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Surviving and Thriving

It is not the person who is the problem. Rather, it is the problem that is the problem.

—Michael White

Geoffrey looked like a cuddly bear: A big mop of reddish hair that never seemed to be combed, freckles, a little fleshy around the arms and midriff in the way adolescent boys get when their appetites are healthy, their bodies about to sprout, and their diet chosen from a seemingly endless snack bar of potato chips, soft drinks, and pizza. When I was in junior high he sat at the back of my Grade 7 home-room. He'd sit slouched, his legs spread, doodling. Most days, he seemed completely inoffensive, just another mediocre student whom teachers might have forgotten if not for his knack of finding victims for his cruelty.

I often think about Geoffrey and how he treated me. In a way, we remained glued to one another for the first three months of Grade 7. Geoffrey needed someone's shoulders to stand on. He needed someone that he could put down, intimidate, and tease. He needed this someone if he was going to find some way out of that cesspool of mediocrity that breeds hopelessness and invisibility among lower-class kids from stable, rural communities who don't excel at school.

Geoffrey knew he was going nowhere. His solution, it seemed, was to defiantly make a claim to whatever fame he could find close at hand.

I was an easy mark. I had been advanced a grade when I moved from Montréal to a small northern community just before I turned 11. I was a little smaller than the other boys the year Geoffrey and I met in that first year of junior high. I did well at school. I liked to focus on projects as they came along. I was a volunteer reporter for a local newspaper. Most days, teachers liked me or, at the very least, they could ignore me in favor of students who needed more attention.

The Many Ways Youth Survive

Similar Backgrounds, Different Behaviors

The strange thing was that the families Geoffrey and I came from weren't that different. Geoffrey lived in a working-class home with a stay-at-home mom. There were rumors that his older brothers got in trouble with the police and that his father was an alcoholic.

I was from a working-class family that was creeping into the middle class. My father, a quiet man, had supported himself and my mother sweeping factory floors while he finished high school studying at night. We had our own secrets, though, ones far less public than drinking. For years, my mother coped with depression, a socially isolated, mildly abusive woman who experienced life secondhand through television and a make-believe world of friends. Before my father retired, he found it best to be absent a great deal of the time, maintaining respectability by spending his time at work, a content workaholic.

But of course, Geoffrey didn't know any of this about me. We were new to the community, and a year after arriving, I still remained relatively unknown to my peers, who were now mostly older than me. Geoffrey's abusive behavior toward me made the first three months of seventh grade a long, horrendous slog. Stomach aches didn't get me out of going to class. Hiding during lunch didn't avoid the taunts, punches, and threats as I was routinely routed out of my quiet spaces and forced to be on the playground by well-intentioned, rule-abiding teachers. I said nothing of course about what I was experiencing.

Doing Whatever It Takes

I'd like to say that this was all one awful experience, but I can't. Instead, I owe Geoffrey some measure of thanks. He planted the seed of an idea that would take another 25 years to bloom. Looking back now at Geoffrey, I see *he wasn't a bad kid acting bad* but a kid like me who each morning rose out of bed and made the simple promise to

himself: "Today I'm going to do whatever I have to do to survive!" And he did. He survived quite well, given the resources he had.

In our haste to change our children's behavior, we overlook how those behaviors make sense to children themselves. Try as we might as adults to guide children, they will not heed our words of advice until they are confident we understand they are already doing the best they can with what they have.

Resilience

Geoffrey taught me what *resilience* really is. I'm not sure I would have used that word when I was in seventh grade, but I have certainly learned since that people survive in many different ways, eking out their best existence from the resources they have at hand. Typically, we speak about resilience as people's capacity to overcome great adversity in their lives. Resilient children tend to fall into two groups: those who beat the odds and those who *more than* beat the odds.

Beating the Odds

Resilient kids *beat the odds* when they achieve success equal to kids who face far fewer problems (Fraser, 1997). These students are the ones who grow up confronting many and varied challenges: some that are *acute*, occurring just once, like sexual abuse or the death of a parent; others that are *chronic* and part of their daily lives. These might include physical abuse, dangerous home neighborhoods, underfunded schools, poverty, or an ill caregiver.

More Than Beating the Odds

The resilient students who *more than beat the odds* manage to rise above their adversity, learn from it, and thrive beyond all expectations. Sometimes we call them *invulnerables* (Anthony, 1987). Though that term is a misnomer, as these adolescents too struggle to cope, they garner our admiration nonetheless.

Children grow and children change. They will move in and out of roles as easily as they slip on and off ponies on the merry-go-round. Surviving will mean one thing one day, something novel and new the next. The only certainty is uncertainty.

Through all these changes, adolescents tell me, through my clinical work and research, that they seek something special to say about

themselves, something that will bring with its next revolution the hopes of *power* and *acceptance* (Ungar & Teram, 2000).

Three Survival Strategies, Three Identities

When we understand what young people tell us, we can see the reasonableness in how they choose to behave. Some remain stuck in patterns, making the most of the one or two things they do well. I call these adolescents, with their permission, *pandas*. After all, panda bears have very little capacity to change. No matter where they find themselves, they will eat only a few varieties of bamboo or perish. They simply cannot adapt, which is why encroachment on their traditional mountain territory in China has proved so fatal to their numbers.

A second group of adolescents are more adaptable but less secure. They change with each new situation they enter, experimenting with new identities but unable to assert who they are exactly. These teenagers are like *chameleons*, those lizardlike creatures that are uncannily adept at changing their skin color to fit in any environment, matching even elaborate and colorfully patterned backgrounds.

Finally, a third group of adolescents appear to have a sure-footed sense of themselves. These are the *leopards*, young people who seem to confidently assert who they are and demand of the world that it regards them in a particular way. I look at these teenagers and think of the languid leopard at rest on the lower branches of a tree, its relaxed stature hiding a more powerful, dangerous capacity to survive and adapt. There are many different breeds of leopards, but each is capable of making its way in several different climates.

THREE SURVIVAL STRATEGIES

Children use three strategies to create powerful identities:

- Pandas stick with one identity no matter where they are or whom they are with.
- Chameleons blend in to survive.
- Leopards insist others look at them in ways they control.

Young people who act like one or the other of these animals may behave in ways we like or dislike, depending on how much we accept the adolescent's behavior as reasonable and, given the circumstances (such as whether the behavior occurs in a classroom or on the playground), acceptable. Regardless of what the youth are doing,

these three approaches to life help the young people cope with the challenges of nurturing and maintaining a powerful way of being themselves when they're with others.

We may judge the panda bear for not changing its diet, but we don't condemn the panda for doing what it does best. Nor do we judge the chameleon for being inconsistent or the leopard for its forthrightness. Our teens are less fortunate. We insist they conform, do as we tell them, behave as we adults see fit. This us-them thinking, of course, gets us nowhere.

Embracing Change

Adolescents, whether they act like pandas and are stuck with one identity, resemble chameleons constantly changing how they are known to others, or have the assertiveness and adaptability of leopards, are all quite normal. Each role may be expressed in ways we like or dislike. After all, adults are pandas, chameleons, and leopards, too. Just look at what we drive, where we live, and who we have as friends. For some, the chameleons and leopards, there is a great deal of variation in the faces they present to the world and how they want to be known. These are the people new-car sellers love, always trading in mildly used vehicles for the latest in automobile looks.

Let's face it: The "problem" kids we meet in our classrooms and offices often remind us that we were once wild and foolish, too. We experimented with different ways of expressing ourselves. I sometimes wonder if we are most upset with adolescents because they challenge us adults to let down our guard, to be a little less certain of how the world ought to be. Kahlil Gibran (1923/1982), who wrote the pithy wisdom of *The Prophet*, tells us, "What of the old serpent who cannot shed his skin, and calls all others naked and shameless?" (p. 36). Our children perplex us with their stick-to-itiveness. They also perplex us when they rapidly change. "Why can't they just do as I say?" we wonder. What happened, though, to our own transitory ways of trying on new identities?

Adults look at change as something to be feared. Kids look at change as something they can't avoid. To cope with the inevitable, our children need practice playing different roles behind different masks. Our job as their educators and caregivers is to provide the opportunities for them to experiment with new identities.

Power and Self-Definition

In Their Own Words

Without the blinders placed in front of us by our biases as adults, it can be interesting to look closely at what young people and their peer groups can teach us about health, identity, and the stories we create for ourselves that direct our lives. If we are to debunk an old myth about all youth who rebel being problem kids, then we will need a more powerful story that tells us how things really are. The more we encounter teenagers' identities as they want them to be known, those they build both inside and outside our classrooms, the more successful we will likely be hearing their powerful truths.

The young people whose stories are recounted in this book help us reconsider what we believe about young people and why. The wisdom of our youth can provide the foundation for a new myth about adolescents and their drift toward health. Like March storms that signal the impending shift in climate from one season to the next, problem behaviors among both children and teenagers can just as often be harbingers of resilience, when we take the time to hear their stories told in their own words.

Choosing Labels

When we hand over some control of the definition of mental health to teens, we learn that they and their peer groups do whatever they need to do to stay healthy and accepted and to experience themselves as powerful in their relationships with others. This power is not a power *over* others but a mutual and diffuse power that philosophers like Michel Foucault (1972/1980) have called "capillary." In much the same way as the small capillaries in our lungs each play an important part in drawing oxygen into our bloodstreams, so too do we each as individuals play a part in deciding who is powerful and who is not.

In practical terms this means that as we perform our roles in society, we add our voices to how our community describes us and others. If I am a bully, like Geoffrey, then I am likely to experience different understandings of that word, adding my voice to the majority (or minority) of others in deciding whether being a bully is something good or bad. Among Geoffrey's closest friends, being a bully meant being powerful. This idea of the bully as powerful, of course, is not shared by everyone. And Geoffrey knew it. To most people, to be called a bully is an insult. Still, it is likely that to Geoffrey's mind, being a bully was a darned sight better label to carry than the alternatives accessible to him, which, I suspect, may have appeared to him to be invested with even less power. Who, after all, wants to be known as a "dumb kid"?

The good news is that most youth want powerful self-definitions but not at the expense of others losing theirs. The problem is that in a world where we hold to the myth that power is scarce, we have come to believe that our happiness must come at the expense of another's. In fact, in a recent study of university students, participants in small groups were asked if they would rather receive \$50,000 and everyone else in their group \$25,000 or receive \$100,000 and everyone else \$200,000. The majority of students chose the first option (Dr. Richard Laynard, cited in Anderssen, 2004). Their happiness was directly related to the lower status of others.

And yet, the troubled teens whom I routinely interview tell me they are far more accepting of others' self-definitions as powerful *when that respect is reciprocated*. At least among the troubled teens I meet, their attitude seems to be "take the money and run," caring little about their status when compared with others their own age. As long as they have something unique and powerful to say about themselves as individuals, they are content. This, like much of what these teens have taught me, goes against our conventional wisdom about problem teens and what they are thinking.

Substitution as Intervention

It is for this reason that I promote tolerance of teenagers' at times problematic decisions about how they are going to achieve resilience. Teens have shown me that behaviors I oppose are seldom corrected more than momentarily through coercion. Instead, I prefer to understand their behavior as a *search for health*. My belief is that we must *substitute rather than suppress*.

I seek ways to offer youth alternatives to dangerous, delinquent, deviant, and disordered behavior. Alternatives must, however, offer the same quality of experience that the young person achieved through his or her problem behavior.

As I will show, bullying and other problem behaviors as diverse as drug use, sexual promiscuity, and truancy are all attractive to adolescents because they satisfy the youth's need for power, recreation, acceptance, or a sense of meaningful participation in his or her community, to name just a few of the benefits that adolescents tell me (and research supports) come from problem behaviors. If I am to help young people move away from these behaviors, I must understand the good things that teens say they derive from being bad. When I fall short of understanding the good reasons for problem behaviors among students inside and outside the classroom, I fall short of offering alternatives that draw youth to take advantage of new opportunities.

Teenagers more often *run toward* something powerful and sustaining than *away from* that which threatens their well-being.

SUBSTITUTION

By helping teens substitute one identity for another, we fulfill three purposes:

- We draw them into new, positive behaviors by offering them practical ways to experience themselves in different but powerful identities.
- We create an opportunity for those who know (and often fear or dislike) the students to appreciate them through new identities that demonstrate their attributes.
- We become the ally rather than the enemy, as they are drawn toward those who can offer powerful and socially acceptable identity substitutes.

Trading Up

If we are going to stop our students' chaotic behavior in our classrooms, on our playgrounds, and in our communities, we are going to have to trade them conventional but *powerful* opportunities to show themselves as healthy and in control of their lives for their unconventional and destructive sources of strength. What we offer must provide them with much the same benefits they derive from unconventional strategies for health. Finding that which is equal but more socially acceptable is often difficult because it must be tailor-made to meet each young person's needs. Fortunately, good educators often know exactly what a student needs. The problem is more often the structural constraints that prevent schools and their administrators from being either able or willing to adapt on a case-by-case basis.

Christine

Fourteen-year-old Christine lives in a group home most days. It's not her choice, but she tolerates her placement because she knows life at home would be worse: no food, a mother struggling with alcoholism, an abusive father who is rumored to have been involved in a rash of recent corner store thefts. Christine survives by trying to fit in. She is a reluctant chameleon, more comfortable playing the hard-to-reach teen, with lots of attitude and a dismissive way of treating her teachers. But she knows she needs help, too. She doesn't want to repeat the mistakes of her mother. The trouble is, she doesn't really know how else to make her life work.

When we met, it was through a referral from her guidance counselor. Christine needed more help than could be managed by someone

with a caseload of 1,500 kids. It was a shame, as her counselor would likely have been better placed to help Christine find a new and powerful identity. In the end we worked together, with the counselor attending sessions whenever she could.

Most days after school, Christine drifts out on to the streets in her old neighborhood, 10 blocks from her group home, which is on the edge of a middle-class suburb. Christine prefers her old school, her old friends, and her old lifestyle, even though it places her at greater risk. She has already contracted one sexually transmitted disease and thought she was pregnant. She's had black eyes from brawls with other girls. She smokes. The police who walk the beat in her old neighborhood know her by name, a point of pride for Christine.

Christine told me that she's comfortable on those streets, and life is predictable. The biggest challenge, she says, is finding a place to be as the evenings turn cold and dark.

School is an interruption in her day. She explained that she goes because she has to, or else she can't stay at her group home. The alternative is an even more restrictive housing arrangement, a mental health treatment center. She refers to it as the "kiddie jail."

What surprised me, though, was that Christine went to school at all. Though she was frequently given detentions, rarely (if ever) completed her homework, and rarely went a week without skipping one class or another, she still attended. She says she liked her homeroom social studies teacher. When I asked her why, despite all the other problems she has in her life, she sticks with school, she grunted, "I dunno." But later, she warmed a bit.

"What happens at school that is different from the rest of your life?" I tried again. This time she answered.

"Mr. Makhnach notices when I'm not there. It's like he sees me. No one else does, really. Even at the group home, it's all rules."

The topic Mr. Makhnach taught helped, too. Social studies interested Christine, who liked standing on her soapbox and arguing with everyone about how things really were "out there." She wasn't shy about her life, even if she didn't know quite what to do to change it.

"Sometimes I'll have to straighten my teacher out on things. He's not from here. Maybe the Ukraine or around there. So he doesn't know much about kids. And the other kids in the class are always making fun of him, but at least he's not all friggin' high on himself. I don't hassle him. But we're all pretty much on his case if he thinks all we do is smoke pot or if he imagines no one is sexually active, stuff like that. Then we have to like say, 'Look, it's like this, you know.' And he listens."

More important, he listens as Christine tries on her new identity as social activist, educating her educators about the realities of

today's youth. Mr. Makhnach gives her space to speak, to play the expert rather than the problem kid.

Christine's guidance counselor met with us after a few sessions. We talked more about Christine's time with Mr. Makhnach. No one had known how much she liked him. It helped to change Christine's educational plan. Whereas the school had been threatening to suspend her permanently and move her to a special school for disruptive youth, this glimmer of hope encouraged them to extend themselves further to include Christine more in the life of the school. As remarkable as it sounds, she was invited to participate in a tutoring program for young children from her neighborhood. As long as it meant time away from her seventh grade studies, she was happy to participate and showed a natural talent for engaging with younger children. "I have two younger brothers, after all," she said when I asked her what made her so good at tutoring.

The Remarkably Unremarkable

Even more important, we spoke with Mr. Makhnach—*with Christine's permission*. A quiet man, he was astounded to hear that Christine was so taken with his class. He felt he did nothing out of the ordinary to engage with her. He only knew her as a slightly "brazen, outspoken" girl whose attendance was sporadic. He liked her and knew she liked the subject he taught, but beyond that, she had not made as significant an impression on him as he had on her.

Odd, we all thought, the way adolescents migrate to what they need, finding what they must in the most unlikely places. We invited Christine's teacher to speak with Christine about her participation in the class. He invited her to help with a community food bank project he was trying to start. Remarkably, Christine accepted the invitation.

Youth will accept our invitations to change when what we offer is as satisfying to them as their less conventional pursuits.

My work with Christine ended a few sessions later. She wasn't looking for counseling about her family. She was looking for a place to belong, first. I left the door open, instead, and encouraged her to talk with her guidance counselor or teacher if she ever needed to get out of a tough situation. I suggested that since they saw her as a competent young woman, they would be honored to be asked for help from someone who knew so much about surviving. I also invited her counselor and teacher to ask Christine for help whenever

they needed advice about how things “really were” in the community beyond the school’s fence.

Narrative Interventions

This work with Christine is typical of the kinds of conversations I have with adolescents and the teachers and counselors who work with them. In the pages that follow, I will discuss a number of strategies that worked well with Christine and how one can put these into practice in one’s own work with “problem” students.

This approach builds on what has come to be known as postmodern approaches to counseling, theorized by psychologists like Kenneth Gergen (2001) and Sheila McNamee (McNamee & Gergen, 1992) and social workers like Adrienne Chambon (Chambon & Irving, 1994), among many others. More recently, their ideas have been developed into clinical, educational, and community approaches to helping by Michael White (2000), John Winslade and Gerald Monk (1999), Alice Morgan (2000), David Epston (White & Epston, 1990), David Nylund (Nylund & Ceske, 1997; Nylund & Corsiglia, 1996), and a host of others who sometimes call themselves “narrative therapists.” Collectively, we are finding better ways to engage with youth that avoid the resistance typically encountered by well-intentioned but unsuccessful professional helpers, whether teachers, counselors, social workers, psychologists, or child and youth care workers with a mandate to intervene.

The Four D’s of “Problem” Teens

Teenagers who get the most attention in our communities are those who are either dangerous, delinquent, deviant, or disordered. Often they carry more than one of these labels. Interventionists using narrative techniques see each of these problems as a story, told over time, and supported by those with the power to label these youth as “problem teens.” Each label velcros to the young person, on the one hand limiting the youth’s options and on the other providing a perfect script for how to act out his or her vulnerability. Youth the world over who are convinced that they are dangerous, delinquent, deviant, or disordered will play each role for all its worth. And why not? When options are few, adolescents tell me, they make do with what they have.

Dangerous Youth

These are young people who scare us with the risks they take, potentially harming themselves or others. They drive

motorbikes too quickly, pull pranks, experiment with fire setting, engage in unprotected sex, run away, and show all kinds of other reckless behavior that endangers themselves and their peers. Dangerous youth are those who have usually avoided jail or the stigma of a mental health diagnosis.

Delinquent Youth

Youth identified with the justice system or likely to be involved with police and the courts are called delinquents. The delinquent youth has broken a law or is dangerously close to breaking the law. These are the youth who shoplift—or worse, steal cars. They get into brawls and bully. They may even drift into prostitution or selling drugs as ways to survive on the street.

Deviant Youth

These youth are social misfits. They are the ones that break with social norms. They may have also broken the law and may have a mental health problem. More often, though, they simply do things the rest of their community feels uncomfortable about. Unfortunately, in some communities, being outwardly gay, lesbian, or bisexual is enough to earn the label. In other communities, it is street youth who are called deviants, or children who hide in their rooms endlessly surfing the Net. We mustn't forget, though, that what we label deviance changes over time and across cultures.

Disordered Youth

Youth who are categorized as disordered either have a diagnosis as mentally ill or are likely to be diagnosed with a mental health problem. Disorders are frequently used to explain the adolescent's deviance, delinquency, or dangerousness. Conduct disorder and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder are ubiquitous labels found among problem kids. More seriously, there are also children who appear to be "borderline" or "narcissistic" and who have problems "attaching." The label of disordered, however, is never entirely scientific, as what is or is not a sign of mental illness constantly changes.

Often these youths' schools, communities, families, and the professionals in their lives hand them ready-made life stories based on the labels they carry. These stories youth tell about themselves are

coauthored and elaborately negotiated between the adolescent and those who are special in their lives.

Powerful Alternatives

As a first principle for helping youth find healthier identities, ones we associate with resilience, whether as pandas, chameleons, or leopards, adolescents must find substitutes for their problem behaviors. Whether we like to admit it or not, for Christine, truancy and everything else gave her a sense of control over her life. It provided her with a status among her peers that she would never achieve academically or through sports. She liked the way her friends looked at her. She liked the way she could survive.

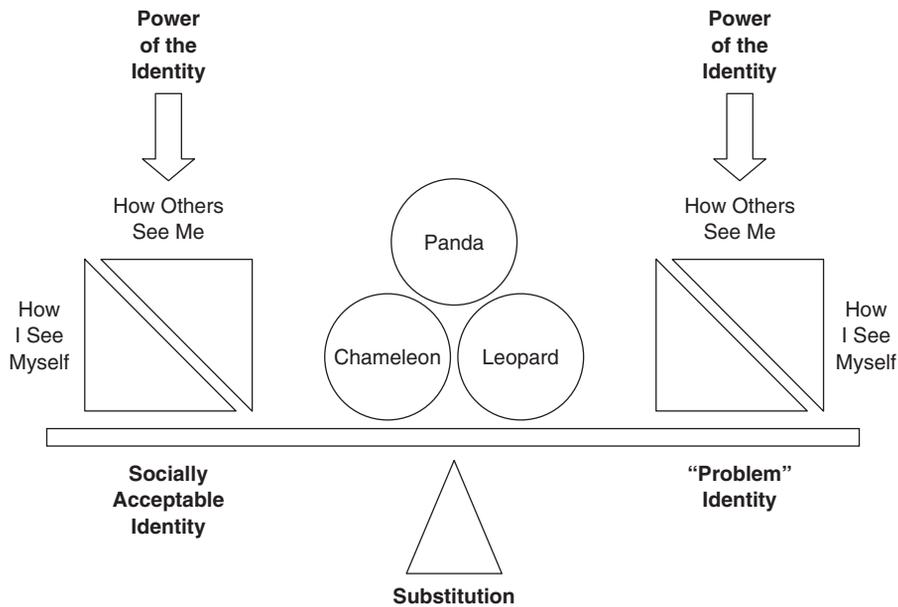
Finding a substitute meant placing in front of her something of equal value. Once her mouthy, defiant personality found a niche, a place where it could perform in a conventional way, she was drawn there like a moth to a flame. Problem behaviors will extinguish much more easily when there is a substitute.

Alternatives Must Be Chosen, Not Required

Despite beliefs by some adults, there is no evidence that interventions that try to force kids to stop behaviors work. They stop smoking not because they are told to stop but when there are alternatives that bring the same experience, are a better use of their money, and are supported by their audience, both peers and adults, who see them as being just as cool, just as adult, and just as much in control of their own lives as when they smoke. Is it any wonder then that cell phones have caught on so well even as cigarette use is declining? Both trade in the same currency: an adultlike social activity that breeds an image as hip.

The same goes with sex. Abstinence will be a draw only for those kids attracted to the alternative: identification with a lifestyle or set of religious beliefs that replaces the cachet that sexual activity brings. We are mistaken if we think admonishing behavior stops kids. It is offering them a well-considered alternative that is key to successful interventions.

Figure 1.1 plots the relationship between socially acceptable and "problem" identity choices. Pandas, chameleons, and leopards are precariously balanced between these choices, pulled in one direction or the other by how others see them and how they see themselves. To the extent that we as educators and caregivers intervene with a pro-social substitute for problem behaviors, the more likely we are to tip the balance and provide the opportunities for youth to gently move their way toward identities as teenagers who survive and thrive (are resilient) in ways that don't harm themselves or others.

Figure 1.1 Identity Choices for Pandas, Chameleons, and Leopards

Negative Alternatives Make for Fierce Competition

It's not always quite so easy to find alternatives. What can we *really* offer a student who is dealing drugs on the playground and who tells everyone to f__ off at the slightest provocation? Frankly, if we admit the truth, most times we have little else to offer than mediocre prospects to achieve minimal grades, a high school diploma, and a service-industry or manual-labor job that pays minimum wage.

If we are honest, sometimes we have little to offer young people that will bring them as much power, as much status, and as much wealth as they find through their problem behaviors. Admitting this to them is the first step to helping youth look for alternatives that are realistically available.

Jamie

Jamie is only 12, but already he has adult-sized problems. He has been running drugs for years for some older boys in his neighborhood. Once he himself came of age and he could be charged with possession, he decided it was better to jump in fully and begin selling for himself. After

all, he had ready access to children his own age. He was, at least at first, rather invisible when buying and selling leftover Ritalin, pot, and anything else that he could find a market for.

Jamie's father worries about him and is willing to come in anytime school personnel phone. However, there isn't much that the adults can agree to offer Jamie except stricter rules and school expulsions. The first he laughs at; the second he encourages, as it gives him more time to hang out and develop his criminal capital, learning from older kids how to make something of himself as a delinquent.

The school, to its credit, has tried to do what it can. It's offered Jamie the opportunity to play sports and fund his equipment. Staff have invited him into programs for peer mediators. They've made extra tutors available and made sure no one teased him when he was forced to meet with a remedial reading specialist.

None of the multifaceted efforts worked, because none of those options were able to draw Jamie away from his street life. When I met him in jail after he'd been caught for possession, he told me, "What do I care? I had all that weed in my pocket. I had my own money. I was so far out in front of the other kids. They got nothing that I want. But I have what they want."

Jamie wasn't about to give it all up. He'd watched his father struggle to make ends meet. His mother had left him with his dad when he was three. His stepmother was kind, but she worried more about her own three children and the one she and Jamie's father had had together. Jamie wasn't neglected, but there wasn't much space for him in anyone's life, either.

Lay the Table and Wait

Jamie's needs were too big for an individual teacher, or even an entire school community, to meet. What's more, Jamie wasn't running toward anything else. He was the happy panda. He was content to be exactly who he was.

For the better, Jamie spent more and more time in secure detention. There he got an education. He also developed his skills as a criminal, but he was doing that well enough on his own long before he crossed through the double magnet-locking doors of his living unit. We all held our breath. His father just shook his head and visited when he could. His teachers by this point had passed him on to junior high, hoping Jamie could make a new start there. There simply was no easy alternative.

Jamie's story may seem a strange one with which to introduce a book on helping adolescents find powerful identities that bring them resilience. But it is a realistic one. Quite frankly, time was on the side

of the adults in Jamie's life. Eventually, kids like Jamie come to want more. The older ones tell me as much. What we offer such adolescents is the safety and continuity of a community of concerned adults, even if those adults and that security come in the form of secure detention. The panda, we must remember, eats only one special bamboo. When we offer a 50-foot buffet dinner, it is unlikely the panda is going to pay much attention to our entreaties to "Please eat"—at least for the moment.

Resilience is as much about the structures we create around young people as their individual capacities. Some kids will not immediately choose the alternative identities we offer them. Nonetheless, we must continue to put in place the structures that provide them opportunities to flourish. Resilience is about much more than personal characteristics. Our role as educators and parents is to make sure the table is laid when Jamie gets hungry. In the meantime, we wait.