

Incarnational Disrhythmia

Hyper Motoric and Inattentive Challenges, Cumulative Stress Reaction, Sensory Overwhelm Issues, Non-Verbal Disorder, Oppositional Defiance ¹

Kim Payne and Bonnie River

Getting "behind the label" of commonly diagnosed child and teen social, emotional, and behavioral challenges is taking on more and more importance for both the classroom teacher and the care professional. Of course, every child is whole and what you see laid out in this chapter is designed to better equip us to be helpers in removing obstacles to a child's full soul/spirit potential. The children that often need our extra support and are "coming in" to themselves are doing so in a way that is not typical and can be out of step with usual developmental milestones. That is why we use the term "Incarnational Disrhythmia." Given the help they need, these students will be fine, but their incarnation has its own ebb and flow. Our task is to do what we can to open up the stream through which their sense of place in the world and within themselves can better flow.

What we have laid out in these sections can help organize our thoughts and help us develop doable and depth-full approaches rather than feeling like we are being hit by an unrealistic tsunami of well-meaning but formulaic strategies.

How to use the guides

Most importantly, keep it simple and doable. Henry David Thoreau, inspired by Ralph Waldo Emerson's call to simplicity, wrote an impassioned response. In a letter to Emerson he wrote of the need to "Simplify! Simplify!!" Emerson wrote back, "One 'Simplify' would have sufficed." So, when you read through these pages a particular child will likely come to mind. Look for which of the descriptions in the "What Do I See?" of the four layers (Physical, Life Forces, Relational, Self) seems to stand out. Now consider each of the "What Can I Do?" suggestions. Choose just one or two, and select the one that seems like it would be the most achievable and sustainable by you. There may be other ideas that seem like they would help more, but if they feel like it would be over-reaching, give them a pass and perhaps circle back to them in a couple of weeks. From a quiet feeling of success, over time, you can increase what you

are bringing to the child in a way that feels natural. Let the parents of the child or teen and your colleagues know your plan. Its simplicity can inspire others. In this way they gain good clarity of your support process and may even join you in their own way. It is so good to hear the question, "Great, what can I do to help?" and to feel a circle gathering around the child.

In this way you are helping the child in need, but you are avoiding that troubling dynamic of diverting too much focus away from the rest of the children in the class. After all, keeping the four layers of the whole class healthy and moving along is probably what the individual child you are thinking about needs as much as anything. No matter how good an idea sounds in the following pages, the children or teens need you to use strategies that seem natural to you, so they hear your voice and intent. In this way they can move safely and easily into the small but increasingly beautiful learning space you open up each day.

The Hyper Motoric Child

Physical Body

What do I see?

- Has problems remaining seated
- Fidgets with hands or feet or squirms in seat
- Displays compulsive movements such as tics, clearing throat, etc.
- Appears "on the go" and "driven by a motor"
- Displays overshooting, impulsive movements

What can I do?

- Increase physical prompting of student (e.g., hand on shoulder or back).
- The student could be given permission, by signaling, to get up and leave the classroom for an "aerobic break".
- Consider shortening main lesson rhythmic time and building in a movement time halfway through the lesson.
- If appropriate, give the child physical compression such as with a gentle firmness squeeze, or rub her arms and shoulders. This can be turned into a game. If this is not possible, consider a very heavy woolen blanket wrapped around the child during which they can have a quiet reading time.

¹ Editor Note: This is a practical manual for dealing with various and sometimes overlapping behaviors, at times with overlapping and even identical strategies. If the reader notes some repeated passages in this long, detailed manual, it is because some suggested strategies are used for different situations. This chapter has been excerpted and slightly edited from Elisabeth Auer, ed., *Helping Children on Their Way: Educational Support for the Classroom* (Chatham, NY: Waldorf Publications, 2017). The *Research Bulletin* is grateful to the authors for their kind permission to reprint their work.

Life, Habit / Etheric Body

What do I see?

- Has organization difficulties and loses things
- Has problems in transitions
- Displays odd habits or compulsive behaviors

What can I do?

- Set timers or other visual reminders for transitions and seat work.
- Post all schedules and refer to them with the class. With younger students, use a pictorial schedule depicting the daily routine.
- Require the use of a 3-ring binder or notebook and subject dividers (starting in fourth or fifth grade at the latest).
- Assist with the prioritization of activities and workload.
- Reduce the clutter and unnecessary visual overload in the classroom (brooms in corners, open shelving and student cubby holes, counter clutter). Pay special attention to the chalk board/front of the classroom.

Senses, Relationship / Astral Body

What do I see?

- Argues or fights with peers or adults
- Has difficulty awaiting turn
- Uses inappropriate language or gestures in non-combative situations
- Cannot sustain planned rhythmic movements, as in circle activities

What can I do?

- Use private signals and cues that have been pre-arranged with the student to help focus attention.
- Design instruction for frequent opportunities to interact with peers.
- Assign special responsibilities to the student in the presence of the peer group so others observe the student in a positive light.
- Hold regular class meetings with carefully set up and monitored, age-appropriate communication skills.
- Play games that involve fast movement together with coming to a complete stand-still. For example, any one of the games that involve running and then having to stand as still as a statue. There are any number of good stalking games that involve moments of stillness (tension) and running (release) in a controlled and conscious way.

- Play listening games. For example, "...listen to a noise far, far away, now a little closer, now in the room, now as close to you as possible." For older children: "Now keeping hold of the very close noise, can you hear the far away sound at the same time?"
- The soliloquy strategy: Many children who have attention issues also can be overly defiant when directly confronted. Try this: Quietly, within the child's hearing range, talk out loud to yourself about your reactions consequences you are considering if it continues. Remember you are not talking to them but about the situation. This gives both the teacher and the student a valuable pause before a potentially negative conflict.

Learning, Organizing / Ego

What do I see?

- Interrupts during instructions (asks for clarification or distracts while teacher is speaking)
- Blurts out answers before questions have been completed
- Needs significantly more supervision than other children
- Impulsive in interactions, does not self-monitor
- Fails to give close attention to details or makes careless mistakes in his/her work
- Self-directs or soothes through speech (e.g., speaks to herself out loud or in a mumble what it is she is doing or wants to do. Sometimes it can also take the form of incessant humming, an unconscious singing)

What can I do?

- Break down longer assignments into smaller, manageable increments, providing a lot of structure, monitoring, and follow through.
- Teach students how to self-monitor on-task behavior, so that they are using class time effectively for getting work done.
- Frame the area of the board you want the children to pay attention to by having a curtain, veil, or shutter to cover unwanted board work.
- Teach internalizing speech and actions. For example, move from singing a well-known song to reducing the volume further and further until humming quieter and quieter until the song is being hummed "inside" without any noise at all. This can be helped by keeping a beat. If you reduce the volume of the beat to none at all – this can become a funny game

when they try to join in at a signal from you and see whether and where you are synchronized.

- A similar process can be achieved in movement by reducing a consciously carried out gesture, making it more and more subtle until the child is motionless doing it “inside”.
- The Calling Out Scale. If a child is a “serial blurter” tell them about the 3-2-1 system:
Three: Wrong comment – wrong time
Two: Right comment – wrong time
One: Right comment – Right time
Each time the child makes a comment, ask them, without any fuss, which of the three categories they thought their comment belonged to. Also give them your assessment. You can do this for an individual student or for the whole class.
- Together with the student, design a simple self-monitoring card using a key goal such as “I spoke out at the right moment in the right way today.” The child is reminded in the morning of his Key Goal. At the end of the day a one-minute review takes place where firstly he gives himself a score from 1 (always) to 5 (very seldom), followed by the teacher giving him a score. The child aims to accrue no more than 10-12 points in a week.

The Inattentive Type

Physical Body

What do I see?

- Is sluggish or drowsy
- Uses odd or inappropriate seating posture
- Appears to be “pulled down by gravity” when seated or standing

What can I do?

- Recommend high protein, low carbohydrate diet with Omega-3 Fatty Acid supplemented.
- Consider shortening main lesson rhythmic time and building in a movement time halfway through the lesson.
- Touch or physically cue certain students for their focus prior to giving directions.
- If appropriate, give the child physical compression such as with a gentle firmness squeeze, or rub her arms and shoulders. This can be turned into a game. If this is not possible, consider a very heavy woolen blanket wrapped around the child during which they can have a quiet reading time.

Life, Habit / Etheric Body

What do I see?

- Drops or loses materials
- Appears tired or complains of being tired
- Forgetful in daily activities

What can I do?

- Post all schedules and refer to them with the class. Use a pictorial schedule depicting the daily routine.
- Require the use of a 3-ring binder or notebook and subject dividers (starting in fourth or fifth grade at the latest).
- Provide assistance (another student or adult) to help them regularly sort through desks, backpacks, and notebooks.
- Provide preferential seating up front, within cueing distance of the teacher, and away from doors, windows, and high-traffic areas of the room, keeping visual and auditory stimulation to a minimum.
- Allow for natural consequences of not having materials (do not replace lost items with new ones).

Senses, Relationship / Astral Body

What do I see?

- Avoids direct eye contact
- Doesn't listen when spoken to directly
- Easily distracted

What can I do?

- Establish a cozy or concentration corner where a desk is veiled off from the rest of the class or an alternative desk or chair in the room (two-seat method). This is *not* a punishment area.
- Assign special responsibilities to the student in the presence of the peer group so others observe the student in a positive light.
- Hold regular class meetings with carefully set up and monitored, age-appropriate communication skills. Ask the student to be the “keeper of the speaking rule.” Her job is to notice when anyone transgresses the pre-agreed guidelines for the meeting.
- Play games that involve fast movement together with coming to a complete standstill. For example, any one of the games that involve running and then having to stand as still as a statue. There are any number of good stalking games that involve moments of stillness (tension) and running (release) in a controlled and conscious way.

- Play listening games. For example, "...listen to a noise far, far away, now a little closer, now in the room, now as close to you as possible." For older children: "Now keeping hold of the very close noise can you hear the far away sound at the same time?"
- The soliloquy strategy: Many children who have attention issues also can be overly defiant when directly confronted. Try this: Quietly, within the child's hearing range, talk out loud to yourself about your reactions consequences you are considering if it continues. Remember you are not talking to them but about the situation. This gives both the teacher and the student a valuable pause before a potentially negative conflict.
- Play various noticing games. For example, the children form two concentric circles. The group on the inside turns to face partners on the outside. They have to look very carefully at every detail of their partner's appearance. They then close their eyes while the partners on the outside change something in their appearance, let's say they put a ring on a different finger. The inside circle members now all open their eyes and have to find what it was their partners have changed.

Learning, Organizing / Ego

What do I see?

- Seems spacey or disoriented
- Uses distracting techniques to avoid being on task
- Doesn't follow through on instructions and fails to finish work
- Resists work requiring sustained will
- Avoids, dislikes, or is reluctant to engage in work that requires sustained mental effort

What can I do?

- Break down longer assignments into smaller, manageable increments, providing a lot of structure, monitoring, and follow-through.
- Teach students to self-monitor on-task behavior/work completion and to set individual short-term goals to self-monitor.
- Frame the area of the board you want the children to pay attention to by having a curtain, veil, or shutter to cover unwanted board work.
- Teach externalized speech and actions. For example, ask the child to sing a song well known to her "inside her head." Next ask her to hum it quietly, gaining in volume until she is singing out loud.
- A similar process can be achieved in movement by increasing a consciously carried-out gesture making

it more and more visible until the child is making the motion in a large demonstrative way.

- Together with the student, design a simple self-monitoring card using a key goal such as "I paid good attention today." The child is reminded in the morning of her Key Goal. The teacher meets for one minute at the end of every day and the student gives herself a mark from 1 through 5. The teacher then gives a score in response to the written question. 1 = Always, 2 = Almost Always, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Not Often, 5 = Hardly Ever. The student sets her cumulative weekly target score of say 8 points, as this would mean really good behavior. An unacceptable score of say 12 is also set and a consequence for such negative behavior is agreed upon. After a set number of weeks, a new goal is chosen and the system repeats itself.

Cumulative Stress Reaction

Physical Body

What do I see?

Pictures of polarities

- Student often appears disheveled or very neat.
- Student is awkward and hesitant in movements or very adept.
- Student stands tall and balanced or is slumped over and lax in form.
- Poor patterns of sleep reported. Restlessness and sleep deprived or oversleeping and very difficult to wake up.
- Hypo/under aware of other children's space and hyper/over aware of his own space
- Little awareness of proprioception. "...Where are my limbs in space and what are they doing?"

What can I do?

- Note, with a symbol, on a calendar, the days in which behavior is really bad, see if there is a pattern. (This often shows up on transition days of a split household lifestyle.) Bring this to the attention of other teachers or caregivers.
- Keep hygiene items in pouch for child and encourage their use for self-care and grooming.
- Use a lot of friendly, forewarned touch and movement to encourage relaxation. Avoid approaching student from behind or in a way that startles.
- Bach flower remedies could be considered. Vervain for being highly strung and fixed or beech for being stressed and critical. (Consult with a doctor first.)

- Recommend warming foods such as oatmeal, also high protein.
- Recommend warm clothing that tuck in and if possible woolen undergarments, as well as shoes that can be securely laced up.
- Avoid situations of adrenalin arousal, increasing calming activities particularly at known points in the day of high complexity and stress.
- Teach student to notice his or her body tensions before it gets too tight.
- Teach 10 deep cleansing breaths when student notices body tension.

Life, Habit / Vitality

What do I see?

- Listlessness, spaciness, or hyper vigilance as seen in alertness to danger
- Large appetite or small appetite (picky, then indiscriminate)
- Need to use bathroom or drink too often or not often enough
- Fixed routines, reacts habitually and/or chaotic habit life
- Startled at novelty and only attends to emotionally charged information

What can I do?

- Use gestures, close to the body and metaphoric, to focus student. For example, frame instructions by saying, "I am going to tell you to do three things. Number one (accompanied by gesture)..." Use the words "please look at me," or "time to focus here."
- Allow student to use self-soothing actions (i.e., sitting on a cushion, holding a stone or crystal or stuffed animal...).
- Develop signals for drink and bathroom and anticipate student's needs (be one step ahead, and subtle).
- Give previews of new situations. Foster and model delight in novelty.
- Predictability, predictability, predictability.

Senses, Relationship Body

What do I see?

- He is vigilant but misses parts of the work, seems forgetful or sloppy
- There seems to be a disconnect between the senses; seems to see but not hear
- Student is hyper-sensitive to touch but twists his own arm in a painful manner.

- Student seems to crave something, like an attachment object, and without it, will display strange and out of proportion reactions to situations.
- Emotionally 'hair triggered'; very low tolerance for frustration
- Out of proportion explosion or implosion of anger/sullenness
- Low tolerance for others whom student sees as different or "weird"
- Spreading the effects of negative events; does not bracket/contain problems but lets them color everything even if many positive things have happened that day
- Student avoids spontaneous play and does not appreciate good humor. Student scans others laughter for possible threat.
- *High Social, Sensory Complexity + Low Form & Predictability = Stress Response.* Formula: $SSC + FP = ?$

Therefore, do everything you can to create...*Low Social Sensory Complexity + High Form and Predictability = Safe Response*

What can I do?

- Develop a "system" with the student whereby you let the student know that he/she is "out the window," this alone helps them "come back" and focus on the task at hand.
- Forewarn the student that you are approaching, that something is going to happen, and use an even and soothing voice (the epitome of phlegma!).
- Keep visual and auditory input as much on "an even keel" as possible, forewarn and identify moments of chaos, tell student to watch you as these moments are not scary to you. (ha!)
- Invite student to try and see the world through different eyes, via stories, plays and creative projects.
- Appeal to student's feeling life and introduce nuances of thought, feelings, and ethics.
- Listen to the student with an open heart, calmly and patiently, without judgment.
- Tell stories and biographies of empathy and compassion.
- In socially complex situations, like spending time on the playground, increase form, even rehearse and later review, *good, better, best* response to usual trigger situations.

“I” / Learning and Organizing Body

What do I see?

- Confusion, frightened or blank expressions
- Withdrawal from the social milieu
- Rejects praise and consistently sees success as failure, an accident or not good enough
- Panics at deadlines, competition
- Low tolerance for new learning
- Cannot scan read, multi-track and maintain creative connection with material being learnt
- Inability to make decisions and/or judgments, or inappropriate judgments
- Perseverance upon an action, or category of actions or content of thinking, as in scary or violent scenes

What can I do?

- When appropriate, identify the perseverant thoughts or behaviors and use direct and “quiet aside” language as in “forget the scene” similar to Steiner’s approach with obsessive-compulsive disordered children.
- Bring the child into the social situation by assuring your presence.
- Work with healing–pedagogical stories.
- Increase structured cooperative learning strategies.
- Reduce any perceived competitive activities or give student a set role in the activity.

Sensory Overwhelm Issues

Physical Body

What do I see?

- Student appears tight, rigid and hyper-vigilant in moments of high social input, particularly in the shoulders and abdomen.
- Disturbances in activity level, floppy muscle tone, and lack of motor coordination.
- Random, goofy movements
- Very sensitive to being touched
- Very sensitive to “scratchy” clothing
- Banging into objects and other people
- Falling on the floor at seemingly random moments. However, looking closer, this usually occurs in moments of high sensory stimulation.
- Student appears to go through exaggerated tension and release patterns where she is tight and tense followed by being floppy and loose.
- The life sense of well-being is affected so the child feels she has to push back hard against a world

that she feels is overwhelming her. This leads her to ‘puff’ herself up and generally harden her face, trunk, and limbs or the opposite: getting floppy.

What do I do?

- Use a lot of friendly, forewarned *firm* touch and movement to encourage relaxation.
- Notice when she is tensing up or about to get floppy and give her a small movement task to do that relieves the tension without the usual explosion of movement or behavior.
- Excuse the student, every hour or two, and let her go to the swings and swing for a few minutes. When she returns do some deep touch. For example, you may “polish her up” by rubbing her briskly or wrap her in a blanket, pretending she is a burrito and roll her on the floor for a few moments or play “car wash”: the child crawls between your feet while you are standing pretending you are the mechanism of a car wash.
- If things are improving, teach her to notice in her body which muscles tense up or get floppy when she is becoming frustrated. Develop a secret signal that she can give you to ask for permission to get up and move or signals that she needs your help to work through a problem before it gets out of hand.
- Have the student sit on either a one-legged stool or a vestibular (wobble) cushion.
- Make a large lap-sized beanbag. If possible, warm it up in a low heated oven and place it on her lap when you see early warning signs.
- Allow a child time to gather her thoughts. She will usually need more than typical processing time.
- Avoid chain-linked requests. Break your requests down into single directions.
- Bach flower remedies could be considered. Vervain for being highly strung and fixed or beech for being stressed and critical (consult a doctor first).
- Consider allowing her to chew gum but only when she is feeling overwhelmed.
- Understand that her falling on the floor and bumping into things is an attempt to secure herself in space
- A Sensory Integration evaluation is very important.

Life, Habit

What do I see?

- Student fails to learn from experience.
- Becomes easily upset when patterns or rules change

- The Adult as a Part of the Self-Stimulating Loop: The high stimulation input, low sensory absorption can be seen as the beginning of an addictive cycle. During stress arousal situations, hormones such as adrenaline, cortisol, and prolactin are released. These “hormone hits” can become a sought-after effect, whereby children will unconsciously provoke strong responses in order to achieve what has become a *normal* sensation that the survival instinct triggers. As adults, we can become unwitting suppliers to this negative social/behavioral habit.
- Recovery from an outburst can take a much-longer-than-typical time.

What can I do?

- Transparency: Children who have SI issues are often oppositional. They can go through times when they are nervous, stressed, and anxious. They are in a state of moderate or hyper arousal for long periods of time. This leads them to choose between fight, flight, or freeze, with fight being most often used but the others applying as well. Predictability, rhythm, and transparency of process are vital if the child is to relax, trust, and feel safe enough to begin to allow other points of view into her life. Examine the aspects of life that could be simplified, made to be more rhythmical and predictable.
- He is often drawn to new people out of his well-developed intellectual curiosity; although this is fine, it can quickly lead him to over stimulation. Therefore it is important to balance this by drawing him back to more predicable patterns and rhythms.
- Spend time outdoors and connecting with nature every day.
- During transitions keep him close, give him a directed well-liked task (e.g., be the keeper of the jump rope), or draw him aside into a neutral sensory place and bring him back in, once the other children have settled down.
- Avoid using the same area for different functions, for example eating in the play area or playing in the bedroom.

Senses, Relationship

What do I see?

- He may be over- or under-sensitive to sensory input.
- He will often be prone to unpredictable emotional reactivity, “hair triggers.”
- He may show speech and language problems.
- Seeks revenge when angered

- He can easily be targeted by peers and seen as annoying.
- He can often seek to emulate the behaviors of his least successful peers.
- Has logic that revolves around denial of responsibility
- He does not transition well, becomes confused, can have quick flares of moods
- He sees himself as often being singled out or picked on. It is not that he doesn’t pick up social cues, for he may pick up way too much of these, leading to sensory overload. The paradox of this tendency is that he actually *processes* very little of the information. Think of it as a funnel with a very large opening but a tiny tube or spout, where a lot comes in at the top but very little actually gets through. Because of this, the child is lead to high stimulation and high-risk situations.
- He will escalate arguments seemingly unaware that he may be in a public place.

What can I do?

- Preview ‘hot spot’ social situations that are likely to result in the child/teen feeling overwhelmed and defiant. Rehearse ‘good’, ‘better’, and ‘best’ responses.
- Bracketing: Make a one-minute list at the end of every day of good and bad things. Help the child/teen see that the day did not only consist of bad and threatening things.
- Isolate him to avoid peer reinforcement and embarrassment: It is important not to speak to a child in a potentially escalating situation in front of others. This will only increase the sensory overwhelm, resulting fight or flight reaction. If the child or adolescent will not come with you to another room, then ask the other children to leave.
- Speak to his peers and coach them in how to best accommodate and deescalate.
- Allow him to stay close to you. The loving presence of a trusted, reliable adult helps provide him with a “north star” by which he can navigate confusing sensory and social situations.
- Offer responsibility for animal care on a regular, rhythmical basis.
- Make a simple, cozy corner tent out of heavy blankets and put a bean bag chair in it. This is good to use when he is showing early warning signs, but it is of particular use when he is very defensive or in a tantrum.

- Avoid talking, raising voice, or reasoning when he is in a tantrum. This may prolong it. A soft, soothing voice or even singing quietly will help.
- As soon as he gets over his tantrum help him into a well-liked practical task.
- Defer evaluating with him until the next day when the strategies will feel less threatening.
- Make sure he has a safe, low sensory impact environment at break times. This will prevent a lot of problems from arising during less structured times.
- Recognize that a loud voice, unfocused play, decreased eye contact, falling are warning signs.

Learning, Organizing

What do I see?

- Student will often have a very well-developed sense of intellectual curiosity.
- Poor self-regulation
- She attempts to answer most questions with “I don’t know.”
- She will argue recklessly almost every point as if it is a life/death situation.

What can I do?

- Project work that provides opportunities for her highly developed research capacities help create safety and challenge. It also helps her peers see her strengths.
- Stories that rehearse potentially stressful situations are helpful.
- Don’t interrupt play that is going well but stay close, so that if the situation becomes confusing you can help. However, avoid ‘saving him’; better help him problem-solve.
- You cannot win against a child who has SMI/ oppositional tendencies in an argument: Simply put, a child that is oppositional can become reckless, even outrageous, while you will have to be the responsible parent or teacher. If you abandon this role in the name of “showing her that you too can be powerful or insulting” then you abdicate your authority. Either way you lose.
- Processing/Sequencing: Seeing the sequence of events as they are objectively played out is not at all easy for a defiant child who is so often in a stress reaction pattern. Because she will tend to miss some key aspects in the build-up that leads to a difficult situation, she can feel unjustly blamed. Look for the points that escalated the situation. Where could have the people involved “gotten off the

escalator?”, “What could have been some different choices?” and something that is often enjoyed “What could you have done that would have made it *even worse*?” As the parent/teacher and child become more practiced at this, the child can often begin to see the sequence of events more clearly.

- Play the “thinking out loud” game: This is particularly useful for younger children where you (the adult) speak your thoughts out loud *within earshot but not directly to the child* about your concerns and voicing 3-4 other ways the child could act.
- Self-Monitoring: For the over-nine-year-old... If she is receiving SI treatment and improvements are happening meet with the child (and parents if possible) and identify one target improvement in behavior, such as “I will do what the teacher asks the first time I am asked...”. This target is written down on a card and kept by the teacher. The teacher meets with the student for one minute at the end of every day, and the student gives herself a mark from 1 through 5. The teacher then gives his score in response to the written question. 1=Always, 2 = Almost Always, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Not Often, 5 = Hardly Ever. The student sets her cumulative weekly target score of say 8 points as this would mean really good behavior. An unacceptable score of say 12 is also set, and a consequence for such negative behavior is agreed upon. After a set number of weeks, a new goal is chosen and the system repeats itself.

Non-Verbal Learning Disorder

Physical / Bodily

What do I see?

- Often low flaccid muscle tone and spastic-like movements
- Muscles of the face often lack definition of expression leading to a flat affect, except times when the student is acting a part, as in a play, then, expressions appear to be gifted and sharply discerned
- The senses of balance and self-in-movement (vestibular and proprioceptive) are immature leading to clumsy, awkward, and disorganized movements.

What can I do?

- Touch the student on the shoulder as a signal to attend to the following two interventions:
- Use identifying words for feelings or nuance as you are making the gesture. It’s like “read my lips” as you smile, you point to your lips and say “this means I feel happy or content”

- Use large signals as in American Sign Language to signify such nuances as “this is a joke or a twist on words,” “this is serious,” etc.
- Provide many small, repeated, predictable activities to stretch; lower the head below the waist and practice movements that involve listening for the number of movements, as in tapping hands against the floor in a rhythm.

Life, Habit / Vitality

What do I see?

- Student appears pale, flushes quickly and seems to become breathless or dizzy at moments of high social input.
- Student does not transition well, becomes confused can have quick flares of moods.
- Student does not seem to have a “sense for time,” words like “in a flash” or “quick as a wink” are not signifiers of a length of time.

What can I do?

- Direct the student to get up and get a drink of water etc., as in directing them to “assume stage left,” just before the class breaks into a transition.
- Help student develop coping skills, such as stepping back, sitting down and listening to the words being spoken while diffusing the sight. “Look out a window and listen to the words,” etc.
- Provide a verbal list of the schedule; have the student put stars or some symbol where the schedule is changed, or they need to use a coping skill to make the transition (icons do not always work). Keep the schedule visible for the student. (E.g., a sideboard or a photocopied schedule which the student alters using color indicators for change or transition. Use a line to indicate length of time as a visual picture.)

Senses, Relationship Body

What do I see?

- The eye and the hand seem disconnected and the student is “sloppy” in grapho-motor skills.
- Student does not appear to empathize or understand nuance of social cues or is literal and not figurative in concept building.
- Student seems very attentive, watching, but does not follow what is being directed: she will describe a game but not enter it, or will enter and stand, her description revealing confusion.

What can I do?

- Provide a liner page, workbook formats, form drawings the student may trace.

- Point-out concrete objects which portray figurative speech to create a bridge to metaphor or analogies: “Look at the columns on the front of this building, they stand straight and tall, now you stand like the columns. See, numbers like to stand up like this too, and they make columns...” It is a though you need to look for a straight line curved over and over again to verbally describe movements in the world.
- Write out rules of a game. Move figures about on a page or board as you talk the rules. Use the words “stop,” “turn to the left,” do not assume that a gesture is read appropriately.

“I” / Learning and Organizing Body

What do I see?

- Student can read but doesn’t have certain skills like story predicting or judgment of right-or-wrong actions taken by characters. Operational reading skills linked to pictures (like, how to follow picture-based furniture assembly instructions) is better than narrative reading.
- Skills taught as lessons of “moral laws” or metaphors for human interactions; for example, the interaction of personified characters depicting the relationship of the number processes or the actions of the parts of speech are often not processed and retained. The information was not concrete and the student, consequently, missed the point.
- Use of temporal language indicators is often misinterpreted. Causative phrases, such as “If you do this, then you will need to do that,” can become confusing.

What can I do?

- Discuss the nature of the reading ahead of time. Make the predicting statements more concrete. Ask the student, What words tell you that something may or is going to happen? With younger students, use homophones such as in the *Amelia Bedelia* books and make the choice of what they are saying concrete.
- Try to take the NLD students aside and tell them the link behind the metaphor and the law say; for example, “When I say fractions are for sharing, I mean this...”; ask them to give you half of something then say, “How you feel now is because you enjoyed the sharing as it was fair” or vice versa.
- Make causative phrases concrete; say, “These signs are telling us laws. If I run through a stop sign, there will be a consequence or a price to pay; I did not obey a law and did something that is wrong; numbers need to obey laws, too, or they will do something wrong.”

Opposition & Defiance

Identification & Strategies

All children and teenagers challenge boundaries. It is a healthy way in which they further define their individuality and their place in the world by meeting loving, conscious boundaries and resistance.

A key question is what is “normal” and what is not. In general, the line is crossed when a child seems driven to defeat the adult at all costs. He or she will be relentless in attempting to prove adults wrong and try to defeat any attempt to exercise authority over them by greatly exaggerating any perceived weakness in the adult.

Identifying oppositional children or teens

Here are some typical behaviors or attitudes of a child or teen that are oppositional.

Oppositional children or teenagers...

1. Live in a fantasy land in which they are able to defeat all adults
2. Look at every situation as a win-lose proposition which they *always* win
3. Fail to learn from experience
4. Feel you must be fair to me regardless of how I treat you
5. Seek revenge when angered
6. Need to feel tough and hide their vulnerabilities
7. Believe that if they ignore you long enough, you'll run out of moves
8. Believe themselves to be the equal of their parents and teachers
9. Can often seek to emulate the behaviors of their least successful peers
10. Attempt to answer most questions with “I don't know”
11. Have logic that revolves around denial of responsibility

In more extreme circumstances, this problem is known as Opposition Defiance Disorder (ODD) and is described as a pattern of negativistic, hostile, and defiant behavior during which four or more of the following are often present. The time-frames given below are approximate.

The child or teen ...

(Behaviors that occurred at all during the last three months)

1. Is spiteful and vindictive.

2. Blames others for his or her mistakes or misbehavior.

(Behaviors that occur at least twice a week)

1. Is touchy or easily annoyed by others
2. Loses temper
3. Argues with adults
4. Actively defies or refuses to comply with adults' requests or rules

(Behaviors that occur at least four times per week)

1. Is angry and resentful
2. Deliberately annoys people

THINGS TO KNOW

Structure & Discipline

Consider flexible structure and discipline that subtly expands when things are going well and contract when things are not. This is particularly effective in working with oppositional tendencies. In terms of consistency, if the child comments “...but last week I was allowed to...”, then the meaningful response is, “Yes, but last week we were enjoying ourselves and you were behaving very well, now you are not.” The book *The Soul of Discipline*² details three distinct gestures as the *Governor* (close holding), *Gardener* (moderate holding), and the *Guide* (close holding).

Transparency

Children who are oppositional are often nervous, stressed, and anxious. They are in a state of moderate or hyper arousal for long periods of time. This leads them to choose between fight, flight, or freeze, with fight being most often used, but the others applying as well. Predictability, rhythm, and transparency of process are vital, if the child is to relax, trust, and feel safe enough to begin to allow other points of view into her life. Examine the aspects of life that could be simplified, made to be more rhythmical and predictable.

Hyper Vigilance

Children who are very oppositional amplify many aspects of life, therefore seeing them as threatening. They see themselves as often being singled out or picked on. It is not that they don't pick up social cues, for many pick up way too many of these, leading to sensory overload. The paradox of this tendency is that they actually *process* very little of the information. Think of it as a funnel with a very large opening but a tiny tube or spout, where a lot comes in at the top, but very little

² Kim John Payne, *The Soul of Discipline: The Simplicity Parenting Approach to Warm, Firm, and Calm Guidance – From Toddlers to Teens* (NY: Ballantine Books, 2015).

gets through. Because of this, the child is lead to high stimulation and high-risk situations in order to obtain what in reality is a small amount of integrated information. Another way to look at this is to think of someone eating fast/processed food. They need to eat quite a lot of it in order to obtain even the small amount of the nutrients that the body needs.

Parents & Teachers Cannot be Held Hostage

Often children who are defiant will threaten to do harm to property or to themselves if they do not get their way. In these situations, it is important to take their threat seriously. Tell them you will call the appropriate authority or trained professional to help them if they go forward with their threat. This helps break the hostage syndrome while ensuring the safety and accountability of the child. In essence it is a reality check.

Anger as Familiar Ground

Children and teenagers who are habitually defiant will often provoke adults into anger. They do this because other emotional responses are unfamiliar, even scary for them. One of the simplest yet most effective strategies employed is to answer every increasingly frustrated question with “I don’t know.” Two strategies are helpful: firstly, humor that has no trace of anger; if that fails deferment such as “We are not going to talk about this right now because it will not get us anywhere other than a bad place where you will end up even more frustrated,” or, “We are not going to talk about this now as we will end up appearing weak or silly rather than responsible and strong,” and even, “I am going to assume that if you say I don’t know you mean *maybe*.”

Allowing the Child to be Miserable

Breaking the cycle of provocation usually involves you as a parent or teacher giving yourself permission to allow the child to be miserable. For a teacher, it usually involves open conversations with one’s colleagues or administration but in particular with the parents. For example, if a child is habitually provocative and defiant, let her know that sadly you will withdraw every single privilege she has that is *within your control*, such as car or bus rides to places she wants to go, playdates, trips, new clothes, pocket money, or recess privileges. If the child says that she will do more bad things, then be grateful to her for giving you the practice you need to do these things that you don’t really want to do.

Insulate Them to Avoid Peer

Our task is to do what we can to open up the stream through which these students’ sense of place in the world and within themselves can better flow.

Reinforcement and Embarrassment

It is important not to speak to a child in a potentially escalating situation in front of others. If the child or adolescent will not come with you to another room, ask the other children to please leave. Children and teens that are oppositional often have strong leadership capacities and a sense of pride that easily leads to embarrassment and defiance if publicly challenged.

Give Clear Messages About Negative Behaviors and Their Costs

From a simple reinforcement perspective, it is good for negative behaviors to cost more than they are worth. These costs are best explained in advance when possible.

You Cannot Beat an Oppositional Child/Teen in an Argument

Simply put, a teen that is oppositional can become reckless, even outrageous, while you have to be the responsible parent or teacher. If you abandon this role in the name of “showing her that you too can be powerful or insulting,” then you abdicate your authority. Either way you lose.

Defer and Deflect

Don’t try to “have it out” with a teen in an oppositional outburst. Let him know that the matter will be taken further but at a time of your choosing.

What Impact is This Behavior Having on His Life?

Unless a child or teen can see that his behavior is negatively affecting his life, why should he change? Although he may not admit as much, he may well listen as you run through some of the negative results of his behavior.

Offer Replacement Behaviors and Thoughts

As a step along the way, encourage the child or teen to be behaviorally “bilingual.” They can be more open with their opinions when with their friends, but when they are with adults they will significantly benefit from being restrained.

“I understand, but that’s not one of your choices.” Children struggling with defiance need help to know what is within their range of choices and what is not.

Admire Their Attempts to be Strong

Oppositional children or teens view themselves as fighting for their rights. The main mistake they make is

to see boundaries as contravening their rights. By looking beyond their words and appreciating the fact that they can stand up for themselves, they see that you are someone who may understand.

Processing/Sequencing

Seeing the sequence of events as they are objectively played out is not at all easy for a defiant child who is so often in a stress-reaction pattern. Because they tend to miss some key aspects in the build-up that leads to a difficult situation, they can feel unjustly blamed. A few things to consider:

1. Listen carefully to their perception and have them sketch out a cartoon-like sequence of well-spaced boxes as they describe the situation. If they do not want to draw, then do it yourself. Even simple stick figures will do.
2. In the spaces between the boxes, add your own pictures using a different color. If the child disputes your view, agree to disagree if necessary. If she seems open to going further, you might try the following:
3. Look for the points that escalated the situation. Where could have the people involved “gotten off the escalator?”, “What could have been some different choices?” And an imagining that is often enjoyed: “What could you have done that would have made it even worse?”

As the parent, teacher, and child become more practiced at this, the child can often begin to see the sequence of events more clearly.

Set Clear and Firm Non-Conflicting Goals.

Ensure that the goals are understood.

If asked, give a straightforward and brief explanations not justifications for what you are asking.

A Good Explanation Usually Contains...

- The effect this behavior will have on others
- The consequences if directions are not followed
- One or two replacement behaviors or other choices that will help the child be more successful

Play the “Thinking Out Loud” Game

This is particularly useful for younger children where you (the adult) speak out your thoughts enumerating 3-4 other ways of thinking or acting while the child tries to pick the best and worst ones.

In trying to talk to a child who is regularly defiant, here are 10 key points to communicate:

1. It’s not really possible to defeat all adults.

2. It’s good to be optimistic, but use your optimism to plan how to win a game or do your work, not how to prove people are wrong.
3. If you fail to learn from experience, you’ll go on getting into trouble.
4. Don’t expect others to treat you fairly unless *you* treat *them* fairly. You are not the sole judge of fairness. Everybody has an opinion.
5. Revenge is not always the best option. Lots of people believe this, but visit a prison and ask the prisoners if they feel this had worked for them.
6. It’s a mistake to believe nice people are weak. Ask a martial arts teacher.
7. When you use the tiniest flaw in what someone is saying to prove they are wrong, you only leave the impression that you are unwilling to consider others’ opinions.
8. Few people believe children and adults are equal. They share the rights not to be harmed, but otherwise children need to get more experience in order to run their own lives and have it work out.
9. People who remain ignorant of their impact on others are doomed to live in a world in which they feel picked on.
10. If you believe parents and teachers will run out of moves, and if you ignore their attempts to use logic and reason, you are wrong. By ignoring them, you invite them to use more drastic solutions.

When Talking Fails

Some of the suggestions that are about to be made may seem “behaviorist” in their emphasis. However, this style of consequences for actions is simple and direct. It allows a child or teen to not get caught in complexity and to get fairly instant feedback for their behavior. These children tend to disassociate from their actions. By instituting systems like these, the child or teen is led back to seeing what actions are acceptable or not. These are not the only approaches, but they are very helpful as early steps in a situation that needs changing.

Warning Systems

One-Two-Three System

An age-old way of warning:

One = Please stop, that was unacceptable.

Two = You are continuing to be out of line.

Three = Now there will be a consequence.

Red-Yellow-Green Light

Take a piece of paper. Fold it in three and tape the ends forming a three-dimensional triangle. Color the sides red, yellow, and green. Place the paper triangle somewhere discreet yet clearly visible.

Green = Well done, appropriate.

Yellow = Not good, inappropriate, proceed with caution.

Red = Unacceptable, you have gone too far and will now have a consequence.

When Warnings Fail*Action Oriented Interventions*

Remember that most oppositional children or teens feel that if they ignore you for long enough, you will run out of moves and give up. So finding yourself having to engage interventions is not at all uncommon.

*Goals and Achievement**Developing Perspective-Taking and Self-Monitoring*

Children or teens who regularly are involved in behavioral difficulties often lack the ability to see things from different points of view. These children also need help to be able to see their own actions objectively without feeling that the adults are picking on them. A *Goals and Achievements* agreement is a simple daily way to develop these skills.

Who is it for?

These agreements have primarily been used for children who tease and bully. It is to help them know when they have “crossed the line” and when they have done well. However, they can also be effective for children who are targeted and/or “bystanders” who either support the bullying child or perhaps support the child being picked on.

How does it work?

There are three steps:

One: The teacher, and, if possible, the counselor meet with the parents to outline the process. It’s important that the parents see that the actions taken are not meant for blaming their child but designed to “catch the child being good” and to help the child reflect when he or she have not done well.

Two: The teacher, counselor, and parents meet with the child and listen to the child’s perspective of what the problem may be.

A positive statement is worked out, describing what the child will try to do to improve the situation. For example, if the child is central in a clique that is excluding others in the class, the sentence may be, “My goal is to consider the rest of the class and the teacher and to find the right time to speak up, if I feel that something is not fair.” This statement is written down on the Goals and Achievements card. The card is explained to the child, including guidelines for “How to score,” “Where to write the scores,” and “How to add-up my scores.” It is an extremely simple process that children understand right away.

Three: At the end of each day, the teacher meets with the child; the scores are added up and compared to her target score. A very brief discussion is held about why the score is better or worse than the target. A plan is made to either “keep the good work going” or “how to do better tomorrow.” A mark is made for that day on the graph provided on the back of the card.

Do we do this for every lesson through the day?

This depends on the nature of the problem and the commitment of the faculty. Some teachers feel that they will apply this only during morning lessons, recess, and other times in the day, when they can keep an eye on things. Other teachers will want to extend this to all lessons throughout the day, as they feel they have the support of the subject teachers and because the problem often comes up during these times. What has proven important is to make sure that recess and after school times are included in the monitored periods, as these are sometimes the most socially challenging.

Children and teenagers who are habitually defiant will often provoke adults into anger. They do this because other emotional responses are unfamiliar, even scary for them.

How does the Goals and Achievements card move from lesson to lesson?

The easiest way is for the child to carry it with him. It’s best kept in a plastic sleeve. At the end of the lesson, the child marks in his score and then gives it to the teacher. In order to not draw attention to this process, it is better if the child is last to leave the class. If the child starts to lose focus and ‘forgets’ to give the card to the teacher, then the child has 24 hours to find the teacher and get the card filled in. If this is not done within this time period, the box is marked with a score of 4. If all this proves to be too much for the child, simplify the

system so that the card is only used in the class teacher lessons. After the child gets into the habit of handing the card to the teacher at the end of the lesson, the system can be extended out to include the whole day.

How long should we use this system?

At least for one month. After the initial period, you might have a break in which you assess if the situation has improved sufficiently that another round of using the Goals and Achievements card is not needed. A common outcome is that the behavior may improve in most areas, and yet certain periods of the day remain problematic. The card can be reinstated targeting such periods. If another round of using the card is needed, it is good—if possible—to shift the focus of the goal. For example, Samantha is now doing better, but she still struggles to accept other people's point of view. So her new goal might be, "I will do my best to try and listen when people say things I don't agree with and understand that they see it differently than me."

What age of children and teens is this appropriate for?

Self-monitoring is woven into the fabric of a child knowing who he is, who he is not, and therefore who someone else is. It is the foundation of empathy and moral development. This slowly emerging quality of 'I am' can be seen from the earliest years, but it only comes more into focus after the eighth or ninth year. This is the age in which a system such as this can be implemented. Prior to this age, the 'gesture' of goal-setting and measurement can still be done, but it relies more heavily on the adult setting simple goals and sensitively reviewing it. With younger children, the review is best done in the moment, for example: "I see that Jonathan shared those blocks so nicely with Sam."

Doesn't this "wake the child up" too early?

A child who doesn't know where her space ends and another child's begins already is often overly awake, nervous, and anxious. This has the effect of taking the child into "fight or flight" and sometimes "flock" in that she may create cliques to gain protection. Because the gesture of social and behavioral inclusion—including Goals and Achievements agreements—is practiced in the spirit of "no blame," a safe container is created that allows for the possibility of a child participating in changing their actions rather than fighting or retreating from suggestions made by adults and classmates.

Remember that most oppositional children or teens feel that if they ignore you for long enough, you will run out of moves and give up.

Isn't this behavior modification?

The system of affecting a child's behavior using reward and punishment has limited effectiveness as it relies on extrinsic judgments of adults. Rather than strengthening a child's ability to self-monitor, it can weaken it. Goals and Achievements still has the "reality check" of the adult's observation but it firstly calls on the child to reflect on his behavior therefore exercising the "muscle" of perspective-taking and empathy.

Why might this not work?

- Introducing too much too soon. Start small. You might be able to handle this for recess and the classes you personally teach.
- Lack of supervision and observation. Stay close. Make sure your judgments are based on real observations, otherwise the child senses a lack of authenticity and feels unfairly judged.
- Lack of conviction. Commitment is essential in this process. Initially, this needs to come from the teacher and, hopefully, the parents. Once committed, *insist* that the agreements are kept. For example, the card *must* be checked at the end of each day. It's the child's "ticket" to getting out of the classroom.
- Too busy, too many calls on your time. Isn't it so often the case that when one is drowning, the life buoy floating nearby seems like another obstacle? After a set-up meeting of about 30 minutes, this system will only take about 2–3 minutes a day *and* it's usually pleasant! Yet, if we really look at how much time we spend in semi-urgent disciplinary mode with the child, we would realize that we are often already spending much more time than that.

Individual Transition and Playground Plan

Supporting a student during the times of the day and subject areas that are problematic is very important for the children involved in the oppositional tension but *also* for the rest of the class. This support is based on the principle of reducing Sensory and Social Complexity (SSC) and increasing Form and Predictability (FP).

Negative Outcome:

SSC + ↑ FP = ↓ STRESS REACTION

Positive Outcome:

SSC + ↓ FP = ↑ SAFE REACTION

These are two ways to anticipate and reduce the possibility of a stress reaction.

Transition Support

This is a simple to implement plan that involves:

1. Meet with the student you know has a tough time transitioning and explore the times of the day that are hard for him or her. Common problematic times include going to lockers or cubbies, bathroom or drink breaks, moving from class to class. Involving the student in this way gives her or him a feeling of warmth and inclusion.
2. Ask the student for his or her ideas about how the transition could be made easier, less busy, and less likely to lead to problems.
3. Add your own ideas and then give an overview of the plan. Be as grounded and specific as possible. Work out when to start and practically how the plan will work for you and the student. Make it simple to remember and make it doable.

A good plan usually involves one or more of the following strategies:

- **Keeping Close:** The teacher staying within 2-5 feet of the student during the transition.
- **Alternative Task:** An alternative quiet and focused task given to the student during the transition, something that is enjoyable and helpful.
- **Altering the Timing:** The student either making the transition before or after the larger group.
- **Transition Buddy:** This involves one or two students who cope very well with transitions being asked to be “transition buddies.” They can provide a kind of “cloak” to a student in need of support. This has an advantage of being subtle, still fun, and yet models what is needed to navigate a transition. This works well for bathroom visits, which can be a real trouble spot.
- **Preview:** Most importantly, the key to a transition plan is briefly previewing the transition and the student’s plan before any movement takes place. This need not be a long, drawn-out chat, just a few words or even a pre-arranged signal.
- **Celebrate:** Be sure to catch the student at being good when things go well and compliment.

Playground Support

This plan is based on giving the right amount of space and autonomy to a student so that he can be supported and coached to navigate recess and feel successful rather than “always get into trouble.” While it limits the area a child has to play, it also increases the support.

Why is Playground Support Needed?

Fringe Dwellers

Traditionally, students who tend to need the most support during recess are just the ones that move around the periphery of the playground or other recess spaces and receive the least support and interaction with the playground supervisors.

Getting Out Their Energy

Letting children run freely at recess is a great thing... if they can cope with it. Sometimes, in the name “getting their energy out,” what happens to a student who has problems with self-monitoring gets more and more out of control and wild.

The Badlands

Many children who might be less assertive or concerned about their safety during recess tend to avoid going out into “the badlands, where there be dragons.” They tend to cluster around the areas most frequented by the supervisors or close to the school building and doorways. The problem with feeling that the playground is a place to survive rather than enjoy is that the student’s understandable concerns can become escalated into daily anxieties. Also, the whole idea of the playground being a place to run around may only be true for a minority of the fringe dwelling, the socially less able kids.

The Control–Rejection Cycle

Most experienced teachers would tell us that children who struggle with social issues on the playground are drawn to games that they feel they can control. These are often situations involving children who play in more of a low key or cooperative way that does not seem to have one dominant player. The child can see this as a leaderless game and moves into a role that the other players do not like or want. Controversy ensues and the game either dissolves or the child is rejected. This pattern repeats itself over and over as the child drifts from one game or play-situation to another and can result in the child feeling intense and a broad-base rejection.

The Outside–In Playground

Self-monitoring is woven into the fabric of a child knowing who he is, who he is not, and therefore who someone else is. It is the foundation of empathy and moral development.

The solution to this dynamic is simple: bring the kids on the edges of the playground into the center where they can get informal coaching and support to play in a healthy way. This opens-up the playground for the majority of children to now repopulate the playground, because now it is safe to do so. By doing this, a subtle but highly significant shift takes place in the playground culture.

Final Note

Children and teens who are oppositional are often bright, creative, and inventive, and this is to be admired and valued. Although you might not agree with many things he does, let the child know that there are many things about him that you would never wish to change. Because such children present themselves in such a negative manner, often these attributes are submerged or extreme. They fight the world with such vigor because they feel they will be overwhelmed if they do not. Therefore, it is essential to let them know that they are valued and what they say and do, if expressed in an appropriate way, will be listened to. Above all, they need to feel they can affect their environment in more ways than simply saying “no.” Working towards achieving this, the child or teen comes to experience a broader range of response and a feeling of trust in the school and family in which they live. This overview of oppositional children and teenagers is designed as a beginning point, in that it focuses on boundary setting and interventions. Does this not intensify the feeling that they have to fight a crushing adult world? No; if these guidelines are followed in a consistent, transparent, and fair way, they lead to a feeling of being met and of security that these children and adolescents do not have to fight for survival in an out-of-control world.

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Kim John Payne, is the author of the #1 Best Selling book, *Simplicity Parenting*, as well as *Beyond Winning and The Soul of Discipline*, among many others. A consultant and trainer to over 200 North American independent and public schools, Kim has been a Waldorf school counselor, adult educator, consultant, researcher, educator, and a private family counselor for over 27 years. He regularly gives keynote addresses at international conferences for educators, parents, and therapists and runs workshops and trainings around the world.

He works directly with schools to implement the Three Stream Process that coordinates Social Inclusion, Care/Therapeutic, and Inclusive Discipline.

Kim is Co-Director of the Simplicity Project, a multimedia social network that explores what really connects and disconnects us to ourselves and to the world. Kim is the founding Director of the Center for Social Sustainability. www.simplicityparenting.com

Bonnie River, is finishing her doctoral dissertation for the University of La Verne. She has worked with special needs learners for more than 25 years and has worked as a classroom teacher and early childhood educator for the past 35 years. She is trained in

mainstream assessment of learning disabilities as well as in Waldorf-style assessment tools, which she has helped to innovate and develop. Bonnie is experienced in working with Anthroposophical doctors and educators. She is a national and international lecturer on a wide variety of topics including: learning differences, early childhood development, Rudolf Steiner's intent for the Waldorf school movement, fostering a compassionate campus, ethics and digital literacy, the adolescent passage, and more. Bonnie is the founding member of Gradalis, an adult education institute offering Waldorf Teacher Training, approaches to learning differences, creating healthy Waldorf Communities, among other certificated programs.

