

College and the Launch to Adulthood for Neurodiverse Youth

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The
STRESSED
YEARS *of*
THEIR LIVES



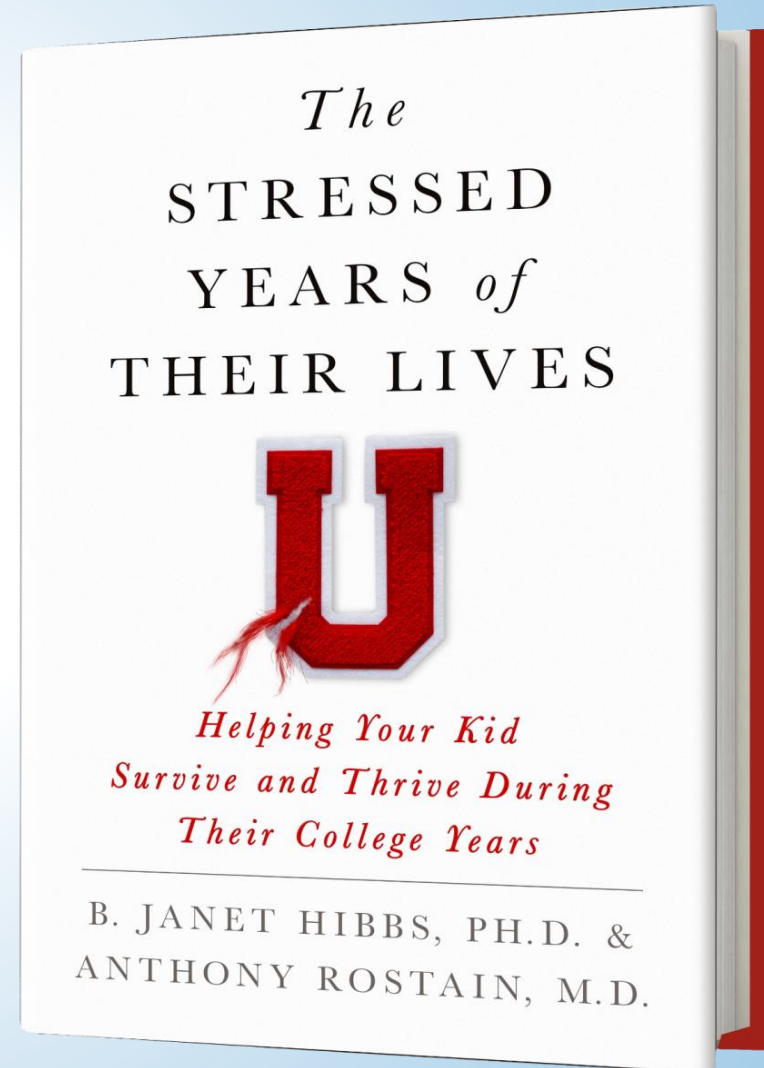
*Helping Your Kid
Survive and Thrive During
Their College Years*

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AdvanceLA
May 10, 2019
Los Angeles, CA

INTRODUCTION

- Who we are
- How we got together
- Why we wrote this book
- What we plan to discuss with you



OBJECTIVES

1. Cite the key indicators of social-emotional readiness for college
2. Outline a plan for selecting the right college or post-secondary program
3. List the three main negative mindsets that interfere with successful transition to college
4. Describe how executive functioning can be fostered prior to the end of high school
5. Identify obstacles to and strategies for helping students in crisis

SOCIAL EMOTIONAL READINESS

8 Key components:

- Conscientiousness
- Self Management
- Interpersonal Skills
- Self-control
- “Grit”
- Risk Management
- Self-acceptance
- Open mindset/Help-seeking

SOCIAL EMOTIONAL READINESS

Conscientiousness = Owning one's actions

- Saying what you mean – doing what you say – owning up to mistakes
- Case example - Alan

Self Management = Ability to take care of day-to-day activities on one's own

- Waking up on time – preparing for the day – remembering tasks and following through on them – developing a routine – making adjustments as needed – falling asleep at a reasonable time
- Case example - Anne

SOCIAL EMOTIONAL READINESS

Interpersonal Skills = Making & keeping friends - getting along with others – handling conflicts appropriately

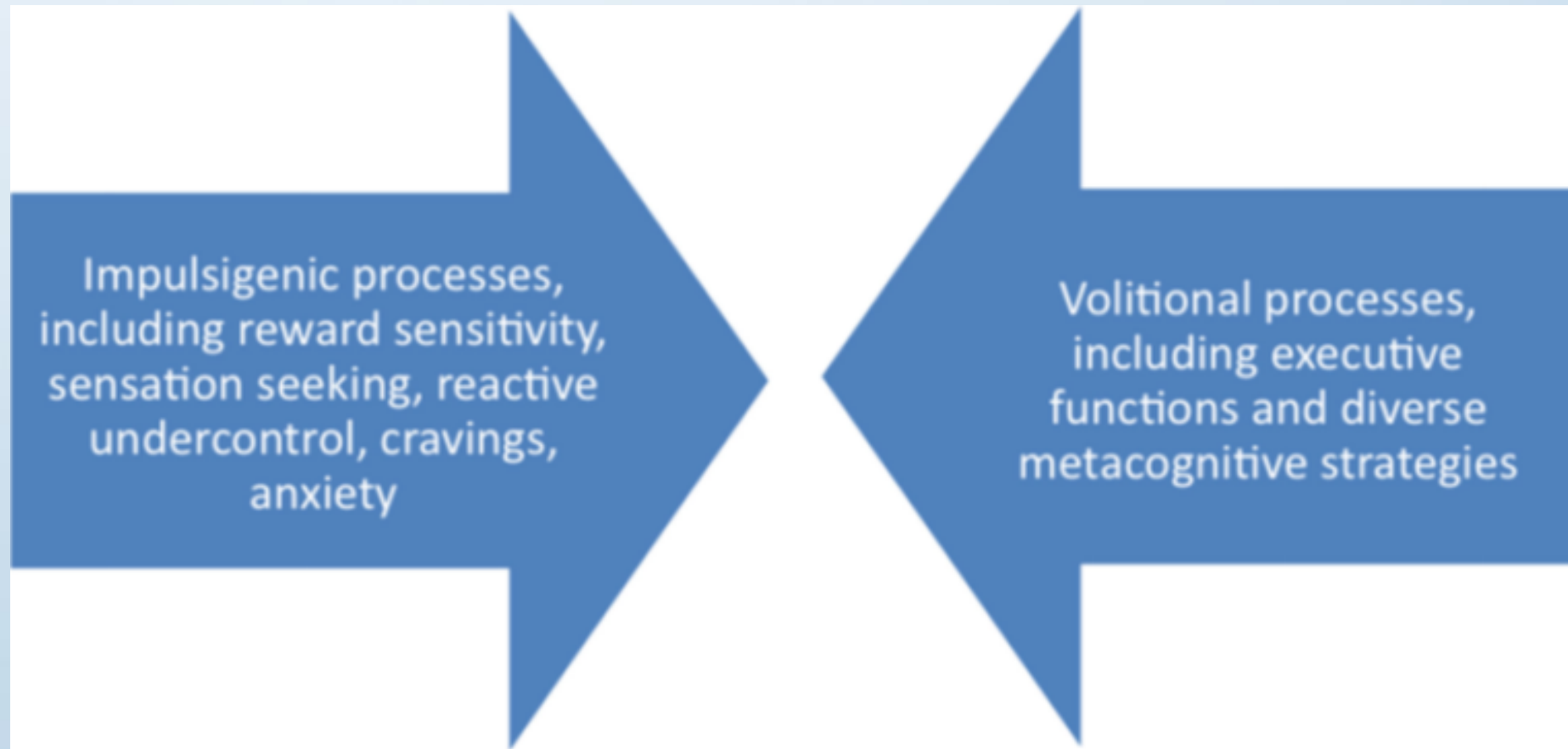
- Social skills inventory: friendship circle (clique), social strengths vs vulnerabilities, level of trust and intimacy, ability to handle disagreements, romantic involvements, etc.
- Internet/social media: usage, profile, problems

Self-control = Ability to set limits and resist urges/desires

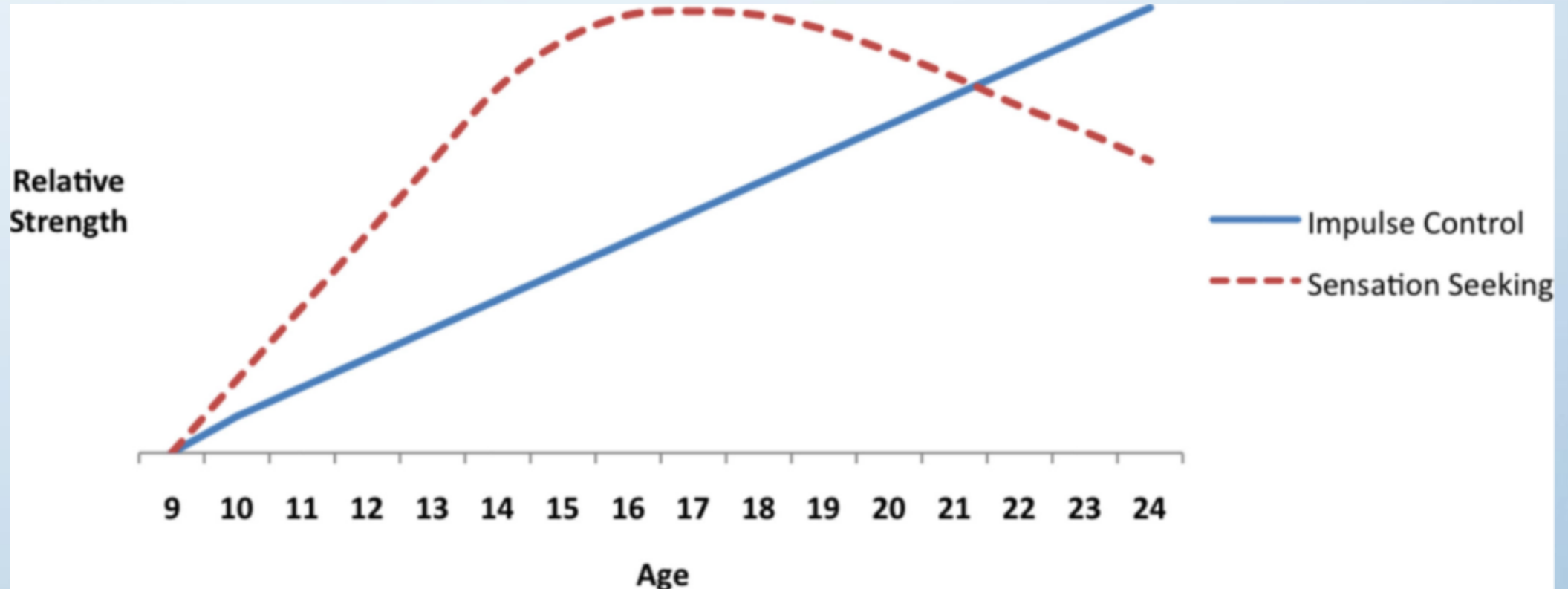
- Marshmallow test
- Graded, practical experiences in exercising autonomy
 - Self-limiting time spent on social media/internet
 - Maintaining healthy eating habits
 - Managing sleep-wake cycle

SELF CONTROL RESULTS FROM INTERACTION OF TWO PROCESSES

“Will power is trying hard *not* to do something that you really want to do”
Frog and Toad Together, A. Lobel, 1979



SELF CONTROL RESULTS FROM INTERACTION OF TWO PROCESSES



Different developmental trajectories characterize the growth of sensation-seeking and impulse control during adolescence.

Duckworth and Steinberg (2015) *Child Dev Perspect*

SOCIAL EMOTIONAL READINESS

“Grit” = Ability to cope with frustration, disappointment and failure and to persist in the face of setbacks & obstacles

- Persistence toward goal attainment – motivation in the face of delayed gratification or hardships – key component of resilience – can be fostered via experiential learning
- Distress tolerance skills can be taught (I.M.P.R.O.V.E.)

Risk Management = Ability to have fun without taking too many risks – acceptable versus dangerous experimentation

SOCIAL EMOTIONAL READINESS

- **Self-acceptance** = Ability to accept one's faults, tolerate one's mistakes and deal with problems without guilt/shame
 - Destructive perfectionism
 - Myth of "infinite perfectibility"
- **Open mindset/Help-seeking** = Readiness to ask for help when things aren't going well – overcoming "denial" that anything could be wrong – accepting the notion that self-help or "tincture of time" isn't sufficient

SELECTING THE RIGHT COLLEGE

TYPICAL AND NEURO-ATYPICAL SEARCHES

- Commonalities
 - Alignment with Academic Interests
 - Importance of Engagement
- Differences
 - Support Services Availability
 - Importance of Safety Nets

SELECTING FOR ENGAGEMENT

- Engagement and future job satisfaction and wellbeing*
- Taking a course with a professor who makes learning exciting
- Working with professors who care about students personally
- Finding a mentor who encourages students to pursue personal goals
- Working on a project across several semesters
- Participating in an internship that applies to classroom learning
- Being active in extracurricular activities

*Gallup-Purdue Study, 2014 of 30,000 graduates

SELECTING THE RIGHT COLLEGE

QUESTIONS TO RAISE WITH STUDENT AFFAIRS PERSONNEL

- How does the school monitor student adjustment to college?
- What first-line support services are available to students who are having difficulty?
- How does the school communicate with parents when concerns arise? And how can parents convey their concerns?
- What does the school do when students are not willing to get help?
- What does the school do if a student needs additional help beyond what is offered by the school?
- Does the school participate in JED campus activities, Active Minds or NAMI Campus Programs?



<https://www.activeminds.org>



<https://nami.org/collegeguide>

OVERCOMING MINDSET BARRIERS

Kids' Mindset Barriers

- Not Belonging (“social rejection”)
- Not Making It (“perfectionism”)
- Disappointing Parents (“family pressures”)
- Being Different (“mental health issues”)

Parents' Mindset Barriers

- Falling Behind other parents (“keeping up with the Joneses”)
- Kid not getting into an Ivy League/Brand-name school
- Loss of the “Perfect Child”

Educators' Mindset Barriers

OVERCOMING MINDSET BARRIERS

- **Student problems**

- Self-stigma
- Lack of acceptance
- No experience or practice with advocacy

- **Parental problems**

- Your job is not over – parents can help prepare students!

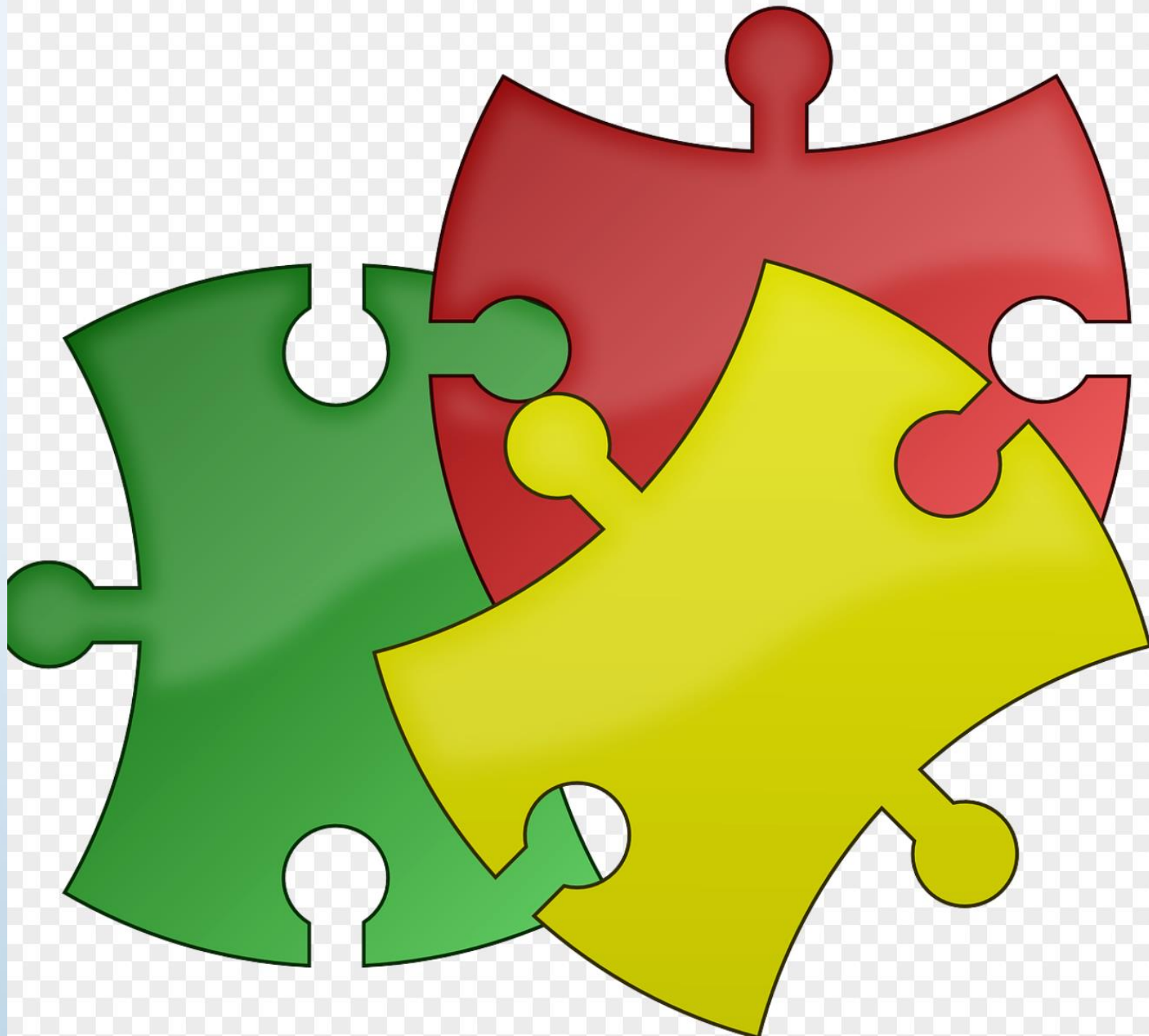
- **College partnership problems**

- Fragmentation of teamwork

SYSTEMS BARRIERS

FRAGMENTATION AND LACK OF EFFECTIVE TEAMWORK

- Disability Providers
- Counseling & Health Providers
- Faculty
- Disciplinary Office
- Students
- Parents
- Outside Treatment Providers

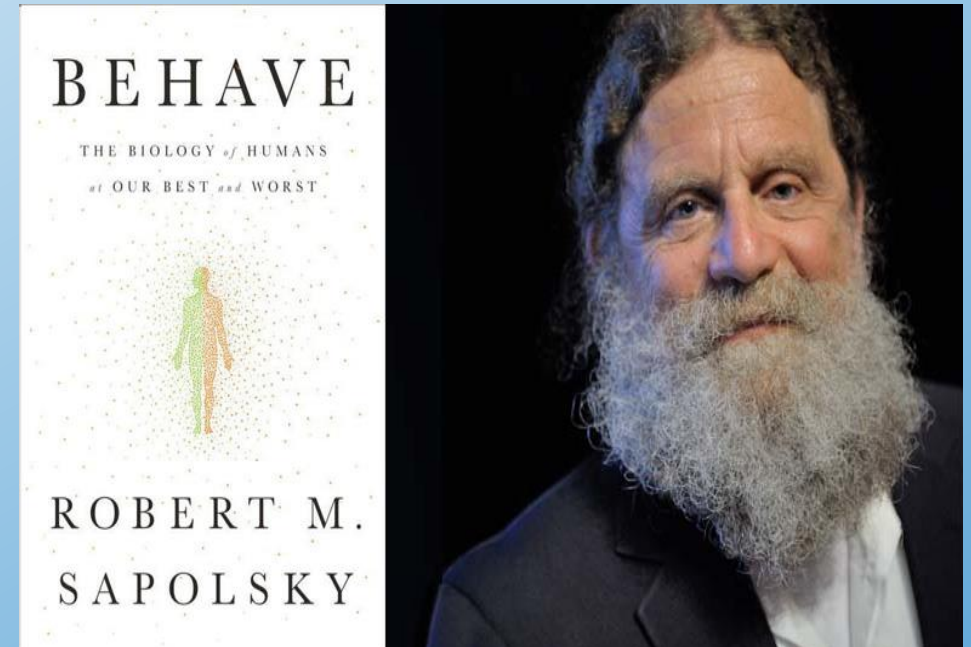


EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING (EF)

- Definition
- Procrastination
- Cognitive distortions
- Planning to Act
- How families can bolster EF

“The frontal cortex (+ EFs) makes you do the harder thing when it’s the right thing to do” (p.45).

Sapolsky (2017). *Behave*. New York. Penguin.



EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING (EF)

Definition:

EF usually emerges as a single factor (“how efficiently do you do what you set out to do”), but there are five semi-distinct domains that emerge in ratings of daily functioning:

- Self-management to time
- Self-organization and problem solving
- Self-restraint (inhibition)
- Self-motivation
- Emotional regulation

Barkley, R.A. (2011). *Barkley Deficits of Executive Functioning Scale*. New York: Guilford.

PROCRASTINATION

- Definition: “to voluntarily delay an intended course of action *despite expecting to be worse off for the delay.*”
- Deferring a challenging or anxiety-provoking task is *highly* reinforcing as it provides an immediate surge of relief (negative reinforcement)

FORMS OF PROCRASTINATION

- Losing track of important tasks due to poor time management, forgetfulness or disorganization (“EF deficits”)
- Engaging in more immediately rewarding activities (“escapism”)
- Hyper-focusing on less important tasks (“procrastivity”)
- Waiting until the very last minute (“brinksmanship”)
- Waiting to be in just the right mood (“front end perfectionism”)

COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS UNDERLYING PROCRASTINATION

- Magical thinking
- Magnification/minimization
- Invidious comparisons
- Emotional reasoning
- Perfectionism

PLANNING TO ACT

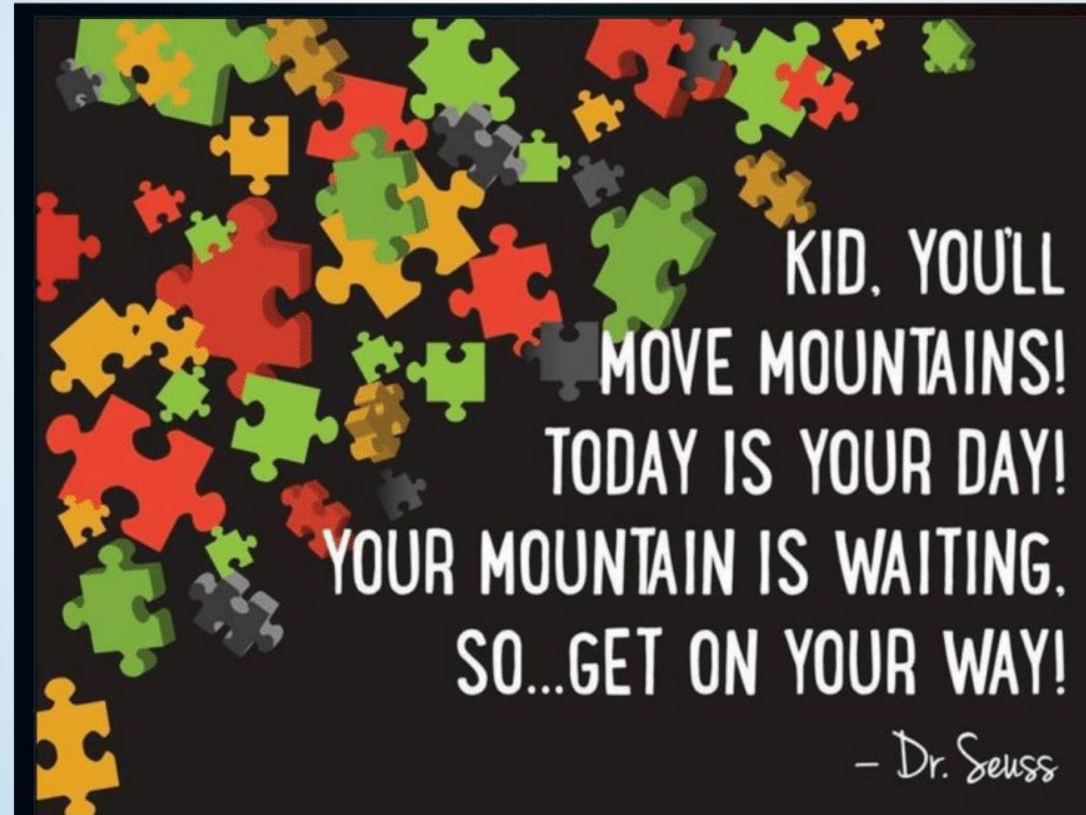
- *Intention implementation strategies* - planning out, in advance, when, where, and how a goal is to be translated into action
 - Shifts focus from goal to implementation strategy
 - *Goal* – e.g. read a chapter from assigned book
 - *Implementation strategy* – sit down and read for 10 minutes
- Behavioral scripts (“If X happens, I will do Y...”)

PRACTICING EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING SKILLS AT HOME

- EF skills should be demonstrated “in vivo” prior to end of senior year
- Gap year may be a way to practice EF skills
- “Implementation intention strategies” are very helpful for helping patients achieve immediate and long term goals that can be elusive
- Weekly monitoring plan should be instituted at outset of transition to college to increase likelihood of treatment adherence
- Beware power of social media, online gaming, YouTube, etc.

LIVING LIFE FORWARD, UNDERSTANDING IT BACKWARD

CLIP #1



CHILDHOOD: “I READ BOOKS AND GOT BULLIED.”

CLIP #2



SO, IS MAX READY?

AND HE SAILED OFF, THROUGH NIGHT AND DAY, AND IN
AND OUT OF WEEKS, AND ALMOST OVER A YEAR...

WHERE THE WILD THINGS ARE, M. SENDAK



BREAKDOWN TO BREAKTHROUGH

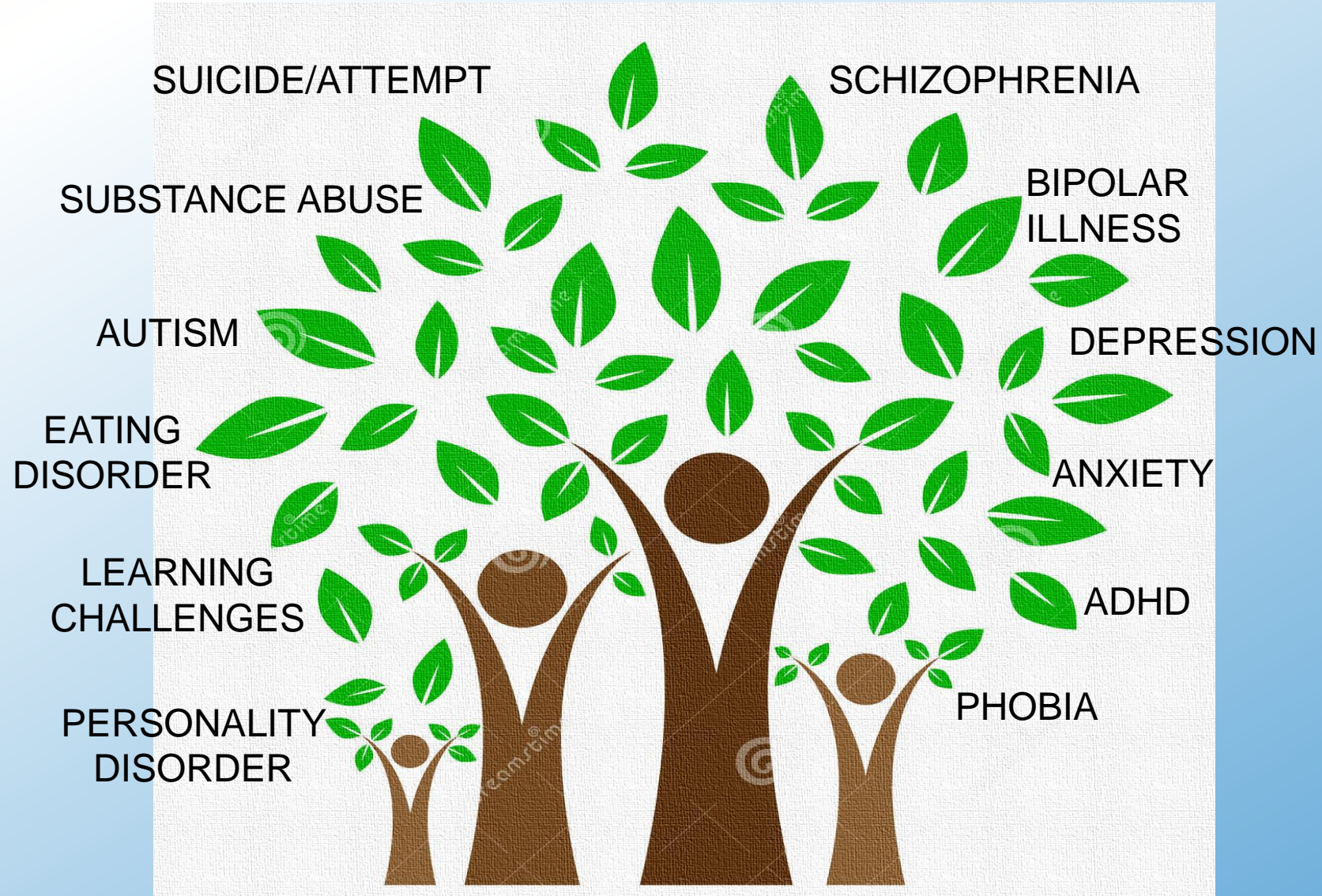
CLIP #3



LESSONS THIS MOTHER LEARNED THE HARD WAY

- Safety first!!
- Kids in crisis may not realize how bad things are
- Denial trumps reality
- Weave a safety net
- Make sure accommodations are working
- Have the student identify their personal safety network
- When social life fails, college fails
- Don't ignore or minimize seemingly small losses

SHAKING THE FAMILY TREE



FAMILIES ARE IMPORTANT



College Student Cohesive-Flexible Family Functioning and Mental Health

Examining Gender Differences and the Mediation Effects of Positive Family Communication and Self-Compassion

M. Blake Berryhill; Christian Harless; Paige Kean; *The Family Journal* October 11, 2018
DOI: 10.1177/1066480718807411 Copyright © 2018 SAGE Publications

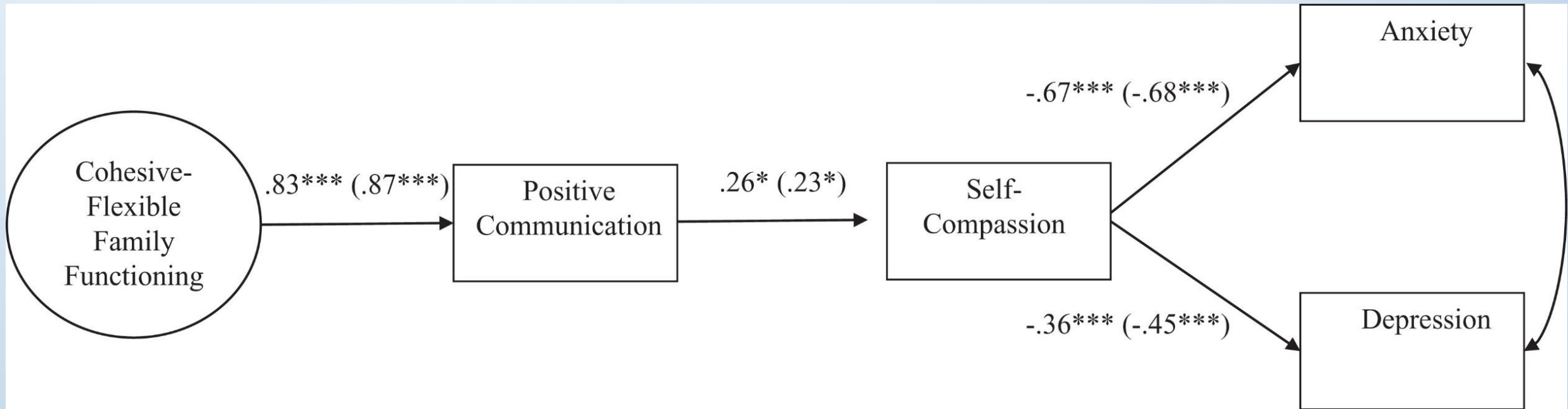
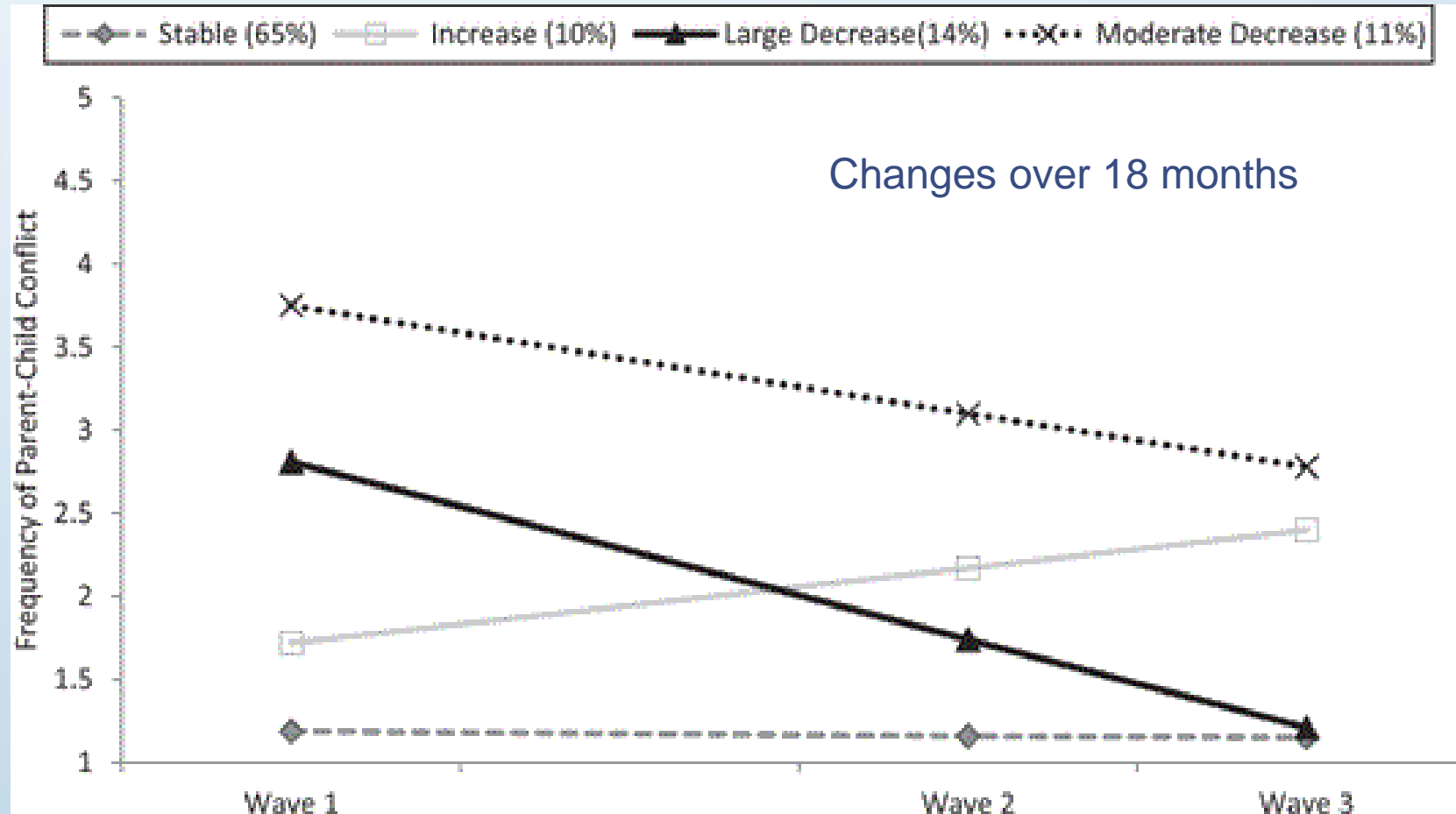


Figure 1. Standardized path coefficients for female ($n = 392$) and male ($n = 108$) college students on the relationships between cohesive-flexible family functioning, positive communication, self-compassion, and depression and anxiety.

Transitions in young adulthood: Exploring trajectories of parent-child conflict during college.

Nelson, S. C., Bahrassa, N. F., Syed, M., & Lee, R. M. (2015). *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 62(3), 545-551. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/cou0000078>



Four-group model of parent-child conflict trajectories for college students (N = 230)

FAMILIES ARE IMPORTANT

- Family connectedness and support are protective against depression and suicidal ideation & behavior among all college-aged youth:
 - General population surveys
 - Youth with history of sexual abuse
 - Sexual and gender minority youth
- Higher family functioning is protective against onset of substance use disorders
- Presence of supportive siblings has a protective impact and may compensate for lack of parental support

BUILDING BETTER SAFETY NETS

- College student support and mental health services play a critical role in building functional safety nets for students with learning difficulties and mental health challenges
- Policies that promote *communication* among key stakeholders offer the best chances for success
- Parent/family involvement early in the conversation is vital
- Parents/families need to be educated about preventive efforts

COLLEGES OFTEN IGNORE OR EXCLUDE STUDENTS' FAMILIES

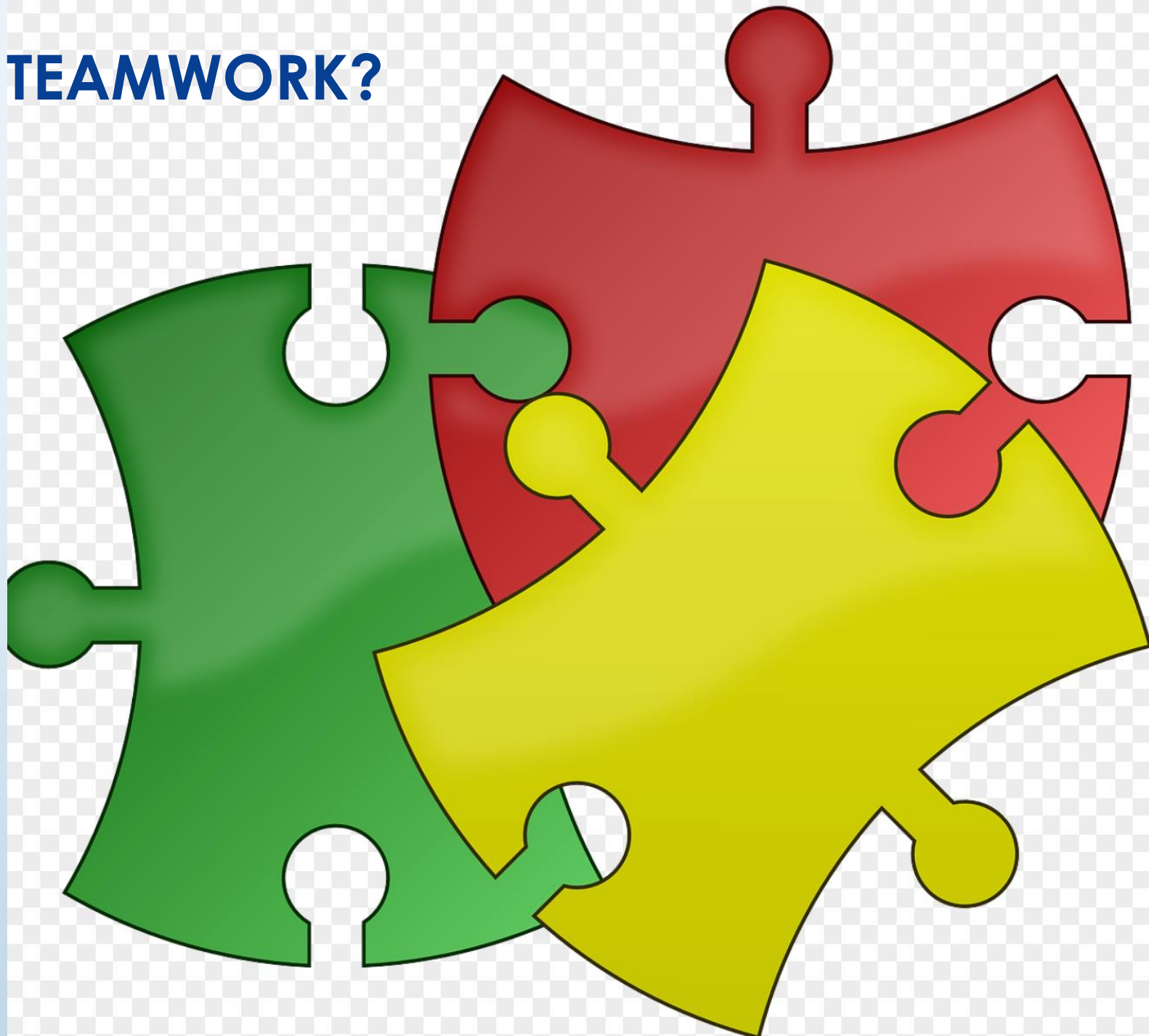
- *In loco parentis* policies presume that colleges are acting in place of parents to oversee student adjustment/adaptation to college, including academic success, social acceptance, health and mental health status
- Assumption is that students are functioning as responsible adults
- Parents/families are kept uninformed about how the student is doing unless there are serious concerns (academic, behavioral, health)
- HIPPA, FERPA, state laws and “privacy concerns” are often construed as obstacles to open communication between college staff and families

HOW DO WE PROMOTE TEAMWORK?

SYSTEMS SOLUTIONS

EFFECTIVE TEAMWORK

- **Disability Providers**
- **Counseling & Health Providers**
- **Faculty**
- **Disciplinary Office**
- **Students**
- **Parents**
- **Outside Treatment Providers**



QUESTIONS & ANSWERS