the terms *internal locus of control* and *external locus of control* to describe persons who feel in charge of their lives and those who feel they are pawns of others.¹³

Resilient youth develop personal autonomy. Even if life is difficult, they have confidence they can make things better. They are able to stand up to negative influence and are not easily misled by others. They distance themselves emotionally from friends or troubled family members, setting their own pathway.¹⁴

Many behaviors that irritate adults are landmarks on the road to independence. Children test their strength with loudness and physical horseplay. Teens show bravado and risk-taking and push the limits of adult control. Rule-breaking becomes a practice run at independence. In the ensuing power struggles, youth seek autonomy while adults seek to control. Youth need pro-social outlets for their growing need for independence.

Generosity: Developing Altruism

Humans function best when they are part of a community of mutual social support. As they fulfill obligations to others, they discover that they are valued and esteemed.¹⁵ But for decades, psychology operated as if all human behavior were selfishly motivated. Now, research on altruism has shown that concern for others is central to human nature.¹⁶ Moral development research validates what the great religious traditions long have taught, that concern for others is the foundation of character and morality.¹⁷ We learn morality not so much by what we are told than by how we are treated.¹⁸

Kurt Hahn, founder of Outward Bound, noted that many modern youth suffer from the “misery of unimportance” and long to be used in some demanding cause. An “I’ll-get-mine” culture leaves students self-absorbed and devoid of purpose. Generosity is an antidote to this narcissism. Giving to others develops higher levels of moral development and provides youth a sense of purpose. Those who were once societal liabilities become valuable assets.

Arranging RAP Training

RAP training can be customized to particular needs and clientele. Further information about costs and other arrangements for RAP training can be accessed by contacting:

Reclaiming Youth International
P.O. Box 57
Lennox, SD 57039
E-mail courage@reclaiming.com

Child and Youth Care Agency for Development [CYCAD]
P. O. Box 12036
Hatfield, Pretoria
0028 South Africa
E-mail info@cycad.org.za

Research Citations

¹ Brendtro, L., & Shahbazian, M. (2004). *Troubled children and youth: Turning problems into opportunity*. Champaign, IL: Research Press.

² Coopersmith, S. (1967). *The antecedents of self-esteem*. San Francisco: W. H. Freeman.

³ These major studies of resilience all identify factors encompassed by the Circle of Courage principles: Flach, F. (1989). *Resilience: Discovering a new strength at times of stress*. New York: Fawcett Columbine; Werner, E., & Smith, R. (1992). *Overcoming the odds: High risk children from birth to*

adulthood. New York: Cornell University Press; Wolin, S., & Wolin, S. (1993). *The resilient self: How survivors of troubled families rise above adversity*. New York: Villard; Benard, B. (2004). *Resiliency: What we have learned*. San Francisco: WestEd.

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⁵ Cassidy, J., & Shaver, P. (1999). *Handbook of attachment: Theory, research, and clinical applications*. New York: Guilford Press.

⁶ Harlow, H. F. (1958). The nature of love. *American Psychologist*, *13*, 673-685.

⁷ White, R. (1959). Motivation reconsidered: The concept of competence. *Psychological Review*, *66*, 297-313.

⁸ Csikszentmihalyi, M., Rathunde, K., & Whalen, S. (1993). *Talented teenagers*. Melbourne, Australia: Cambridge University Press.

⁹ Dewey, J. (1910). *How we think*. Lexington, MA: D. C. Heath.

¹⁰ Sternberg, R. J. (1997). *Successful intelligence*. New York: Plume Books.

¹¹ Bandura, A. (1995). Exercise of personal and collective efficacy in changing societies. In A. Bandura (Ed.), *Self-efficacy and changing societies* (pp. 1-45). New York: Cambridge University Press.

¹² Ford, D. H. (1994). *Humans as self-constructing, living systems: A developmental perspective on behavior and personality*. State College, PA: Ideals.

¹³ Rutter, J. B. (1954). *Social learning and clinical psychology*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

¹⁴ Desetta, A., & Wolin, S. (2000). *The struggle to be strong*. Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit.

¹⁵ Cobb, S. (1976). Social support as a moderator of life stress. *Psychosomatic Medicine*, *38*, 300-314.

¹⁶ Hoffman, M. L. (1981). Is altruism part of human nature? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *40*, 120-137.

¹⁷ Gibbs, J. C. (1994). Fairness and empathy as the foundation for universal moral education. *Comenius*, *14*, 12-23.

¹⁸ Greenspan, S. I. (1995). *The challenging child*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.