

Predicting the Unpredictable Students by Stepping into Their Shoes

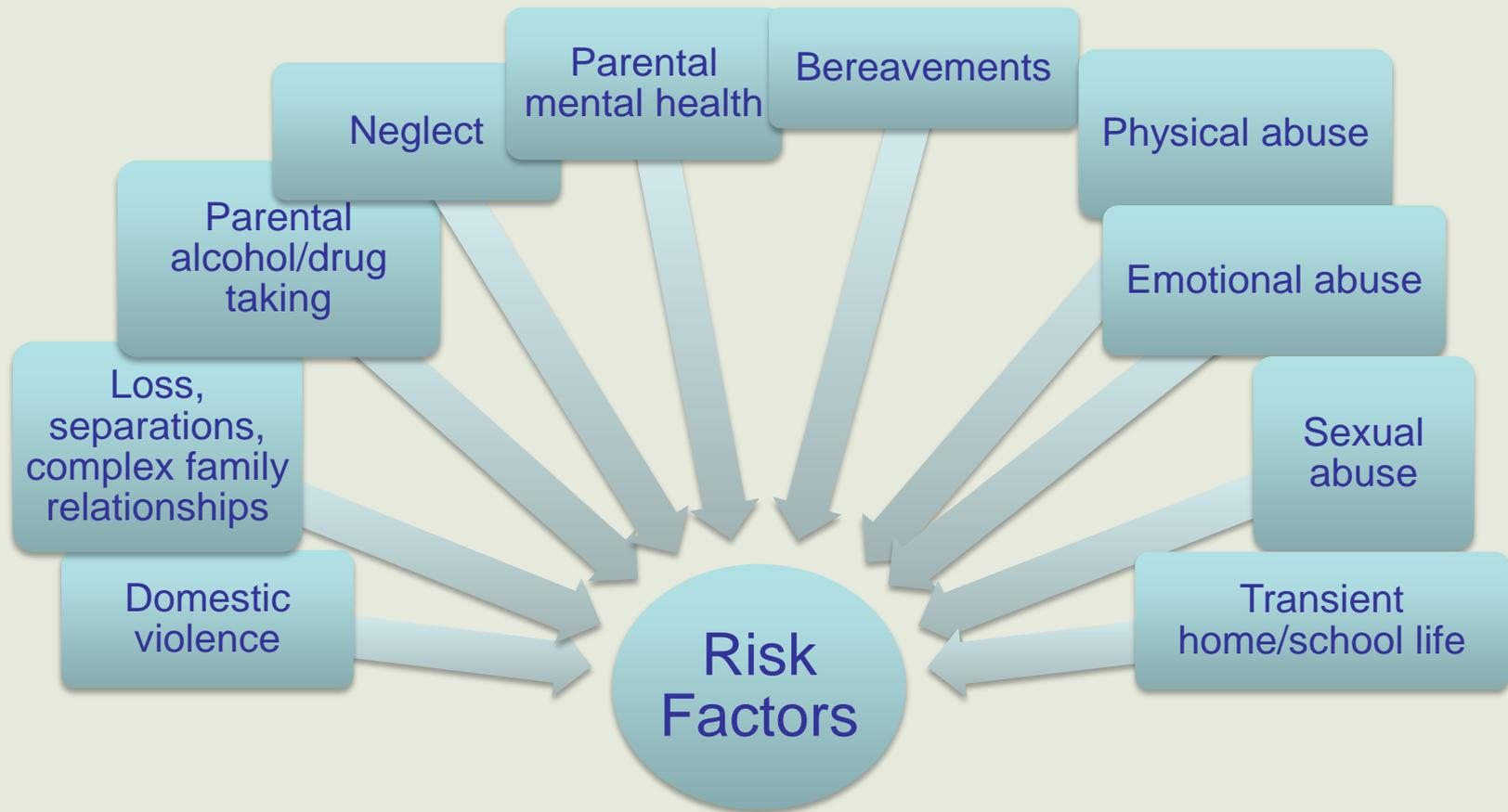


Presenter: Desiree McGhie
Ed Psych Forum
Massey, Albany
November 2011

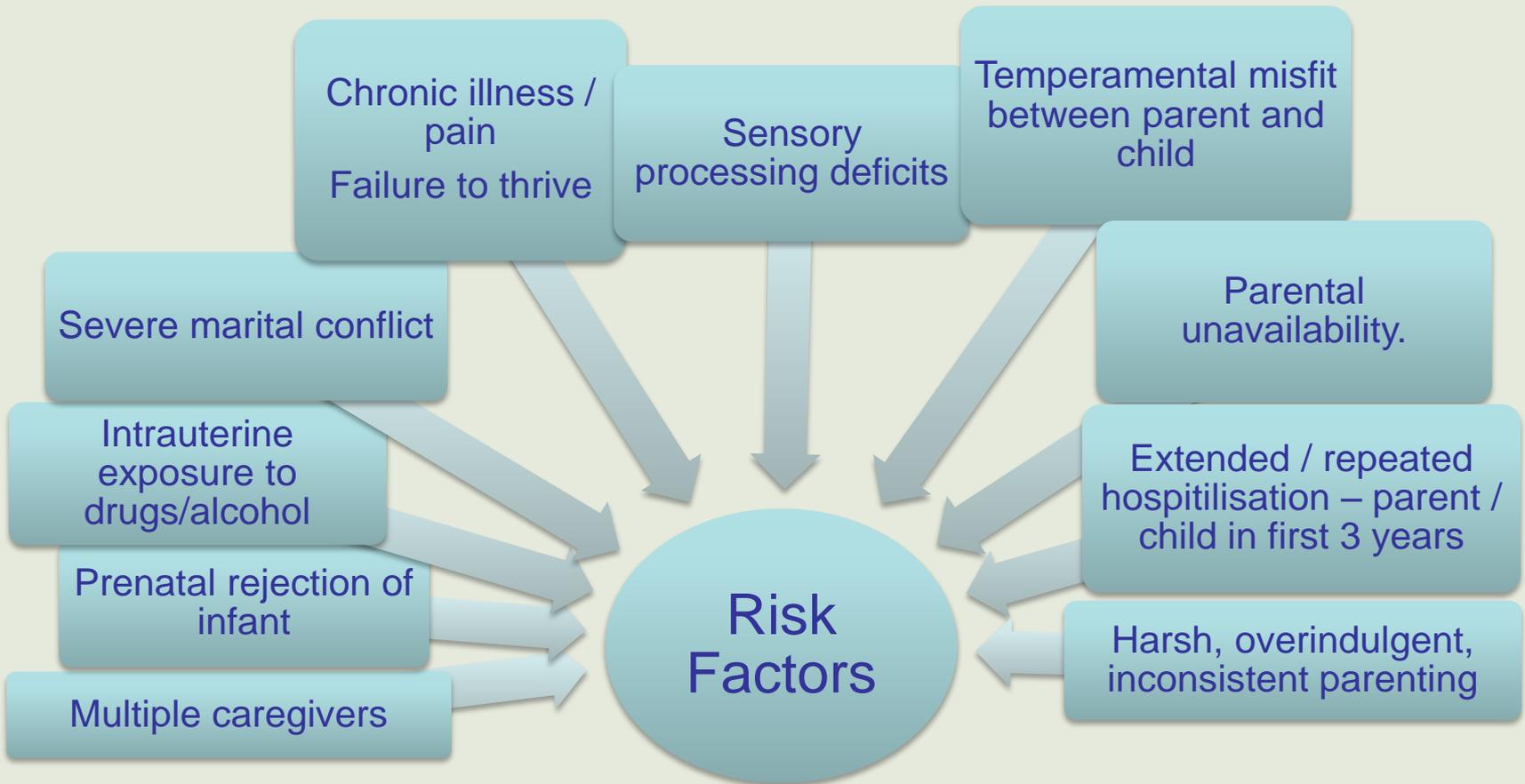
Aims for this session:

- To step inside the shoes of a student described by teachers as being “unpredictable,” and why.
- To step inside the shoes of a teacher trying to predict what the “unpredictable” student is going to do next, and why.
- To consider unpredictable and unconventional ways of managing these students in the school environment.
- To consider our responsibility as psychologists to help create a safe learning environment and help to foster positive outcomes for these students.
- To take with you at least one new idea / thought / strategy.

Multiple risk factors impacting on the student's ability to learn



Multiple risk factors



Types of Neglect



- Medical:** Failure to provide visits to the doctor not receiving medical attention following injuries.
- Physical:** Failure to provide food, water or adequate sanitation.
- Emotional:** Failure to provide appropriate attention, nurturing and support to a child.
- Neglectful Supervision:** Failure to provide appropriate and responsible care to a child.
- Abandonment:** Failure to assume adequate responsibility for a child, such as leaving a child with no plans to return.

Misdiagnosis – “a diagnostic collage”

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

Oppositional Disorder

Conduct Disorder

Generalized Anxiety Disorder

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

Dysthymic Disorder / Major Depression

Bipolar Disorder / Cyclothymic Disorder

Sensory Integration Disorder

“The part is mistaken for the whole”

Experiences of Chaos, Fear, Trauma, Loss, Abandonment

Impaired growth and development

Neuron connections not “wired” - inadequate connections

“Use it or lose it”

Abnormally high levels of stress hormones

Brainstem overused - constant high alert, potential harm

Response to threat - Fight / flight or freeze response. Numb. Less pain.

Over reactions to the environment

Inability to think, retrieve information, problem solve, self regulate

“Children who have been profoundly rejected will evoke rejection in others.”

“Children who have tried to defend themselves against threat with hostility, will evoke hostility from others.”

Bloom 1995



This world of hostility creates a “hostility cycle” unless interrupted.

Student Shame.....

“People who live with toxic shame feel fundamentally disgraced, intrinsically worthless and profoundly humiliated in their own skin, just for being themselves....toxic shame arises when an individual’s inner core is tormented through rejection.”



Gabarino, 1999

The External World of the School versus the Internal World of the Student

“How I work + how others work + how the world works

=

my **Internal Working Model (IWM)**

Positive IWM

- + memory templates
- + map to navigate a situation
- + work in progress
- + modifiable
- + more defined over time

Negative IWM

- negative memory templates
- anxiety interrupts navigation
- inflexible
- all or none fashion
- hypervigilance
- vulnerable

Reframe the story....

The door, the dog and the backyard.....



The boy, the other boys, the teacher and the smelly mat.....



It's a bit like a steak really – well done, rare, or simply just plain raw.....



Expect the Unexpected Self-Regulation



An 'internal locus of control' is developed over time.

Develops mastery of resilience and confidence over time, in all developmental domains.

Trauma and broken attachments don't let this happen.

An 'external locus of control' is developed instead. Unable to manage emotional states.

Traumatized children can shift to states of anxiety, agitation and dysregulation within moments, which makes them unpredictable.

The challenges

React negatively to changes in routine or teachers

Physically or verbally abusive

Aggressive in response to classroom pressures

Excessively withdrawn

React inappropriately to correction or praise

Unable to develop or sustain relationships with peers

Break school rules

Low level off-task behaviours

Mood swings

Attention seeking

Distract others

Truant

Impulsive dangerous behaviours

Damage property



Mad? Bad? or Sad?

When behaviour is very aggressive, loud, oppositional or controlling, it is very difficult to believe that the child is not doing this deliberately.

In that case, why is he doing it?



Sally's Sabotage.....



What do young people need to be able to do, in order to learn?

- Feel safe
- Take risks
- Positive self-esteem
- Seek help without expecting criticism or ridicule
- Concentrate
- Ignore distractions
- Self-regulate emotions
- Positive coping strategies when confronted with challenge
- Can wait for attention
- Understand the meaning of consequences



Impact on Academic Performance & Social Functioning

Impacts on academic performance	Impacts on social relationships
<p>Reduced Cognitive Capacity</p> <p>Sleep Disturbance (causing poor concentration)</p> <p>Difficulty with Memory (making learning harder)</p> <p>Language Delays (reducing capacity for listening, understanding and expressing)</p>	<p>Need for Control (causing conflict with teachers and other students)</p> <p>Attachment Difficulties (making attachment to school problematic)</p> <p>Poor Peer Relationships (making school an unpleasant experience)</p> <p>Unstable Living Situation (reducing learning and capacity to engage with a new school)</p>

Characteristics – maintenance of psychological safety

Temper Tantrums:

What do these behaviours look like? Escalation of anxiety. Extreme outburst. Desperate attempt to make perceived danger / threats to go away.

Immature / Nuisance / Regressive Behaviours:

Signal escalation of anxiety. Two-fold function: an escape from the emotion and an escape from immediate teacher control. What do these look like?

Passive / Aggressive Behaviour:

“Compliant appearance that packages a defiant spirit.” Right – wrong; complete – incomplete; more – less; sit – stand. Maintain view that adults are not to be trusted and justifies strivings for control.

Provocative Behaviours Toward Peers:

Peers vulnerable to react. Reaction as proof of power and control over peers.

School / Home Division:

Attempts to divide the adults. For example - reports teacher as preferred parental figure. Teacher awareness not to form an opinion of parents based on student's interchange.

Characteristics

Teacher Instruction:

Erratic - spaciness, forgetful, defiant, stubborn, bored, haphazard - fluctuating patterns when anxious, angry or feeling insecure.

Presumption – work is nothing to do with learning **and** a way to control the student.

Support / Praise:

One of three re-cycled responses:

- Accept – no big deal
- Reject outright
- Accept – then denigrate

Expressions of Gratitude:

Implies dependence. Be prepared against feeling unappreciated, resentful if extra efforts are not recognised.

Remain Optimistic... (yeah right!)



Despite the student being non-compliant, unmotivated, unco-operative and lots of other un...words.

Despite the student waving his middle finger at you or telling you where to go and how to get there.

Despite the student constantly off-task, calling out and producing work only when he feels like it.

Despite the student frequently disrupting the class.

Despite the student seeking out conflict, fights and arguments.

Behaviour pain-based. Not that they won't behave like other students, but that they can't.

Don't come near me!



Finding your "buttons" gives them:

- Control in an unsafe world
- Keeps you off balance
- Keeps you at a distance



Always on 'tenter hooks.' "It's a balancing act"



Avoidance
Embarrassing
Feel attacked
Unappreciated
Overwhelming
Undermining authority
Get on with it
Collegial support
Student reputation
Lack of understanding
Competence
Exhausted
Impact on others
Parent complaints

Got you!! Hook, line and sinker!
An easy catch. Unless....



What is likely to work:

Teacher's Interpersonal Stance:

Matter-of-fact, task orientated - mindful that bringing more emotion into interaction may trigger anxiety and behavioural deterioration.

Fairness / Unfairness:

Defined as - every student is treated according to what they need, therefore comparisons between students are irrelevant. No debate over whether things were “fair” or not.



Unpredictability:

Intentional navigation around the array of avoidance manoeuvres. Predicting means a target that is more likely to “work.” Guesses can tell more than answers.

Eye contact:

Culturally sensitive. Non-verbal component of developing interpersonal trust. Avoidance helps to perpetuate mistrust. Encourage if appropriate. Inter-subjectivity – shared experience and emotions.

Rules:

Matter-of-fact, firm, no nonsense – but not hostile. Pro-active, positive, concrete. “Do....” directions not “Would you...” then “Thanks...” in anticipation. Follow up.

What is likely to work:

Choice:

Makes no sense. Tell student in a matter-of-fact way, that he is making choices all the time and behaviours are not always attributed to external factors / the external world. Coat – carry or wear?

Praise:

“You are going really well today.” Vague. A manipulative control strategy. Opportunity to provoke oppositional behaviour. Praise suggests being the more powerful one, passing judgement. Link appreciation to specific behaviour instead.

Advice / Assistance:

Always ask the student if he wants help. Forces the student to take some responsibility for stating what he wants in order to get it. Avoids risk of negative reactions.

“Tricks”

Describe behaviours observed as “tricks” rather than more loaded words – manipulative, lying...

Task completion:

Erratic performance frustrating. Emphasise student accountability and results/outcomes are dependent on his own good / not so good choices.

What is likely to work:

Consequences:

Intentional humiliation? Acknowledge it will be difficult for student. Might trigger anger. Use natural consequences that relate to the problem behaviour and designed to repair damaged property or damaged relationships.

Restitution:

Little or no understanding of this concept. Important relational skill to learn. Apology warranted, as well as an act of restitution – more effective. Can be a consequence.

Task Completion:

Erratic performance frustrating. Emphasise student's accountability and results / outcomes are dependent on his own good or not so good choices.

Communication / One Liners:

May invite “murky” conversations. Avoid these “quicksand” conversations. Some one liners:

- “That’s an interesting idea. How did you figure that out?”
- I never would have thought of that. Hope it works out.”
- “Do you have a plan?”
- What do you think you will do?”
- Let’s make a time so you can talk about that with me later.”
- “What do you think I think about that?”

Internal experiences; thoughts and feelings influence perceptions

Get to know the student – cultural differences / needs.

Story telling – be the naïve enquirer. Listen as if you have never heard it before.

Validate and translate. Will determine the way you communicate .

Check it out! If not correct, you'll be told.

Talk to walls if you need to!

Use the child's name.

Breathe for 3 – 8 seconds.

Don't look for THE answer. It doesn't exist.

**Strategies done the same time, each time, will
enable the student's behaviours to flourish. It makes you
SO predictable!**





Home and School Strategies



Attention:

Activates thoughts, feelings and behaviour - “What are you paying attention to, that is leading to this behaviour?”

Distrust of Self:

Reframe “I don’t know” as “pretending not to know” After a while, what is real and what is pretend becomes blurred. Unaware that he is fooling himself.

Blaming others:

Often takes on the form of “self-pity.” As “victim” not to feel sorry for self. No empathy – this is enabling. Goal to promote personal responsibility for the child. Restitution in the form of an action, not a verbal apology. “What are you going to do now to fix this up?”

Promises:

If promise broken, remind he will hurt himself . Will not be able to use promises in future. Will need to figure out how to earn trust back.



Home and School Strategies



Cross – Talking:

Two adults talk with child present, to convey information to him. Prevents child from mounting an argumentative response. May be hypothesizing about what might be going on with the child. Keep it brief.

Unresponsiveness:

If no response when talking with child, role play possible child response and switch back to adult role. Alternate in matter-of-fact way.

Unintelligible Speech:

Keeps adults in a “not knowing and trying to find out” position. Don’t ask to repeat. Assume it wasn’t important and carry on. Make child responsible for communicating clearly.

Tantrums / Meltdowns:

Ensure a match between child and approach. Direct, left alone, affection, warm and supportive.

Unpredictability:

Unpredictable range of responses. Keep a little off balance. Element of surprise. Consistency provides predictability. Easier for child to protect himself.

The 3R Self-Care for Teachers Rules

Reflection

Regulation

Relaxation

Reflection

The behaviour – what, why, where?

How do I feel about it? Am I managing? How am I responding?

My relationship with the child? Is there a connection?

Do I need help? Who can I talk to?

Regulation

Manage your own emotions and responses by:

Knowing the child might make you angry or upset

Knowing that strong emotions are contagious

Knowing your own trigger points and what upsets you the most

Take time to calm yourself when you do feel angry and hurt

Get help, have strategies, debrief

Relaxation

Give yourself time, hobbies, family and friends, humour, patient, realistic with yourself



Relationships, Relationships, Relationships
Repetition, Repetition, Repetition
Location, Location, Location

Replacement experiences, brainstem-altering experiences

Consistent (home and school)

Predictable sometimes in unpredictable 'safe' ways

Calm, consistent, routine

Frequent !

Recruitment of other adults in student's life

Your perception of the student will affect the relationship you make with him.

Your perception of the student will determine the style of your intervention.

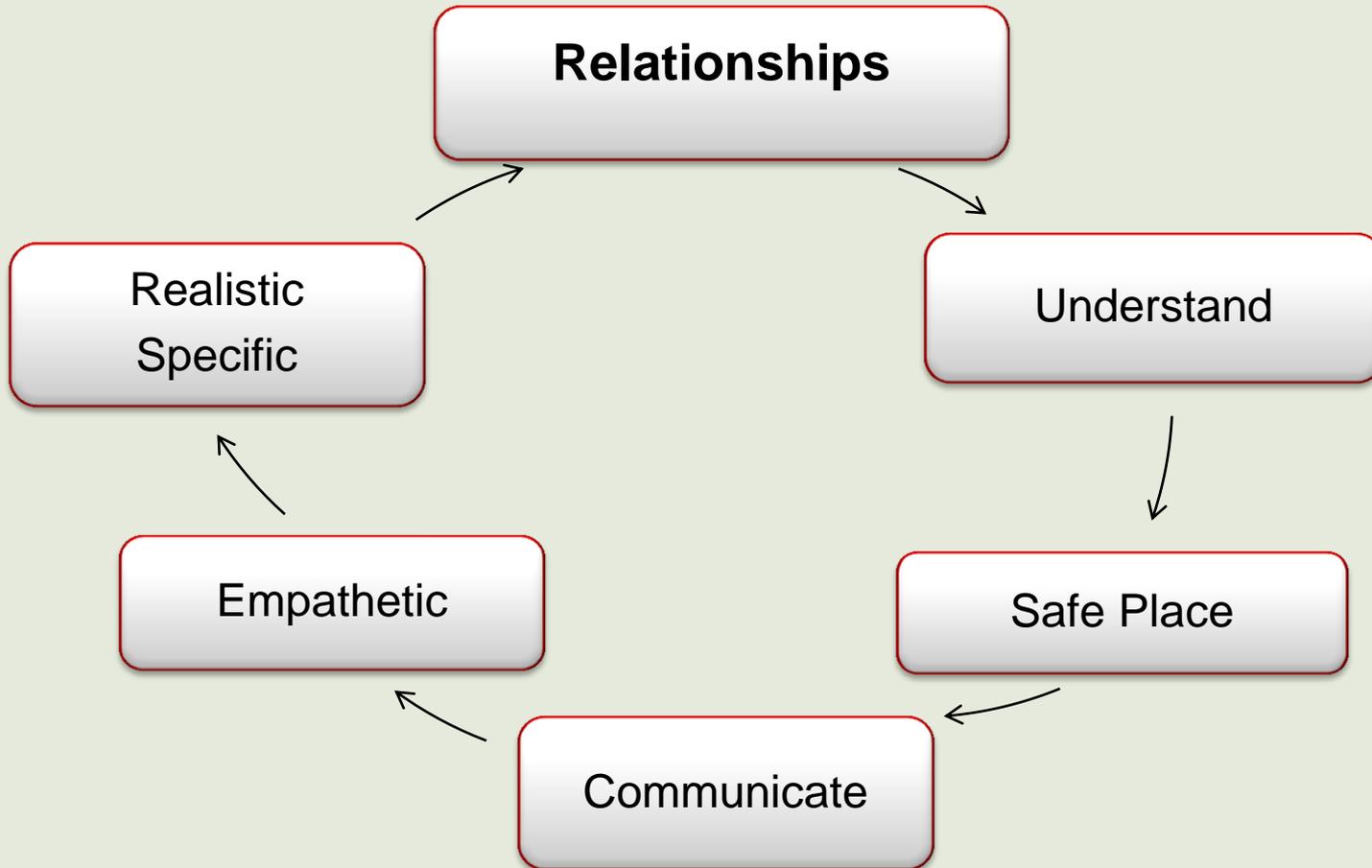
Your understanding and knowledge of the student will affect how you react to challenge.

Your response will depend on your point of reference.

“Bring the storm. I will captain the ship!”



What is our responsibility?





“It is through attachment and the development of strong and supportive relationships, that children will be able to heal. This is the primary goal of our work. To join with those who feel they are not worthy enough to be cared for.”

Nicolau 2009