

# Mission Impossible: from troubled teens to thriving families

Patricia E. Zurita Ona, Psy.D.  
East Bay Behavior Therapy Center

Sandra Georgescu, Ph.D.  
Associate Professor - Clinical Psychology  
The Chicago School of Professional

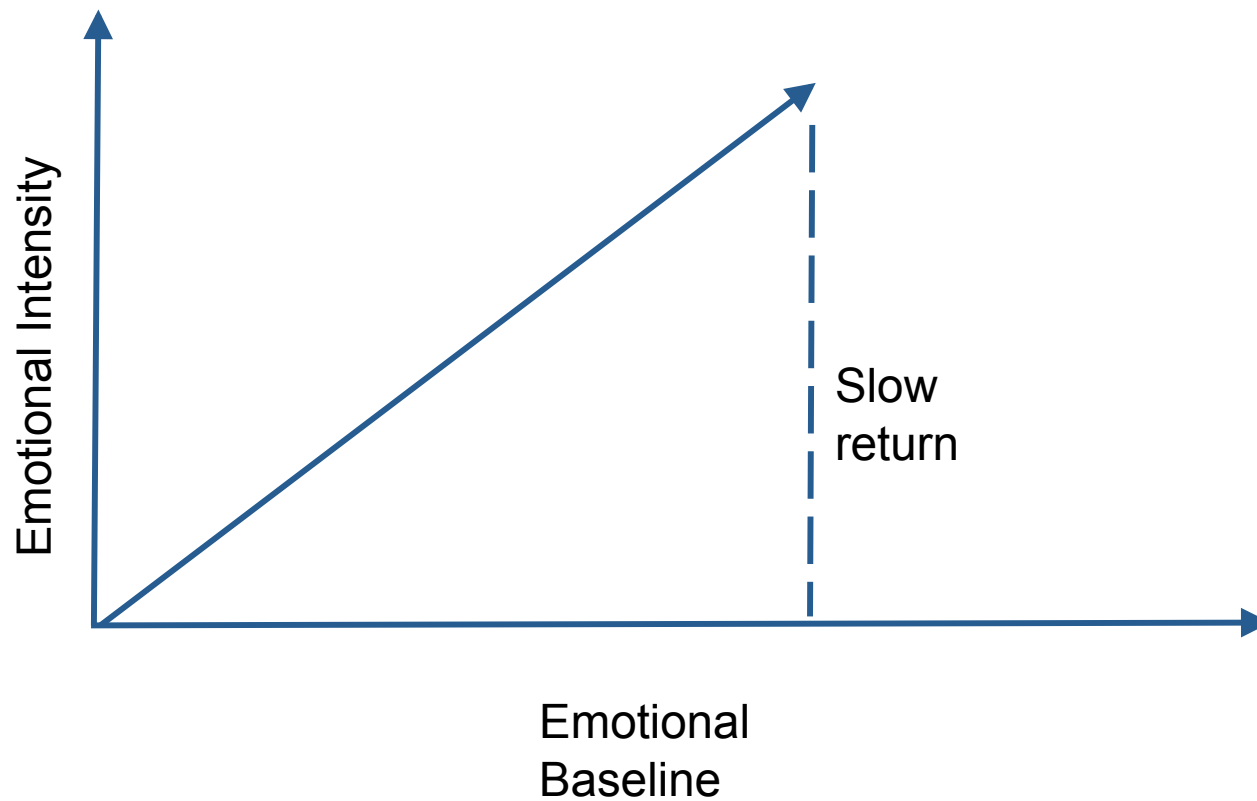


Mission impossible: from troubled teens to thriving families,  
Zurita Ona & Georgescu

## Our goal:

To share with you the “why”  
and the “how’s” of treating  
parents of teens with emotion  
dysregulation with Acceptance  
and Commitment Therapy

# What is emotional regulation in a nutshell?



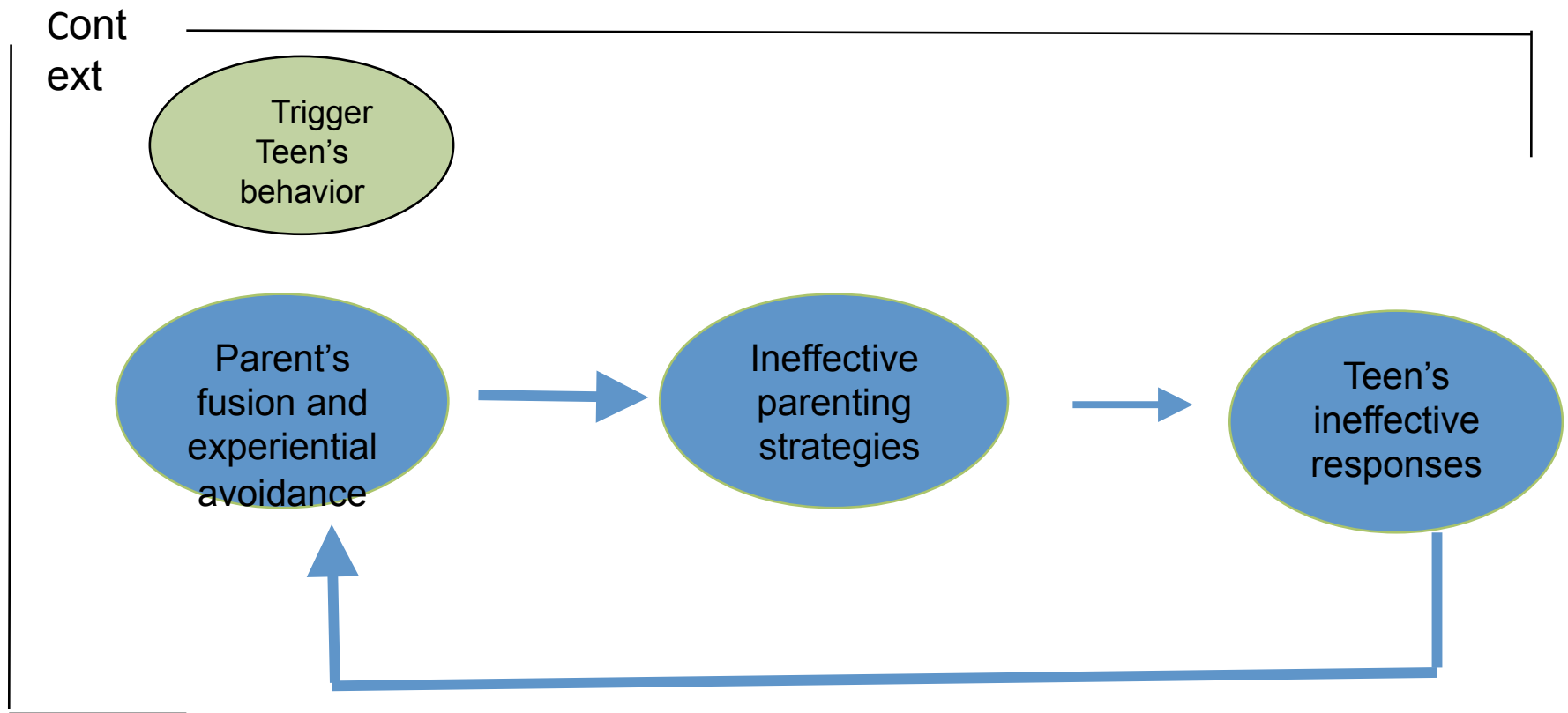
Mission impossible: from troubled teens to thriving families,  
Zurita Ona & Georgescu

# Emotion dysregulation is a reality among teens



- ◆ What's the reality of teens dealing with emotion dysregulation?
- ◆ ACT can make a difference

# ACT formulation for parents of teens struggling with emotion dysregulation?



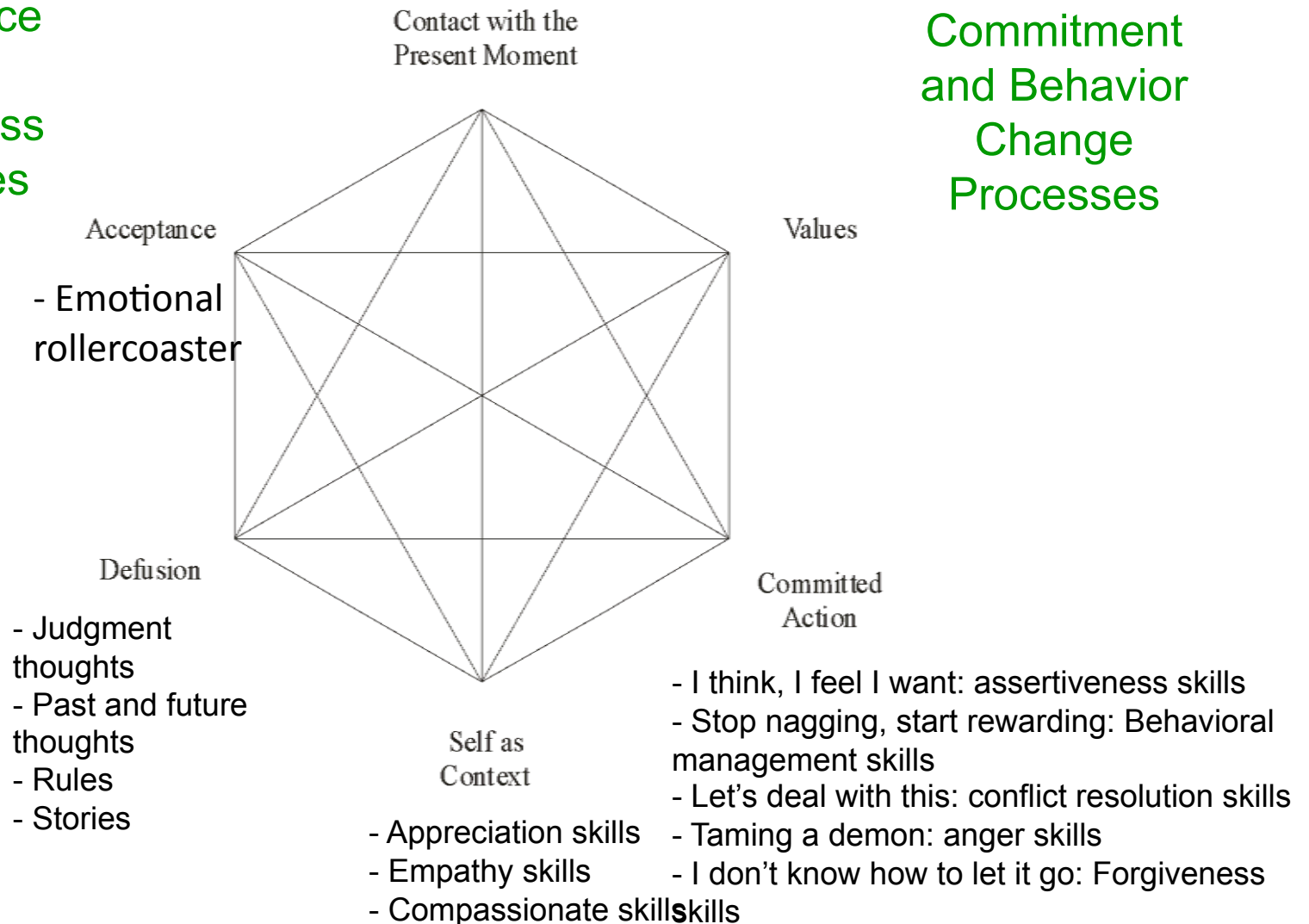
## Cycle of conflict

Mission impossible: from troubled teens to thriving families,  
Zurita Ona & Georgescu

# Hexaflex: formulation

Acceptance  
and  
Mindfulness  
Processes

Commitment  
and Behavior  
Change  
Processes



Mission impossible: from troubled teens to thriving families,  
Zurita Ona & Georgescu

# First step: creative hopelessness

Parent says: “Fix my teen. My teen is the  
problem.”

What does ACT say?

Exercise

# First step: creative homelessness

Inventory of everything you have done to manage your teen's behavior and your own emotions	Do they bring you closer to the parent you want to be?	What happens to your relationship with your teen?
- Offer money if she behaves	No	Gets worse and worse.
- Saying no because she already knows what she is asking is against the rules of the household	No	She wants to hang out more with her boyfriend; she screams at me, threatens me with suicide or cutting more often, disappears into her bedroom.
- Give up on asking for compliance	No	She runs all over me; simply makes more demands
- Taking her for a walk and make a request	No	She just gets angry at me.
- Searching for the perfect therapist for her	No	She does not change
- Talking calmly with her	No	She does not respond to reason
- Yelling at her	No	She screams back
- Asking grandma to talk to her	No	She complains to grandma about me.
- Saying firmly, "Stop & listen"	No	She does not listen. She continues to complain about everything I do even though it's not related to her.

transitioning from troubled teens to thriving families,  
Zurita Ona & Georgescu



# Defusion

- Judgmental thoughts
- Past and future thoughts
- Rules
- Stories about the teen and the parent

## Defusion: “I suck as parent”

A couple of years ago, I received an e-mail from a parent, Stacey, who wrote, “I just opened Mark’s backpack and found new cutting gear, two packs of Marlboro, one opened, and his wallet with \$50. I don’t know where that money is coming from . . .this is very disheartening to me because my husband and I have talked to him multiple times. We have encouraged him to trust us, to tell us what’s going on, and he keeps rejecting any support we try to offer him. I honestly don’t know what else to do. I feel I

# Defusion : The author within my mind

- Defusion exercise

Exercise: My story telling mind says that: ...

# Defusion from past & future thoughts: Time machine



Tiffany and Ken walk into my therapy office. After we exchange greetings, Ken is quick to say, “Don’t ask us anything about the weekend. We tried to remind Mariah to use her skills, but nothing mattered to her; she completely ignored us. I tried to talk to her in different ways, but I got no response. Nothing is going to work, and she just

# Acceptance: Emotional rollercoaster

Exercise:

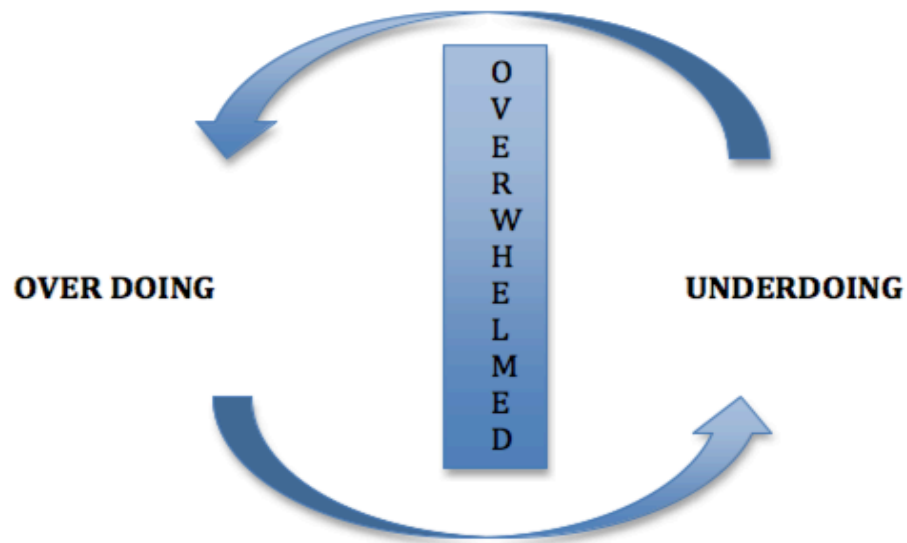
Noticing your feelings

# Acceptance: Emotional rollercoaster

## Emotional avoidance “escapism”

Surrender	Disconnecter
Numbster	Externalizer
Hummingbird	

# Acceptance of internal emotions



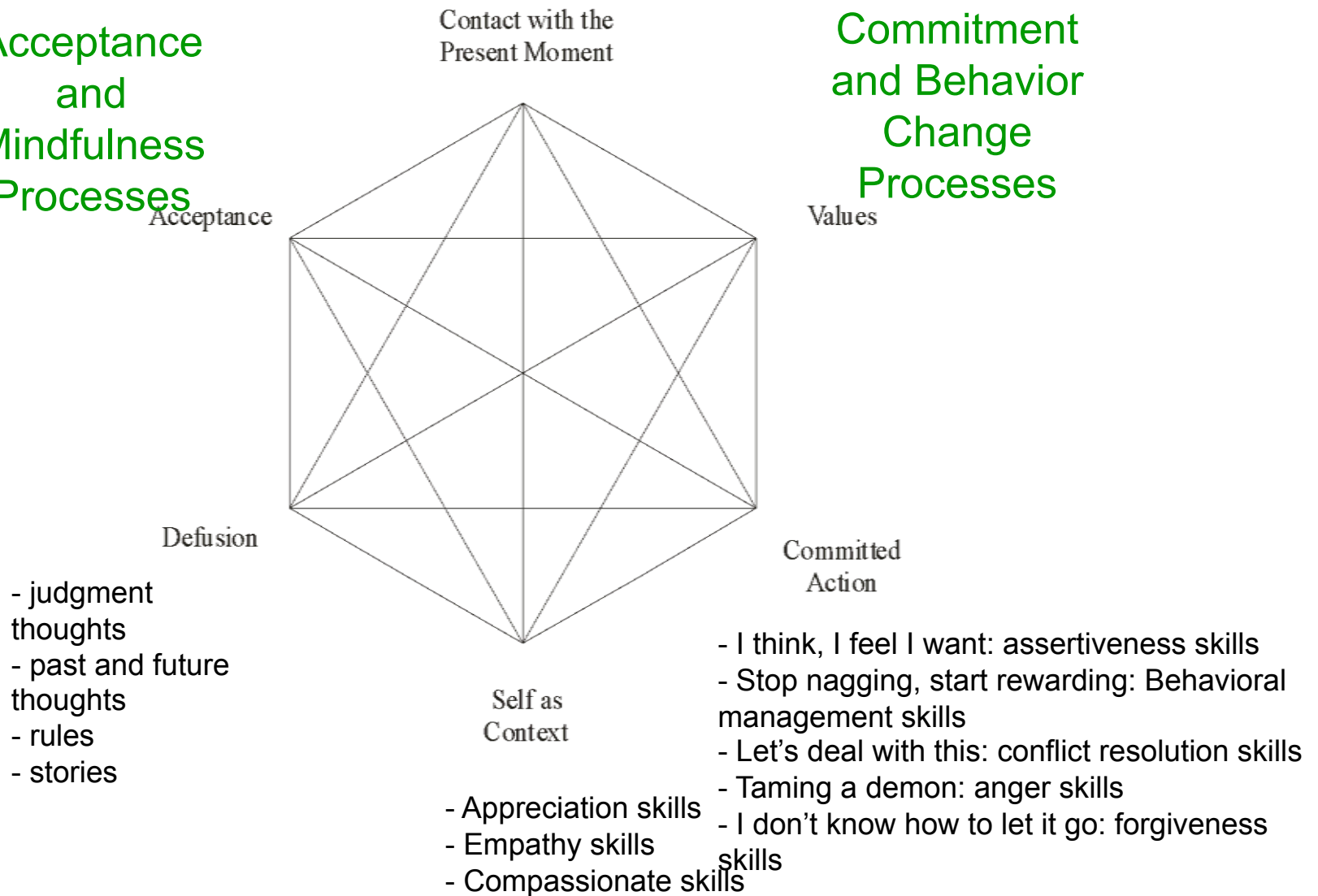
Holmes, E. P. (2011). Title of the Diagram from *The Practice of Living Meaningfully* (Unpublished Manuscript).

Mission impossible: from troubled teens to thriving families,  
Zurita Ona & Georgescu

# Hexaflex: formulation

Acceptance  
and  
Mindfulness  
Processes

Commitment  
and Behavior  
Change  
Processes



Mission impossible: from troubled teens to thriving families,  
Zurita Ona & Georgescu



# Committed action

- ❖ I'm here, fully present: mindfulness skills
- ❖ I see you: appreciation skills
- ❖ I get you: empathy skills
- ❖ I think, I feel, I want: assertiveness skills
- ❖ Stop nagging, start rewarding: behavioral management skills
- ❖ Let's deal with this: conflict management skills
- ❖ Taming a demon: anger skills
- ❖ I don't know how to let it go: forgiveness skills
- ❖ Why do I need to be compassionate? Compassionate

# What type of parent do you want to be?

- Values clarification exercises



Exercise: Your last parenting days on earth

Exercise: pure moments of direction

# Catching your teen doing good: appreciating skills



Relationships are living entities that evolve, morph, and transform, and to be successful, they require attention. No relationship will survive without adjustments, changes, and caring behaviors from the people involved in it.

WHY?

HOW? Let's NAP (exercise)

And what about the though

moments?

Mission impossible: from troubled teens to thriving families,  
Zurita Ona & Georgescu

# I get it: empathy skills

What is this so called empathy?



From presence and curious behaviors to empathic ones:

(1) Practicing empathic behaviors: 4 A's

a. Ask curious questions

a. Accept

b. Appreciate

c. Ask directly

Mission impossible: from troubled teens to thriving families,  
Zurita Ona & Georgescu

d.

# Empathic statements & empathic learning

## Practicing empathic statements



A teen screaming at you when you tell him he cannot go to a party that is unsupervised; he says, “I hate you! My friends will make fun of me over this.”

## Exercise: Practicing empathic learning

Teen and parents talking interviewing each other about their struggles in their relationship.

# Assertive skills:

For parents:



Assertiveness is a specific type of communication that will allow you to clearly state limits with your teen, ask for a change on his behavior, and give him feedback while increasing the likelihood of being heard.

# Stop nagging, start rewarding



Why?

Why are you going to use  
“bad words?”

# Stop nagging, start rewarding



	Positive	Negative
<b><u>Reinforcer or augmenter</u></b> (increases a behavior)	Adding something pleasurable your teen likes	Removing something your teen doesn't like
<b><u>Punisher or minimizer</u></b> (decreases a behavior)	Adding something your teen doesn't like	Removing something your teen likes

**You can have fun creating behavioral plans!**



# Let's deal with this: conflict management skills

After a parent coaching session, Louise and Jonathan left our session with a specific plan about how to respond to their son, Benjamin's, suicidal threats. We laid out specific responses, rehearsed them, and even anticipated internal obstacles such as future oriented thoughts and intense feelings of hopelessness. They returned the following week and Louise recounted what happened when trying to implement the original plan: "I lost it; I couldn't take it anymore, and the next thing I knew, I started screaming at Benjamin and telling him how inconsiderate and disrespectful he is by threatening us with dying. I simply lost it. He kept screaming in my face that if I didn't let him go back to his old school with his old friends it would be my fault if he died. I was so upset that after screaming at him and bursting into tears, all I could think of was a shot of scotch, and it was 8:30 in the morning!"

# Let's deal with this: conflict management skills

## - in the moment -



- Breathe slowly intentionally
- Make a commitment with yourself
- Turn up your “defusion skills” dial all the way up (\*)
- Turn your “appreciation skills” dial all the way up
- Notice verbal distractions (\*)
- Make your assertive statement (\*)
- Get out of talking in circles (\*)

# Taming the demon: anger skills

Choice: response-ability and account-ability



Exercise: Catching anger before it catches you (for a past angry situation)

Tips: What to do in the middle of an angry provoking situation.

# I don't know how to let it go. forgiveness skills



was so angry that  
couldn't stop thinking  
about it. What's wrong  
with him? He posted on  
fb that he was going to  
kill himself on the day of  
his birthday, and guess  
what, I received all  
types of e-mails and  
phone calls from his  
friends and their  
parents. I even had  
visits from parents that  
saw that post. I don't  
know if I'll ever be able  
to forgive him for

# I don't know how to let it go: forgiveness skills

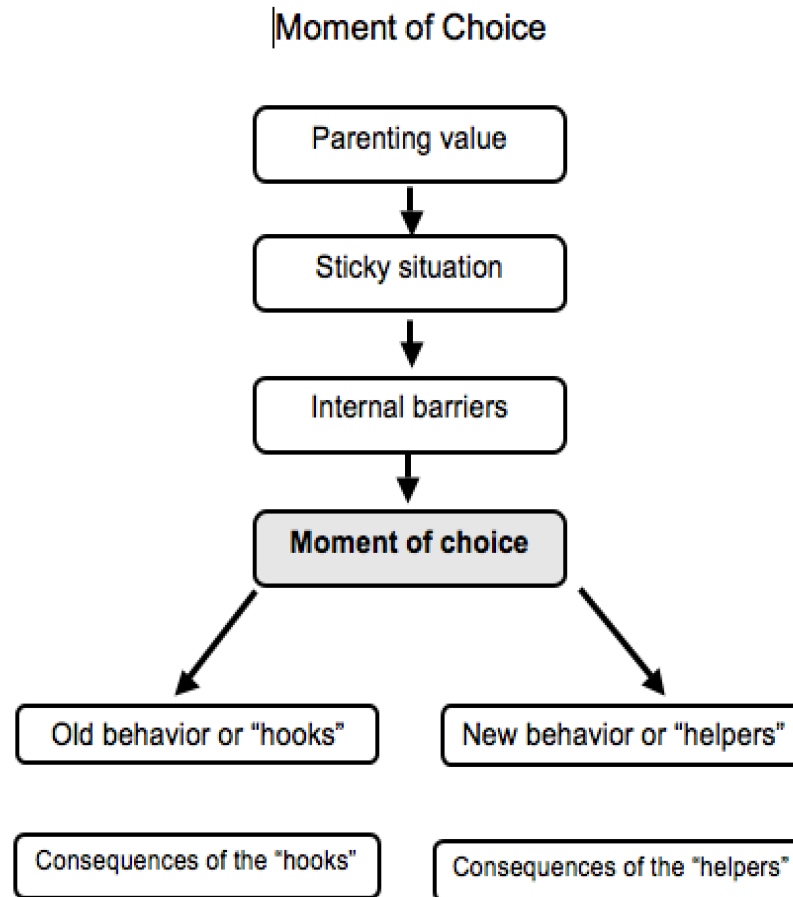


Are you ready to  
forgive?

If you're not.. What's  
the master you are  
serving to?

**Exercise**

# Moments of choice: mapping



Adapted from: P. Zurita (2016), the "Choice point" worksheet, Ciarrochi, Baley, & Harris (2014)

Mission impossible: from troubled teens to thriving families,  
Zurita Ona & Georgescu

# When things go wrong....

1. Notice your full experience:

My mind says...

2. Name your inner experience:

3. What's the workability of that inner experience?

If you hold onto those thoughts, emotions, sensations, and urges and then act on them, do you move closer towards the parent you want to be?

If you hold onto those thoughts, emotions, sensations, and urges and then act on them, what happens to the relationship with your teen?

4. Defuse from the inner experience if it's not helpful to being the parent you want to be

5. Compassionate talk

Can you talk to yourself the way that a compassionate and caring friend would talk to you in this moment? Write down what your kind friend would tell you at this moment.

© Ona from Zurita (2016), the "Choice point" worksheet, Ciarrochi, Baley, & Harris (2014)

Mission: compassionate and caring to thriving families,  
Zurita Ona & Georgescu

# Don't be shy, contact us...

Patricia E. Zurita Ona, Psy.D.

[ebbehaviortherapycenter@gmail.com](mailto:ebbehaviortherapycenter@gmail.com)

[www.eastbaybehaviortherapycenter.com](http://www.eastbaybehaviortherapycenter.com)

**Dr. Sandra Georgescu**  
**smgeorgescu@gmail.com**  
**Associate Professor - Clinical Psychology**  
**The Chicago School of Professional Psychology**  
**Licensed Clinical Psychologist**  
**ACBS Peer reviewed trainer**