

Problems as Opportunity: Meeting Growth Needs

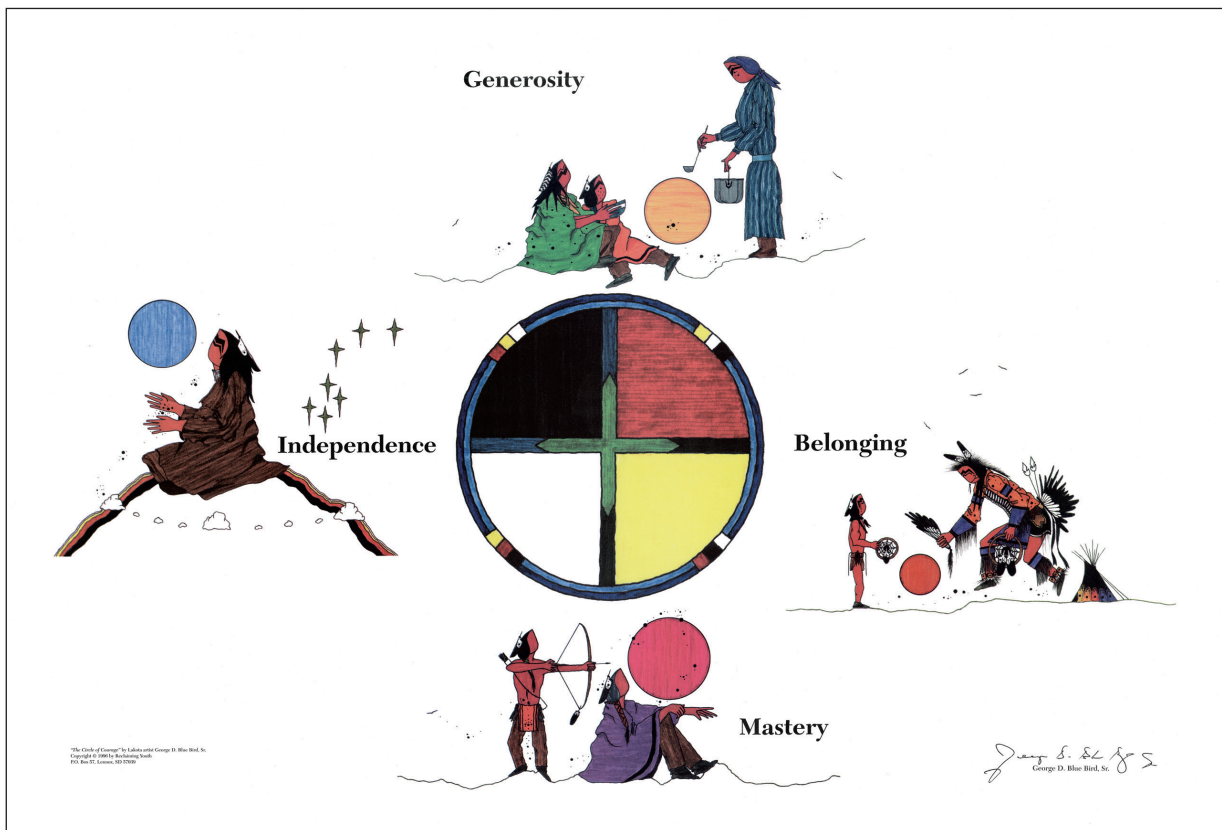
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Children have innate brain programs for building personal strengths and social bonds, but conflict and trauma can jeopardize their growth potentials. Life Space Crisis Intervention provides specific tools to turn problems into potentials.

The oneness of the human family is rooted in our common biological heritage and shared values as human beings (Diamond, 2012; Wilson, 1997; Wiredu, 1997). Children in every culture have universal needs for belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity. These are sculpted in human brains and enshrined in the ideals of cultural and faith traditions (Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Van Bockern, 2002). But contrary values—exclusion, failure, powerlessness, selfishness—are pathways to pathology.

Known as the Circle of Courage, these growth needs are portrayed in the accompanying Native drawings by Lakota artist George Bluebird. These constitute the vital signs of resilience and strengths of positive youth development (Peterson, 2013; Werner, 2012). When growth needs are met, children thrive. When obstructed, they show a host of defensive and debilitating behaviors (Steele & Malchiodi, 2012).

Life Space Crisis Intervention provides advanced therapeutic strategies for building strengths in troubled or traumatized children and youth (Long, Wood, & Fecser, 2001). Problems are not dealt with as infractions requiring punishment but as opportunities for learning and growth.



The Circle of Courage by George Bluebird is available as a print for framing from www.reclaiming.com

The blueprints for effective child care, education, and treatment are the same: nurturing the growth needs of children. LSCI provides specific interventions for positive support with children and youth who show patterns of troubled and self-defeating behavior. Below we highlight reclaiming strategies for six patterns of problems with examples of how these address Circle of Courage needs:

1. Limited social skills: Some youngsters have positive motivation but lack the tools for success. The goal is to teach skills and effective coping strategies. Strengthening social skills builds belonging and mastery, the foundations for meeting other needs.

2. Imported problems: Some youngsters “carry in” frustrations from home or the street and transfer their pain to others who have done them no harm. The goal is to offer support and help youth manage stressful emotions. Strengthening trusting bonds and self-control fosters belonging and independence.

3. Errors in perception: Some problems stem from distortions in thinking and perception. The goal is to help a youth think clearly and solve problems. Strengthening clear thinking fosters mastery and problem-solving abilities.

4. Impulsivity and guilt: Some young people feel guilty and ashamed about impulsive and inappropriate acts but lack confidence and self-control. The goal is to build controls from within. Strengthening self-regulation fosters responsible independence.

5. Delinquent pride: Some individuals are purposefully aggressive and hurt or exploit others but show little remorse for hurting actions. The goal is to help youth develop compassion and show concern for others. Strengthening empathy fosters generosity.

6. Vulnerability to peer influence: A youth who needs to impress friends may be easily misled into problem behavior. The goal is to strengthen the ability to think for oneself and to exert a positive influence on peers. Developing responsible decision making and helping others fosters independence and generosity.

These six LSCI strategies are designed to help troubled and traumatized young people develop strengths and flourish. The journey toward positive growth begins by creating bonds that meet the need for belonging. These connections prepare a youngster to develop mastery by learning from trusted adults and positive peers. In turn, competence in academic and life skills builds a growing capacity

for independence. But young people only develop a sense of their own worth as they give to others in a spirit of generosity. If self-absorbed young people are to contribute to the world, they first must experience kindness themselves—even when their behavior suggests they do not deserve this treatment (Long, 1997). Kindness is the most powerful therapeutic tool in our arsenal for transforming youth with problems into youth of promise.

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