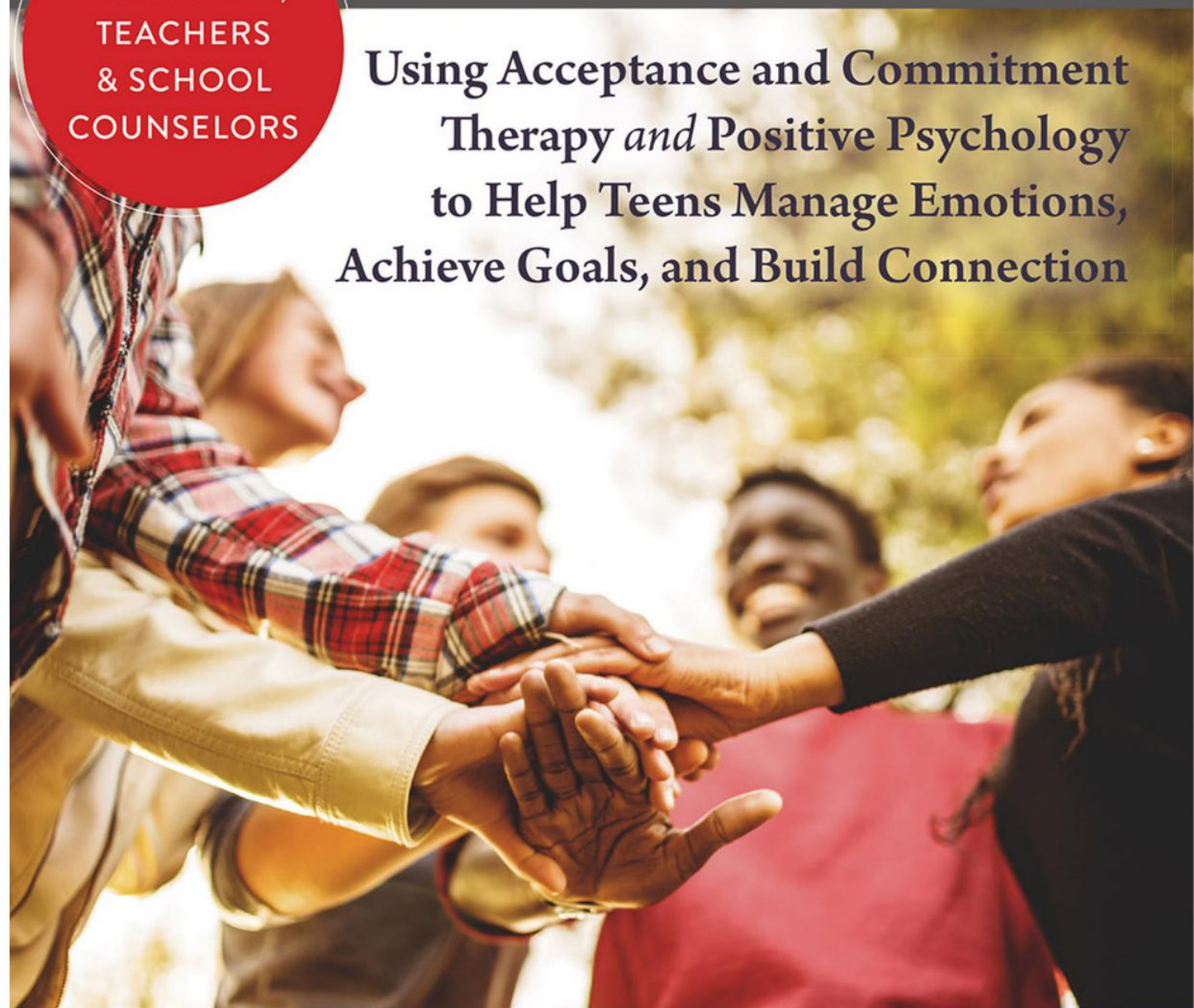


THE THRIVING ADOLESCENT

FOR
THERAPISTS,
TEACHERS
& SCHOOL
COUNSELORS

**Using Acceptance and Commitment
Therapy *and* Positive Psychology
to Help Teens Manage Emotions,
Achieve Goals, and Build Connection**



LOUISE L. HAYES, PhD
JOSEPH CIARROCHI, PhD
FOREWORD BY STEVEN C. HAYES, PhD

“Reading *The Thriving Adolescent* sets you on a journey into the hearts and minds of young people in a way that is unique, fascinating, and incredibly informative. From the beginning, I felt compelled to reflect upon how, as a therapist, my goal was always to help distressed adolescents adapt to the adult world. This book turns that assumption upside down and asks us instead to help adolescents linger longer in their journey to adulthood by cultivating their abilities to notice what is going on in their world; to detach from destructive, self-focused mental chatter; and to be playful and experimental in their behaviors. Just as it takes a village to raise a child, it takes a prosocial approach like the DNA-V model to give us a sense of direction with a distressed adolescent. This book is packed full of revealing insights, interesting case examples, therapist-client dialogues, practical clinical tips, teaching protocols, and worksheets. All of this is done in an easy-to-read, conversational, and entertaining style. *The Thriving Adolescent* addresses the social landscape of adolescence, from the intricacies of developing healthy self-narratives to creating naturally occurring prosocial groups that help adolescents discover the practice of kindness to self and others. This book is a must-read for teachers, school counselors, therapists, and anyone else who wants to help teenagers thrive.”

—**Kirk Strosahl, PhD**, cofounder of acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) and coauthor of *Inside This Moment* and *In This Moment*

“This book breaks new ground in our understanding of how to nurture the development of adolescents. It translates the acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) perspective into a strategy for helping young people develop social and emotional competence. I expect that it will enable schools, families, clinics, juvenile justice works, and communities become much more oriented toward ensuring that young people become caring and productive members of their communities.”

—**Anthony Biglan, PhD**, senior scientist at Oregon Research Institute, and author of *The Nurture Effect*

“This is an excellent resource written by two eminent thinkers and skilled practitioners. Every chapter is filled with creative exercises, metaphors for explaining complex ideas, and scripts that can be fine-tuned for each teenager you’re trying to help. With step-by-step strategies, this book is a road map for leading adolescents toward a better life.”

—**Todd B. Kashdan, PhD**, professor of psychology at George Mason University and coauthor of *The Upside of Your Dark Side*

“This book is not about psychopathology. It is about that struggle for identity and becoming that happens in adolescence. Hayes and Ciarrochi offer a comprehensive developmental approach built on the best available science. It contains well-thought-out theory to ground the work and is packed with tools, transcripts, and real-life examples to make it readily accessible to any teacher, counselor, and health care professional.”

—**Kelly G. Wilson, PhD**, professor of psychology at the University of Mississippi and author of *Mindfulness for Two*

“How I have longed for this book! It’s an invaluable resource for helping teenagers to grow into their full potential and live life full out. This book is an engaging and clear road map with its practical suggestions, worksheets, exercises, and examples. It’s a must-have for teachers, counselors, and health professionals working with adolescents.”

—**Fredrik Livheim**, licensed clinical psychologist, clinical researcher on ACT for teens at the Karolinska Institutet in Stockholm, Sweden, and coauthor of *The Mindful and Effective Employee*

“*The Thriving Adolescent* moves beyond traditional behaviorisms to present a new perspective on engaging young people in vitalizing relational ways. The book is rich with ideas at the interface between positive psychology and youth development, and with practical strategies for helping young people identify meaningful goals and life values. Hayes and Ciarrochi map out many useful and concrete pathways for adults to build constructive, facilitating relationships with

teenagers that can contribute to flourishing on both sides of the dialogue. Definitely advances the field.”

—**Richard M. Ryan**, professor at the Institute for Positive Psychology and Education at the Australian Catholic University

“*The Thriving Adolescent* contains a great deal of wisdom and understanding of young people, and a practical approach to working with them in a developmentally attuned way. There are few clear and practical blueprints for this vital work, and the model the authors have crafted will be a useful addition to the repertoire of clinicians.”

—**Patrick McGorry, AO, MD, PhD, FRCP, FRANZCP**, executive director of Orygen, and professor of youth mental health at the University of Melbourne

“This is a long-needed book. The combination of Hayes’s and Ciarrochi’s expertise in clinical and research work with adolescents contribute to make acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) simple to apply even for those who are new to this third-generation cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) approach. Their DNA-V model is robustly grounded in the ACT research tradition. The authors distill its essence into three core behaviors, making it easy to build psychological flexibility and openness to the world and to any experience (which is basically what is needed by any adolescent in the world). There is no need to be an ACT expert to practice the DNA-V model, but you will become that expert. Exercises and metaphors are specifically tailored within a developmental frame and with adolescence in mind to help the reader become the context that models, instigates, and reinforces DNA skills in young people. This book should be read (and practiced) by any person interested in adolescence, or in being a therapist, counselor, teacher, or simply a parent.”

—**Giovambattista Presti**, associate professor of psychology and coordinator of the undergraduate program in psychology at Kore University of Enna, Italy

“Listen up counselors, teachers, and primary care clinicians. If you care about adolescents and helping them flourish, this

book is for you. The authors provide a theoretical basis to support ‘DNA-V conceptualization’ of adolescent evolution, and they make intervention easy with downloadable worksheets. Read it, apply it, and take pride in the fact that you are more able to love, protect, and equip tomorrow’s leaders.”

—**Patricia J. Robinson, PhD**, director of training at Mountainview Consulting Group, and coauthor of *Real Behavior Change in Primary Care*

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LOUISE L. HAYES, PHD
JOSEPH CIARROCHI, PHD

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To my loved ones across the world who held my hand during the darkest of days; you now have my heart. To my coauthor and friend, Joseph; without your mentorship this book would not exist. You carried my value when it was too heavy for me.

—LH

It took a lot of trauma to write this book. So I would like to thank my father for treating me like a nuisance and never teaching me to deal with bullies, play sports, or make friends; the football coach who grabbed my face mask and yelled abuse at me in front of my grandma sitting in the bleachers; the teacher who belittled me in front of the class because I kept forgetting to bring a pencil; the well-dressed lady who opened her car door suddenly and knocked me off my bike—and then looked straight through me lying on the street and walked away without saying a word. Thank you for teaching me how difficult it is to get through childhood without an adult to stand up for you and protect you. This book is for the protectors.

—JC

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Dear reader,

Welcome to New Harbinger Publications. New Harbinger is dedicated to publishing books based on acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) and its application to specific areas. New Harbinger has a long-standing reputation as a publisher of quality, well-researched books for general and professional audiences.

As part of New Harbinger's commitment to publishing books based on sound, scientific, clinical research, we oversee all prospective books for the Acceptance and Commitment Therapy Series. Serving as series editors, we comment on proposals and offer guidance as needed, and use a gentle hand in making suggestions regarding the content, depth, and scope of each book.

Books in the Acceptance and Commitment Therapy Series:

- Have an adequate database, appropriate to the strength of the claims being made.
- Are theoretically coherent. They will fit with the ACT model and underlying behavioral principles as they have evolved at the time of writing.
- Orient the reader toward unresolved empirical issues.
- Do not overlap needlessly with existing volumes.
- Avoid jargon and unnecessary entanglement with proprietary methods, leaving ACT work open and available.
- Keep the focus always on what is good for the reader.
- Support the further development of the field.
- Provide information in a way that is of practical use to readers.

These guidelines reflect the values of the broader ACT community. You'll see all of them packed into this book. This series is meant to offer professionals information that can truly be helpful, and to further our ability to alleviate human suffering by inviting creative practitioners into the process of developing, applying, and refining a better approach. This book provides another such invitation.

Sincerely,

Steven C. Hayes, Ph.D.

Georg H. Eifert, Ph.D.

John Forsyth, Ph.D.

Robyn Walser, Ph.D.

Foreword

Stepping Boldly Forward with Models Meant for ACT Work with Children and Adolescents

Children and adolescents are not just small adults any more than a sprout is a small tree. If all goes well, someday children will in fact be adults, and the developmental processes they went through as children will undoubtedly be reflected in their adult status. And from an adult vantage point, we will likely be able to see how specific later forms were reflected in earlier ones.

Unfortunately, that understanding is not necessarily what is needed to know how to support healthy development itself. It is easier to see the sprout in the tree than the tree (and not, say, a cabbage or a thistle) in the sprout.

In other words, we need ideas, categories, and methods that fit the phase of life we are targeting. We cannot just take adult psychopathology, plop it on the heads of children, and call that developmentally adequate.

For a long time, acceptance and commitment therapy has been a bit awkward to apply to children and adolescents. We know that the model underlying ACT applies because the child-appropriate measures of psychological flexibility predict developmental trajectories in exciting and coherent ways. Experiential avoidance is toxic to children and well as adults; cognitive fusion is entangling to both; mindfulness is helpful to both; and so on.

But that is not the same thing as being able to work therapeutically or in a prevention capacity with children and adolescents. We need concepts and methods that meet children where they are, and that guide practitioners to help children learn how to be more psychologically flexible over time.

I believe this book is a significant step forward of that kind. I was excited when I read an early draft, and I encouraged the authors to pursue their ideas, setting aside many of the more

traditional ACT descriptions. I think it is likely that the DNA-V model will do for ACT work with children what the hexagon model has done for ACT work with adults. We cannot say for sure—intervention research specifically based on this model is still needed—but the way it fits with what we know about ACT for children and adolescents is reassuring, and the vistas that open up inside a DNA-V approach are notable and immediate.

Let me give an example.

Traditional ideas about defusion are designed to help tone down excessive verbal dominance. But “defusion” is not a term designed for use with clients—it is for therapists—and it says relatively little about how to approach children *per se*. The metaphor of “the advisor,” which covers some of the same territory, can guide therapists more directly. It seems easy to slide in and out of times that an advisor gives too much direction (“the demanding advisor” or “the mean advisor”) and times when it is useful. The use of the metaphor directly with children will support healthy defusion. It is possible that a link to a specific process of change will be weakened—there is unlikely to be a set of processes measures for “the advisor”—but the therapeutic advantages seem notable.

DNA-V is not a one-to-one translation of hexagon terms to an adolescent context. That is not what is needed. Instead, it represents the attempt to develop a clinical intervention model that reflects the core of contextual behavioral science, and of ACT and psychological flexibility processes, while giving much more direct guidance to therapists about how to do this work. That is an exciting new idea. It seems that nothing worthwhile in the existing ACT intervention protocols with children needs to be put aside, but many of these methods can be rethought, reworked, and revitalized in a model that is easy to understand, convey, and remember. For example, the connection between flexibility, values, and committed action just naturally seems to fall out of the metaphor of “the discoverer.” You don’t have to grind away at the hexagon model element by element, and then assemble those elements into a meaningful package. There is vision of a role—the role

of a discoverer—that naturally includes many things at once that are sensible from the point of view of ACT.

I do not think we as a community could have started with a DNA-V model in ACT work with children and adolescents and still have expected a progressive science in this area from a contextual behavioral science point of view. The DNA model stands atop decades of hard work in thinking through psychological flexibility issues, functional contextualism, relational frame theory, and evolution science issues. But for where we are now as a field, it seems to represent a major step forward—not as a substitute for these other issues, but as part of the range of applied scientific and clinical tools we need to progress from where we as a community are today.

One final feature of this book is especially worth noting.

Scaling psychological concepts from the individual to the group has been a hallmark of behavior analysis from the beginning. Contextual behavioral science and ACT has used the linkage to evolutionary ideas and the evolution of culture to return to that original vision, and this book makes that process extremely clear. We are social beings, and leaving the group out of a psychological approach to children leaves children without their natural context. It is wonderful to see how naturally this book moves across levels of analysis. I think a corner is being turned in this area, and all books on ACT and related processes going forward will have to consider how to put people back into their social and cultural context.

I applaud what the authors have done, and look forward to the many studies and extensions I predict will flow from this book. It appears to me to be a real advance—and I hope we as a community will move quickly to find out whether and by how much.

—Steven C. Hayes

University of Nevada

Reno, NV

July 2015>

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank Jasmine Star for her fabulous editing and clear thinking, putting the final polish on our labors. Thank you to the staff at New Harbinger, especially Catharine Meyers for her guidance and Sara Christian for her illustrations. Thank you to our families and friends for their encouragement, support, and, most of all, patience over the past three years. We would also like to thank all the young people we've worked with for being willing to participate and to tolerate our efforts as we found our way through this work. And finally, this work would not exist without the original 1999 ACT book written by Steve Hayes, Kirk Strosahl, and Kelly Wilson, and the ongoing support and sharing from the community at the Association for Contextual Behavioral Science.

Introduction

Youth awakens to desire. The body strengthens, and the dangerous yet beautiful world tempts. A single day can bring forth strong and opposing states: love and loneliness, freedom and constraint, excitement and fear, confidence and self-doubt.

Perhaps the greatest cause of suffering for humans, no matter what their age, is the attempt to have the positive without the negative. We desire success but don't want to risk failure. We desire intimate relationships but don't want to risk rejection. We fail to realize that risk is an inherent part of success and intimacy. If we exclude the negative, we lose opportunities to experience the positive.

The same desire to split the positive from the negative occurs in our relationships with young people. We love that they're passionate, but we don't want them to be "too emotional." We love their creative and exploratory nature, but we don't want them to take risks. We want them to build positive relationships, but we don't want them to push us away and submit to peer pressure. So what do we do? We seek to control them by discouraging their emotionality ("You don't want to feel that way"), constraining their ability to explore new things ("You don't want to go there"), encouraging them to leave the present moment ("You've got to think about your future"), and trying to force our influence on them ("Listen to me, not your friends").

A core premise of this book is that rigid attempts to control young people create discord, rebellion, and unhappiness for everybody involved. The solution to this apparent problem is to first recognize that there is no problem with the young. Young people's passion, novelty seeking, exploration, and engagement with peers can be a source of strength, if we can create the right context for them.

This book will show you how to work with, rather than against, the natural tendencies of young people. It provides a practical theory and flexible intervention that will allow you to

harness young people's energy and direct it in ways that help them thrive. We provide guidance on individual interventions as well as scaling up to large groups and classroom settings.

The Foundations of Our Approach

We've developed a simple yet powerful approach to working with young people, called DNA-V. It's based on the framework of contextual behavioral science, which takes a philosophical approach of functional contextualism and incorporates scientific knowledge from evolutionary science principles (variation, selection, and retention for the purposes of adaptation), operant principles (for contingent learning), relational frame theory (for language and cognition), and acceptance and commitment therapy (for applied mindfulness and behavior change). We also include applied knowledge on growth and development gained from positive psychology interventions in schools. Numerous published studies show that interventions from acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT; S. C. Hayes, Strosahl, & Wilson, 1999) are useful in treating clinical problems such as anxiety, depression, eating disorders, and addiction (L. L. Hayes, Boyd, & Sewell, 2011; Ruiz, 2010, 2012), and positive psychology has been shown to be useful for working with nonclinical groups (Merry et al., 2011). The theoretical foundations are explained in detail in chapter 1 and revisited as applied knowledge in chapter 13.

Our DNA-V model reveals how we can help young people develop strengths, overcome unhelpful mental habits and self-doubt, live more fully in the present moment, and make choices that help them reach their full potential.

Overview of This Book

We'll explain the DNA-V model and the acronym in chapter 1. However, at this juncture we'd like to point out that in our model, DNA has metaphorical meaning beyond the acronym. It serves as a reminder that we're all made from the same essential stuff, and that all young people are capable of

expressing their full potential given the right support and training.

The book is divided into two parts: basic skills and advanced training. Part 1 (chapters 1 through 7) teaches the three core aspects of our DNA-V model. DNA encompasses three skills, labeled “discoverer,” “noticer,” and “advisor,” used in the service of values-consistent action—the V. We will demonstrate that young people often struggle when they either lack these skills or are unable to flexibly shift between them when a situation calls for change. The interventions in part 1 are perfect for delivery in individual or group interventions and as curriculum in classrooms. Chapters 2 through 7 each conclude with exercises to facilitate teaching the skills. We’ve also included case examples and conceptualizations to help you understand the theory in the context of helping.

The advanced training in part 2 (chapters 8 through 13) expands on the basic DNA skills. First, we set forth how to use the DNA-V model to help young people develop a new relationship to their self, in chapters 8 through 10. Then, in chapters 11 and 12, we move to building strong social networks. Finally, in chapter 13 we offer tips that will help you become a DNA-V expert.

Both parts of the book will help you identify a young person’s DNA skills, plan individualized intervention approaches, and conduct suitable exercises. Throughout the book you’ll find scripts that can get you started quickly—suggestions for how to present various concepts, metaphors, exercises, and so on. You can readily adapt these scripts to suit the individuals you’re working with. In the book—and on our website, <http://www.thrivingadolescent.com>—we provide worksheets as ready tools for working with young people, including case conceptualization worksheets, worksheets for exercises, and visual metaphors for key aspects of the model. We encourage you to use the worksheets as flexibly as the scripts. They aren’t set in stone; they’re just ways of highlighting the key components of interventions. You might initially use them as presented, then later, as you become more familiar with the model, use them as a simple memory cue to guide your

discussions. You may also wish to create your own worksheets to fit your style and work setting.

Finally at our website, you'll also find links to audio and video resources that you can give to young people or use with them. These include mindfulness exercises and animations. (A complete list of downloadable resources appears in the appendix.)

A Radical New Way of Relating to Young People

The youth you once were is still within you, still part of you. You are the same person who once sat in classrooms, worried about exams, played in the schoolyard, and tried to make friends, be cool, and fit in. Your inner adolescent still speaks to you.

This book isn't just about interventions for young people; it's about you and your relationship to young people. Learning is bidirectional. We don't solely teach young people; they also teach us—or perhaps they remind us. They remind us of the importance of taking risks, seeking novelty, being passionate, creating new friendships, having ideals, and exploring this awe-inspiring world. Many of us adults have lost contact with the vitality of our youth; we've gotten caught up in the busyness and structure of everyday life and mindlessly rush from one goal to the next. Where are we rushing to? Why are we so tired? Young people can help us rediscover our curiosity and energy.

This book breaks away from traditional ways of responding to young people, which involve telling them that they ought to follow adult rules, that they need to develop respect and self-control, and that they “absolutely must make the right decisions or they'll ruin their life.” They're often given the message that all the important things begin after high school or after college, when they can start a career and be responsible. Adults may unintentionally convince young people that their life is primarily about waiting. Meanwhile, amidst these messages of restraint, young people's bodies yearn; they ache

to experience the world beyond home and school, with all of the associated risks and excitement. Is it any wonder that young people so often turn away from the adults who tell them to stay put, and turn toward their peers—young tribes offering fun, adventure, and romance?

This book will help you develop genuine appreciation for young people and respect for their important role in society. It starts by resisting the assumption that young people have problems that adults have to solve. So when we work with young people, we don't seek to make them more adult. And we don't teach them to wait until they get out of school to start living, having influence, creating joy, and building genuine relationships. We believe that they're already on an important journey through life, just as we are on our own journey.

Why Is So Much of This Book Directed at Readers?

The typical intervention book focuses on how to apply techniques to clients. We do that here too, but in an unusual way. Often we first discuss how the principles are relevant to you, in your own life, before showing you how to use them in your work with young people.

The theory underlying this book assumes that, although youth and adults may inhabit radically different worlds, the causes of suffering are the same for all of us. We all suffer because of our capacity to worry about the future, ruminate about the past, and get stuck inside our judgments of ourselves and others. We all need to find ways to make peace with ourselves and our world.

We want to draw out how the struggles of young people are simultaneously unique to their developmental period and universal to the human condition. We believe the best way to do this is to present the material in this book from three different viewpoints:

The “we” view: In this viewpoint, we speak directly to you as a fellow human being, underscoring how the principles apply equally to you and to young people.

The immersed view: In this viewpoint, we present brief narratives from young people's lives in order to immerse you

in their social and emotional world, and to help you understand their hopes and struggles.

The practitioner view: In this viewpoint, we present clear instructions for implementing the DNA-V model with young people.

One of the best aspects of working with young people is that you can't connect with them without connecting to yourself. In those small moments when you reach out to struggling young people and help them know what it means to be human and to have thoughts, feelings, and challenges, you are learning about your own humanity. You are learning to accept all aspects of yourself. When you learn to respond to your own setbacks with self-compassion, you develop the capacity to teach young people how to do the same. When you stand on the edge of discovery, step up, and decide to stand *for* young people, you'll be able to help them stand for something important. Together, you will have a shared journey, stepping into life with courage, awareness, and the potential to live an extraordinary life.

Part 1

Learning DNA-V: The Basic Skills

Chapter 1

The Elements of Thriving

How can we help young people thrive? We believe that the answer to this question can't come from looking at adult therapeutic models. Such models typically seek to compare "normal adults" to clinical groups and then suggest interventions to make the clinical group more "normal." For example, a number of therapeutic approaches seek to challenge "abnormal," dysfunctional beliefs and replace them with more "normal," functional ones (Beck, 2011; Ciarrochi & Bailey, 2009). From a developmental perspective, using an adult therapeutic model makes little sense. It's a bit like trying to figure out how a seed grows into a strong and healthy tree by studying fully grown trees. Such an approach limits our ability to understand the biological and environmental conditions that lead to positive growth in the first place. This book starts with the seed—the child—and seeks to describe the conditions that lead children to develop into strong and healthy young people.

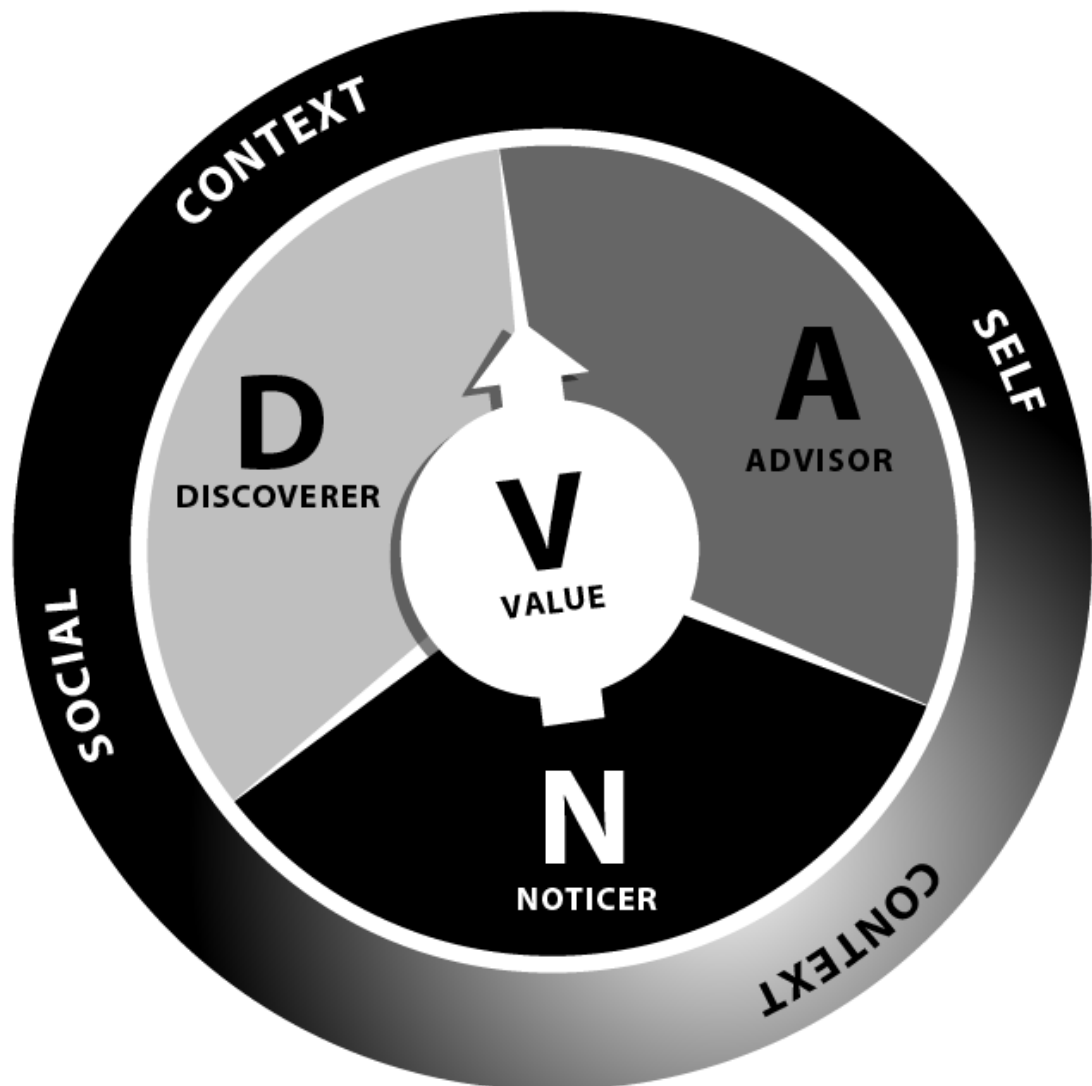
Development is inevitable, thriving is not. Some young people expand their understanding of the world as time passes, while others become increasingly narrow-minded. Some find friends; others retreat into a world of fantasy and loneliness. Some find activities that are challenging and exciting; others find that everything is a bore.

We can increase thriving. We don't have to settle for a world where a large numbers of young people languish. The world can be changed for the better—and already has been. For example, young people are now safer because society no longer thinks it acceptable for parents to beat their children. Young people are also now much smarter than they were in the 1930s (Flynn, 1987), perhaps because of improvements in nutrition and education. What's to stop us from also improving young people's ability to thrive—to develop friendship and love, enjoy the moment, take on challenges, care for themselves, give to others, and have a positive influence on their world?

The last century has seen an explosion of scientific research into the causes of thriving. The key now is to translate that scientific understanding into practice. This book will do just that.

Developing Flexible Strength

The DNA-V model is shown in figure 1. DNA describes three functional classes of behavior, which we refer to using the metaphorical names discoverer, noticer, and advisor. All three exist in the service of values—the V. DNA behavior is influenced by context, which includes factors in the immediate and historical environment that influence our level of DNA skills, our view of ourselves, and our view of others in our social world. In essence, all of the interventions in this book will teach you how to create contexts that promote DNA skills to build valued behavior.



The ultimate aim of using the skills taught in the DNA-V model is to build psychological flexibility—or, to use a term young people can relate to more readily, flexible strength. In adults, psychological flexibility has been described as “the ability to contact the present moment more fully as a conscious human being, and to change or persist in behavior when doing so serves valued ends” (S. C. Hayes, Luoma, Bond, Masuda, & Lillis, 2006, p. 8). For youth, we modify this definition as follows: Psychological flexibility in young people is the ability to utilize DNA skills in a way that promotes growth and builds vitality and valued action.

While our definition is similar to that for adults, it does differ in a few important ways. First, we emphasize the DNA skills needed to grow. We don’t assume young people have values in the way adults do; rather, they’re discovering and creating their values as they journey into adulthood. They’re in a stage of learning about thoughts and feelings and what it means to be a human being. They also need to test out new behaviors and explore whether those behaviors lead to valued ends. One of the most efficient ways humans learn is by trying things, so young people must try many new things, and that might include taking risks, trying on new selves, and testing boundaries set by adults.

This Book’s Theoretical and Philosophical Foundations

This book isn’t merely a collection of disconnected techniques taken from ACT and positive psychology. Rather, it presents an approach that is grounded in contextual behavioral science—a scientific and pragmatic way of understanding behavior, finding solutions to human problems, and promoting human growth and development. Contextual behavioral science utilizes functional principles and theories to analyze and modify action embedded in its historical and situational context. DNA-V is our distillation of this broad framework into simple processes that young people can understand and apply to their lives. The whole book will unpack this idea, but in the following sections we’ll break it down a bit by briefly considering the pillars of the book: evolutionary science, functional contextualism, operant theory, and relational frame theory.

Evolutionary Theory

What if the same simple theory could be used to explain the development of all living things, from humans to algae?

Evolutionary theory can do just that (S. C. Hayes, Barnes-Holmes, & Wilson, 2012). It's based on three principles: variation, selection by consequences, and retention. With these three principles, we can explain how alterations in the environment shape development. More importantly, practitioners can apply these principles to help young people develop their full potential. DNA-V is our user-friendly way of putting these three principles into play.

Let's look at how variation, selection, and retention promote development in two widely different realms: that of rabbits and that of humans. Imagine that one thousand rabbits are released in a snowy area. They differ in color, ranging from brown to white (variation). The lighter rabbits are more likely to survive because they can blend in with the snow (selection). Over time, the lighter rabbits pass on their genes for pale fur to their offspring (retention). In this way, the rabbit population will gradually become paler, with more individuals blending into this snowy environment. (This would be an example of a genetic inheritance system. See Jablonka & Lamb, 2006, for a detailed discussion of the four inheritance systems: genetic, epigenetic, behavioral, and symbolic.)

In the realm of humans, instead of looking at development across many generations, let's consider rapid development across just two generations, in the context of one person and her children. Let's say a thirteen-year-old girl moves to a new country. When she goes to her new school, the other kids tease her about how she dresses. She desperately wants to fit in, so she tries wearing different types of clothes (variation). Her peers respond extremely positively to some clothes but give her little positive feedback on others (selection). Gradually, she starts to wear the clothes her peers like (retention). She fits in and increases her chances of social success, including eventually finding a mate and reproducing. When she has children of her own, she teaches them the culturally appropriate style of dress through modeling (behavioral transmission) and direct explanation (verbal transmission). Thus, this style of dress is passed down to the next generation (retention).

This is such a simple theory, yet it's incredibly powerful. It can be summarized like this: We try different behaviors in the world (variation), we are reinforced for doing some things and punished for doing others (selection), and we repeat behaviors that have worked for us in the past (retention). We do these behaviors for the purposes of adapting to our context and, ultimately, surviving. Perhaps the most powerful aspect of this theory is that failure to thrive can be thought of as failure in variation, selection, and/or

retention. We'll give you a few examples here, and the rest of the book will illuminate this simple idea.

Young people often become so dominated by their inner experience that they show little variation in behavior. For example, imagine a boy who responds to his anxiety in only one way: social withdrawal. His anxiety seems to stop him from going to school dances, engaging in extracurricular activities, introducing himself to new people, or trying out for a sports team. He merely sits in his room.

DNA-V provides a way to overcome such rigid responses. It begins by teaching the boy to respond to his inner experience in new ways: to notice anxiety and allow it to be, rather than reacting to it. DNA-V then teaches the young person to systematically increase behavioral variation through discovery processes. The boy would be encouraged to leave his room and begin to contact the physical world. Then natural reinforcers can shape his behavior. He may discover that he loves a particular extracurricular activity and that someone in his class has similar interests. Over time, he learns to live with his social anxiety without letting it restrict his behavior. He changes (variation), learns what behavior works for him (selection), and develops his strengths and grows (retention).

DNA-V teaches young people to select their behaviors based on values rather than on unhelpful impulses or immediate circumstances. For example, a girl might try two rewarding activities: smoking pot and learning to dance. Let's say she can't do both regularly. Which behavior will she select? By clarifying her values, the DNA practitioner can help her think in terms of what she cares about and what sort of person she wants to be. She learns to think about both the short term (*What do I love now?*) and the long term (*What will help me grow and develop a life that's fun and meaningful?*). If she identifies learning to dance as a value, she'll tend to select that behavior rather than smoking pot.

Functional Contextualism

Functional contextualism is a philosophical position that has the defined goal of considering how behavior functions within the context in which it's expressed (S. C. Hayes, 1993). Here, "behavior" means anything a person does. This includes overt, visible behavior, and also covert behavior, such as thoughts, feelings, sensations, and memories (Ciarrochi, Robb, & Godsell, 2005). "Context" refers to "the changeable stream of events that exert an organizing influence on behavior" (S. C. Hayes, Strosahl, & Wilson, 2012, p. 33). This includes intrapersonal factors like

memories, health, and history; interpersonal factors like social relationships; and situational factors like school and stressful events. It's important to remember that context is not a "thing." Rather, it's always defined in terms of behavior (S. C. Hayes, Strosahl, et al., 2012). For example, the clock strikes noon and this elicits the desire to eat lunch. One may say the clock is the context that elicits eating behavior. However, if the clock strikes twelve and nobody hears it or sees it, it ceases to be a context for eating behavior.

Functional contextualists assume that all behavior is purposeful—an adaptation to a specific context (S. C. Hayes et al., 2006). That is, all behavior is reinforced in some way, even if it looks entirely dysfunctional from the outside. Without a contextual view, we are likely to make the fundamental attribution error (Jones & Harris, 1967) of seeing dysfunctional behavior as caused by traits inside the young person, rather than as evoked by the immediate and historical environment. With a contextual view, we are able to identify why a dysfunctional behavior is reinforcing and help the young person find more functional ways to receive this reinforcement.

Operant Behavior Principles

Operant principles are analytic tools that are widely used to study the behavior of humans and animals (Skinner, 1969). Operant principles might be thought of as the mechanisms that facilitate the evolutionary principles of variation, selection, and retention, discussed previously. According to operant theory, behaviors that are reinforced are repeated and get stronger (selected and retained), while behaviors that are punished are not repeated and become weaker (not selected). Operant principles are essential for understanding how we might shape new behaviors in children through reinforcement, punishment, imitation, and modeling (Patterson, 1982, 2002). Interventions based on operant principles are used in classrooms and families and stand out among the very few well-established treatments for children (Brestan & Eyberg, 1998; Ollendick & King, 2004).

Operant psychology and behaviorism have been famously attacked for failing to account for many aspects of internal life, such as emotion, cognition, and needs (Chomsky, 1967). These attacks have led some people to reject behavioral principles entirely. One consequence of this rejection is that professionals who work with young people are seldom well trained in how to apply operant principles.

We won't go into a detailed discussion of the debate, but note that while some of the criticisms of early behaviorism are fair, it's a mistake to abandon operant principles entirely. This would mean abandoning one of the most reliable and powerful interventions available. Decades of research show that operant principles can reliably predict and influence behavior across almost every situation imaginable (Domjam, 2014). We argue that, far from being peripheral, operant principles should be the very foundation upon which interventions for young people are built.

Yet we need a way to move beyond the old behaviorism if we are to make operant principles relevant to the rich, inner life of young people. We need a theory that can extend operant principles from overt behavior to the covert behavior we commonly refer to as "thought," or symbolic thinking. Relational frame theory meets this need.

Relational Frame Theory

The theory of human language and symbolic thinking upon which ACT was founded is called relational frame theory (RFT; S. C. Hayes, Barnes-Holmes, & Roche, 2001; S. C. Hayes, Strosahl, Bunting, Twohig, & Wilson, 2004). A thorough explanation of RFT is beyond the scope of this chapter. (For a detailed theoretical discussion of RFT, refer to Blackledge, 2003 and S. C. Hayes et al., 2001; for a detailed description of RFT that goes beyond the brief outline we'll give in this section, see Törneke, 2010.) However, it's important to be clear that the therapeutic model underlying ACT arose from this theory of verbal behavior. RFT shows how symbolic thought, such as judging and believing, is under the control of contextual factors (meaning it can be reinforced or punished) and is therefore subject to the same operant principles that have proven so useful in shaping nonverbal behavior.

RFT has added new principles for verbal behavior: arbitrarily applicable relational responding, combinatorial and mutual entailment, and transformation of stimulus function (S. C. Hayes et al., 2001). These principles explain how verbal behavior transforms our responses to emotions, to our sense of self, and to stimuli in the physical world. To be more specific, "arbitrarily applicable" means that we relate to stimuli in a way that is not based on experience or on formal properties of the stimuli. For instance, consider a young girl who receives praise from her parents whenever she brings home a popular friend. Over time she becomes popular herself. She then discovers that geeks are good at math but unpopular. Doom strikes

for her when she gets excellent math scores and is given the opportunity to take an advanced math class. Her response is “No way!” She fears that she’ll lose all of her friends because “geeks” will be there. In this instance, she’s made several verbal derivations that are arbitrary, in the sense that they aren’t based in physical experience. She’s made derivations such as “It would be bad if I wasn’t popular” and “Being around geeks will make me unpopular.” These derivations lead her to avoid the advanced math class as if it’s dangerous. She sees “popular” as a thing she has and can lose, rather than as a symbolic idea that may be more or less useful.

As far as we know, this ability to develop responses to things without any direct experience of them is unique to humans. A dog will never respond with avoidance to the word “geek” unless that word signals the onset of an aversive physical experience, like an electric shock. Humans are unique in their ability to react emotionally to verbal ideas about the future, the past, and themselves, even when there is no physical evidence for those ideas.

Précis of the DNA-V Model

Having laid the foundations for our model, we will now provide a brief overview of how it works. DNA-V focuses on three major classes of behavior, which, as mentioned, we term “discoverer,” “noticer,” and “advisor.” These terms are used metaphorically and pragmatically and should not be viewed as concrete cognitive or biological mechanisms; rather, they are intended to aid you in implementing behavioral principles.

DNA can be thought of as different classes of behavior that serve a particular purpose. When working with young people, we call them skills. The advisor’s purpose is to use past teaching and experience to navigate the present; the noticer’s is to detect physical, psychological, and environmental events as they occur; and the discoverer’s is to expand behavioral repertoires. A key goal of the DNA-V model is to help young people move flexibly between these three classes of behavior, or skills, in a way that helps them live with vitality and within their values. The following sections provide a brief overview of each of the model’s parts.

Valued Living and Vitality

The purpose of DNA-V is to help young people develop values and live with vitality. The discoverer, noticer, and advisor provide the means to engage in valued action, supporting the values that lie at

the center of the model. Values can be thought of as a compass that guides people through the storms and confusing times of life and toward the things they care about. Values often come from answering questions that boil down to “What for?”

- What do I want my life to stand for?
- What is this learning for?
- What is counseling for?
- What is anything for?
- What do I care about in this moment?
- What kind of person do I want to be?

When we live consistently with our values, we tend to have more vitality. “Vitality” can be defined as the capacity to live, grow, and develop. It’s characterized by physical or intellectual vigor, energy, and the power to not just survive but thrive.

Practitioners sometimes find it hard to know when to address values in an intervention with young people. We think of values interventions like bookends, being useful both before and after teaching DNA skills. Therefore we have two chapters with a focus on values: chapter 2 explains how to use values early in the course of helping a young person, and chapter 6 shows how to return to values once the person begins acquiring DNA skills.

The Advisor

Our term “advisor” is a metaphor for how humans use language and cognition—how we use relating (the operant) to make sense of the world without needing direct physical contact or experience with things. In lay terms, it’s how we use our inner voice or self-talk to make sense of the past, form beliefs, evaluate ourselves, and predict the future. Thanks to the advisor, we don’t have to rely on experience and trial and error to figure everything out; we can simply advise ourselves using derived relations based in our learning history.

For example, imagine you’re a three-year-old child and your curiosity draws you to eat something out of the garbage. Just as you pick up a half-eaten bar of chocolate, your mom yells, “No, don’t eat that! It’s disgusting!” You stop and feel disgusted. You’ve never eaten garbage or had a bad experience as a result, but now you avoid eating it. Your mom was able to use her words to transfer her disgust reactions to you contingently; yelling “disgusting” was a punishing stimulus that weakened your behavior. Now anytime you hear the word “disgusting,” your reaction to the salient stimulus changes; you

become cautious. Let's say you're looking at a pretty flower when the word "disgusting" is uttered. You immediately become cautious because of your history with the word. To go one step further, imagine that someone says you have "disgusting" hair. Now you transfer all of the properties associated with "disgusting" to yourself—you become "disgusting." You might also try to psychologically distance yourself from the "disgusting" parts of yourself. Perhaps you'll avoid looking at your hair, or wash it excessively, or cover it with a hat when other people are around. Note that you have never been directly reinforced for engaging in these behaviors. Such is the power of words.

This doesn't happen in nonverbal animals. In order for an animal to be influenced by a word, it has to predict something negative in actual experience. For example, you would have to say "disgusting" when your dog was eating garbage and provide a punishing stimulus (your disapproval), and you would need to do this over and over again. You would also need to say "disgusting" for each and every stimulus you don't want your dog to eat. Eventually, your dog would learn that anytime you say "disgusting," he should stop eating whatever it is. Even so, your dog would never learn to spontaneously apply the word "disgust" to flowers, people, or other dogs. A dog's is shaped by direct experience, whereas a human's can be shaped by verbal activity that has little or no link to actual experience.

We could have chosen among many other names for the advisor, such as the inner voice or the assistant; however, we opted for advisor for several reasons. First, we find that young people readily understand this personification of their inner voice. They tend to take up this term easily, saying things like "My mean advisor showed up," "My advisor was trying to figure it all out again," or "My advisor spent a whole hour trying to tell me I looked fat in a particular dress." Second, the word "advisor" serves as a metaphor that allows us to talk about verbal content (thoughts) in a way that promotes a more detached perspective toward that content. It allows us to create a space where individuals are *here*, looking at their advisor *there*. A third benefit of the term "advisor" is that it reduces defensiveness. Young people learn to see the advisor as just one part of them, not their whole self. They learn that the advisor often says seemingly unhelpful things, and that this doesn't make their whole person defective.

The Noticer

The noticer is a powerful process that allows us to connect with our feelings, our body, and the physical signals coming from the world around us. We all start life with this ability to notice. During infancy, the world is what we see, hear, touch, taste, and smell. However, once we start verbalizing and thinking symbolically, we can easily lose touch with our ability to notice and experience the world as a physical place.

Noticing has at least four important functions. First, the noticer tunes in to the body. The world gives us signals, and they usually show up first in the body. The noticer is adept at recognizing physical cues that reflect strong emotions, stressful events, joy, pain, danger, and so on. These cues give us essential information about ourselves and how we are in the world. Second, the noticer is aware of the individual's actions. Without noticer skills, we can't know how our actions are affecting others. Third, the noticer tunes in to the external world and what it has to offer. This helps us connect with people, things, and places and detect the potential rewards that are available in the environment. Finally, for those who tend to get stuck in difficult thoughts or with a critical advisor, the noticer provides a way to reconnect with the physical realm and step out of the advisor's world. The noticer helps us mindfully pause and observe our experience when we're uncertain whether our self-talk is helping us.

Noticer skills are central. No matter how confusing, difficult, or busy life gets, we can always shift into noticer behavior and find our center and stability.

The Discoverer

The discoverer represents behaviors related to exploring and testing the world. Young children naturally seek out and explore. They push a tower made of building blocks and it falls over, and they learn the ways of gravity. So it is with the discoverer. We use discoverer skills to broaden our behavioral repertoire, try new things and assess how they work, find and create values, and build strengths.

Young people are drawn to risk, novelty, and sensation seeking—behavioral patterns that are essential to positive development (Siegel, 2014). However, in some contexts, these same behavioral patterns can be associated with maladaptive risk taking and impulsivity. The goal of the DNA practitioner is not to squash young people's exploration out of fear that they will hurt themselves; rather, it is to help them harness and direct that exploration so that they build a meaningful and enjoyable life.

Self-View and Social View

The outer ring of the DNA-V model (figure 1) represents self-view and social view—factors that influence how we see ourselves and others. These are higher-order skills that are assumed to emerge from DNA and, in turn, influence DNA. Part 2 of the book will focus on these two areas.

Self-view involves the ability to see yourself across different contexts, with you, the observer, *here*, seeing yourself, the actor, *there*. For example, self-compassion requires the ability for you, now, to see yourself suffering in the past. And you might feel more hopeful if you can see yourself, in the past, having changed and grown, or envision yourself changing in the future. Another important type of perspective taking is seeing that what you believe now isn't what you believed in the past, which raises the possibility that beliefs aren't always all-important. Self-view interventions undermine unhelpful self-concepts and help develop self-awareness, self-knowledge, and useful self-concepts.

Social view focuses perspective-taking skills beyond the self, to relationships and social groups. From evolutionary science and research on human attachment, we know that humans need others to survive and thrive. Therefore, acquiring relationship-building skills is an important developmental task for young people. In the DNA-V approach, we begin with strengthening close relationships and then broaden to social groups. Key skills in social view often involve cultivating flexible verbal perspectives, such as “If I were you, how would I feel?” “If I'd been there in your shoes, what would I have done?” and “In this situation, I would feel this way and you would feel that way.”

DNA-V Is Always Contextual

We use DNA as a metaphor to describe our model because it encompasses behaviors that all young people express, albeit in different ways, just as cellular DNA can be expressed in different ways. There are at least two advantages to using the acronym DNA. First, it implies that these skills are basic capabilities, a bit like our basic biology. Naturally, there is individual variation, but the same core DNA components are present in all typically developing children.

Second, DNA skills don't exist in a vacuum. Like biological DNA, the processes in our model need certain environmental contexts for

optimal expression. Some contexts lead DNA to become fully expressed; for example, a supportive parent helps a young person develop the ability to notice emotions. Other contexts suppress DNA; for example, an invalidating parent leads a young person to avoid and lose sight of emotions. This book will help you become the context that promotes young people's expression of DNA.

It may seem as though advisor, noticer, and discoverer behaviors are always discrete; that is, if you are engaging in noticer behavior, you can't be engaging in discoverer behavior. However, these skills and behaviors continually overlap and influence each other. In fact, DNA skills can often work together to produce effective behavior. For example, when a young person feels angry at someone, he may predict (thanks to the advisor) that hitting that person will lead to bad things, like getting expelled from school. As a result, he may try a series of new ways of responding (thanks to the discoverer), perhaps ignoring the person, reporting the problem to a teacher, or asserting himself with the person. He may also use noticer skills to gather information, sensing how he's feeling before and after he responds and detecting how the other person is feeling and responding.

There is, of course, a flip side in which different aspects of DNA interfere with each other. For example, overreliance on verbal beliefs (the advisor) may reduce the range of behaviors we try, test, and explore (the discoverer). Overreliance on verbal understanding may also reduce noticing skills.

Conceptualizing DNA-V for Young People

Figure 2 presents a case conceptualization model for use with young people. We'll use it throughout the book to show you how DNA skills are developed. It allows us to examine young people's strengths and weaknesses, plan interventions, and reinforce and shape skills. (Figure 3 presents a blank case conceptualization worksheet based on this model. The blank worksheet is also available for download at <http://www.thrivingadolescent.com>. We also provide several examples of filled-out case conceptualization worksheets in later chapters, in conjunction with case examples.)

In our model, the environment and DNA behavior are expected to reciprocally influence each other. Improved DNA skills lead to an upward developmental spiral in which these skills help young people improve their circumstances in life; then, in turn, these

improvements lead to strengthened DNA skills. For example, emotion identification (a common noticing skill) appears to increase social support during adolescence (context), and social support, in turn, increases skill in emotion identification (Rowse, Ciarrochi, Deane, & Heaven, 2014).

Current situation and presenting issue

Why is the person seeking or needing help?

What are the important aspects of the person's environment (other than social context), such as sleep patterns, medical conditions, a dangerous environment, and nutrition?

Social and historical environment

Who is important to the person? Why?

Who can the person turn to for help?

Who is the person in conflict with?

Who is the person disappointed in?

What critical experiences have happened in the past?



Self-view

Recognizes that self is more than self-concepts.

Can see the self as holding self-concepts.

Sees that growth and improvement are possible.

Doesn't view self-concepts as physical descriptions of the self.

Can view himself or herself with compassion.

Social view

Recognizes the value of social connection.

Is able to have empathy and compassion for others.

Can cooperate, build friendships, and love.

Sees that history with others influences present interactions, and believes he or she can change.

Sees personal agency: "I can choose" instead of "They made me like this."

FIGURE 2. DNA-V case conceptualization model.

Current situation and presenting issue

Social and historical environment

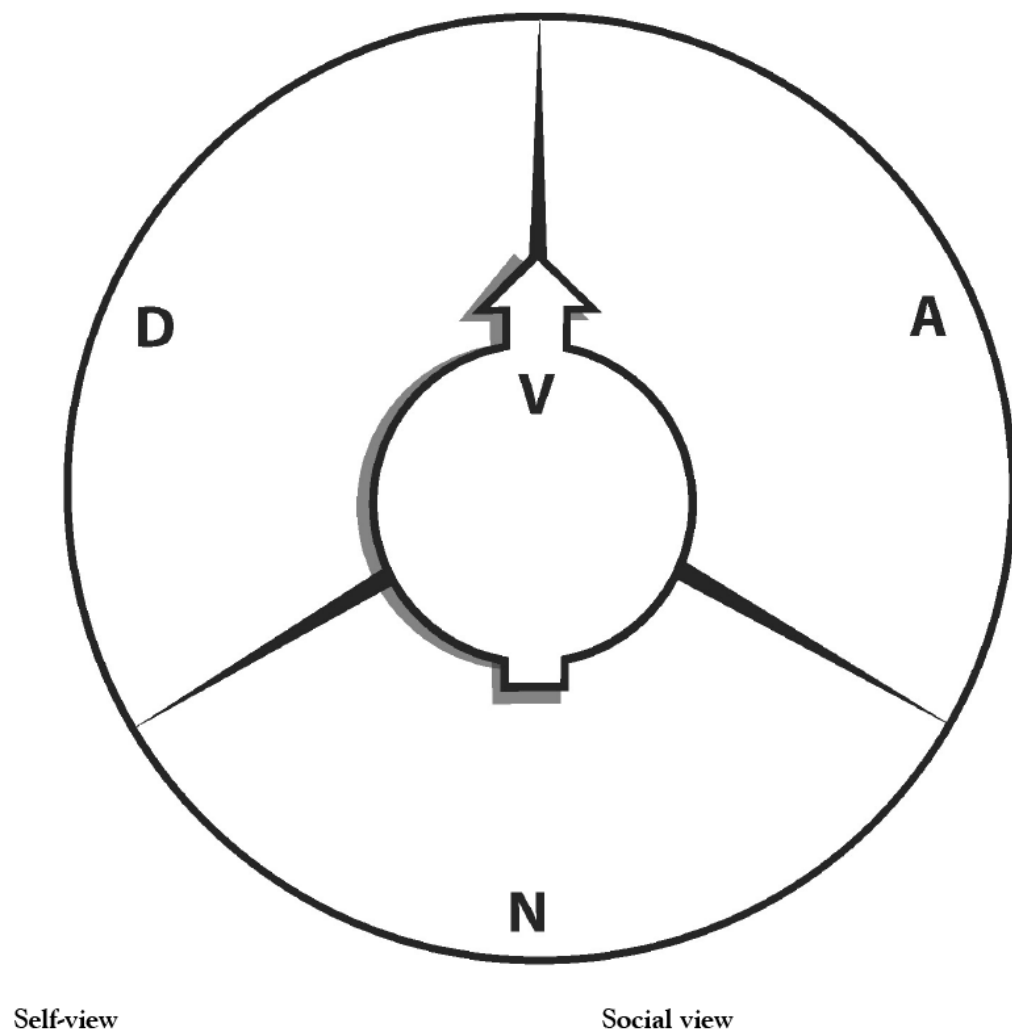


FIGURE 3. DNA-V case conceptualization worksheet.

Introducing Young People to DNA-V

Each practitioner will develop his or her own style of introducing DNA-V to young people and talking about it in a way that's inspiring. In the following sections, we provide two examples of how we often do this to give you a taste of how the work looks and feels, and so you'll have a sense of direction as you read on.

Taking the DNA-V Walk of Life

This introduction is done with one person, either a volunteer from a group or classroom or an individual in therapy. You first write the letters D, N, and A on three sheets of paper and place them on the floor in a circle. Space them at least a few steps apart. Don't explain what's happening at this point. Let the curiosity build.

Ask the young person to walk to A with you and, once there, say something like this:

This A stands for advisor. It's something we all have. I have it. You have it. It's that inner voice in our heads, evaluating everything and trying to tell us how good or bad we are. Have you ever seen a movie where there's a little creature sitting on someone's shoulder, whispering advice in the person's ear? It's kind of like that.

Let's illustrate what the advisor does. We'll both do this together. Think of some critical ways you evaluate yourself, and I'll do the same. I'll write mine first. I'll start with "I'm not good enough. I'm unlovable."

Write your evaluations on the piece of paper with the A on it, then have the young person write her evaluations, encouraging her to really think about how the advisor evaluates.

Take a moment to just stand there together, looking at the words on the page. Then ask, "What's it like to be standing here?" Seek some descriptions. Then just wait until the person says something like "How long do I have to wait here?" or "What else can we do?"

To this, you might reply with something like "What else *can* we do then?" You're attempting to have the person say she could see what the sheets of paper with N and D are for. If need be, use your gaze to playfully prompt this. Once she voices that idea, say something like, "Okay, let's walk to N and see what that is." Once you're at N, say something along these lines:

What we just did is the most important skill in our work. If we feel stuck, we move to something else. Whenever you're stuck, you can move—you can do something new with your hands and feet.

Okay, so here we are. N stands for noticing. This is a space we can move to when we feel stuck and want to increase our awareness of where we are and the choices available to us. Let's do a noticing practice right now.

Have the person take a few slow, deep breaths, just noticing the breath for a moment or two. Then ask her what it's like to be in this space. Also ask whether she can notice a difference between the advisor and the noticer. Explain that we all have the ability to be a noticer and we all have an advisor.

Next, elicit curiosity about D, again playfully using your gaze if need be. Then walk to D and praise the person for being curious and wanting to see what D is. Discuss how moving around is more flexible than standing and fixating on the advisor's evaluations. Then describe D something like this:

D stands for discoverer. This is where we try new things and see what works. It's where we discover what we care about. We can be discoverers even when our advisor says we can't be. For example, has your mind, or advisor, ever told you that you can't do something, but you did it anyway? When you did that, you discovered for yourself whether or not you could do it, instead of relying on the advisor.

Now let's return to A. I don't want to suggest A is always bad and that D and N are always good. They're just different spaces we can move to, or different skills we all have. Can you give me some examples of when the advisor might make some useful evaluations? (Elicit some examples, such as "it's a bad idea to drink and drive," or "it's a bad idea to put off studying until the last minute.")

Next, say something like "There's something in the middle here, something that drives DNA." Then write a V on a sheet of paper and place it in the middle of the circle. Return to D, then ask the person to walk to the new sheet of paper with you. Once there, begin to introduce values:

We use our DNA skills in the service of what you care about. I call this valuing, or values. Values might be having fun, playing sports, or connecting with others. It just depends on the person. For each of us, everything we do is in the service of this. So everything we do in our work together will be about helping you to have more things you care about and value in your life.

Navigating the World with DNA-V

This book will present you with many metaphors and different ways to help young people understand what DNA-V stands for and how they can use it in their lives. In chapters 3, 4, and 5, you'll find illustrations that depict the central metaphors of advisor, noticer, and discoverer. (You can download these illustrations, as well as animated videos on DNA-V, at <http://www.thrivingadolescent.com>.) For now, let's take a closer look at how D, N, and A can be used as guiding metaphors with young people.

The Discoverer

The discoverer finds new ways to be in the world. When people are in discoverer space, they're behaving in ways that allow them to grow, learn, and expand their behavioral repertoire. Verbal behavior is often tied to the physical actions of testing and exploring.

Example metaphor: Imagine that you stand at the border of a wondrous country, one that has everything you could possibly find interesting. It has libraries, water parks, fascinating people, music, dance, museums, all kinds of entertainment, parks, zoos, and restaurants with every cuisine. It has thriving forests with a wide variety of animals and plants, many of which you've never seen before. It has every kind of game and sport imaginable. Sounds awesome, right? However, this country also has dangers, such as poisonous animals, con artists, muggers, and hostile gangs. The challenge is this: The discoverer has no maps or guidebooks for this new country. Instead, the discoverer must rely on trial and error to find the fulfilling things and avoid the dangerous ones. The discoverer's journey is both exciting and scary.

Example discoverer questions: Why do you want to try something new? What would happen if you kept doing the same thing you've always done? What do you think the dangers of exploring are? What seems to prevent you from doing new things? What new things can you try? How can you discover and develop your strengths? What new directions can you take? How would you know if you tried something new and it didn't work?

The Noticer

The noticer senses physical and psychological events as they occur and uses the five senses to receive information from the environment. When in noticer space, people are behaving in ways that allow them to receive information from the world through sight, taste, sound, touch, and feel, and through their physical reactions and emotions. The noticer allows inner experience to come and go,

rather than trying to change it or cling to it. It's essentially a neutral observer.

Noticing creates the space between internal experiences (feelings and thoughts) and outward behavior, offering an opportunity to choose a behavior rather than "having to" react when difficult feelings and thoughts show up. When we don't automatically react to our inner experience, we're often able to better choose actions in the service of what we care about. Developing our noticer skills is the key to breaking free from old patterns of behavior that are no longer working. Noticer space can often be likened to a car's neutral gear. When noticing, people aren't necessarily moving forward (discoverer) or looking back (advisor). Rather, they're just taking a look around.

Example metaphor: For the noticer, feelings and thoughts are like the weather. The noticer observes them and allows them to flow, just as the weather does. The noticer stands back from the scene, witnessing everything that's happening without seeking to change things. The noticer uses all senses and bodily reactions to take everything in. Emotions come and go without automatically provoking reactions. Anger doesn't automatically lead to hitting, fear to fleeing, or shame to withdrawing from other people.

Example noticer questions: What signals are you getting now in your body? Are they linked to feelings? Are you trying to control your emotions, or are you making space and allowing them? What's going on around you? What are you doing? What thoughts are showing up? How are you reacting to me? How are you acting? How are your actions influencing others? What impulses do you notice?

The Advisor

The advisor formulates verbal conclusions about the present context based on what it has been taught or what has worked in past circumstances. For example, young people who are physically abused at home may assume that they face the same risk of abuse at school. We might say the advisor forms the rule "People are dangerous." Consequently they may act guarded, withdrawn, and fearful both at home, where it's adaptive, and also at school, where it's usually less adaptive.

When in advisor space, people avoid engaging in trial and error experience with the world and instead behave in ways that have historically allowed them to gain rewards or escape aversive stimuli. They rely on past learning, teachings, judgments, verbal rules,

reasoning, or problem solving. So the young person who's experienced abuse feels she "knows" that people are not to be trusted and therefore avoids relationships and the risk of further abuse. But she also misses opportunities to forge friendships, gain support, and broaden her life.

Example metaphor: The advisor is like a GPS in a car. It seeks to guide you quickly to where you want to go. It saves you time by preventing you from going in the wrong direction, and it sometimes helps you avoid fatal mistakes, like driving off a cliff. However, a GPS is sometimes unhelpful. For example, imagine you're using a GPS to get to the beach, but it instead guides you to a swamp. Now what do you do? If you remain in advisor space, you'll act as if what the GPS is telling you is literally true. It says, "You have arrived at the beach." Consequently, you act as if the swamp really is the beach and go for a "refreshing swim" in the smelly, green water.

Example advisor questions: Are your predictions, evaluations, and justifications helping you live a vital life? Should you listen to your advisor? Is it a useful guide in this situation? Or should you turn the advisor off and move into noticer or discoverer space?

Values Help Us Connect to Meaning and Vitality

Humans can be surrounded by beauty, have enough to eat, be entirely safe from danger, and yet be utterly miserable. We so easily let ourselves get stressed by the small things: misplaced keys, bureaucratic red tape, inconsiderate people, office politics, deadlines, difficult neighbors, traffic jams—the list goes on and on. As adults, we may neglect to develop and maintain our relationships while spending countless hours working to get another promotion to impress mere acquaintances. Yet relationships bring well-being (Holt-Lunstad, Smith, & Layton, 2010), whereas working long hours often doesn't (Spector et al., 2004). And all too often, we fail to take on challenges that could bring vitality and growth but are willing to endlessly rehash a difficult situation or complain about a challenging person. Taking on challenges brings well-being (Moneta & Csikszentmihalyi, 1996), whereas rehashing complaints doesn't.

Young people can also lose countless hours to meaningless activities, often at the insistence of adults. We force young people into rote learning instead of feeding their thirst for knowledge. We ask them to speak like adults instead of being open to their outrage and passion. We also influence them by example; each time we do something petty, meaningless, or life destroying, we teach them to do the same.

Why do we humans waste so much time persisting in things we don't value? There are many answers, and this book will explore some of them, but at least one relates to our relationship to time. We think we have plenty of time to waste. We suffer from the illusion that we *have* time in the same way we have shoes or a car. So we believe that eventually we'll have time to focus on what's important. The problem with this idea is that, unlike a car or other material possessions, time is something we can't actually possess. It's given to us in small increments—about one second at a time. We get to choose what we value in that second, but we don't get to choose how many seconds we get.

It isn't surprising that we're under the illusion that we own our time. People tend to talk about the future as if it's a physical thing,

something promised to us. Adults tell young people that what they're doing in the present is simply preparation for an outstanding future career. Studying helps them get into the right university, volunteer work looks good on a résumé, and extracurricular activities will show a future employer that they're well-rounded. Young people get so much reinforcement for preparing for the future that they grow into adults who live for the future; meanwhile, the seconds of each day evaporate.

And when they aren't pulled to the future, young people are subjected to many valueless influences in the present moment, such as materialism, media, and negative peers. Adolescents see more than 5,900 food commercials per year, and most of those commercials promote unhealthy food products, such as candy, sweetened beverages, and snacks (J. L. Harris et al., 2010). Magazines present idealized body images that young people strive to imitate, sometimes to the point of illness, with an estimated 3.3 percent of adolescent females having symptoms of an eating disorder (Patton, Selzer, Coffey, Carlin, & Wolfe, 1999). In addition, peers often reinforce behavior that boosts status in the short term but has long-term negative consequences, like insulting teachers.

Amidst this chaos and confusion, young people need to find their way. But how? In this chapter, we provide guidance on how you can quickly orient young people to values before teaching them DNA skills. Then, in chapter 6, we describe how to connect young people's DNA skills to their values in a deeper way by using lessons and experiences gained from the work in chapters 3 through 5.

Values Are the Center of the DNA-V Universe

All young people want meaning and vitality, even if they aren't able to speak about it. Of course, what constitutes meaning and vitality varies from person to person. It also varies depending on stage of life. For babies, vitality involves being nurtured. For toddlers, it probably involves discovering, exploring, and returning to a safe place. For children, adolescents, and adults, meaning and vitality become more complicated because of the development of language. But in general, research suggests six activities that promote vitality: connecting with others, giving, being active, embracing the moment, taking on challenges, and caring for oneself (Aked, Marks, Cordon, & Thompson, 2009; Ciarrochi, Bailey, & Harris, 2014).

In our model, advisor, noticer, and discoverer skills are all used to connect to values and create vitality. The discoverer role (chapter 5) is particularly important for helping young people uncover their passions and strengths. Our focus is on teaching young people to discriminate between ways of living that are values based and life enhancing, rather than valueless and life draining. In the sections that follow, we discuss how values are used in practice.

Values Transform the World

Essentially, a value statement makes some activities more rewarding and others less rewarding, depending on whether the activity is consistent or inconsistent with the value (S. C. Hayes et al., 2001). For example, a young woman may view learning Spanish as incredibly boring. However, if she relates that task to her value of traveling, it may become reinforcing, or at least a good deal more bearable. She has a values-based rule for herself along these lines: “I love to travel. Learning languages will help me do this.” Contrast this with a girl who’s relatively neutral about learning Spanish and loves playing challenging games on the Internet. When she takes a Spanish class, she discovers that studying for it takes a lot of time and interferes with playing games. She thinks, *This class is keeping me from playing*, and she starts to find the class increasingly aversive.

In ACT, a value is formally defined as a chosen quality of action. It is constructed through language and our interactions with the world, is evolving, and is intrinsically reinforcing (S. C. Hayes, Strosahl, et al., 2012). That’s a rather dense definition, so let’s break it down into its parts, with a focus on young people and the DNA-V model.

A Value Is Chosen

DNA-V is a pragmatic model. It asks young people, “What works in your life?” Such a question can’t be answered without first knowing what the individual wants to work toward. So the entire DNA-V system begins with a choice: “What do I choose to care about?” For the purposes of DNA-V work, we don’t need to have the ultimate answer to this question, but we do need to have some form of an answer, which we can refine and build upon with time.

A Value Is a Quality of Action

A value is like a direction on a compass. We engage in valued actions, but we never obtain values, just as when we travel on our

planet, we can never “obtain” west, no matter how long we travel west. This is good news because it means we can’t permanently lose our values. No matter how many times we fail to go west, each moment offers another opportunity to change direction and head west. Values are the same, we can always choose them as our direction. For example, a young person might say she values dancing and helping her younger brother with math. These values are described using verbs. They are actions. She can’t always be dancing or helping her brother. Indeed, sometimes she might avoid dance class or be unhelpful to her brother. But these values-inconsistent actions don’t negate her ability to start again the next day and say, “I choose to value dancing and helping my brother.”

A Value Is Not an Outcome

Values are about how people want to act, not about the outcomes they want to achieve or the way they want others to act toward them. So “being respectful to my teacher” is a value, whereas “getting respect from my teacher” isn’t. We can’t make people respect us or give us what we want, but we can act in ways that make those outcomes more likely.

A Value Is Not a Goal

One way to understand values is to contrast them with goals. Whereas values can never be permanently achieved, goals can be ticked off a to-do list once they’re done. For example, learning is a value, whereas getting a good test score would be a goal. Being caring is a value, whereas getting support from others is a goal. That said, goals can be helpful for putting values into play.

A Value Is Constructed from Language and Interactions with the World

When we ask young people what they care about, we have to understand that the words they come up with may not point to a “true” answer. They can’t know what will give them meaning and joy in three months’ time, let alone three years’ time. Our role is not to quiz them relentlessly until they give us an answer that matches our definition of values; rather, it is to help them explore and construct their own values language. In the DNA-V model, this arises from discoverer skills, because values come from our experience in the world.

Discussion of Values Is Held Lightly

Values talk is just a tool to get young people moving and interacting with the world so that their life has more meaning. Think of their

words around values as being more or less useful, not more or less true. If a young boy says, “I love writing stories,” but never writes, then the words aren’t particularly useful. They are words without action. We have to either help him write stories or help him discover other values that can encourage him to interact with the world right now.

Values Are Dynamic

Values are fluid and can change in form and function. Consider a girl who says she loves learning to dance. This value might be linked to broader values, such as learning, being challenged, or perhaps being active. She may love dancing in eighth and ninth grade but gradually lose interest and cease to love it in the eleventh grade. Assuming that she’s genuinely disinterested in dance, we might help her identify other activities that satisfy her values, as dance once did. Perhaps she’d like to try out activities like learning to surf or challenging herself at public speaking. Ceasing to love dance doesn’t mean she ceases to love learning, being challenged, or being active. The way values are expressed can change as young people develop and learn from their experience.

A value might also change in relative importance. For example, a young person may graduate from high school and spend a year living the value of being adventurous and exploring new places; ten years later, when he has young children, this value may be less important, and he may instead highly value keeping his loved ones safe and healthy. Similarly, a girl may value playing games with her dad when she’s nine years old but decide it isn’t important when she’s fourteen.

A Value Is Intrinsically Reinforcing

A value is something you do because it’s important and meaningful, because it’s enjoyable, or both. It isn’t something you do because some arbitrary social agent wants you to do it or because you want to avoid feeling guilty. Consider the statement “Honesty is the best policy.” A young person could follow this rule just to please her mom and not follow it when her mom isn’t around. In this case, following the rule isn’t intrinsically reinforcing. Many values start out in just this way. Over time, however, the rule may develop into a genuine value. This young woman may discover that being honest is personally important to her and helpful in building close relationships. Then she may behave honestly even when her mom isn’t around, and even when she could actually get away with dishonesty. She has come to value honesty.

That said, it's important to be aware that behavior is almost always under multiple sources of control. There are probably few behaviors that are purely intrinsically rewarded or purely compliance oriented. For example, a boy may engage in physical exercise both because he feels he should and because exercise is enjoyable. Or he may study history to avoid getting in trouble with his dad and also because the subject is enjoyable at times.

How to Listen for Values

Every ACT discussion has a value behind it. Sometimes what a person cares about is explicit; other times it's hidden. Our job is to be on the alert, always asking, "What does the young person care about here?" Value doesn't appear only when young people talk about positive experiences; it also shows up when they discuss painful experiences. For example, nobody has experienced friendship and love without also experiencing disappointment and rejection. Our task is to help young people connect with their values even in painful experiences.

Values are an individual's choice, and theoretically, people can choose to value anything, even antisocial things. This possibility can be discomfoting to practitioners, who often wonder what to do if an individual's values are out of sync with their own. For example, what if somebody says he values harming others? What do we do? When faced with clients whose values conflict with ours, DNA-V practitioners have only two choices: refuse to work with them or refuse to work on particular values, such as antisocial ones. The good news is that values conflicts between practitioners and those they work with are rare and can usually be resolved. We humans tend to be more alike in our values than different.

Indeed, research has identified six patterns of valued activity that are associated with vitality and well-being (Aked et al., 2009). It's likely that any young people you work with will want to engage at least some of these patterns of activity, if not all of them:

- **Connecting with others.** Humans are essentially social. Remove us from our social group, and we are likely to develop poor mental health, get sick, and die (Hawkley & Cacioppo, 2010; Sarason & Sarason, 1985). Take a moment now to answer this question: What is most important in your life? Does your answer involve other people?

- **Giving to others and having a positive influence.** Giving is a pattern of activity that's likely to be forced upon young people. Even so, research suggests that giving may be intrinsically reinforcing (Rilling et al., 2007), so if we can find ways to help young people experience giving, they'll be likely to discover their own authentic reasons for giving. There is no need to force-feed them this value.
- **Being active.** Physical activity is associated with greater well-being and lower rates of depression and anxiety across all age groups (Biddle & Ekkekakis, 2005). Recent research also suggests that activity may improve intellectual performance (Singh, Uijtdewilligen, Twisk, van Mechelen, & Chinapaw, 2012). In addition, physical activity can also support other values, such as connecting with others and embracing the moment (Ciarrochi et al., 2014).
- **Embracing the moment.** This broad category involves fully partaking of whatever is immediately in front of us, rather than being focused on the future or the past. This value spans many realms, from exploring and traveling to playing music and enjoying food. For this reason, it's likely to overlap with many if not all of the other categories of values.
- **Challenging ourselves and learning.** It's a myth that people are happiest when they have no work and can live a challenge-free life. In fact, evidence suggests that unemployment is one of the strongest predictors of poor well-being (McKee-Ryan, Song, Wanberg, & Kinicki, 2005). Researchers have found that when people are immersed in a challenge, they tend to experience increased subjective well-being (Csikszentmihalyi & Hunter, 2003).
- **Caring for ourselves.** This category refers to a broad range of self-care behaviors, such as maintaining a healthy diet, getting enough sleep, and doing something relaxing after a hard day.

Note that in describing these six patterns of behavior, we aren't suggesting that practitioners dictate values to those they work with. Discoverer skills are designed to connect people to their values through actions. The six patterns we just described provide hints about where to look for values. For example, most young people you work with will value connecting with others. However, the way they wish to connect with others and the context in which they wish to connect will differ from person to person.

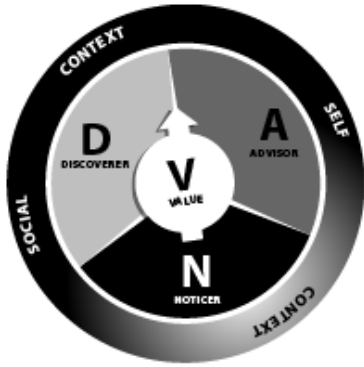
Redefining Success

Young people live in a world that heavily emphasizes success. And they're taught that success means getting good grades, beating their peers in competitions, developing the "right" appearance and style, and obtaining desirable material possessions. The problem with this focus is that, despite people's best efforts, they often don't get what they want. Further, what they do get often turns out not to satisfy. For example, obtaining material possessions often doesn't produce lasting happiness (Kasser, 2002). Nevertheless, people tend to devote a great deal of time to working for nonessential possessions.

What if we were to define success another way? Instead of focusing on outcomes, we could focus on living in alignment with our values. For example, let's say a young woman values being active and challenging herself. If she trains hard for a race and runs as hard as she can during the race, then she's succeeded, even if she doesn't win. Or if a young man values being a good friend and acts in accordance with that value, he's been a good friend even if a particular friend betrays him. By shifting the focus from outcomes to values, we put success squarely in the grasp of young people.

So how can we illustrate the difference between measuring success by outcomes versus by values? Doing so is surprisingly simple because young people already have an intuitive understanding of the latter. We just have to show them two scenarios, one involving someone doing her best and winning at something versus another doing her best and not winning. (You can find inspiring videos for demonstrating this at <http://www.thrivingadolescent.com>.) Once you've presented the two scenarios, simply ask, "Who succeeded here?" Young people almost always say, "Both people succeeded." This can open up a conversation about what it means to succeed, during which you can reinforce the idea that we can't always choose the outcome, but we can choose how we conduct ourselves.

Basic Training: Creating a Values-Informed Space



The basic training sections of this book present detailed plans for helping young people. In this first basic training section, we describe how to quickly introduce values. This approach is useful at the start of one-on-one counseling or as an icebreaker when working with groups.

Starting the Values Conversation Gently

You may sometimes have trouble getting young people to talk about values at the beginning of an intervention. They often meet questions about values with suspicion of a hidden agenda or statements like “I don’t know.” Yet to begin the journey with young people, it’s helpful to have some idea of where they want to go. In addition, working with them to identify their values can facilitate the challenging work of managing difficult thoughts and feelings that arise as the intervention progresses. We recommend beginning the values conversation gently with simple questions along these lines:

- *What will we work for?*
- *What do you want out of our sessions?*
- *What do you hope I might be able to help you with?*

These simple questions signal to young people that this work is for them, not for their parents, their teachers, or other adults. Their answers need not be consistent with our definition of values at this stage. They are merely a place to begin, and you can simply say, “Our work will be about this.”

As you work on the DNA skills with young people, you can sharpen the values dialogue and watch them become flexible enough to talk about their most heartfelt concerns and needs. For this reason we have two chapters on values in this book (the second one is chapter 6). Think of them as bookends to the process of building DNA skills.

Getting Beyond Automatic Responses

Questions about what's most important can be the hardest to ask and the trickiest to answer. To experience this difficulty, answer this question for yourself:

- What makes a good life?

Did you have a quick response? Perhaps your mind raced to a well-worn answer, like "being with loved ones," or maybe you said something like "bringing more peace into the world." Quick answers often come from advisor space and reflect something you've learned to say. Alternatively, maybe you tried to argue with the question or had thoughts like *But I can't have a good life* or *This is silly*. These kinds of responses are also likely to arise from your advisor: the advisor's role is to protect you from the dangers associated with valued action.

Perhaps some feelings of dissatisfaction came up as you thought about what makes a good life. Did you step into noticer space and acknowledge those feelings, or did you find yourself wanting to avoid answering the question? Or perhaps you were adventurous and answered the question from discoverer space.

In DNA-V, we advocate allowing young people time to deeply engage with questions about values so they can consider them thoughtfully and come up with answers that truly connect with what they care about in life. Therefore, we recommend an approach that makes room for noticing, pausing, and taking time. The following visualization can be helpful here:

Imagine that someone who's important to you is standing in front of you. This is someone you hold dear, perhaps a friend or family member. Take some time and imagine a person you're close to... Now imagine that this person asks you, "What makes a good life?" As you consider your answer, assume it will have important implications for this person's life... Pause and be with the question... Let your mind wander as you try to choose just the right words to respond to this person, then imagine yourself answering the question.

Many young people find discussions about values difficult. They often avoid these discussions, give answers that are glib or "adult-friendly," or simply shrug. Practitioners need patience and a willingness to slow down, stay with young people, and appreciate wherever they are in their journey. The following exercise will help you do this.

Values Exercise 1: Converse and Appreciate

The conversation cards that follow are designed to facilitate lingering on and exploring the topic of values. (You can download these cards at <http://www.thrivingadolescent.com>. Professionally printed cards can also be purchased at that site, with all proceeds donated to charity.) They're designed to develop a repertoire of talking about important life issues and choosing values. Don't rush the process; you aren't simply gathering information like someone from the census bureau.

What do you think is your main purpose in life?	Which do you prefer, blending in or standing out?
Who is the wisest person you know?	What would you most like to achieve?
What does freedom mean to you?	What's the most important thing to you right now?
What do you hope for?	Imagine you could achieve anything—what would it be?
What makes a good life?	What is it like to learn?

What does independence mean to you?	What would you do if you were rich?
What makes you strong?	Who has taught you the most in life?
Have you dreamed of doing something extraordinary?	What does it mean to find peace?
How do your values differ from those of your family?	Who is the most compassionate person you know?
What do you hope people will remember about you?	What would it be like to trust?
What does it mean to love?	What does it mean to be seen or heard?

What does forgiveness mean to you?	Who would you most like to thank?
Have you longed for something?	Have you ever been bullied?
Have you felt despair?	Have you ever felt unsafe?
What is the hardest thing to accept about yourself?	Have you ever thought of dying?
Have you ever been let down?	What makes a friend?

The physical properties of words on printed cards can be helpful when working on values. They create some space between you and the young person, easing the pressure to look at you and answer your questions. Instead, the young person is answering the card, and the two of you are engaged in the process together. Here's the procedure we recommend for using the cards:

Place ten or twelve cards randomly on a table. We've discovered that it doesn't matter which cards you put out. Then provide a simple

instruction, such as “We’ve talked about the problems that brought you here. Now let’s talk about something different so I can get to know more about you than just problems. Which of these can we talk about?”

Many people can discuss their problems but avoid talking about what’s closest to their heart. You can facilitate the process by taking turns and answering the questions yourself. Your key role is to listen mindfully when the young person speaks:

- Listen for the value: What does the person care about?
- Listen for the pain: What is the person trying not to say? What hurts? People’s values are generally on the other side of their pain.

When the person gives an answer, don’t rapidly move on. Linger and explore beyond the first answer by asking questions like these:

- *What’s it like to have that?*
- *What would it be like if you never had that?*
- *Would you like to have more of that?*

Together, the two of you can discuss several cards as you create a meaningful space for discussing values.

Be aware of how the person is answering. You may or may not choose to discuss the person’s style of answering at this early point, but thinking it through can guide your future work. Here are three typical ways of responding to the conversation cards:

- **Advisor responses are often well-practiced answers that sound like whatever is socially acceptable or safe to say. Often these answers involve a lot of verbal reasoning and conclusions, such as “I could never do X,” “I should do Y,” or “I already do too much Z.” If you want to elicit advisor-type answers, just to illustrate to young people what the advisor is like, you can ask them to answer with what they think they’re supposed to say.**
- **Noticer responses involve being able to observe the body sensations and thoughts that arise when considering values-oriented questions. As the professional, you might even notice a change in people you’re working with as feelings or difficulties arise for them. To help them get into noticer space, encourage them to breathe and observe what shows up when they read the question. You can use the noticing**

techniques you'll learn in chapter 4 or, at this early stage, just ask them to scan their body for sensations.

- **Discoverer responses arise from a creative space. These answers aren't automatic. In this space, young people might respond slowly and with uncertainty, thinking, pondering, and even making up an answer. Don't jump in; allow the silence and let them explore the question. To help them get into this space, you can encourage them to notice their first response without saying it out loud, and then to allow other potential responses to emerge.**

If the conversation allows, you can summarize some of the things young people have said they care about, and you can note this in a blank DNA-V case conceptualization worksheet (figure 3 in chapter 1, which is also available for download at <http://www.thrivingadolescent.com>). Later, as you move through the DNA skills, you can begin to think about how they might choose to act on their values. (The exercises in chapter 6 will be helpful here.)

A Note About Self-Disclosure

Self-disclosure is important in DNA-V, so it's okay for you to share some of your answers to the conversation cards if appropriate and helpful. You can say something like "Would you like to ask me a question first?" Of course, self-disclosure must be in the service of helping those you work with, rather than being done merely so you can tell your story. The purpose would be to normalize young people's difficulties and help them see that other people have similar experiences. We've found that self-disclosure can be useful with adolescents but has a different quality than when done with adults. Young people can easily view it as the adult talking too much and perhaps being a know-it-all. After all, you appear to them to have survived your own adolescence and become successful. Go gently here. Watch their behavior and stay with the function of the exercise, which is to help *them* open up.

The Advisor Helps Us Efficiently Find Our Way

The advisor is a metaphor for our inner voice. By age two, it becomes our constant companion, ready to evaluate, judge, predict, and, most importantly, offer advice about life. It's with us so often that we sometimes forget it's there. Fortunately, we can do something quite simple to notice it again. We can simply sit in a quiet place for three minutes, eyes closed, and listen to the voice. Try it.

This chapter will help you understand the advisor and see how it can be both a positive and negative influence. Creating awareness of the advisor is the first step toward helping young people recognize how to utilize it.

In order to give flesh and blood to the concepts in this book, we will illustrate them with examples from young people's lives. These examples will also be used to illustrate case conceptualization within the DNA-V model. So now we turn to Matt's story to exemplify working with the advisor.

Matt's Story

Many parents have a romantic story about how they met. Matt's parents didn't. His father was working in a psychiatric hospital, and his mother was a sixteen-year-old patient. They conceived Matt three months after meeting.

His mother's family was wealthy and influential in the government, and when they learned about the pregnancy, they gave his father a choice: he could marry Matt's mom or he could go to jail. He chose marriage. A year later, Matt's mother left and his father got "stuck" with the boy. He hated his situation and even hated Matt a little because Matt reminded him of the disastrous marriage. Matt's father felt that he'd only made one small mistake but now would have this burden—Matt—for the next eighteen years.

Matt's father soon remarried, this time to a woman with two children of her own, and together they had a third child. Matt's stepmom was preoccupied with her own children and treated Matt indifferently.

The best year of Matt's childhood was second grade, when his family lived on a farm. Matt's parents were so busy with farmwork that they had little time for Matt, which suited him just fine. He became immersed in his physical surroundings. He ate green apples straight from the tree, explored deep into the woods, and watched water bugs skim across the stream. It was one of the few times in his childhood when he lived outside of his own head.

After a year the farm business failed, and Matt's family was forced to move to the city. Money was tight and his parents fought all the time. His father was aggressive and moody and often yelled at the kids, especially Matt, whom he regularly intimidated, belittled, and sometimes hit.

Now Matt is fifteen. He is failing in several classes. He sits by himself at lunch hour. His father has spent years berating him, shouting things like "What's wrong with you? Why can't you do anything right? Give me an answer. Say something! Don't just sit there looking stupid."

Matt flees into his imagination. He gets his catcher's mitt and baseball and goes into the backyard, where he throws the ball against the side of the garage again and again, pretending to pitch in front of a cheering crowd at the Cleveland stadium. His fantasies are always the same. He starts as the underdog—too young and small to succeed as a pitcher. He's facing a great team, like the New York Yankees. After about an hour of pitching against the garage, he imagines that the Yankees are on the verge of winning and the bases are loaded. Then he stretches his arm way back and throws. The last batter strikes out and the crowd goes wild, cheering, "Matt! Matt! Matt! Matt!" as he walks off the field. He's led the Cleveland Indians to the championship and is the most loved person in Cleveland.

The next day at school, he is teased for his shoes because they're old and dirty. The kids say, "Hey, you need to soak those in Clorox. Your name's Clorox from now on." He plays cool and laughs along with the joke. Soon everybody at school is calling him Clorox. When the final bell rings, he runs the whole mile home.

Reflecting on Matt

Although the details of Matt's life are unique, his developmental pattern is common among young people who are struggling. Young people often lose touch with the physical world and become absorbed in fantasy. It is worth noting that Matt shows little awareness of being caught up in his head or the elaborate world he

constructs there. He's unaware that he's concluded he's too weak to do anything about being bullied. He doesn't know there might be an alternative. Young people like Matt are everywhere. They often seem invisible—until they show up as a “problem.”

In essence, Matt is alone, having grown up in an abusive and neglectful environment. He lost his mother very early in life, and his father is an angry man. Matt probably has few strong attachments or people to show him gentle and kind love. He has no one who is accepting or offers guidance that would help him thrive. That's the practitioner's task. We have the opportunity to step in and help Matt manage his out-of-control thoughts and feelings and learn to be alive in the world rather than escaping into fantasy.

Take a moment to reflect on how you'd respond to Matt:

- What shows up for you when you're working with or interacting with a young person like Matt? Consider your feelings, thoughts, doubts, and hopes.
 - Do you think it's possible to help Matt when he is surrounded by so many unhelpful people?
 - How would you conceptualize Matt's problem?
 - If you were Matt's counselor, how would you ideally like to act toward him? (Think of your values.)
 - How might you seek to help Matt? Where might you start?

Escaping the Physical World

Matt's story reflects the human condition. When life seems too hard to accept, we are all inclined to leave the physical world for the one inside our head. The content provided by Matt's advisor seems almost positive, with statements like “I'm a great pitcher,” but that positive content masks pain: Matt's secret belief is that he's weak and not good enough. As we'll discuss shortly, both extremely positive content and extremely negative content can be indicative of being stuck in our advisor space.

This ability to get stuck in our heads is a relatively recent problem. Before our ancestors developed language, they were probably much like other primates. They lived in the world of sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell. They learned to avoid something only after it hurt them and to approach things they found pleasurable. In other words, they relied on physical experiences. Physical experience was a fairly good guide, but it did have one major downside: sometimes it was

dangerous or even deadly. Our ancestors had to eat something poisonous before they learned to avoid it. They could spend days searching for food through trial and error and die of hunger. Storms and darkness threatened their well-being, and wild dogs, saber-toothed cats, and other predators hunted them. It's likely that they lived in the present moment—and died prematurely in it too.

It was probably the coevolution of cooperation and language that allowed early humans to transcend the physical world. They learned to work together, which gave them more eyes and ears to locate danger and larger, more coordinated groups to fight enemies or stave off threats. They got better and better at communicating with each other. They probably started with simple communications, such as “Eek” or “Hoo,” uttered in a way that indicated danger or the presence of something interesting. Gradually, their communications became more complex and useful, until one day, perhaps on some distant African savannah, they started using symbols—sounds that represented something; a word such as “cat” stood for that two-hundred-pound, furry thing with sharp teeth. And if a tribe member uttered that sound in a certain context, everybody knew to be afraid. They learned to run away without even having to see the cat, increasing the chances they'd survive. It was language that allowed humans to dominate the earth.

Symbols allowed our ancestors to learn from each other's experience in the safety of a mental space. For example, if a young person was about to eat a piece of rotten meat, an elder might utter a familiar word meaning “rotten.” Then the young person could experience revulsion and disgust without having to actually eat the meat.

Elders could also use language to tell stories by which younger generations could learn to avoid danger, find food, entice a mate, and conquer opponents—all in a safe and comfortable environment. Such stories allowed the next generation to have the experience of their elders without the risk.

Elders are just one source of advice in the modern age. We get suggestions on how to live from many sources, including parents, TV, church, friends, great literature and bad literature, the Internet, radio, magazines, and more. We're surrounded by advice. And, importantly, this advice doesn't remain external. We internalize these teachings and use language to develop rules for action. Essentially, we develop the advisor, a guiding internal voice that functions similar to external advice. In this way, language and the

internal advisor are at the heart of our human power—and also, as you’ll see shortly, at the heart of our human suffering.

The Advisor Is a Metaphor

The young people you work with might ask, “Where is the advisor?” or “Is the advisor real?” It’s important to clarify that the advisor is a metaphor, not a description of anything physical inside the head. The advisor simply represents the human tendency to judge, evaluate, interpret, predict, worry, and create rules and instructional stories.

The advisor’s primary purpose is to help us avoid the dangers of trial and error. It does so via language processes that attempt to use past teaching and learning to navigate the present.

Not all language behavior can be classified as advisor related. For example, language can be oriented toward experiencing the present (related to noticer skills) or toward finding new paths into the future (related to discoverer skills). For example, we can develop a vocabulary for describing and appreciating music (noticer), we can use language to imagine possible futures, from going on vacation to coming up with ways to eliminate poverty (discoverer), and we can use language to speak our values out loud and encourage ourselves to persist in our goals.

When working with young people, you can describe these three varieties of language processes along these lines:

- *Advisor words are for navigating efficiently.*
- *Noticer words are for connecting with and appreciating the moment.*
- *Discoverer words are for imagining new possibilities.*

Upsides of the Advisor

Sometimes the advisor gets a bad rap, as evidenced by labels like “the inner critic.” Yet it does have many useful functions, so let’s look at those before considering the downsides of the advisor.

The advisor protects us from danger. We don’t want to rely on trial and error experience to learn everything. There are far too many things that can hurt and kill us. As described earlier, words allow us to learn about danger without having to experience it.

The advisor promotes high-speed evolution. Language allows us to build on past learning and make rapid scientific and technological advances. For example, the Wright brothers began experimenting

with flight in 1896. After nearly six years of work, they flew the first powered plane in 1903. Language allowed them to communicate their innovations so successive inventors wouldn't have to repeat their years of labor. Likewise, no one has to reinvent penicillin or the computer.

The advisor promotes fast and efficient functioning. Words help us learn quickly and navigate our world with a high degree of efficiency. For example, while sitting in your living room you can receive exact instructions on how to sail a yacht. You can learn the fundamentals of sailing without ever contacting the water. You probably won't be able to sail well without some experience, but you will have a real advantage over those who must learn entirely by trial and error.

The advisor provides helpful rules. Helpful rules are present at every developmental period and in every human context. Toddlers delight in showing others that they know the rules. Elementary school children learn when it's playtime and when to sit quietly. By the end of elementary school, we know many rules that promote connection and cooperation. We have rules about how to behave in different social contexts and how to respond appropriately when someone says, "How are you?" If you have any doubts about the utility of the advisor, imagine what would happen if everybody suddenly lost their advisor and had no rules to follow. Would you want to be driving on the freeway or be a passenger in a plane? Would you want to be hospitalized?

Downsides of the Advisor

Although there are many upsides to the advisor, it is also responsible for a great deal of human suffering. Here are just a few reasons why this is the case.

The advisor can lead to rigid rule following. Rule following is not always useful; it has a dark side too. Verbal evaluations and rules tend to make us insensitive to the actual situations that exist in the physical world (S. C. Hayes, 1989). For example, Matt's father abuses his authority by belittling Matt and hitting him; therefore, it would be natural for Matt to derive rules like "Adults are not to be trusted." Yet when Matt enters environments where his father isn't present, following this rule may cause him to miss opportunities to be mentored by kind teachers and to develop trusting relationships.

The advisor absorbs others' unhelpful ideas. Once we have an inner voice, we may stop making choices based on our own experience. Instead we often rely on socially transmitted ideas, such as other people's advice and opinions. But other people aren't always right. Sometimes they give us advice that's in their best interest, not ours (for instance, manipulators); sometimes they try to deceive us to gain an advantage (like advertisers); and sometimes their advice is just outdated or doesn't apply to our particular situation (what you might call "human dinosaurs").

The advisor can become decontextualized. Physical environments are typically heterogeneous and changing, so a verbal rule that works at one time in one environment may be entirely useless in another. All too often we forget this and apply the same rules across widely varying contexts. If you travel to other countries, you may experience the sudden irrelevance of many of your cultural rules. In some cultures, honking a car horn at another driver is only done in dangerous situations, and in other cultures it's deemed appropriate to honk at almost every car you pass.

The advisor can distort incoming information. The advisor is like a magician. It can take any idea about any person or thing and transform it into something else. For example, let's say you have a fairly neutral attitude about a new coworker named John. Then you have lunch with a friend who tells you "John is selfish. Don't trust him." The advisor can use these evaluations to transform how you feel about John, leading you to dislike him even though he hasn't done anything to you. And when you observe John doing something innocent, such as getting stationery from the supply closet, your advisor may convince you that he's actually doing something untrustworthy, like stealing. The advisor can also distort the future and past. For example, it can make the future seem more dangerous through worry, and the past seem more damaging through rumination. These transformations can occur independently of any new experiences in the physical world.

Living in Two Worlds

We all live in at least two worlds: the noticer's physical world and the advisor's symbolic world. Consider Matt. In his physical world, he might see a boy chasing him in the distance, smell the exhaust of a car, touch the door handle to run upstairs to his room, and taste the dryness in his mouth from running so far. In this physical world,

things can be touched. His father can hit him, or a fellow student can steal his money.

In Matt's advisor's world, he can be a sports star playing in front of an adoring crowd. Most of us have no trouble distinguishing this kind of daydreaming from the physical world, and Matt knows his daydreams aren't real. Yet he assumes that other symbolic parts of his world are just as real as physical things. For example, Matt's advisor can tell him that his father is abusive because "there's something wrong with me." As a result, Matt can spend his life trying to kill this "wrong" part.

When Matt assumes his advisor's view is true or real, he looks out at the world through this lens and believes that failure is inevitable. His advisor convinces him that everyone sees him as inherently flawed, not just his father.

This biased way of seeing the world can arise for many reasons beyond a challenging childhood. It happens even to those lucky children who have had a nurturing childhood. We are all prone to bias because of our verbal capacities. For example, imagine a one-year-old girl eating a piece of cake. She hasn't acquired the language to judge the cake as bad or her body as "too fat." Imagine the pure joy in her face as she eats it. Now imagine that same girl as a twenty-year-old woman with anorexia, still wanting a piece of cake but feeling guilty, then looking in the mirror and seeing an obese body, rather than the too-skinny body everybody else sees. She's lost in the advisor's world.

So while the symbolic world of the advisor—the world of evaluation and prediction—frees us from the constraints of the physical world, it can also cut us off from exploring that same world. Consider how this plays out with Matt. In an all-too-typical interaction with his father, he's thinking, *Dad is yelling at me now because I can't answer this question from my homework. He thinks I should know it. He's standing over me and yelling, and I'm afraid he's about to hit me. I don't want to cry.*

Then his father says, "Oh, are you going to cry? Are you going to cry like a little girl? You disgust me. Get out of my sight."

Matt thinks, *Why am I so stupid? What's wrong with me? Why can't I do anything right?*

In trying to cope with his situation, Matt tells himself things that make him appear small and pitiful to his father. This might be his only decent response in this helpless situation, so perhaps his advisor

is helpful in this moment. But what happens when Matt engages in the same behavior in different contexts? For example, when Matt feels threatened by bullies at school, his advisor is likely to give him the same rule, telling him that his only option is to appear weak and small. He doesn't think to defend himself. Nor does he consider telling a teacher or other adult, since his advisor warns him that adults can't be trusted.

Unhooking from the Advisor

Imagine that you're living with just your advisor, without the benefit of noticer and discoverer skills. You listen to the advisor's constant stream of words telling you how scary the world is and offering advice that's based on interpretations from the past rather than your current physical reality. Everything the advisor says seems so real. It's almost as if you're hypnotized by the advisor and feel like you have no choice but to listen to it.

Fortunately, the other DNA skills are always available, allowing us to step into noticer space and check out the physical world around us. As we do so, the advisor will come along for the ride and keep evaluating and advising. Then we can notice what the advisor says, but also notice what the world around us offers. Our view will expand, as well as our options for action.

To unhook from the advisor means learning to notice when the advisor says something like "I'm not good enough" and then to shift out of advisor space into noticer or discoverer space. Here's one example of how this may play out in the DNA-V model:

1. We recognize that the advisor may not always be unhelpful.
2. When we suspect the advisor is being unhelpful, we shift into noticer space or discoverer space.
3. In noticer space, we experience thoughts as passing sounds, rather than literal truths. In discoverer space, we try something new, even if our advisor is discouraging us.

Making Good Use of Advisor Skills

Once we learn to unhook from the advisor, we become more sensitive to what works in the physical world. This allows us to adapt to changing environmental demands and also to develop our advisor. For example, experience can teach the advisor helpful rules

of thumb, such as “The advisor can’t always predict the future,” “Emotions aren’t harmful,” “It’s often best to be guided by values rather than impulses,” “Trying new things is necessary for developing skills,” and “Self-improvement is almost always possible.” The key is that these rules aren’t absolute truths; rather, they are tools to be held lightly—used when they’re helpful, and put aside when they aren’t.

In DNA-V, we use specific strategies to train the advisor and help young people develop helpful ways of thinking. The focus of DNA-V training is not to use words to persuade young people to believe helpful rules. Among other problems, this approach reinforces an excessive reliance on words to guide action. For now, we’ll simply say that the key idea is to teach young people to hold their verbal beliefs lightly and regularly check their experience to see if their rules are working.

Basic Training: Getting to Know the Advisor



Now we turn to basic training steps to help young people experience their advisor in action. Often we do just one of the following exercises in a session and then debrief by relating it back to their life. However, these exercises can also be done as a set. In the latter case, it’s important to remain sensitive to the responses of those you’re working with. Seeing the advisor so clearly and completely can be a shock or feel overwhelming.

Using Visual Metaphors to Introduce the Advisor

Visual metaphors can be a useful way to begin conversations about the advisor, noticer, and discoverer. They provide at least two benefits. First, they offer an avenue for young people to talk about and look at their experiences in new ways. Second, visual metaphors involve minimal influence from the adult because they allow young people to provide their own interpretations of the images. In chapters

3, 4, and 5, we provide both male and female visual metaphors for the advisor, noticer, and discoverer. (Downloadable video is also available at <http://www.thrivingadolescent.com>.)



Figure 4. Two visual metaphors for the advisor.

If you use one of the images in figure 4, you might say something like this:

Here's an image. What do you notice about it? (Allow some time for the person to respond. Then, if necessary, prompt that there are two people in the image, one being like a shadow.)

We can use this image as a metaphor for your inner voice. Imagine that your inner voice is a person who follows you around all the time, offering advice. Let's call this person your advisor. The advisor is always talking, judging, evaluating, and predicting. Its job is to help you avoid bad stuff and find good stuff. Sometimes your advisor is negative, saying things like "You can't do it," "Nobody likes you," or "Be careful; there's danger here." Sometimes it is positive, saying things like "You're good at sports," "You can achieve your goals," or "Don't worry; nothing bad could happen." Every human being has an advisor.

Does that make sense? What do you think are some common things people's advisors say? (Allow plenty of time for discussion.)

No one's advisor gives useful advice all the time. And it isn't just a matter of whether the advice is positive or negative. Sometimes negative advice can be useful, and other times not. Think about this

advice: “Be careful; there’s danger here.” Can you think of an example of a time when that would be useful and an example of a time when it wouldn’t? (Spend some time discussing this.)

How about positive advice, like “Don’t worry; nothing bad could happen”? Can you think of times when this would be useful and times when it wouldn’t be? (Again, spend some time discussing this.)

Okay, so sometimes the advisor isn’t very helpful. This means it probably isn’t a good idea to follow its advice all the time. Can you think of a time when you thought you couldn’t do something, but you did it anyway? That’s an example of succeeding because you didn’t follow the advice of your inner voice.

We can become more skillful in working with the advisor. We can learn when to listen to it and when to disregard it. After all, we’re the ones in charge, not our advisors.

Experiment and Normalize

In this section, we’ll outline an experiential approach to introducing the advisor to young people—one that doesn’t involve using visual metaphors. (You can, of course, combine the two.) This approach involves three basic experiments, because the best way to get familiar with the advisor is through experiments where the advisor can be seen in action. The experiments are followed by a discussion aimed at normalizing the advisor.

To introduce experiments, you might say something like this:

Do you know what an experiment is, like the kind of things you do in science class? (Once you have confirmation, continue.) What’s the main thing we do in an experiment? (Allow the person to answer before proceeding.)

What we do in an experiment is try something, with no idea about what will happen. Experiments involve keeping an open mind. So the things we’ll do next, and often in our work together, are like that. They’re experiments. Since I don’t know exactly what will happen for you, your job is to tell me what does happen. It doesn’t matter what happens. There’s no right or wrong. It’s just you telling me so I can know how you experience the world. Okay?

It’s often effective to suggest that the weirder the experiments, the better the information we gain from them. Whatever approach you take, be sure to make it clear that you aren’t trying to outsmart those you’re working with. Then proceed to briefly introduce the advisor and provide an orientation to the DNA-V model.

I'd love to talk to you today about something I call the advisor. It's something we all have in our head. It's a name for the way we talk to ourselves, like our inner voice. If we can learn to hear the advisor, we aren't as likely to be pushed around by it. Would it be okay if we do a few quick experiments so you can experience the advisor?

Having laid this groundwork, you can now proceed through any of the exercises that follow. You need not do all three in one session; choose whichever one might best suit the young person before you.

Advisor Experiment 1: Give the Advisor the Microphone

The first experiment is a three-minute writing exercise that requires pencil and paper and something to keep time.

In this experiment, your job for the next three minutes is to write down everything your mind says. Whatever comes to mind, write it down, even if it seems trivial. It's fine to write the same thing over and over if that's what your mind is saying. For example, you might write, "How much longer? How much longer? It's hot. How much longer?" Your task is to just write for three minutes without stopping.

Don't worry about grammar or punctuation. If your thoughts are fast, you can capture them with just a word; there's no need for complete sentences. Just write whatever shows up. You don't have to share what you write with me afterward if you don't want to, and you can even destroy it if you like. So feel free to write any thoughts that come to mind, no matter what they are.

If, during the three minutes, you notice that the person has stopped writing, encourage him to write anything whatsoever, even just "I'm stuck" or "I forgot what I was thinking about." Once the time is up, look over what the person has written if he's amenable to that. Whether or not you read it, say something along these lines:

What was your experience of that? Did you notice how busy your advisor is? I mean, you're just sitting here with me and all these words and feelings are flowing through you. You may have noticed that your advisor is busy labeling, evaluating, judging, saying positive things, saying negative things, worrying, and on and on. Do you notice how much is chatter, repeated over and over? It never stops, really. Amazing, isn't it?

We encourage you to do the experiment at the same time, writing your own three-minute monologue. That way, the two of you can share what you've both written, if the young person is comfortable doing so. Then you can each talk about the qualities of your advisor.

You'll probably notice a lot of similarities—repetition, worry, boring chatter, and so on. You may both find that your advisor was mostly busy with unimportant things. You'll also notice that one thought seems to be the antecedent to another, and another; this is an example of how we can relate symbolically.

As an antidote to this quality of mind, you might then do a brief breathing exercise to get into noticer space:

When we listen to the advisor and take it at its word, it's like we left the room. We went into the advisor's world. Let's do a quick exercise to bring ourselves back into the room. Just take a few slow, deep breaths and notice the rise and fall of your breath for a few moments. (Demonstrate by doing this yourself.)

Advisor Experiment 2: Going to Extremes

This experiment (inspired by S. C. Hayes, Strosahl, & Wilson, 1999) helps demonstrate how the advisor is always judging us, the world around us, and other people. When you read the sentences, pause for about two seconds after each:

In this experiment, I'm going to say a few sentences. After you hear each sentence, simply think about what I've said and then notice what your advisor says about it. Your job is just to notice what your advisor does. There's no right or wrong here. Just notice what shows up when you listen to what I say. It might be best to close your eyes so that you can concentrate. Ready?

- I am weird. Remember, just notice what the advisor says...
- I am brilliant...
- I am perfect...
- I am broken...
- I am stupid...
- I am ugly...
- I am beautiful...

Afterward, discuss what the person's advisor did with this information. Here are a few questions you can use to guide the discussion:

- *Did the advisor try to evaluate the sentence as right or wrong? (You might mention that the advisor sometimes uses a stronger word, like "bullshit.")*
- *Did the advisor see images and try to make sense of things?*

- *Did the advisor say things about me, like “Why is she saying this?” or about you, like “Am I doing this right?”*

Then conclude by offering a dramatic shift in perspective:

Now here’s the most interesting aspect of this experiment. Do you remember my instructions? I asked you to listen to some sentences I was going to say, and your job was to notice what your advisor did with them. I never once mentioned that they were about you. In fact, they were about me. I was saying, “I am weird,” not you!

Isn’t that interesting? We’re just sitting here and I say some sentences and ask you to notice what happens. Then your advisor goes into overdrive and all this difficult stuff shows up.

Advisor Experiment 3: Is Your Advisor All-Powerful?

This experiment makes use of one of the points emphasized in the script for the visual metaphor, so if you’re using both approaches, you may want to omit this point when discussing the metaphor.

Can you remember a time when you had to do something hard and you weren’t sure you could do it—a time when your advisor was saying you couldn’t do it but you did it anyway?

Elicit an example. Since you’re focusing on some fear the person has overcome, she’s likely to be proud of it. Have her describe the situation (for example, preparing for a test), and then describe associated feelings and thoughts (*You’ll never be able to get a good grade. You can’t do it.*)

So, what would have happened if you’d listened to your advisor? What if you’d let it push you around? (Be sure to get an answer.)

But look at what actually happened. Your advisor was being discouraging, but you did something you cared about anyway. That’s a great example of courage, by the way, and it’s something you can build on.

Now we’ll do a quick experiment to illustrate this point. Ready?

Close your eyes and tell yourself to stand up, and then imagine yourself standing up, without actually standing. Really imagine your body leaving the chair and standing up in front of it.

In this example, your advisor was at work, telling you to stand up as you imagined doing it. Would you agree there’s a difference between your advisor telling you to stand up and the physical reality of standing?

Okay, let's do another quick experiment now. Repeat this sentence: "I can't stand up. I can't stand up." While you say this sentence out loud, really stand up. Physically move your body upright.

Did you notice how you could have discouraging words like "I can't stand up" and still stand?

The thing about the advisor is this: What it says is just advice, and it can be quite separate from what we do in the physical world. We have to decide whether the advice is good or bad, and the best way I know to do that is to connect it to the physical world and what we value. Sometimes the advisor says, "You can't do it," and we give up. Sometimes the advisor says, "You can't do it," and we don't listen—we just keep trying. And sometimes when we keep trying, we succeed.

If appropriate, provide an example from your own life. Then return to the person's example and use it to generalize and illustrate that the advisor is often unhelpful.

Advisor Exercise 1: Normalizing the Advisor

An important gift you can give young people is to let them know that their negative thoughts and feelings are normal. If young people believe they are abnormal or "bad," they're likely to behave in destructive ways. They may seek to escape the "bad" parts of themselves through internalizing strategies such as self-harm, using drugs, distraction, or emotion suppression. Or they may respond with externalizing strategies, such as attacking people they view as responsible for making them feel bad. Because the advisor's content is often negative, we suggest a simple discussion or experiential exercise to help young people understand why that negativity is natural. The salient material in this exercise involves the evolutionary advantage of a negative bias—here conceptualized as an unbroken chain of ancestors or a "survival game." You can use the following image to illustrate the chain of ancestors if you like.



Figure 5. Ancestors chain.

Role Play the Survival Game

This exercise will help you understand why the advisor can be so negative. Let's start with a crazy idea: You being alive is an amazing thing. It's a huge improbability. Think about it: You're the result of a long chain of ancestors who didn't get killed before they could have children. If the chain had been broken at any point, you wouldn't be here. So you have hundreds and hundreds of ancestors, going back thousands of years, who managed to not get killed.

That is amazing, isn't it? What's especially amazing is that humans didn't always live in houses and safe environments. They didn't always have weapons and other tools to protect themselves.

Thousands of years ago, humans lived in a world that was extremely dangerous, and they spent a great deal of time outside. Humans are slow compared to other animals, and they don't have claws or sharp teeth. There were many animals that could kill these ancient humans.

Let's go back in time, say eight thousand years, to a place where humans and hungry lions live together. There, we see four humans sitting in the grasslands where the lions frequently roam. One of these four will survive and become your ancestor. Let's figure out which one.

The first person has an advisor that's extremely positive. So when a tan-colored blob appears in the distance, the advisor says, "Ooh! Look at that beautiful creature. Maybe I'll pet it." This person dies.

The second person has an advisor that's a bit more negative. The person hates the advisor and tells it to shut up—which the advisor does. So when a lion shows up in the distance, the advisor doesn't shout a warning. It's been shut up. The person gets eaten.

The third person has an advisor that can't be shut up, but this advisor isn't always negative. It has a laid-back view, seeing dangers but not being highly tuned in to them, so it misses a few dangers. But how many dangers can it afford to miss? One. Just one and this person gets eaten too.

Finally, there's the fourth person, who has a supersensitive negative advisor. This person hates the advisor too and tells it to shut up. But this advisor isn't laid-back, like the third person's. It sticks with evaluating, judging, and making negative comments. No matter how hard the fourth person tries to quash the advisor, it still yammers. The good news is, when a lion appears in the distance, the advisor

shouts its warning. The fourth person runs away from the lion and survives.

For you to be here, your ancestors had to make zero fatal mistakes before they produced children—zero mistakes across thousands of years. If your life depended on making zero mistakes, would you rather have an advisor that's too negative and sensitive, or one that's laid-back and sometimes makes mistakes?

We've learned some important facts about the advisor from these four scenarios. If the advisor wasn't sensitive to negative things, or if it could be shut up at will, your ancestor would have died, and you never would have been born. The chain would have been broken.

You've inherited the same advisor that helped your ancestors survive. So if you've struggled to turn off your advisor when it's negative and haven't succeeded, this makes you a perfectly normal human being.

And here's the really tricky thing. Your advisor does not just look for problems in the outside world. It looks for problems inside you. Sometimes it searches for ways that you are not good enough, or weak, or unlovable, or broken. Our advisors can be real tough on us.

As mentioned, you can conduct this exercise as a discussion using the preceding script. Or you can act out the script by playing the role of each advisor (positive; negative and able to be shut up; laid-back; and supersensitive, negative, and not able to be shut up). One way to do this is to sit just behind the person you're working with. Tell the person to imagine that she's living in a dangerous place with lots of lions. Then say you're going to role-play different advisors. Start by saying that there's a tan-colored blob in the distance, probably a lion. Then role-play the positive advisor, saying things like "Oh, isn't that interesting! I wonder what that could be. It's probably something fun." Ask the person if she's likely to survive with that kind of advisor.

For the advisor that can be shut up, start by role-playing a danger-detecting advisor, saying things like, "What is that? It could be a lion. I could get killed. Maybe I should run." Then instruct the person to turn around and tell you to shut up. When she does this, stop talking. If need be, help the person see that if the advisor could be shut up, she probably wouldn't survive for long.

Next, role-play the more laid-back advisor, saying things like "What's that tan-colored blob? Is that dangerous? Oh, it probably isn't anything." After this scenario plays out, point out that while a

laid-back advisor would be more pleasant to live with, it would be more prone to lethal mistakes. And in this scenario, the tolerance for mistakes is zero.

Finally, role-play the supersensitive negative advisor that won't shut up. Start as in the second scenario, but this time, when the person says "shut up," just keep talking and pointing out the threat.

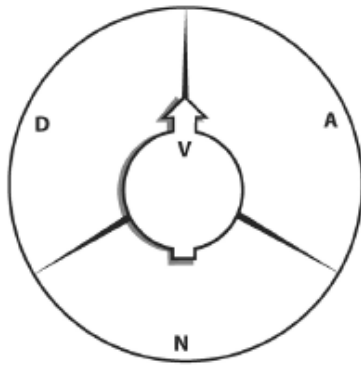
Whether you present this exercise as a discussion or experientially, conclude by generalizing to the young person's life. Talk about how the advisor tends to be cautious, fearful, and on the lookout for mistakes.

Advisor Exercise 2: Watching for the Advisor

Once young people are familiar with the advisor, ask them to simply notice when the advisor shows up. This noticing practice can be done in many ways, but the key task is to get young people looking *at* the advisor content, rather than *through* the content. Here are some simple ways to do that: Write advisor statements on a whiteboard or piece of paper. Ask the young person questions that elicit noticing, such as "What does your advisor say here?" Help the young person notice when the advisor is active, with statements such as, "Wow, your advisor is really busy now." For homework, you can ask them to notice advisor evaluations and predictions in everyday life. For example, they might notice when they are feeling stuck, being really hard on themselves, worrying about the future, or dwelling on the past. The instructions can be tailored to the individual young person.

Now that young people understand that the advisor's talk is just part of the normal process of being alive, they can begin to decide if they need to listen to its advice at any given point in time or whether it might be better to step into noticer space. Chapter 4 offers many avenues to helping young people develop their noticer skills, and as they do so, they can increasingly apply these to the advisor. In the process, they often discover some important ways to use their advisor rather than letting it use them.

Case Conceptualization and Intervention Planning



Now we'll take a look at applying the DNA-V model to case conceptualization, returning to Matt's example. This is the first of several case conceptualizations we'll provide to give you a feel for how the model can be used to conceptualize problems and plan interventions. Note that although figure 6 presents a full case conceptualization, for the purposes of this chapter we'll focus primarily on the advisor, particularly in regard to interventions.

In using this model, it's important to put aside inferences about young people and instead focus on their behaviors—the things we can see them do or hear them say. It's all too easy for practitioners' inferences to be clouded by their own advisor's biases. Note that in the case conceptualizations in this book, it is assumed that the practitioner would have had one or two sessions with the client and gathered a great deal of information.

Current situation and presenting issue

Failing school.

Attention difficulties.

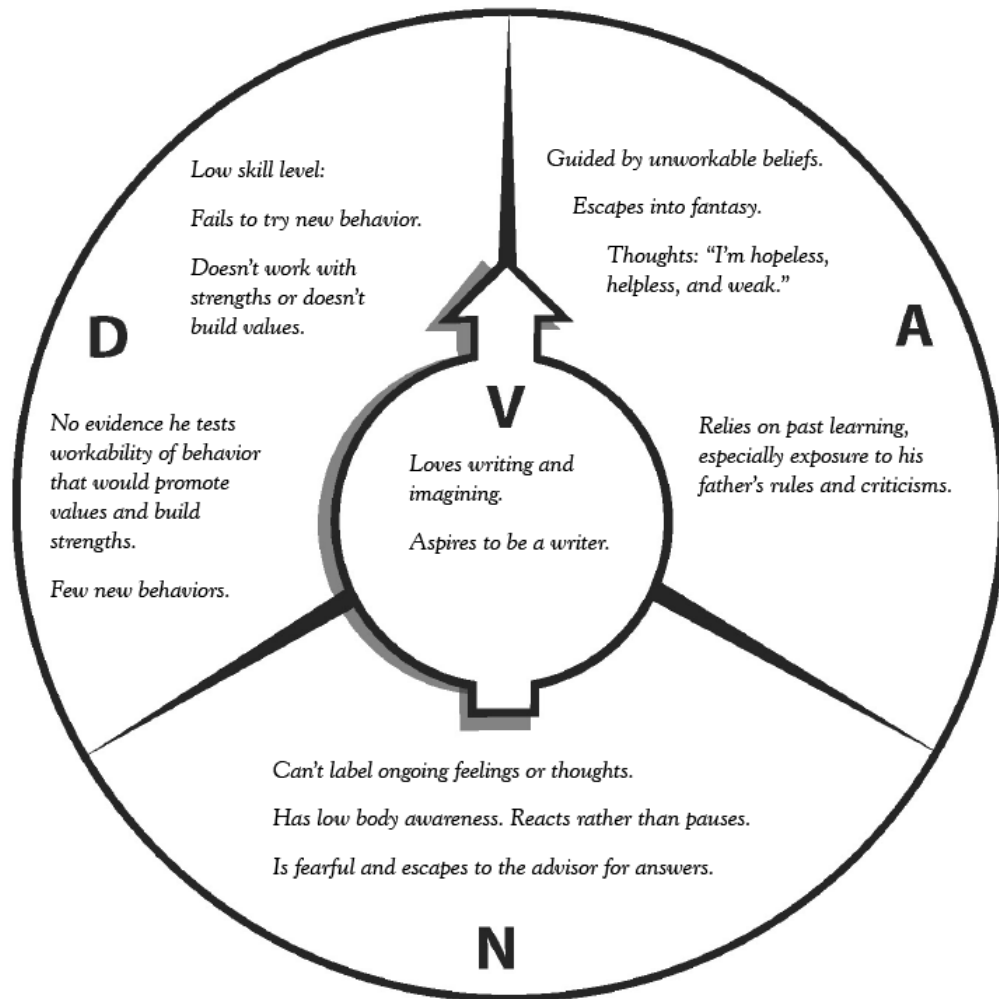
Social and historical environment

Father authoritarian and abusive.

Mother absent.

Insecure attachments.

Few social supports.



Self-view

Tries to prop up self-esteem with fantasy.

Reacts to threats by fantasizing about being great.

No evidence of self-compassion.

Social view

Disconnected from others.

Recognizes the value of others but is poorly skilled in making friends.

Is bullied by peers.

FIGURE 6. Matt's DNA-V case conceptualization.

Matt and His Advisor

To see the role the advisor is playing for young people, we must look at their thoughts and self-talk, and the implications or functions these have in their lives. One way of doing this is to look at what their advisor is saying in three overlapping areas: self-evaluation, talk about others, and talk about the world.

Taking this approach, let's first consider how Matt relates to himself. Matt typically uses his advisor to look for deficiencies in himself: *Why am I so stupid? What's wrong with me? Why can't I do anything right?* The majority of the time he seems to be blaming himself in a way that mirrors what he learned from his harsh, authoritarian father. Next, let's look at how Matt uses his advisor skills to relate to others. The primary way this plays out is that Matt allows his constant negative self-evaluations to color all areas of his life, including his interactions with others. In regard to how his advisor evaluates his relationship to the world at large, it's full of messages that suggest hopelessness. This theme clouds everything he does because he obeys these evaluations of hopelessness as though they were rigid rules—cowering not just from his father and peers, but also from challenges related to his schoolwork, as we'll discuss later in the book.

Matt's Other DNA Skills

Although the topic of this chapter is the advisor, we'll quickly note a few salient points about Matt's skills with other processes in the DNA-V model. In terms of being a noticer, Matt doesn't seem to be aware of his emotions; nor does he seem to accept difficult emotions and allow them to come and go. He doesn't see his feelings as a normal reaction to his circumstances.

Similarly, his discoverer skills and ability to build valued behavior are both weak. Instead of pursuing the things he might build into value or vitality—writing, playing baseball, and finding friends—he escapes into fantasy. He is unable to discover himself, his strengths, and his courage.

Turning now to the sections “Self-View” and “Social View” at the bottom of the case conceptualization worksheet, Matt demonstrates a defensive sense of self-worth. When he feels threatened, he reacts by fantasizing about being great at something. Further discussions with Matt might reveal that he believes the negative things his father and others have told him. It's highly unlikely that he can see himself from a compassionate perspective. At this point, we don't have much evidence about his social views, but the few hints we do have suggest that he is fearful of others and also has trouble empathizing

with them. In regard to both his father and his peers, he makes comparisons indicating that he is weak and they are strong. He seems to be socially disconnected, unable to connect with others or fit in with groups and participate.

In sum, there's little evidence that Matt possesses high levels of any of the DNA skills. He barely notices himself, his feelings, and his social world, and isn't in contact with his ability to discover what the world has to offer. Matt is stuck in the world of his advisor. The physical world is lost to him.

Getting Started with Matt

Once we have an understanding of Matt and his skills within the DNA-V model, we can begin to help him build those skills. One possible first step in helping Matt would be to have him consciously experience his advisor. We suggest starting here because Matt is often caught up in his evaluations, thoughts, and rules. Loosening the advisor's grip will create the wiggle room we need to begin the harder work of teaching him to accept his physical sensations and feelings.

First we want him to experience looking at his advisor rather than through it. For Matt, we would begin with Advisor Exercise 1: Normalizing the Advisor—the one that explores four different advisor responses to an approaching lion. We begin here because Matt sees danger everywhere and is therefore likely to relate to it. This is an example of thinking functionally and choosing exercises to suit the individual. After role-playing that exercise, we would ask Matt to tell us where his own advisor sees danger, then ask him to describe the dangers he sees both at school and at home. We would discuss that while some things are indeed dangerous, like the kids bullying him, others are less dangerous, like forgetting to bring a pen to class. The tricky thing is that Matt's advisor puts him on alert for both types of situations. Therefore, we'll work with him to help him distinguish between when this is helpful and when it isn't.

We wouldn't want to proceed too quickly here because Matt is so tangled in his thoughts. He probably believes that all his thoughts are true and that his mind is always helpful. So we might do just the one exercise in the first session, then ask Matt to go home and simply notice how often his advisor sees danger. We could even ask him to rate the danger on a scale of 1 to 5. For Matt, the crucial first step is to become aware of his advisor and see that detecting danger is normal.

In the next session, we'd ask Matt to describe what he noticed and how often his advisor saw danger. We could have him discuss any differences he sees between modern humans and our ancestors. The point of this would be to help Matt see that we seldom face immediate threats like lions in today's world, and that despite the advisor's opinion, forgetting your pen isn't dangerous.

We would then use the visual metaphors for the advisor (presented in figure 4) and have Matt describe his advisor and what it might look like. We could even ask him to draw or name his advisor. If necessary, we could then use the advisor experiments at the beginning of this chapter's basic training section or Advisor Exercise 2: Watching for the Advisor, which would allow him to see how unhelpful the advisor can be at times.

Finally we can provide guidance on how Matt can begin to unhook from his advisor by seeing the role it plays, and on stepping into noticer space when he feels stuck. Once Matt has loosened the advisor's grip, we can start helping him with noticer and discoverer skills. The DNA-V model is adaptable, and you can start wherever seems most appropriate.

Does DNA-V Map to Diagnoses?

You may wonder where Matt fits in terms of diagnosis or why we haven't discussed diagnostic labels. Case conceptualization in the DNA-V model relies less on diagnostic labels than in many other psychological models. DNA-V is, after all, transdiagnostic and based on the function of behavior in context. This means the focus is on behaviors, the context in which those behaviors occur, and the consequences of the behaviors. (Remember, "context" refers to the changeable stream of events that exert an influence on the behavior of interest, and includes history, time, and interpersonal and intrapersonal factors.) The key is to look at how people's behavior functions for them, something we'll address at length in later chapters. And the aim is to use all of the DNA skills fluidly to adapt to the situation at hand.

Nevertheless, in order to speak to other disciplines, let's look at what sort of traditional diagnosis Matt might receive. His predominant symptoms are anxiety related: he ruminates and is fearful and socially anxious. This is common among young people; about 14 percent of them have experienced an anxiety disorder (Wittchen, Nelson, & Lachner, 1998). Matt also has behavioral problems, including difficulty with attention and an inability to stay on task. This too is common, with about 9 percent of young people

experiencing attention deficit disorder (Froehlich et al., 2007). He also has dissociation symptoms, escaping into fantasy, especially when stressed by interactions with his father. This could be interpreted as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) due to his father's abusive treatment. About 20 percent of young people experience at least one traumatic event, and about 3 percent developed PTSD in their youth (Perkonig, Kessler, Storz, & Wittchen, 2000). Alternatively, this could reflect attachment disorder due to being abandoned by his mother at an early age. The overlap between these diagnoses, as high as 40 percent in prevalence reports (Kessler, Chiu, Demler, & Walters, 2005; Merikangas et al., 2010), shows how difficult it is to give young people a single diagnosis and also points to how important it is to focus instead on the function of behavior for an individual in a specific context.

Thus, in this book—and in the DNA-V model—the focus is on behaviors and contexts. As you read on, you'll learn to help young people develop new behaviors. You'll also gain insight into how you and the young people you work with can influence the contexts in which they live.

The Noticer Helps Us Appreciate and Choose

The last two decades of research have begun to suggest that mindfulness might be one of the most important skills we can teach young people. Mindfulness has been associated with higher levels of intellectual functioning, self-control, well-being, and physical health (Davis & Hayes, 2011). In DNA-V, the noticer encompasses a number of mindfulness skills, including observing inside and outside experience, acting with awareness, identifying and labeling feelings, and nonreactivity to inner experience (Baer, Smith, Hopkins, Krietemeyer, & Toney, 2006).

Who wouldn't want to be more mindful? The difficult issue is how to teach mindfulness. It would be great if we could get young people to do structured meditation, say a daily twenty-minute practice of sitting still and focusing on the breath. But the truth is, many young people (and even adults) won't stick to a routine mindfulness practice. Fortunately, with DNA-V, you can help young people develop noticer skills without requiring them to do structured practice. This chapter provides many approaches to developing noticing skills amidst the ongoing flow of life.

There are two major ways in which noticing is beneficial. First, noticing involves pausing and allowing one's experience to be as it is, without always reacting to it. We can notice anger and not react with aggressive behavior. We can feel anxiety and not react with avoidance. The less we react in old, unhelpful ways, the more freedom we have to choose new responses. The second benefit of noticing is that it improves sensitivity to information from both the environment and the body in the present moment. This allows us to observe our experience more fully and, as a result, respond more appropriately to the demands of any given situation. It also allows us to appreciate the good things that are all around us.

In this chapter, we'll use a case history to depict the all too common lack of noticing skills in young people. Then we'll discuss why young people struggle to notice, and provide exercises to help them develop basic skills that can turn this situation around. We also have

free downloadable audio recordings of some of the exercises in this chapter at <http://www.thrivingadolescent.com>.

Bree's Story

"Don't leave your bag in the hall," Bree's mom yells. Then, as Bree walks past her mom without saying a word, her mom says, "Don't you ignore me." Bree rushes into her room and slams the door. "Why are you so negative all the time?" her mom yells through the door. "This is the best time of your life. Just wait until you grow up. It's not going to get any easier."

I can't stand it anymore, Bree thinks. Nobody gets me. Nobody likes me.

Bree sits on her bed with her precious possessions surrounding her: her journal on her desk, her art posters, and her yellow laptop and cell phone. Other things are hidden behind the secret door cut into the ceiling of her closet: a bottle of wine, some pot, and her cutting implements.

Bree thinks about how stupid her parents are for not knowing that she steals their wine. Then she thinks over her day: *I've been going to the same stupid school for four years, and today was the worst day ever. It was so boring I felt like cutting myself just to block out the boredom. My friends talked about the usual stuff, boys and moronic boy bands. My teachers talked in boring voices about boring stuff. Mr. Woods made us copy paragraph after paragraph from his PowerPoint slides. Ms. Campbell showed a fifty-minute video that was at least thirty years old. Mr. Wilson told me to grow up because I was drawing instead of paying attention to his stupid class. I can't stand it anymore. None of them understand me. None of them care about what I want, what I feel, and what I think.*

Then Bree picks up her notebook and starts writing:

My pain is alive. My soul aches. Nothing helps. I have nowhere to go. I've tried everything to control my feelings, but nothing works. If I lose control, I might actually go too far. That scares me and makes my heart hurt too. So I'm going to keep cutting, deeper and deeper. I can't stand it. I don't intend to kill myself...at least I don't think I do.

Bree throws her journal across the room. Then, almost automatically, she extracts the blade from her secret place, sits down on her bed, and slowly cuts her upper thigh. The cutting feels otherworldly, like someone else is doing it. She watches as the blood runs down her

leg. She had felt like screaming at her mom just a few seconds ago, but now she feels nothing.

Reflecting on Bree

Volatile and self-harming, Bree is the kind of client who scares many practitioners. It's hard to know whether she's going to kill herself or hurt someone else. Initially, it can be difficult to see what's motivating her to such extreme behavior. She has no history of abuse. In fact, from the outside, her family looks supportive, if perhaps a bit permissive and invalidating of feelings. For example, sometimes her mother suggests that Bree shouldn't be feeling negative, with such comments as, "This is the best time of your life." But overall, nothing in Bree's family situation seems sufficient to explain her self-harm and rage. This could leave us puzzled and unsure how to help her.

Take a moment to consider how you'd respond to Bree:

- What shows up for you when you're working with or interacting with a young person like Bree? Consider your feelings, thoughts, doubts, and hopes.
- How would you conceptualize Bree's problem?
- If you were Bree's counselor, how would you ideally like to act toward her? Think of your values.
- How might you seek to help Bree?

Bree's Story Is All Too Common

Prevalence rates for deliberate self-harm in young people aged fifteen to nineteen years old are around 17 percent for females and 12 percent for males. However, this is an underestimate, given that self-harm tends to be unreported or undetected (Martin, Swannell, Hazell, Harrison, & Taylor, 2010). Self-harm is often a behavioral coping strategy rather than an attempt at suicide (explaining why it's also termed "nonsuicidal self-injury").

Whether the presentation is self-injury or suicidality, we practitioners often feel overwhelmed. We may feel the need to first figure out what the underlying cause is before we intervene, to come up with a complex intervention to match the extremity of the behavior, or to refer these people to someone else. Although it may feel like we have to do something dramatic to get control of the situation, this isn't necessarily the case. Sometimes simple behavior changes are helpful. The DNA-V model offers a place to begin that

goes to the heart of the issue for many young people: difficulty with understanding their physical signals, identifying their emotions, and regulating their behavior. Developing noticer skills is needed for remedying these problems—and that is the focus of this chapter.

We Begin as Noticers

Infants enter the world as noticers, experiencing the world as physical sensations. When babies feel scared, angry, or tired, they simply feel scared, angry, or tired. They don't interpret their feelings as good or bad; they just experience them as sensations that arise, often as a result of interactions with the world. This is an essential skill for infants' survival, allowing them to detect their sensations and communicate their needs to their parents through tears or smiles.

However, the next few years bring dramatic changes as children learn to interpret sensations. Between twelve and twenty-eight months of age, they often hear their parents say such things as "You're tired" or "You're sad." Gradually children take over and say such things themselves. By the preschool years (ages three to five), most children have learned simple labels for their responses to the physical world, can convey those responses, and can link them to the events that elicit emotions. In other words, they are no longer simply noticing the world through just physical experience. They're starting to talk about it with their other people and, eventually, to talk to themselves about it too. Each interaction influences the development of their verbal awareness of feelings in themselves and others, and over the course of early childhood they become increasingly sophisticated in their interpretations.

The advisor really gets busy in middle childhood (ages five to ten), when many children learn to evaluate their emotions as either good or bad. Their parents, teachers, peers, and social world are constantly modeling how to do this. For example, when a mom says, "Oh, you're sad. Here, have a cookie," a child learns that "sad" is a feeling that ought to be escaped with sugary treats. Or when a dad says, "Good girls don't get angry," his daughter learns that feeling angry must make her bad in some way. Due to this influence, many children stop simply noticing feelings as they come and go. Instead, they evaluate their feelings using their advisor: angry is bad, happy is good, and sad is terrible. And many children become fearful of feeling.

The advisor often continues to become increasingly dominant over time. In adolescence, it starts stepping in and providing rules around emotions, such as “I shouldn’t feel fear when I take on a challenge” or “If I’m sad, there’s something wrong with me.” Teens also learn to evaluate themselves for having these emotions: “I’m bad because I get angry.” Eventually, they even develop feelings about their feelings, or meta-emotions. For example, they may feel embarrassed about being sad or ashamed about feeling anger. And because it’s possible to have multiple conflicting emotions simultaneously, it can get very complicated; for example, they can love and hate their parents at essentially the same time.

Why Noticing Disappears

Adolescence is a deeply emotional time, one that’s often more memorable than any other stage of life (Siegel, 2014). Young people get their first taste of independence and the big world beyond home. They experience exhilarating highs: love, sex, music, parties, and deep friendships. They also experience crushing lows: heartbreaks, a best friend’s betrayal, feeling isolated in the schoolyard, and awkward sexual encounters. To manage these intense experiences, they turn to the advisor, trying to use words to find solutions for their emotions and attempting to figure out how to make bad feelings and painful experiences go away.

In this way, emotions become something to control, stomp out, or manage. Bree’s advisor tells her that her feelings are unbearable and that she should cut herself to feel better. Matt’s advisor tells him that there’s nothing he can currently do to improve his life, so his only choice is to escape into fantasy. Listening to this kind of advice has two devastating results: young people cut themselves off from the world, and they cut themselves off from the wisdom of their emotional reactions.

By the time young people like Bree reach a counselor, their first request is often “Make this feeling stop!” Unfortunately, we can’t give them what they’re asking for. We can’t make the emotions stop. Indeed, trying to make feelings stop is part of the problem, not the solution.

Think of all the destructive strategies that, at their heart, are attempts to avoid or quash feelings: not just cutting and self-harm, but using substances, surfing the Internet obsessively, using TV as a distraction, avoiding social situations, worrying, overeating,

undereating, shutting down, giving up, dissociating, denying, procrastinating, bullying others to feel big, and on and on. None of these strategies tend to help people to live a valued life, and yet both adults and young people use them over and over again.

Although we can't give young people what they want—the ability to get rid of or control emotions—we can give them what they need. We can help them relearn how to experience the world physically and loosen the advisor's rigid rules about feelings. We can help them rediscover that emotions are messages from the environment that they can experience in an open, nonjudgmental way. Once they learn to step back from feelings and simply notice them, their emotions will no longer seem to be toxic or barriers to valued action. Young people can then cease fighting their feelings and redirect their energy to the challenging task of living a fun, meaningful, and productive life.

Rediscovering the Wisdom of Our Feelings

Reconnecting with noticing skills is a way to reclaim our ability to experience the world as it is, not as the advisor says it is. These skills help us shift out of advisor space and connect with our physical experience, allowing us to pause mindfully, label the physical sensations in our bodies, and curiously allow judgment and evaluation without getting hooked into them.

Stepping out of advisor space and into the world of physical sensations loosens the advisor's destructive attempts to quash feelings. Furthermore, it allows us to return to the center of our existence—the present moment—where we are free to flexibly shift among all of our DNA skills. For this reason, noticing is central to the DNA-V model.

Our approach to strengthening noticer skills involves three steps:

Step 1. Normalize

- Being aware that all feelings are normal
- Being aware that no feeling need be controlled, eradicated, changed, or down-regulated
- Being aware that all feelings pass, often quite quickly

Step 2. Practice AND

- Begin with an exercise we sum up with the acronym AND (DNA backward)
 - A = Aware: being aware of physical sensations in the body
 - N = Name: naming the physical sensations in the body
 - D = Describe: describing these inner experiences as feeling states, or emotions

Step 3. Allow

- Allowing feelings and whatever is there in the moment
- Allowing judgments about feelings and not reacting to them
- Extend “notice and allow” skills with daily mindfulness practices

These steps are easily remembered in the phrase “normalize AND allow.” Practice in noticing skills builds from these three simple steps to extend into mindfulness exercises. The following sections offer an in-depth discussion of the process. Then, in the basic training section later in the chapter, we explain how to provide instruction in each step.

Step 1. Normalize

Normalizing involves learning what it means to be human. We don’t feel with our minds; we feel with our bodies. Further, we are destined to feel all emotions, not just the happy ones. As obvious as this statement is, it is often misunderstood because our society shapes us to view feelings cognitively, rather than as physical sensations. We often buy into the advisor’s interpretations—for example, *That tense and doubtful feeling means I can’t do it*. Other times we try to have only positive emotions, or we find all emotions to be overwhelming and seek a way to eradicate them.

Let’s take a step back from this laden, complex attitude toward emotions and try to simplify. To do so, consider the Latin root of “emotion,” *e-movére*, which means “to move.” This speaks to the essence of emotions: a message comes in from the physical world, and the body responds with physical sensations that say, “Get ready! Something is going on. Do something!” (Or “Stop doing what you’re doing and listen.”) Emotions have physical power, exerting deep influences on the body. This gives rise to common descriptors like butterflies in the stomach, pressure on the chest, sweaty palms, or tension in the shoulders. These are all manifestations of emotions.

A Fairy-Tale Wish

Have you ever wished you could be in charge of your feelings? In this thought experiment, we'll grant that wish. You can try this with young people too. They're often surprised to think about their feelings in this way.

For a moment, just pretend that we've touched you on the shoulder with a magic wand and you no longer have any difficult feelings: You never have to experience sadness again. Despair and frustration are banished. Anger will never sneak up on you. All you will have is joy, happiness, and love. Take some time to imagine this.

Now consider what will happen when someone you love dies. Will you miss your loved one if you can't be sad at this loss? Will you honor the person's memory? Will you let others know that you need their support?

Now think of some sort of work you value doing. What will happen if you fall behind in this work? Will happiness be enough to let you know you need to get moving?

What about if a young person you care about is abused? Will you be less motivated to help if you don't feel angry about the situation?

Can you see what the problem is? If we lose our "negative" emotions, we lose our humanity.

Western Society Makes Feelings into an Enemy

Our society teaches us that reason can conquer everything we don't like. This stance makes sense, in a way. By applying reason, we've cured diseases, made remarkable advances in agriculture, and devised ever-better structures to shield us from the weather. We've gotten rid of so many difficult aspects of our outside world that it's only natural that we turn our powerful reasoning to solving the "problems" of the inside world. And we can identify many things in the inside world that we don't like and want to get rid of. Thus, we set about controlling our anxiety, thinking positively, not feeling insecure, and trying to prevent feelings of sadness, anger, regret, and despair. This leads to a culture-wide message that painful feelings are something we can and should control.

Further, we're taught that emotions cause us to act in certain ways. For example, if a child hits someone, we usually ask, "Why did you do that?" And we insist on an answer. Children might be confused by this question at first, but eventually they learn that a reason must be stated, and then they're likely to answer, "Because I was angry." On the surface, this sounds like a good reason. Yet if we accept it, we've reinforced the idea that emotions cause actions, rather than

actions being chosen. This emotions-as-causes reasoning can lead to a long string of inferences:

- *I hit because I was angry.*
- *If I'm not angry, I won't hit.*
- *If I can stop myself from feeling angry, I won't hit.*
- *Anger is bad because it makes me do bad things.*
- *If I feel anger, I have a problem. There's something wrong with me.*

Rarely do we hear the message that all feelings are okay. Imagine if Bree understood that her feelings aren't the enemy—that her feelings “just are.” Do you think it would change her behavior? Unfortunately, young people like Bree often can't identify their embodied emotions. Many are afraid of their body's sensations. Some appear shut off from the neck down. For example, Bree is poor at noticing physical sensations of anger and naming them as such. Instead, she expresses her feelings in terms of her evaluations: sadness becomes *I hate myself*, and anger becomes *I can't stand my mom*. However, these words don't help Bree manage her emotions or own her physical signals, so ultimately she cuts herself as a coping strategy.

Emotions Are an Essential Source of Information

Sometimes emotions are seen as a sign of weakness and irrationality, but this could hardly be further from the truth. They are essential to being rational (Ciarrochi, Chan, & Bajgar, 2001; Ciarrochi, Chan, & Caputi, 2000; Ciarrochi, Forgas, & Mayer, 2001). They're a kind of perception, a way of seeing how events in the world relate to our values, needs, and desires. For example, sadness results when something undesirable has happened, and fear results when something undesirable might happen (Ortony & Clore, 1990). Anger is a common response when we believe a person has intentionally wronged us.

Positively valenced emotions, such as joy, contentment, interest, and love, often occur in response to cues in the environment that signal safety and reinforcement, and they tend to broaden our repertoire of behaviors (Fredrickson, 2001). For instance, joy is associated with the urge to play and try new things. Animal research indicates that playfulness is a kind of training ground, allowing animals to safely practice chasing, fighting, and testing their limits. Positive social emotions are associated with the urge to play and explore with

others, which promotes building friendships and developing social resources.

So-called negative emotions, such as fear and anger, initially occur in response to cues in the environment that signal danger. Negative emotions tend to narrow our repertoire of behaviors and prepare us for fighting or avoiding. That's reasonable, as long as the cues are physical in nature. However, our verbal advisor makes the interpretation of our emotions much more complicated. For example, sometimes we may experience fear apparently for no good reason, as in the case of panic disorder, in which we think we will die from the sensations we feel. Then we can even experience secondary emotions, such as fear of fear.

Noticer skills involve understanding that, despite emotions sometimes not being wanted, we can't do without them; they're an essential source of information. One particularly striking study demonstrates this (Bechara, 2004). People with prefrontal brain injuries and a control group were given a gambling task that involved choosing one of four decks of cards. Some of the decks gave small rewards and no major losses ("good" decks). Other decks yielded slightly bigger rewards but occasionally led to a large loss ("bad" decks). The control group initially chose from the bad decks, but after a number of trials their emotional responses started to provide them with information. When they reached for a bad deck, they experienced anxiety that prompted them to shift to a good deck; as a result, they ended up with more money than they'd started with. In contrast, those with prefrontal brain injuries never developed an anxiety response to the bad decks. Over time, they lost more and more money. They retained their intellectual ability, but because they didn't have their anxiety to guide them, they engaged in unhelpful risk taking.

In the general population, people differ substantially in their ability to notice and label emotions, and those weaker at this skill are at a decided disadvantage. Young people who struggle to identify their feelings tend to develop emotional problems and poor social networks (Ciarrochi, Heaven, & Supavadeeprasit, 2008). Adults who struggle to identify their feelings are much more likely to turn to substance abuse to cope with emotions (Lindsay & Ciarrochi, 2009) and are more likely to experience asthma, hypertension, chronic pain, and gastrointestinal disorders (Lumley et al., 2005). As if that weren't bad enough, limited skills in emotion identification are associated with death due to increased risk of cardiovascular disease, accidents, injury, and violence (Kauhanen, Kaplan, Cohen, Julkunen,

& Salonen, 1996; Tolmunen, Lehto, Heliste, Kurl, & Kauhanen, 2010). In summary, identifying emotions appears to be essential to the ability to cope with them and the events that elicit them.

Step 2. Practice AND

After normalizing feelings, the DNA-V model teaches young people a key emotion awareness exercise that we call AND (easy for them to remember as DNA backward). Then we extend this into basic mindfulness exercises.

The AND exercise involves practicing curious awareness of physical signals and then, instead of reacting to them automatically, connecting to the body, naming sensations in the moment, and allowing the feelings to be. In practice, it can be as simple as the steps that comprise AND. We encourage you to try this practice now:

- **Aware:** Become aware of your sensations. Scan your body and notice whatever physical sensations are there, whether in your stomach, chest, head, shoulders, or hands.
- **Name:** Put names and labels on your sensations. Use any name that comes to mind: “tight,” “churned up,” “calm,” “bursting,” “tingly”—whatever comes up for you.
- **Describe:** Now try to describe the sensations as an emotion with a feeling label: angry, happy, sad, burned-out, and so on. Then take a few slow breaths if needed.

The AND skill can be done in a different order depending on what’s most useful. For example, if someone you’re working with quickly provides a clear emotion word, like angry, you can transform the practice into DAN:

- **Describe:** “The emotion I’m feeling is anger.”
- **Aware:** Scan your body and notice the physical sensations.
- **Name:** Put words to the sensations that make up the anger, such as “tightness in my chest.”

However, we advocate using the sequence A, N, D in most cases. This is a way of loosening the advisor’s evaluations and returning to physical sensations in the body, rather than getting caught up in words, thoughts, and interpretations. It takes some practice to be able to use the AND skill. If you practice it a few times yourself, you’ll be in a better position to help others learn how to do it.

It's common for young people to mislabel emotions. For example, a young man might say that he's angry, yet the sensations he's aware of are heaviness or sluggishness, which we might more commonly think of as sadness or despair. Sometimes young people may be describing a secondary emotion, such as anger about being sad. At other times, the problem is that they have limited skills in associating emotions with physical sensations, rather than cognitions. If this happens, don't worry about getting the label "right"; instead, help the person learn to discriminate between sensations and verbal labels for emotions. For example, you might gently say, "When you're angry, you feel heavy in your body. That's okay, but a lot of people might use the label 'sadness' when they're feeling heavy, and 'anger' for when they're feeling charged up. Can you describe how you feel anger and how you feel sadness?" Over time, the goal is to help young people learn to discriminate between physical sensations and experience those sensations without reacting immediately.

Let's rewind and see how we might help Bree use AND during interactions with her mom. First, we'd ask her to quickly scan her body: "Imagine that your awareness is like one of those airport scanners, sending a beam from your head to your toes. See what sensations you can become aware of." Then we'd have her name the sensations and describe the emotion. She might say, "My chest is tight and hard. I'm feeling frustrated"; "My body is going to explode. I feel angry"; or "I notice heaviness in my belly now. Maybe I'm sad." Bree doesn't have to be "correct" in how she describes her emotions. She just has to become aware of her physical body and use any words that come to mind to express the sensations and emotions she's experiencing. This skill, along with normalizing emotions, can help her open up to her emotions and see the sensations in her body as passing messages.

Step 3. Allow

Once you've established that negative emotions are normal (step 1) and helped those you work with slow down and practice AND (step 2), you're in a good position to help young people understand the benefits of allowing their feelings. There are two major reasons to allow feelings. First, research suggests that avoidance—the flip side of allowing—doesn't work and often makes things worse (S. C. Hayes, Wilson, Gifford, Follette, & Strosahl, 1996). For example, PTSD is characterized in part by attempts to prevent traumatic memories from arising; social anxiety involves efforts to avoid negative social evaluations; and addiction often arises from using

substances in an attempt to escape feelings of disappointment and shame (S. C. Hayes et al., 1996). Similarly, cravings are increased by attempts to suppress them (Hooper, Sandoz, Ashton, Clarke, & McHugh, 2012). And in the general population, attempts to suppress negative emotions are associated with an increase in negative emotions (Ciarrochi, Kashdan, Leeson, Heaven, & Jordan, 2011; Williams, Ciarrochi, & Deane, 2010). The way to escape the destructive control agenda is to learn to allow emotions.

The second benefit of allowing is that it greatly expands people's ability to respond and act in valued ways. We can only seek to succeed if we're willing to allow fear of failure. We can only build positive relationships if we're willing to allow feelings of vulnerability. Positive growth occurs when we allow ourselves to have the anxiety that comes from stepping into the unknown.

The Willingness Question

The alternative to control is choosing to allow, or to be willing. It can be expressed as a simple question, which we call the willingness question:

- Am I willing to allow _____ [internal states] in order to _____ [do a valued activity]?

If your answer is yes, notice feelings and allow them to come and go as you do the activity. Don't fight them.

If your answer is no, consider engaging in a different valued activity.

The primary purpose of the willingness question is to help people engage in valued behavior no matter what they're feeling. However, willingness can also have some indirect benefits. First, willingness gives people choice, and this can make experiencing negative emotions less aversive (Bown, Read, & Summers, 2003; Smith, Jostmann, Galinsky, & van Dijk, 2008). For example, both rats and humans appear to experience electric shocks as less aversive when they have some control over when the shock occurs (Gliner, 1972). Second, willingness connects negative emotions to valued actions. Research suggests that people experience a difficult situation as less aversive if they can ascribe meaning to it (Coutu et al., 2010). For example, one study compared soldiers and civilians who had similar injuries (Beecher, 1956). The civilians reported much more pain than the soldiers. One explanation for this was that the soldiers' injuries were meaningful; among other things, an injury was a ticket home and out of the war. In contrast, the civilians weren't likely to

experience their injuries as meaningful in any way. The third beneficial effect is that noticing and willingness allows us to see feelings as they are—as passing events rather than as fixed things that are unrelenting, overwhelming, and damaging. Research suggests that if people expect something to be damaging, they experience it as more painful than when they don't expect it to be damaging (Moseley & Arntz, 2007).

Willingness Metaphors

Willingness can be tricky to teach, especially in Western cultures, where people learn to fight their feelings and have almost no training in allowing them to be just another experience. As discussed earlier, we often receive messages suggesting that painful emotions should be avoided, for example, that it's bad to feel insecure, that sadness is terrible, that boys don't cry, or that girls don't get angry. The control message is so pervasive that most people don't even realize there's an alternative.

Basic training in DNA skills involves teaching young people to discriminate between avoiding and allowing. We don't have to explain which is generally more adaptive; we just have to help them notice the difference. Then they can discover what does and doesn't work.

An excellent way to teach people what it means to allow feelings is through metaphors. Good metaphors are images or stories that help people look at their experience in a new way. The ACT literature includes many metaphors that are easily adapted for young people. If you have an understanding of the functions of metaphors, you'll be able to adapt them flexibly. Eventually, you're likely to feel confident enough that you can create your own metaphors. Shortly, we'll outline the bare bones of three metaphors that are useful for helping people allow their feelings.

Metaphor, as used in ACT, is an attempt to map a behavioral pattern (the target) onto another pattern (the base) in order to intuitively understand our behavior (S. C. Hayes et al., 2001). It's usually best if the base is something physical and easily understood. Consider the three examples that follow. In each of these examples, the target and the base share similar properties, but the base functions to allow people to experience the target in a new way. We'll further develop the first two metaphors in this chapter. For a detailed presentation of the third, see *Get Out of Your Mind and Into Your Life for Teens* (Ciarrochi, Hayes, & Bailey, 2012).

Target: Struggling against feelings and wanting to hide them from oneself and others

Is like

Base: Trying to keep a beach ball submerged underwater

Drawing out the metaphor: Struggling against water pressure takes effort and is ultimately futile. When you let go of the beach ball, it explodes into the air.

Target: Allowing feelings to come and go

Is like

Base: Seaweed swaying in the waves.

Drawing out the metaphor: Waves come and go, and seaweed sways with their motion. Seaweed doesn't fight the ocean, it flows with it.

Target: Fighting your own feelings

Is like

Base: Having a tug-of-war with a monster

Drawing out the metaphor: Feelings are the enemy, like a monster, but fighting them is like being in a tug-of-war against yourself. It's impossible to win, and the costs of fighting are high.

You can introduce metaphors to young people by simply describing them, or with pictures or videos. The following script outlines how you can use the beach ball metaphor to teach young people to allow their feelings rather than trying to suppress them:

Imagine you're swimming in the ocean with some friends. You have a beach ball with you, but you don't want your friends to see it, so you try to keep it hidden by holding it beneath the surface with your hands. Despite your best efforts, your friends can see that you're holding something down. After a few minutes, your hands tire and suddenly the beach ball slips from your grasp and shoots high into the air. Now everyone can see it, and it attracts their attention. You quickly grab it and try to hide it again, but now everyone is asking you questions: "Why are you hiding that ball from us?"

Even when nobody is around, you sometimes try to push it down and hide it from yourself. You don't even want your own self to see the beach ball.

The problem is, holding the ball underwater is exhausting—and ultimately impossible. It's always shooting up out of the water and

creating a spectacle, and then you have to look at it. Plus, you don't get to swim or surf because you're constantly working on holding the ball underwater.

Can you think of any alternatives to holding the ball underwater?

Try to elicit an answer like "letting the ball rise to the surface" or "giving up holding it," dropping some hints if need be. Then continue to draw out the metaphor:

Let's say you decide to try that alternative. You let the ball float around nearby. Sometimes your friends can see it, and they might even give it a nudge, but most of the time they don't notice it because they're busy with their own things. You also discover that when you let the ball float on its own, you can engage with your friends. It doesn't take much effort just to let it be there. But if you try to hide it, that takes a lot of effort, and when you get tired it shoots up and creates a big spectacle, attracting a lot of attention.

Imagine for a moment that your feelings are like this beach ball. What do you notice?

After allowing the young person to respond, then discuss the implications:

Our emotions are a bit like the beach ball. When we try to push them down, we can succeed for a while, but it takes a lot of effort, and sometimes we get too tired and can't do it any longer. Then we explode, and everyone seems to notice.

Accepting our emotions is like letting the ball float up on the surface of the ocean, rising and falling with the waves. Anyone can see it. Sometimes it floats up close, and other times it floats farther away. What would it be like to allow your feelings to float around without struggling with them or trying to control them?

The important aspect of using metaphors is to have those you're working with experience the metaphor and then relate it back to their behavior. In this case, the target behavior is allowing feelings or noticing the struggle with them. Therefore, we chose a metaphor that highlights the benefits of allowing, including that it's easier than struggling. The metaphor speaks to the costs of the struggle and the advantages of giving up the fight.

It's important to use metaphors flexibly and playfully and not get too caught up in their literal meaning. For example, in the beach ball metaphor, a young person might make the valid point that she shouldn't display certain emotions to certain people, such as

displaying disappointment at receiving an undesirable gift from a loved one. In such cases, validate the person for making a good point. Then explore the possibility of allowing the disappointment internally without showing it externally, perhaps saying something like “It’s totally normal to feel disappointment in that situation. Imagine how hard it would be to try not to feel disappointment. That would be like trying to push the beach ball under the water. But do you think there’s a way to accept your disappointment and allow it to occur while still smiling and being gracious about the gift?”

Building Noticer Practice into Each Day

Once young people have begun to grasp the three basic steps to being a noticer (notice AND allow), you can help them build their skills by introducing mindfulness exercises. Daily practice at being a noticer can be as informal as asking them what they notice in any given moment during your time together, or as formal as mindfulness meditation practice.

We’ve found that small, informal mindfulness practices work best for young people. The key is to present mindfulness as something to practice during the course of everyday life, as a way of building their “noticing muscles.” Then, when they encounter difficult situations or experience strong emotions, they’ll find it easier or more familiar to shift into noticer space and create a mindful pause. This will help them steer clear of simply reacting to emotions.

Here are some everyday activities that offer a good opportunity to practice and build mindfulness. (Supporting scripts and free guided audio for young people are available at <http://www.thrivingadolescent.com>).

- Breathing (described in full in Mindfulness Exercise: Balloon Breathing, later in this chapter)
- Eating
- Walking
- Listening to sounds
- Stretching
- Moving
- Yoga
- Observing the outside world
- Listening to music
- Playing
- Having a conversation

Basic Training: Building Noticer Skills



To develop noticer skills, you'll begin by introducing the concept. Then you can provide instruction in the three basic skills: normalize emotions, practice AND, and allow.

Using Visual Metaphors to Introduce the Noticer

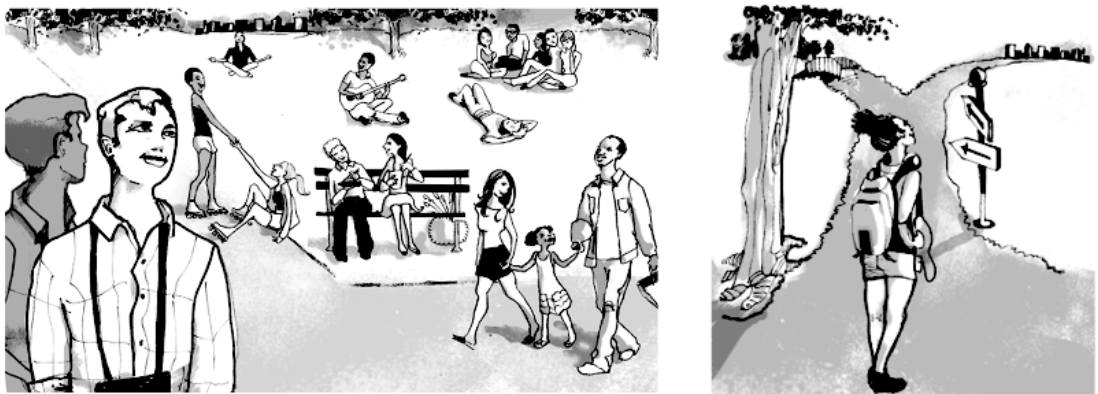


FIGURE 7. Two visual metaphors for the noticer.

The images in figure 7 can be useful as visual metaphors for the noticer and its beneficial functions. The images emphasize the noticer's ability to help us connect with positive things in the present moment and to recognize important choice points. Determine which of the images is most appropriate for a given individual, then present the image you've chosen and ask questions along these lines:

- *Here's an image. What do you notice about it?*
- *What do you think this young person is doing? (Elicit looking around.) What benefits might they get from being aware?*
- *What happens when you don't notice? For example, what happens if you don't notice when you're angry? (Use whatever emotion is appropriate.)*
- *Noticing involves pausing and taking a look around. How does this increase your ability to choose? (Answers may include*

“you notice more than one path” or “you don’t have to react to thoughts and feelings and this gives you another choice”).)

Once you’ve introduced the noticer, whether through visual metaphor or a didactic discussion, you can proceed with teaching the three-step process discussed in this chapter: normalize, practice AND, and allow.

Step 1. Normalize

The goal of this step is to help young people recognize that their emotional experiences are normal and a result of their situation. There are three primary messages to convey: You aren’t weird. Our rules about emotions aren’t always helpful. And you are not a problem to be fixed.

You Aren’t Weird

First, emphasize to young people that they aren’t unusual or weird for having fear, insecurity, anger, or other emotions—especially difficult emotions. Some hard data can help you establish that they aren’t alone in having these experiences. For example, you can share that one in four young people have difficulty with their emotions (McGorry, Purcell, Goldstone, & Amminger, 2011). You might explain this as follows:

How many kids are in your class? (For this example, we’ll assume that there are twenty-four.) You may not have heard this, but this year, about one in four young people will be struggling with some tough stuff in life. This means that one in four of us are struggling with anxiety, sadness, insecurity, or any of a number of strong emotions.

That one-in-four statistic applies to adults as well as young people. Are you surprised that adults struggle too? It’s true. We adults haven’t figured out how to stop negative feelings from occurring.

Given that there are twenty-four kids in your class, that means six of them are probably going to struggle in some way this year. If you know twenty teachers, that means it’s likely that five of them are struggling with something. You may not even know which ones they are. Most people are pretty good at hiding their feelings.

It’s normal for us humans to struggle. And even those of us who aren’t struggling right now probably will in the future. Life throws a lot of unpleasant surprises at us.

So struggling with feelings or needing help doesn't make you weird or stupid. It makes you human. Society has let you and other people down by teaching you that negative emotions are a problem to be fixed.

If appropriate, you might note ways that you struggle too, perhaps saying something like, "I sometimes feel insecure too." The aim of this approach is to help young people see that no one has it all figured out.

The Advisor's Rules About Emotions Aren't Always Helpful

A second key facet of normalizing emotions is to help young people see that their advisor has created a bunch of rules about emotions. Everyone learns these rules by hearing hundreds of statements about emotions. These rules are acquired throughout life, sometimes just being overheard or picked up by accident. The problem is that these rules aren't tested to see whether they build value. Also, they tend to emphasize avoiding emotions. Here are some examples:

- *It isn't okay to feel this* (use a relevant example, like anger or sadness).
- *I can't cope with this feeling.*
- *It's bad to feel like this.*

At this stage, you might simply ask young people to experiment with some new, more flexible rules about emotions. The key is that they should test any rule for workability and use it only when it meets the goal of broadening their life. Here are some more workable rules:

- It's okay to feel.
- Feelings just are.
- Feelings come; feelings go.
- All feelings are okay.
- This feeling will pass.

If you provide examples, use content from what the young person has said whenever possible. (Downloadable images to help reinforce these ideas are available at our website, <http://www.thrivingadolescent.com>; you can give young people printouts of these images or let them take a photo of the images with their phone.) The aim is to create reminders that tell young people they're okay and having emotions is okay.

Be sure to check back with them about how this works, guiding them to track the effects in real life. Ask them to tell you about what

happened when they tried these new rules. Did it help them hold their emotions and let them pass? Did it make life a little better?

You Are Not a Problem to Be Fixed

The third crucial aspect of helping young people normalize their emotions involves the way you respond to them interpersonally. When young people express intense emotions, adults often give them messages that it isn't okay to feel that way, saying things like "Don't be negative; think positive" or "Just get over it already." Adults may also jump in with problem-solving strategies, offering suggestions like "Just don't think about it" or "Have you tried X?"

These messages can invalidate young people's feelings and imply that there's something wrong with them. Remember, the aim is to help them have their feelings and view them as normal. For this to happen, we must allow them to speak their emotional truth and be willing to hear their distress. There will be time for problem solving later. First create space for acceptance, listening, allowing, and sharing.

Remember, throughout this book, the processes that apply to young people also apply to adults. Just as young people can hate their feelings, so too can adults. Therefore, if we practice allowing our own feelings to be, we'll have a greater capacity to model this open, accepting, and self-compassionate stance for young people.

Step 2. Practice AND (Aware, Name, Describe)

Our second step in helping young people develop noticer skills is the AND practice, described in detail earlier in the chapter. You can teach it exactly as set forth previously, using the additional exercises that follow as you see fit. The key with any of these approaches is to help young people tune in to their physical cues and emotions in the moment, rather than focusing on how they may have felt in the past. This can take a bit of practice.

AND Exercise 1: Exploring Emotional Memories

Once you've outlined the basic AND practice, you can use this exercise to provide training in using the AND approach. The exercise is designed to bring up emotions while you're working with young people. First, ask them to recall a past emotion-provoking event and then fully immerse themselves in the memory. The emotions this brings up might be the same as what they felt at the time or different. What's important is to help them tune in to what they experience in the present as they recall this memory, becoming

aware of their physical sensations, naming them, and then describing them as an emotion.

Using a Pleasant Event

It's generally best to start with a pleasant event. This will make the process of contacting, allowing, and identifying emotions less difficult.

Now let's try the AND steps to build your noticer skills. Recall a recent pleasant event—something that happened in the past week. It can be something as small as a laugh with a friend or your pet greeting you at the end of a long day. Close your eyes and fully immerse yourself in the memory. Imagine yourself in that experience again and let it unfold for a minute or so.

Now scan your body and notice any physical sensations this memory has brought up for you. What are you feeling in your body right now? Notice your chest, stomach, hands, face, arms, legs—any part of you at all—tuning in to your physical sensations right now, not thinking about how your body felt back then.

Now give the sensations some sort of name. It doesn't have to be "right"; just come up with a way to speak about it. It could be "bouncy," "light," "heavy," "tight," "exhausted," "free"—just whatever you feel.

Now describe it as an emotion. You might say "happy," "angry," "sad," "excited"—whatever fits.

To bring this visualization to a close, you can take a few slow breaths if you like.

Using an Unpleasant Event

Once you've introduced this exercise using a pleasant event, you can conduct it once again using an unpleasant event. Initially, it's best to ask people to choose an event that was only moderately unpleasant.

Now recall an unpleasant event that happened in the past week. Again, it can be something small, maybe being late for school or struggling with homework. Close your eyes and fully immerse yourself in the memory. Imagine yourself in that experience again and let it unfold for a minute or so.

Continue the exercise in exactly the same way as for the pleasant event, guiding the person through all three steps: aware, name, and describe.

AND Exercise 2: Seeing Physical Sensations as Signals

The human emotion system is a sensitive instrument, detecting the match between what we want and need and what the environment is giving us. This system signals us through sensations in the body. With this exercise, you can help young people begin to notice these sensations and associate them with their emotions. This can help them recognize emotional experiences more quickly and facilitate mindful responding, rather than mindless reacting.

Aware. First, promote awareness of physical sensations by teaching young people to ask themselves questions like these:

- “What am I aware of in my belly?”
- “How does my chest feel?”
- “How do my hands feel?”
- “Do I notice an urge to move?”

Name. Then teach them to add a name to their experience, using clear statements:

- “My stomach feels queasy.”
- “My chest is tight.”
- “My fists are clenched.”
- “I feel like I need to run away.”

Describe. Finally, teach them to describe this sensation as an emotion:

- “That queasiness is me feeling nervous.”
- “That tightness in my chest means I feel worried.”
- “My clenched fists are a sign that I’m feeling angry.”
- “Wanting to run is a signal that I’m scared and really want to get out of here.”

Step 3. Allow

The third step in helping young people learn noticer skills is to teach them that they can choose to allow their feelings to come and go, and that this choice can create more space for living. In contrast, trying to control feelings usually narrows a person’s life. Remind them that no feeling is good or bad, and that emotions aren’t the enemy; rather, they’re messages about what’s happening in their world. When they struggle with their emotions, they’re fighting a natural process and are more likely to have even more negative emotions, such as feeling angry about being sad, or feeling ashamed about being anxious.

As discussed previously in this chapter, metaphors can be useful for helping young people see the benefits of allowing their emotions. We provided three metaphors earlier (keeping a beach ball submerged, seaweed swaying in the waves, and a tug-of-war with a monster). We'll use the second metaphor here. We find it's best to act the metaphor out together so that young people experience the story and can map it to their own behavior. In all three approaches, the goal is to help young people take meaning from the metaphor and generalize to their own problem.

Allow Exercise: Seaweed Goes with the Ocean

We find that acting things out helps young people understand key concepts, whereas explaining can lead them to think yet another adult is telling them what to do. You may feel silly at first when acting out this metaphor, but we encourage you to give it a try. It really works. However, you can also do this as an eyes-closed, seated meditation, simply imagining the scenario. Assuming you're acting it out, stand together with the young person with eyes closed or looking at the floor.

Imagine you're a seaweed plant. You're strong and have been growing for a long time, and your roots are firmly anchored into the seafloor.

The sea is calm, with only small waves. You're gently swaying backward and forward, and it's peaceful. Notice how it feels to be swaying gently and going with the ocean. (Continue with this visualization for about thirty seconds, giving occasional verbal cues and swaying gently together.)

Now along comes a big wave, and then many big waves. You sway way backward and forward much farther, moved by the powerful waves. Your roots remain firmly planted in the seafloor even as you're rocked backward and forward more powerfully by the sea. Notice how it feels to be rocking with the waves. (Continue with this visualization for about thirty seconds, giving occasional verbal cues.)

Now imagine massive waves crashing over you. They're so strong that you want to fight them. So you become rigid. Imagine the waves crashing around you, and notice the effort it takes to force yourself to stay rigid while these massive waves wash over you. (Continue with this visualization for about twenty seconds, providing occasional verbal cues and standing rigid.)

Now the sea becomes calm once again, and you go back to gently swaying with the peaceful ocean. Notice how it feels to be swaying gently and going with the waves.

After doing the visualization, ask the young person to describe what it felt like to be swaying gently, swaying strongly, and then fighting the waves. Most people notice that being rigid and fighting strong waves takes a lot of more effort than allowing themselves to be rocked by the waves.

Gently relate the metaphor back to the young person's emotions. Allowing feelings to come and go is like swaying with the waves. Sometimes emotions are gentle, and other times they're powerful, but going with them is always much easier than being rigid and fighting against them.

Mindfulness Exercise: Balloon Breathing

Once young people have a basic understanding of noticer skills, you can help them build on this with everyday, informal mindfulness exercises. Teaching basic mindfulness skills, such as noticing the breath, promotes the key noticer approach: normalize AND allow emotions.

Here are some basic instructions for mindful breathing using the belly as an anchor for noticing the breath (adapted from Ciarrochi et al., 2012). A guided audio file is available at <http://www.thrivingadolescent.com>.

Start by sitting upright and placing one hand on your chest and the other on your belly. Relax your hands in these positions and just observe your breath for a moment. Is the hand on your belly rising when you breathe in, or is the hand on your chest rising? Maybe it's a bit of both.

Most people tend to breathe into their chest. This is normal. What you're about to learn is something slightly different: breathing into your belly.

Now I'm going to ask you to use your imagination to do something a bit unusual. Keep your hands in the same positions and imagine that you have a balloon in your belly. When you breathe in, the balloon in your belly inflates and gets bigger, and this makes your belly rise. And when you breathe out, the balloon deflates; it gets smaller and your belly goes down.

When you breathe this way, the hand on your chest shouldn't move very much. It may take some time to get used to breathing this way.

You may need to practice, since this is probably different from the way you've been breathing. Just stay with it and keep observing your breath. As you breathe in, the balloon inflates and gets bigger. As you breathe out, the balloon deflates and gets smaller.

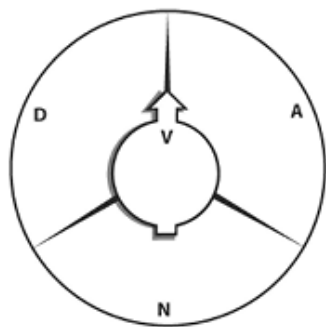
It's okay if you have trouble staying focused on your breath. That happens to everybody. Counting as you breathe may help. When you inhale, say, "In, two, three." Then, when you exhale, say, "Out, two, three."

Practice breathing this way for at least a minute. If you're really stressed, you might even go to three minutes.

After guiding young people in mindful breathing, encourage them to practice at least a few times each week, and ideally every day, for a few minutes each time. Point out that if they practice during calm times, it will be easier to use this technique when things get tough. Also explain that the beauty of mindful breathing is that it can be done anytime, anywhere: while waiting for the bus, when sitting in class, while listening to music, during a difficult test, or while just hanging out with friends.

You can extend this approach by using it with other activities, including those listed earlier in the chapter.

Case Conceptualization and Intervention Planning



Let's examine Bree's behavior using the DNA-V model and then look more specifically at her emotion control strategies and how we might work with them. Although a full case conceptualization worksheet follows, for the purposes of this chapter we'll focus primarily on Bree's advisor and noticer skills.

Current situation and presenting issue

Self-harm.

Substance use.

Anger and conflict at home.

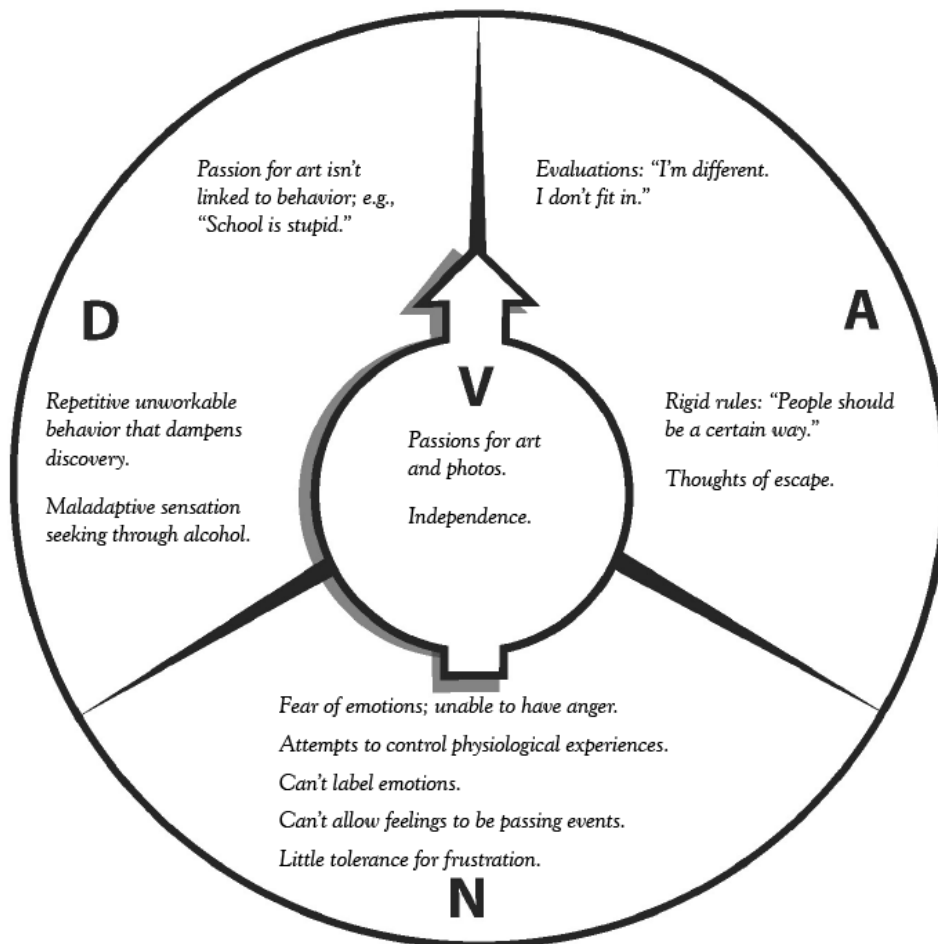
Social and historical environment

Mother: warm but passive.

Other family: unknown.

Peers, school: has friends, but doesn't seem connected to them.

No information on school support.



Self-view

Narrow view of herself.

Responds as if her thoughts and feeling in this moment are all there is.

Thinks she is her words.

Has no self compassion and is cruel to herself rather than kind.

Social view

Sees other people as not like her: "They're all so boring."

Social actions are based on "should" rules, not honest connection.

FIGURE 8. Bree's DNA-V case conceptualization.

Bree's Advisor Skills

To assess Bree's advisor skills, we consider two key questions: Does she have flexible rules? And can she hold her advisor statements lightly? The answer to both is no. Bree seems fixated on her advisor's rules. She has lots of rules about how people should be (for example, her teachers shouldn't be boring, and her friends shouldn't be immature). She's spending a lot of time thinking about her problems over and over again without coming up with any solutions. Her mom, her teachers, her peers, her future—it's all bad. There's a rigid quality to her advisor. Her thoughts are angry and demand that she take action. Her initial emotions are intensified by her advisor's evaluation of them. Eventually, the feeling "I hate her" leads to "I hate me too."

Bree's Noticer Skills

Certain key questions orient us to Bree's level of noticer skill: Can she bring her awareness to her physical being? Can she name her sensations and describe her feelings with awareness? The answer to these questions is also no. On all counts, Bree is reactive, rather than being a noticer. She doesn't pause to notice her physical sensations and consider whether she ought to act on them or just wait for them to subside. She attempts to use her advisor to fix her emotions, rather than seeing them as valuable sources of information. In fact, she seems to think her emotions are unbearable or abnormal and seems unwilling to allow them to occur. She uses self-harm to dampen her emotions and the related physical sensations.

Deciding Where to Begin

When intervening with young people like Bree, we begin by teaching them to track their behavior and assess the costs and benefits of self-harm (or other salient problem behaviors). Then we help them develop noticer skills, particularly emotion identification, using the normalize AND allow approach outlined in this chapter. Once Bree has an idea of these steps and has gained some ease with her feelings, we can then add mindfulness exercises for her to practice at home.

Again, there is no "correct" place to start in the DNA-V model. We could start by teaching any of the skills. However, when young people lack awareness of their emotions or are heavily defending against emotions, it may be best to start with noticer skills before moving to other facets of the model. With noticer skills, they can experience the advisor in a new way, stop reacting automatically and defensively to emotions, and begin to make contact with the discoverer.

Distinguishing Form from Function

The DNA-V model is built on understanding the function of behavior, rather than the form. In Bree's case, we can only understand why Bree harms herself if we identify the function within the context in which the behavior occurs. You can loosely think of the function of behavior as the purpose, whereas the form is what it looks like. For example, a teenager can say "This is stupid" in a variety of contexts, and the form will be much the same. But the function of doing so would be quite different in the context of having a laugh with a friend versus arguing with a parent.

To get a bit more technical, the form of a behavior is topographical, so it typically involves what the young person's behavior looks like when compared to normative development. From this perspective, Bree's cutting and substance use seem maladaptive—high risk in comparison to the behaviors of others her age. These behaviors may even seem quite frightening from a professional's standpoint. Focusing on form brings up questions like these:

- Is this behavior normal or maladaptive? Would we call it healthy behavior?
- Does it seem risky or dangerous, or does it compromise health?
- What is the trajectory—what future outcomes might be associated with the behavior? (In Bree's case, the question would be whether cutting indicates suicide risk.)

In contrast, function focuses on what purpose the behavior serves for the young person and is specific to the context in which the behavior occurs. Functional assessment assumes that all behavior is purposeful—that humans engage in a behavior because it's appetitive or reinforced, and that they stop doing a behavior if it's aversive or punished. So a functional account demands that we let go of what a behavior looks like (even if it's frightening, like cutting) and instead think about how it has been contingently shaped by context, such that it has become reinforcing or punishing.

Once a behavior of concern has been identified, four key questions will provide information that can inform a hypothesis about its function in context:

1. **Context:** What are the setting events? Consider historical factors, such as prior learning and interpersonal and intrapersonal events; current factors, such as motivational state; and influential environmental factors.

2. **Antecedent:** What happened just before the behavior?
3. **Consequence:** What happened just after the behavior? What might the young person have gained or prevented by engaging in it?
4. **Function:** Is the consequence appetitive (strengthening the behavior and increasing the likelihood of reoccurrence) or aversive (weakening the behavior and decreasing the likelihood of reoccurrence)?

Based on the answers to these questions, we can come up with testable hypotheses about the function of the behavior. So now let's apply these questions to Bree's self-harming behavior:

- **Context:** Bree typically has high levels of arousal. She has a history of struggle with intense sensations and distressing thoughts. She's extremely worked up about a "boring" day at school, and she argued with her mother.
- **Antecedent:** She went to her room with these intense emotions, especially anger.
- **Behavior:** She cut.
- **Consequence:** Immediately after cutting, she felt almost calm.
- **Function:** Because the behavior gave Bree some relief, it's probably appetitive, increasing the likelihood that it will occur again.

Based on this analysis, we can form a hypothesis that cutting allows Bree to escape from strong feelings. We don't need to persuade her that this behavior is irrational because, in some ways, it's perfectly rational. What we need to do is ask, "Is it possible to live for something more than escape? Can we find something in your life that's more vital and meaningful than cutting?" The next chapter, on developing discoverer skills, will show you how to address questions like these.

But first, we need to cultivate the ability to allow feelings and open the door to the possibility of discovery. We need to help Bree allow her feelings to come and go without always reacting to them. Once she stops doing what she typically does (cutting), she'll be ready to discover new ways of relating to her feelings and new ways of getting her needs met. And paradoxically, once she stops trying to reduce her negative states, she's likely to experience fewer negative mood states, such as anxiety and depression (A-Tjak et al., 2015).

The Discoverer Helps Us Develop and Grow

In chapter 1 we explained that DNA-V is based on three core principles of evolutionary science: variation, selection, and retention. Chapter 2 discussed how values can be the basis for selection and retention of behavior. Chapter 3 showed how unhelpful evaluations, beliefs, and rules—overreliance on the advisor—can limit variation by leading people to rigidly repeat old, unworkable behaviors. Chapter 4 demonstrated that deficits in noticer skills can lead young people to respond to emotions in rigid ways, reacting to them with either avoidance or impulsivity. Becoming skilled at using advisor and noticer skills is the first step toward increasing variation in behavior. This chapter will show you how to further promote variation with discover skills that allow young people to develop new, more effective ways of being in the world.

As we turn to the discoverer, we don't leave the noticer or advisor behind. Discovery often brings up difficult emotions. We need the noticer to be able to observe and allow those emotions in the service of building a better life. Discovery can also activate the advisor, generating worries and reasons why we shouldn't take the risk of trying something new. We need to be able to hear the advisor while also possessing the ability to unhook from it if we need to.

Ultimately, allowing feelings, unhooking from the advisor, and trying new things are all done in the context of values. Thus, when we begin to introduce discoverer skills, we are working in the full DNA-V model.

In this chapter, we'll use a case example to illuminate the importance of developing discoverer skills. Then we'll discuss the three key steps in building these skills: tracking the real-world results of behaviors rather than relying on the advisor, identifying values, and building strengths. All help build a sense of value, vitality, and meaning in life.

Ruby's Story

Ruby was just a little girl. She didn't understand why her parents argued and screamed at each other. Sometimes she saw her dad

hitting her mom. When that happened, she would run to her bedroom, hide under a blanket, and wait for the fighting to stop.

Then there was the day, three weeks after her tenth birthday, when Ruby came home from school and learned that her dad had killed himself. Neither her mom nor her sister helped her to understand what happened. Her mom just seemed to disappear, leaving heavy silence in the house.

The family had never been well-off, and after Ruby's father committed suicide, they descended into poverty.

High school brought new problems. Ruby was physically and verbally bullied by an older girl and her gang. Once, while she was walking to biology class and trying to be invisible, the gang attacked her. They pushed her to the ground and pulled a big chunk of her hair out by the roots.

Ruby felt ashamed, but she didn't think she could trust any adults to help, so she kept her problems to herself. Her only peace came when she was walking between home and school. She would read during the walk, letting stories wash away the world and everything in it. She no longer saw the trash on the streets or felt the heat of the day.

One story especially captivated her. It was about Georgie, a teenager who dropped out of school and ran away from home to live a carefree existence in an abandoned house on the coast. She joined up with other teens and together they had parties, kissed, and fell in love.

Ruby wished she had the courage to do what Georgie had done. She imagined stepping out on the road, putting her thumb out, and hitching a ride to the coast. She wanted to have her own house and walk barefoot in the sand. When these fantasies came up, Ruby's would think, *You're a coward. You'll never run away.*

Ruby started to see another option: death. Some nights she lay awake and imagined the grim reaper tapping on her window. She wanted to let him in, but she felt she was too cowardly for that. She also remembered how, after her dad killed himself, everybody else was left to deal with it and try to carry on. She didn't want to do that to others.

So Ruby just checked out. She hardly ate and started losing weight. She pretended to go to school but instead went to a vacant lot where she could hide and read. She was sure she was slowly dying. She felt like she was being dragged down into a black lake, unable to remove the lead weights on her back.

Ruby's mom started to notice some of these changes, despite being mostly checked out herself. She started nagging Ruby to eat more and take care of herself. Finally, the school reported Ruby's absences to her mom, and the two of them had a long and bitter fight.

The end result was that Ruby was sent to a psychologist. But she was sure she'd never tell the shrink anything. Her secrets were hers. *They should leave me alone*, she thought. So she just sat there. He asked stupid questions. She shrugged and answered, "I dunno." He asked more questions. And as she looked around at the shrink's big desk and the office walls lined with bookshelves and framed awards, she thought, *He's rich. He wouldn't have a clue about what it's like to sleep beside a broken window in a house that's falling down, and to be so poor that you can't afford decent clothes for school. He has no idea what it's like to have boys trying to screw you all the time, telling you that you're beautiful one minute and calling you a slut the next. No way I'm going to let this shrink write down my secrets.*

Reflecting on Ruby

The preceding story lets you peek inside Ruby's mind a bit, but in reality, as a counselor you would only be able to see her outward behavior: missing school, offering surly responses, losing weight, and so on. You'd have trouble figuring out what's going on inside her. To make an assessment, you'd have to use reports from others, including school staff and Ruby's mom, who, like Ruby, doesn't offer much information.

- What shows up for you when you're working with or interacting with a young person like Ruby? Consider your feelings, thoughts, doubts, and hopes.
- How would you conceptualize Ruby's problem?
- If you were Ruby's counselor, how would you ideally like to act toward her? Think of your values.
- How might you seek to help Ruby?

A Small, Safe Place

To outsiders, Ruby seems lost, checking out of the world one book at a time. Her options appear to grow more limited each day. Her world is a stressful place with family trauma, poverty, and bullying. She responds by tuning out the world, refusing to cooperate, not communicating, not eating, and trying to stay somewhere she feels

safe: inside novels. It's almost as if her advisor is whispering, "Come here into this world made of words. It's safe. Stay here."

If you were to ask Ruby how she's doing, she might say she's fine or even happy, implying that she doesn't need any help. She would tell you that, for her, reading is her passion—that she belongs in the stories of fictional girls like Georgie. But inside, Ruby can hear her advisor telling her, "You're weak. You're broken. Get it over with." So her reading is likely to be an attempt to shut out the advisor's cruel voice. Ruby has lost the ability to discover and is trying to find peace by making her life small. She isn't dreaming; she's just surviving.

There are many young people who, like Ruby, have experienced trauma. In a survey of twelve- to seventeen-year-olds, 8 percent reported being sexually assaulted, 17 percent reported being physically assaulted, and 39 percent reported witnessing violence (Kilpatrick, Saunders, & Smith, 2003). Another study suggests that by age sixteen about one-fourth of young people will have been exposed to a high-magnitude traumatic event, such as sexual abuse, violence, a serious accident, or the death of a loved one (Costello, Erkanli, Fairbank, & Angold, 2002). What makes matters worse is that many young people, like Ruby, don't seek help (Ciarrochi, Deane, Wilson, & Rickwood, 2002; Ciarrochi, Wilson, Deane, & Rickwood, 2003; C. J. Wilson, Deane, & Ciarrochi, 2005).

The good news is, you don't have to know all of a young person's trauma history or secret thoughts to start providing help immediately. Because DNA-V is focused on skills, you can enter at any point in the model and begin. This chapter is devoted to discoverer skills, so that will be our point of entry with Ruby. Beginning here allows us to focus on what young people are good at (their strengths) and what they care about and love (their values), rather than on what has gone wrong for them in the past. However, as you'll increasingly see, entering at any point in the DNA-V model leads to the other parts of the model. You simply can't talk about discovery, building strengths, and creating values without encountering emotions (via the noticer) and unhelpful beliefs (courtesy of the advisor).

The Discoverer Helps Build Behavioral Repertoires

We define discovery as an adaptive form of risk taking, undertaken explicitly for the purposes of selecting new behaviors that are life enhancing. It involves creating values and building strengths, and demands an exploration of the unknown. We can't predict with 100 percent accuracy whether the young people we work with will be up to the challenge or what the outcome will be. We don't know if the world will hurt them or make them stronger. But we do know that there's no way to eliminate the risk of the unknown and still live a rich and meaningful life.

Adolescent risk taking is often seen as abnormal, but cross-species comparisons suggest otherwise. Nonhuman animals also have an adolescent-like phase that's characterized by risk taking, sensation seeking, love of novelty, and changes in interactions with parents (Spear, 2004). These behaviors have many valuable functions, such as offering practice in overcoming environmental challenges and seeking a mate. Human risk taking also involves leaving one's family of origin, developing skills, forging new relationships, and building independent social resources.

Adults often try to stamp out risky behaviors in an attempt to prevent young people from making the same mistakes they themselves made. However, these efforts often fail. Adolescence continues to be characterized by higher rates of accidental injuries, violence, substance abuse, unintended pregnancy, and sexually transmitted diseases (Casey, Jones, & Hare, 2008). In fact, in some cases, particularly with high-risk adolescents, efforts to prevent risky behaviors actually increase their attraction to risk (Ellis et al., 2012).

This creates a problem: We want young people to be able to make their own decisions and build their skills and resources outside the home, but we also need to protect them from making dangerous mistakes. The solution to this problem is to direct young people's curiosity and risk taking into a values-guided processes of discovery—risk taking that's adaptive. This can help young people explore extraordinary ways of living, rather than tiptoeing through life tentatively or plodding through it with blinders on.

Tracking: Building Discoverer Skills by Mapping Behavior to Workability

The first task in helping young people become discoverers is to equip them with basic skills for testing their experience in the physical world. Then they can learn to rely not only on their advisor,

but also on their experience, asking themselves, “Does this behavior work? Should I do more of it? Does it help me connect to my values?”

Whenever people practice a new skill, they come into contact with the environment in different ways and need to track what happens, connecting their behavior to its consequences. Metaphorically, they follow their behavior to see where it takes them. Tracking is important because there’s no guarantee that any new behavior will be beneficial; therefore, we must become skilled at looking for feedback.

To help young people develop tracking skills, encourage them to ask themselves these kinds of questions:

- “How did the new behavior go?”
- “Did it help me to expand my life and my possibilities?”
- “Did it help me to do more of what I care about?”

Later in this chapter, we’ll provide a worksheet to help young people track the consequences of their behavior. For now, here are two examples of how Ruby might track her own behavior using the approach in the worksheet.

The situation: *I was sent to a psychologist.*

What I did: *I refused to talk to him.*

What happened next? *I felt in control at the time.*

Did it work? *It seemed to work at first, but later my advisor really got going, telling me “You’re weak. You’re broken.”*

Did it make life better in the long run? *I guess it left me all alone without help.*

The situation: *I went to my second session with the psychologist.*

What I did: *I tried being a noticer by using the AND exercise. I became aware of my physical sensations, I named my anger as a surging rush like a tsunami, and I described this as feeling anger at him.*

What happened next? *I breathed and waited. I nodded a few answers. I didn’t cry.*

Did it work? *It didn’t seem to work at first, but after a few minutes I seemed to get a bit calmer.*

Did it make life better in the long run? *I'm not sure, but I might try talking to the psychologist next time.* (Here, Ruby is foreshadowing a discoverer process.)

Discovering Values

After teaching young people to track their experience, the second task in developing their discoverer skills is to help them test what they care about by trying on values. In chapter 2 we defined values as a chosen quality of action. Values are constructed through language and our interactions with the world, are evolving, and are intrinsically reinforcing (S. C. Hayes, Strosahl, et al., 2012).

Values construction isn't an "uncovering" of values, because we don't assume young people have well-formed values to uncover. In addition, we don't assume values are fixed. Rather, the process of constructing values is about allowing young people to wander, experiment with different ways of being, and test their behavior to see if it's enjoyable and meaningful.

Think for a moment about your own ability to construct values. You might start by taking a few moments to answer this question: What brings vitality to your life?

Adults are able to answer this question with words, but often we don't seek to answer it by trying new things in the physical world. Instead, we provide an answer that's based on what's familiar to us or what others have taught us to say. Discovery requires us to let go of ideas about what we "should" be doing.

Choosing a valued path can be stressful. The advisor tends to ramp up that stress by saying things like "If you make the wrong choice, you might ruin your life." Even if you do choose values that fit well for you, the advisor will still relentlessly remind you that you might fail—which will be all the more painful because you care. The advisor takes its job of warning you about potential problems seriously and can be quite outspoken.

Creating Your Values as a Professional

When you see young people surrounded by unsupportive and even abusive adults, you may wonder how you can possibly help them. You only have access to them for a short time, maybe for a single one-hour counseling session each week. Unsupportive adults seem to have access to them the rest of the time. Your advisor may advocate caution: "Can you really make a difference? How can you

possibly help these kids dream big? Aren't you just setting them up for failure?"

To see how this plays out for you, let's do a quick experiment. We'll present a statement, and your job is to just notice what your advisor says. Listen for whatever verbal content shows up. Ready? Here's the statement:

- You can change a young person's life in less than an hour.

Just take a moment to notice the thoughts that show up.

Did your advisor try to refute the statement by saying something like "No way; that's impossible"? Then again, maybe your advisor said something positive. Just notice whatever showed up and make space for it.

Here's another statement. Ready?

- You might be able to change a young person's life with just one sentence.

Again, just take a moment to notice the thoughts that show up.

What did your advisor say? Did it predict and judge? If it was skeptical, we're here to tell you that your advisor can be wrong, and if you listen to it, you may never get to discover the kind of influence you might have had on a young person.

Many people from across the globe have told us about mentors who helped them navigate adolescence, often through only brief interactions. We've both had such experiences. Louise clung to just one sentence through many tough years. In the sixth grade her teacher, a stern and disciplined man who gave praise cautiously, once said, "You're smart enough to be a professor." Louise didn't believe him initially. She felt lost and unmotivated and couldn't imagine things ever being different. Nevertheless, she was excited that someone believed in her. When she dropped out of school at fourteen, she held on to that teacher's statement as a precious reminder of what was possible. It gave her courage and helped her to recommit to her education and eventually graduate from college.

Joseph had a similarly tough adolescence. He had a troubled home life and was a terrible student in high school. He flunked several classes and, believe it or not, even got caught cheating on an exam in religious studies. Needless to say, most of his teachers weren't very supportive. They seemed to take his lack of academic performance

personally, as if he was deliberately insulting them by flunking. However, his English teacher was different. She flunked him too, but she didn't take his failure personally. Instead, she always treated him with kindness. Thirty years later, he still feels grateful to her. She taught him that even when people aren't doing their best, you can still be kind and forgiving. And all these years later, he has a passion for English literature and writing, and for helping young people to discover the power of kindness (manifested in this book in chapters 10 through 12).

Do you have your own example of a mentor who saw promise or potential in you when you couldn't? What if you could do that for even just one person?

Allowing Your Values to Outshine the Advisor's Predictions

You may encounter data showing that some environmental factors, such as poverty or abuse, are associated with poor outcomes for youth. However, this kind of data is based on group averages. Individuals can vary from these averages and defy all predictions. We may be able to say that kids who have alcoholic parents are more likely to abuse substances when compared to kids who don't have alcoholic parents (Chassin, Pillow, Curran, Molina, & Barrera Jr., 1993). But we can't say that any given child will abuse substances because his or her parents did. There are plenty of young people who come from terrible environments but manage to make a great life for themselves. And there are many from good families and comfortable environments who end up failing abysmally. You'll be in the best position to help young people if your actions are directed by your values and hope, rather than by your doubting advisor.

Discovering Strengths

The third task in helping young people develop discoverer skills is to guide them in finding and testing their strengths in the world. When young people are coming to you for counseling, they've probably been identified as having a problem. It's likely that other adults have tried to control them or "fix them" many times. Therefore, the young people you see might distrust you, suspecting that you're yet another adult trying to fix them. Focusing on their strengths is a way to radically shift the work and signal that you appreciate them and believe in them. And by working with them collaboratively, you indicate that you think they're capable of solving their own problems.

Strengths, as defined in ACT, are quite close to values. Just like values, they are behaviors we do, not things we own. Indeed, any statement of strength could probably be converted into a values statement with the change of a single word. For example, the strengths “capacity for love” and “persistence” could be restated as “valuing love and persistence.” The primary distinction between a strength and a value is that a person can have a strength but potentially not value using it in particular contexts. For example, a person who has the strength of being a good leader may not value using that strength to do something meaningless or unethical.

Building strengths is similar to the positive psychology approach of broadening and building, which involves engaging in actions that are novel, varied, and exploratory (Fredrickson, 2001). If people engage in this pattern over time, they gradually explore their environment and improve their understanding of it. They engage in challenges and develop their skills, and they explore new relationships and build their social network. In the process, they become stronger.

However, our conceptualization of building strengths differs from broaden and build theory in an important way. In the latter theory, positive emotions are thought to be the force prompting the broadening of repertoire in both thoughts and actions; negative emotions, by contrast, narrow the repertoire (Fredrickson, 2001). Positive emotions may indeed have this effect, but in the DNA-V model people need not be in a positive state to start broadening and building. They can feel quite down and unhappy with their life and still engage in discoverer behaviors. For example, in the DNA-V approach we help young people relate to their anxiety in a new way, seeing it as a reminder that they care deeply about something, rather than viewing it as a barrier. This expands their ability to act effectively in the presence of anxiety. You might say they’re building strengths of persistence and courage.

Practitioner Exercise: Spotting Your Own Strengths as a Professional

Here’s a thought experiment to help you see how surprising and unpredictable strength spotting can be. Once you’ve tried it for yourself, you can also use it with young people, asking them to travel back five to ten years into their past, or to whatever age seems appropriate.

1. Imagine you can travel back in time to visit your thirteen-year-old self. Your job is to surprise your thirteen-year-old self with how you turned out. Think back on what you were planning to

do as an adult or how you expected your life path to unfold. From those memories, choose something that turned out to be utterly wrong. (For example, Joseph thought he would spend his whole life in the army, but he went to college instead and became a pacifist.)

2. Imagine telling your thirteen-year-old self about that unexpected turn of events in your life.
3. Next, think of something incredible that's happening in your life right now that you never would have predicted as a thirteen-year-old.
4. Imagine telling your younger self about this unforeseen development. (For example, Joseph might say, "One day you move to Australia and live in a small town by the sea." His younger self definitely didn't see that coming.)

How did that go?

Consider your ability to spot your strengths: What strengths did you need for these developments in your life? Did you see those strengths back then? What strengths do you have now that you didn't have then or didn't know you had?

Now consider your advisor's ability to make predictions: How accurate was your advisor way back then? It's unlikely that its predictions from years ago were all true and accurate. Although the advisor generates endless predictions, they can be absolutely wrong, as this exercise shows.

You may also have noticed that the advisor devotes a great deal of time to self-criticism. Given that we frequently have narrow perspectives on ourselves, we clearly can't rely solely on the advisor to identify our strengths. We need to turn to the physical world and discover and build our strengths through experience and feedback.

Basic Training: Steps for Developing the Discoverer



Openness is crucial in order for young people to step into discoverer space. The prospect of discovering a better life can be terrifying. Go slowly. The narrow, known life offered by the advisor often seems safer, even if it's painful or dissatisfying. Offer a creative space where you and the young people you work with can embark on discovery together, with a spirit of courageous exploration.

We often begin this work by introducing the idea of the discoverer, as in the metaphor we present shortly. We then seek to strengthen discovery skills through a four-step process:

1. **Track the workability of old behaviors.** We begin by examining young people's current patterns of behavior. We want to know what is working in their life—that is, what's promoting long-term well-being and vitality—as well as what isn't working. We're especially interested in how they respond to difficult thoughts, feelings, and situations. We've already looked at workability in previous chapters. In chapter 3 we looked at the workability of listening to unhelpful beliefs (the advisor) and in chapter 4 we looked at the workability of responding to emotions with avoidance or impulsivity. In this chapter, we focus more on what works to bring meaning and vitality into young people's lives.
2. **Discover values.** We create space to explore and discuss what young people care about, and we interact with them in ways that allow them to feel respected, mature, and appreciated.
3. **Build strengths.** We expand young people's ideas about themselves and help them learn how to build their skills and talents, particularly in the service of their values.
4. **Track the workability of new behaviors.** We encourage young people to loop back to the workability criterion to determine whether their present and future behavior makes their life more enjoyable, meaningful, or vital.

Introducing the Discoverer Using Metaphor



FIGURE 9. Two visual metaphors for the discoverer.

The two images in figure 9 can be useful visual metaphors for the discoverer and its beneficial functions. You can present one of the images and ask questions along these lines:

- *Here's an image. What do you notice about it?*
- *What do you think some of the benefits of discoverer space are?*
- *What happens when you don't discover? For example, what happens when you don't see, hear, or learn new things?*
- *Is discovery and trying new things risky? How?*

If need be, describe how the person in the image is finding new, interesting things out in the world—and, in the process, discovering values and sources of vitality and meaning in life.

Step 1. Track the Workability of Old Behaviors

Perhaps the most important question in ACT is “Is my behavior working? Is it making my life more fun, meaningful, or vital?” When working with young people, it's important to teach them to ask this question of themselves again and again—and to teach them that the answer can't always be found in the mind. If they decide something isn't working, your task is to help them try something new.

Discoverer Exercise 1: Tracking Workability

This exercise helps young people step out of advisor space and into the discoverer orientation to assess if their current approach is working to make their life bigger, richer, and more vital. We use the tracking worksheet that follows (also available for download at <http://www.thrivingadolescent.com>) to help them connect their behavior to the basic workability questions. You might introduce the task as follows:

Let's do a quick exercise to practice being a discoverer. One of the most important qualities of a discoverer involves paying attention to

what happens after we do something. Did the behavior improve our life and give it more meaning, or make it worse? A discoverer is good at finding out what works and doesn't work. Let's do that now.

Start by thinking of some challenging situations you've faced in your life. Once you've thought of a few, take a little time to write about them on this worksheet. (If the two of you have already discussed specific challenging situations, those can be used in this exercise. If they decide something isn't working, ask them if they are willing to step into the discoverer space and find something new to try—see the next section, step 2.)

How Did It Go?

The situation	What you did	What happened next?	Did it work? Did it make life better in the long run?

Step 2. Discover Values

Remember, valuing is about engaging in ongoing patterns of activity that are reinforcing. We use two exercises to help young people discover their values by looking at their experiences. The first takes young people on a walk through the past year or two to discover the values within their past experiences. The second exercise looks to the future and is a process of discovering which values they'd most like to embody as they move forward in life.

Discoverer Exercise 2: The Advisor vs. the Discoverer

This exercise is designed to help young people see that it doesn't work well to rely exclusively on the advisor to decide what they care about. It helps them enter discoverer space and learn about their values by searching for evidence from their life, via photos, possessions, and social media. The exercise, which has three stages, makes use of the worksheet "The DNA-V of Your Life." (The worksheet appears after our description of the exercise and is available for download at <http://www.thrivingadolescent.com>.) As ever, we encourage you to do this exercise yourself before conducting it so you have personal experience with it.

Feed the Advisor

Take the person you're working with through the following procedure to illustrate the limits of the advisor. Begin along these lines:

Pause for a moment and think about the past few years... When you're ready, list five memorable events from those years on the worksheet.

Next, you'll elicit the person's advisor's evaluations of the five events:

What do you notice about the things you listed? Were they major events, or did you also recall more minor incidents? Also notice the type of events you listed. Are there dominant themes, like school, friends, or love? For each memory you listed, would you say it was a good time or a bad time?

Now get your advisor to make a conclusion about your life based on these five events. You don't have to actually believe the conclusion you come up with. Just be playful.

Did you notice how easy it is for the advisor to make conclusions?

Explain that the advisor often makes evaluations and judgments based on what can be recalled from past experiences. When young people have had major struggles in life, they tend to recall many low points. If this is the case, explain that this is because painful events have a stronger influence on people's memory and reactions than positive events (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, & Vohs, 2001). You can circle back to Advisor Exercise 1: Normalizing the Advisor, in chapter 3, explaining that this occurs because detecting and dealing with dangerous or negative things helped our ancestors survive. Failing to detect a positive event, such as a pleasant evening

with no threatening weather, isn't as problematic as failing to detect a threat, such as a poisonous snake.

Collaboratively draw out the implications this might have: If young people feed their advisor from past memories, they're likely to give it mainly bad memories. That only increases the advisor's tendency to predict bad things or suggest that good things are unlikely. The advisor doesn't dream of an extraordinary life; it focuses on surviving.

Become a Discoverer

Next, share the good news: there's a way to get around this negativity bias. It involves shifting into discoverer space. You might describe it like this:

There are lots of activities that we value but tend to totally forget about. We can find these valued activities again if we're willing to enter discoverer space. Would you like to try that? There's no risk. You can always return to advisor space if you think that will help.

We can discover what we care about by becoming "life detectives," searching our lives for clues about our values. To do this, we need to get out of our heads and into our lives.

Then help the young people you're working with gather the necessary physical evidence. Here are three ways to do so:

- Ask them to share personal things they've stored in their electronic devices that are meaningful to them: photos, books, movies, video clips, music, favorite websites, and things they've shared or liked on social media. The latter can extend to things like high scores on games, tagging a band or an interest, or following a blog.
- Ask them to put together a collection of objects that are meaningful to them to share with you next time you meet. In addition to the items just listed, this might include souvenirs, tickets, books, toys, or gifts—whatever is meaningful to them.
- Ask them to spend some time before your next meeting taking photos of things that are meaningful to them. These might inspire them, bring them joy or peace, or simply be fun. Possibilities include people, places, pets, and beloved objects. Encourage them to include small things, such as a poster on their bedroom wall, a book cover, or favorite possessions.

The next step is for you to look at and appreciate what they've chosen to share. This isn't about problem solving; it's about savoring

everything they present—their joys and their difficult moments. Ask them to describe why the things they share are meaningful to them. Why do they care about a certain object, memory, or experience? As they share, have them use the second section of the worksheet (“Becoming a Discoverer”) to jot down some of the things they really care about: things that inspired them or made them laugh, cry, or feel alive. Encourage them to be courageous and to brainstorm, filling that section of the worksheet with notes.

Clarify that their personal difficulties and struggles are likely to come up in this phase of the exercise, and that it’s fine to list these as well. They need not share or list only positive things. The key is to consider what value lies within a painful experience. For example, sometimes they may see value in a struggle or value in building strengths.

Notice the Difference Between the Advisor and the Discoverer

The next step is to guide young people in using their noticing skills to compare what happened in the first two parts of the exercise, and then have them record any differences in the third part of the worksheet. Here are some things you might say to guide the discussion:

- *Notice that we forget many of our joys and vital experiences, especially the day-to-day ones. Sometimes the advisor tries to make conclusions about our whole life based on the few things we remember. This can cause us to lose touch with our values.*
- *Notice that we forget whole chunks of time or events that are important, meaningful, or fun, whereas we tend to readily recall the hard times.*

Then make this key point:

- *Discovering requires that we touch the physical experiences of life. This is too important to be left to imperfect memory and the advisor’s quick conclusions.*

The DNA-V of Your Life

1. Feeding the Advisor

Write down five events that have happened in the past few years:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

Ask the advisor to judge which of those memories are good and which are bad.

Get the advisor to make a conclusion about your life based exclusively on these five events.

2. Becoming a Discoverer

Gather evidence about your life. For example, you can look at what you've stored on electronic devices (photos, posts on social media, and so on) or some of the meaningful objects you own. Or you might just take photos of what's important to you. Consider discussing this with someone. When you're ready, jot down some notes about what you discovered and appreciated. Really brainstorm. The more notes, the better.

3. Noticing the Differences Between the Advisor and the Discoverer

Compare what you wrote in the first part of this worksheet to what you wrote in the second. Then take a little time to write about the differences here.

Discoverer Exercise 3: Making Your Life About Values

This exercise is designed to help young people move forward by connecting their plans and goals for the future to their values. There's a delicate balance here. We need to be gentle because discovery is risky, yet if young people always play it safe, they can't live extraordinary lives. This three-part exercise makes use of the accompanying worksheet, "My Valued Journey" (available for download at <http://www.thrivingadolescent.com>).

Identifying Past Values

In the previous exercise, young people identified a number of joyful or meaningful events from their past. Now you'll build upon that work to help them hone in on their values.

Ask them to choose about ten items from the second section of the previous worksheet ("The DNA-V of Your Life") and sort them into the domains in the worksheet that follows, writing them in the column "Things I've valued." If they think of new items, it's fine to add them. The items and events can be large or small. The main thing is to choose things that connect them to a sense of vitality—things that made them smile, touched them, were meaningful, or made them feel alive in some way. Encourage them to disregard whether they did things well or feel they didn't do enough of something. Only one thing matters: that they cared enough to engage in an activity, keep a memento, or take a photo, and then cared enough to share it with you.

The domains in the far left column are just to help people sort items into various areas of life. You can add more categories if some of these don't fit a given person well. You might point out the domain of "challenging myself and learning" and connect it with the difficulties the people you're working with have faced and struggled through. Explain that discovery is about building resilience. People often overlook how struggles make us stronger.

Identifying Favorites

Now ask young people to rate their favorites, identifying which things they'd most like to do more of. The rating system is a simple scale of one to five: Five stars indicates something is an extremely

vital part of their life and they want to do more of it soon. One star means they don't care much about pursuing that at this time.

Watch for the advisor, which is likely to get active as they start rating. They may start comparing their ratings for different items. Encourage them to think about each item separately. If they want, they can give everything five stars.

Step Into the Future

In the final part of this exercise, young people explore their future and set goals. What does their work in the first two parts of the exercise tell them about their more treasured experiences? What would they like to explore and discover over the next year? Have them fill in the right-hand column of the worksheet, coming up with behaviors they'd like to increase.

Be sure to point out that this exercise doesn't lock them into having to do anything or to do things well. It's just a list of what they care about and dream of—things that might bring more vitality and meaning to life. In fact, if they aren't ready to set goals yet, they can simply imagine what they might do in the future. In closing, emphasize this key point: The first step into becoming a discoverer is being willing to think from discoverer space. This may feel risky until you realize that it's just thinking.

My Valued Journey

Domain	Things I've valued (Events that made me smile, touched me, were fun or meaningful, or made me feel alive)	Favorites ★★★★★ = top ★★★ = middle ★ = okay	Step into the future (What actions can I take to have more of this in the next year? What are some small steps I might try?)
Connecting with others			
Giving to others and having a positive influence			
Being active			
Embracing the moment			
Challenging myself and learning			
Caring for myself			
Other:			
Other:			

Step 3. Build Strengths

The next step in building discoverer skills involves helping young people identify and develop strengths. In the DNA-V model,

building strengths isn't a value in itself. Rather, it's done in the service of helping young people to engage in new challenges, explore their world, and discover valued activities.

Discoverer Exercise 4: Strength Spotting Card Sort

This exercise is a simple way to identify young people's strengths. We include the strength spotting cards in this exercise. You can also download them at <http://www.thrivingadolescent.com>. And you can purchase professionally printed cards with evocative images at our website, with all proceeds donated to charity.

Give young people the cards and ask them to sort the cards into three piles: their top five strengths, their next ten, and all the others. As with all verbal activities, the words on these cards should be held lightly. They are meant to be used as tools for helping young people develop and grow. If young people have strengths that aren't on the cards, those can be written on the blank cards.

Once they've sorted the cards, explore some of the following questions:

- In what way does each personal strength link to their values or sense of vitality?
- How do their strengths help them engage in valued activities?
- What would they like to do with their strengths—now and in the future?

The following two approaches are ways to expand on this exercise. Both can be helpful in overcoming challenges that might arise while doing it.

Changing Perspectives

Sometimes young people struggle to see their own strengths. Perspective taking—seeing themselves through the eyes of someone else—can help with this. Here are some techniques to help build perspective taking:

- Have another person complete the card sort based on the strengths he or she sees in the young person. This could be a mentor, or it could be you if you know the young person well. Compare how the young person saw his or her own strengths to how the other person saw them.
- If you're working with a group and the members have some knowledge of each other, you can have pairs do the sort for each other and then share the strengths they see. This can be a

powerful way for individuals to see themselves from another's view, and to build relationships.

Dealing with Unrealistic Sorting

Sometimes young people select strengths that seem quite unrealistic in comparison to the behavior you observe in them. For example, a narcissistic young man might choose humility as a top-five strength. When this occurs, there's no need to contradict the person. Rather, consider this to be an opportunity to foster new behaviors built upon the preferred strength. Here are two strategies you might try:

- Ask the person to imagine a situation in the future when he or she can use this strength.
- Ask the person to imagine how he or she will display this strength, and what the anticipated outcome might be.

<p>Appreciating beauty</p> <p>I appreciate art, music, painting, dance, or other expressions of beauty.</p>	<p>Capacity for love</p> <p>I can express and receive love.</p>	<p>Teamwork</p> <p>I'm good at working with a group.</p>
<p>Capacity for friendship</p> <p>I can be a good friend to others.</p>	<p>Curiosity</p> <p>I find the world a very interesting place and like to be involved in new things.</p>	<p>Being fair</p> <p>I admit when I'm wrong and try to treat all people equally.</p>
<p>Forgiving</p> <p>I don't try to get even. I accept that my friends and loved ones will be imperfect.</p>	<p>Being grateful</p> <p>I express gratitude and I'm thankful.</p>	<p>Hope</p> <p>I believe I can achieve my goals.</p>
<p>Humor</p> <p>I use humor to brighten others' day. I try to add humor to whatever I do.</p>	<p>Persistence</p> <p>I keep doing what I think is important even when things get difficult or I fail.</p>	<p>Honesty</p> <p>I tell people what I care about, keep promises, and don't lie.</p>
<p>Careful judgment</p> <p>I think things through and make decisions after I have all the facts.</p>	<p>Kindness</p> <p>I help friends, go out of my way to cheer others up, and love to make others happy.</p>	<p>Leadership</p> <p>I'm able to take charge and help a group work well together.</p>

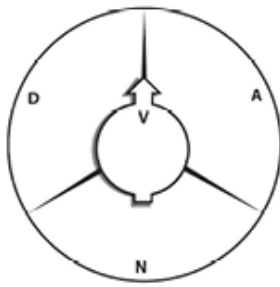
Love of learning I love to learn and grow.	Humility I don't act as if I'm special, don't brag, and am humble about good things that have happened to me.	Creativity I like to come up with new ideas and new ways of doing things.
Wisdom I don't lose sight of what's really important in life.	Carefulness I avoid unnecessary risks and think before I speak.	Self-control I'm highly disciplined and able to stick to my goals despite temptations to abandon them.
Social intelligence I can fit into different situations, and I'm good at sensing what others are feeling.	Spirituality I believe in a universal power or God, and I keep my faith even during hard times.	Courage I'm able to do what I think is important, even when I feel fear, uncertainty, or intimidation.
Enthusiasm I love what I do and can't wait to get started on projects.	Perspective taking I see things from different viewpoints, and I can take other peoples' perspective.	Discovery I love to try new things and explore possibilities.
Noticing inside I'm usually aware of what I'm feeling and thinking.	Noticing outside I notice what's going on outside me and the consequences of my actions on others.	Self-kindness When I don't live up to my expectations, I'm able to forgive myself and recommit to my goals.
Willingness I choose to do what I care about even when I have difficult feelings, such as sadness, anger, insecurity, or low motivation.	Inner Balance Difficult thoughts and feelings don't push me around. I can have self-doubt and fear and still work toward success.	Workability focus I focus on doing what works—acting in a way that makes my life better.

Step 4. Track the Workability of New Behaviors

Step 1 of the basic training in this chapter involved helping young people identify values and sources of vitality in their past behavior. In step 4, we revisit this, asking young people to determine whether their present and future behaviors meet their workability criterion. We also help young people start setting goals and seeing whether

these goals might add value to their life. The goals don't have to be extraordinarily difficult or ambitious; they can be small. The key thing is that they are new and driven by the desire to make life more enjoyable or meaningful. The next chapter provides some concrete tips for maximizing the chance that young people will achieve these valued goals.

Case Conceptualization and Intervention Planning



Now we'll return to Ruby and see how we might bring her into discoverer space. First let's take a look at Ruby's key issues using the DNA-V case conceptualization model.

In terms of her advisor, Ruby has unhelpful thoughts. The central theme in her internal dialogue is that no one else can understand her. She also frequently tells herself, *I'm a coward*. In terms of being a noticer, Ruby demonstrates little ability to notice her present feelings or accept them. Rather, she looks through her thoughts, allowing her advisor to tell her what to do. As for discoverer skills, which will be the focus of this section, it's clear that Ruby doesn't use these skills at all.

Finally, we turn to values. Ruby values reading, but she's using it as a way of avoiding her feelings. While that does help keep the advisor quiet and dampen down her feelings, it doesn't work in terms of creating a vital life. So her reading isn't working in the long run, even though it's a value. Revisiting the concept of form versus function, we can see that the problem isn't Ruby's reading, per se; rather, it's how reading functions in her life. Once Ruby learns DNA skills, she may read for the pure joy of it. Keep in mind that in the DNA-V model no behavior is inherently helpful or harmful; rather, we look to the consequences of a given behavior to try to understand how it functions.

Current situation and presenting issue

Dropping out of school.

Disconnected from friends and family.

Refuses help.

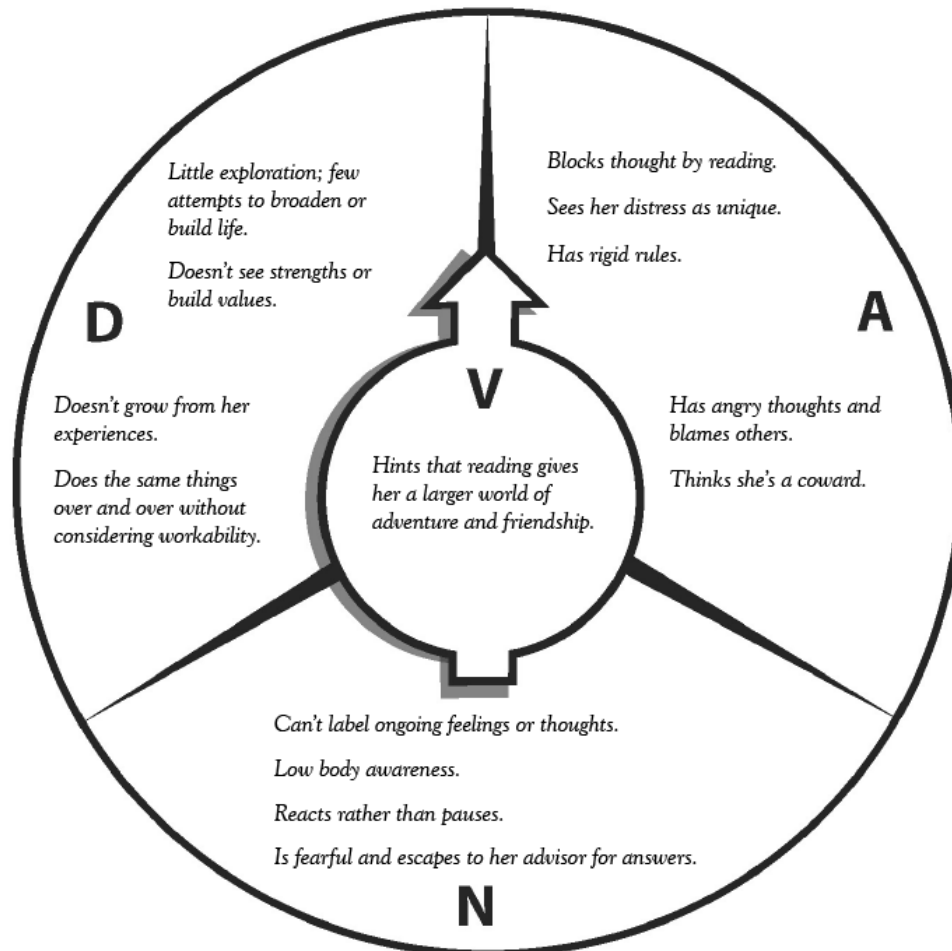
Social and historical environment

Family history of violence and trauma.

Father is deceased.

Mother is withdrawn.

Absence of close relationships with family and peers.



Self-view

Fixed view of self.

No self-compassion.

Is unkind to herself.

Social view

Withdrawn from others and school.

Assumes others can know her interior world.

Unable to connect and build relationships using empathy or social skills.

FIGURE 10. Ruby's DNA-V case conceptualization.

Ruby Tentatively Steps into Discoverer Space

We need to begin gently with Ruby, guiding her through her life and working together to find things she cares about. In the process, we can help her “accidentally” see that there are some positives in her life.

The “accidental” approach is important. Ruby has a powerful advisor. If we were to simply say positive things to her, like “You’re really smart,” her advisor would probably shut that down with a critical comment like “You’re only saying that to make me feel better. You don’t really mean it.”

We’ve provided examples of how Ruby might fill out the worksheets in this chapter. When we review the first worksheet (“The DNA-V of Your Life”) with Ruby, we can ask her what she notices. It should be apparent that although her advisor is negative and Ruby says her life is terrible, the reality of her physical world is far different. She had glossed over some fun experiences with cooking, the bands she saw, her journaling, and field trips. If she doesn’t notice the difference between what her advisor tells her and her actual experience, we can gently point this out. The idea is not to challenge her ideas about her life, but to teach her that discovering the physical world is different from thinking about the physical world.

The DNA-V of Your Life

1. Feeding the Advisor

Write down five events that happened in the past few years:

1. *Bullied at school.*
2. *Read some great books.*
3. *Had to see a psychologist.*
4. *Hated school a lot.*
5. *Went to a fab music festival.*

Ask the advisor to judge which of those memories are good and which are bad.

1, 3, and 4 are bad. 2 and 5 are good.

Get the advisor to make a conclusion about your life based exclusively on these five events.

There were some good things in my life, but it was mostly shit.

2. Becoming a Discoverer

Gather evidence about your life. For example, you can look at what you've stored on electronic devices (photos, posts on social media, and so on) or some of the meaningful objects you own. Or you might just take photos of what's important to you. Consider discussing this with someone. When you're ready, jot down some notes about what you discovered and appreciated. Really brainstorm. The more notes, the better.

Reading a new Stephen King novel until 5 a.m. New album released by my favorite band. Front row seats at the music festival. New jeans. Writing in my journal. Painting my bedroom yellow. The museum field trip at school. Learning to cook Chinese food. Missing class and not getting caught. Cooking and eating at Christmas time. Going to the beach camp. Going with my sister to the music festival.

3. Noticing the Differences Between the Advisor and the Discoverer

Compare what you wrote in the first part of this worksheet to what you wrote in the second, then take a little time to write about the differences here.

I'm scared to do this exercise. I see that I've forgotten a lot of the good things. I probably do this a lot.

Now comes the tricky part. We need to ask Ruby to be willing to dream about a valued future. Ruby is fairly rigid, and we'd probably conduct basic training in advisor and noticer skills before moving to extensive values clarification and setting goals, but we'll cover how the rest of the exercise might unfold to illustrate this approach. In Ruby's case, we'd ask if she's willing to notice that her advisor has a pretty shoddy way of recording her life and then ask her if she's willing to just play with some ideas about her future. If she's willing, we'd work together on the worksheet "My Valued Journey." Here's what she might come up with.

My Valued Journey

Domain	Things I've valued (Events that made me smile, touched me, were fun or meaningful, or made me feel alive)	Favorites ★★★★★ = top ★★★ = middle ★ = okay	Step into the future (What actions can I take to have more of this in the next year? What are some small steps I might try?)
Connecting with others	<i>Going to the festival with my sister</i>	★★★★★	<i>Go to another festival, maybe with other people?</i>
Giving to others and having a positive influence			
Being active			
Embracing the moment	<i>Discovering new authors</i>	★★★	<i>Sign up to online forums about books and authors.</i>
	<i>Listening to favorite music</i>	★★★★★	<i>Share the music I like with others.</i>

Domain	Things I've valued (Events that made me smile, touched me, were fun or meaningful, or made me feel alive)	Favorites ★★★★★ = top ★★★ = middle ★ = okay	Step into the future (What actions can I take to have more of this in the next year? What are some small steps I might try?)
Challenging myself or learning	Reading novels	★★★★★	Write something of my own. Learn about writing poetry.
	Going to the museum	★★	
	Learning to cook Chinese food	★★★	Borrow a cookbook from my aunt (the best cook in the family).
Caring for myself	Buying cool new clothes	★★★★	
Other:			
Other:			

Although it's clear from the above that Ruby is still alone and has little social connection, she has made a start. By generating possible new behaviors, Ruby has created choices for herself: she can continue following her advisor, or she can be willing to take small discoverer steps. Because there's no guarantee that any new behavior will be beneficial, before she launches into new behaviors we need to help her develop skill in receiving feedback from the environment. That's where workability comes in. If she's to be a discoverer, she needs to track the consequences of her behavior against her plans for valued action. Here are some questions that can help her tune in to the consequences:

- *Will this help you do more of what you care about?*
- *Will this open up your life or close it down?*

- *Did this allow you to keep going?*

Let's look at a concrete example of Ruby tracking the consequences of her behavior:

1. Ruby decides that the first valued action she'd like to try is writing poetry.
2. As she engages in the action, she notices what her advisor is saying and what she's feeling. In other words, she practices being a noticer. She determines that she feels scared and fears she can't write well, and then allows the tension of those feelings to just be there.
3. After sitting with those feelings for a few moments, Ruby asks herself if she's okay and whether writing poetry seems to add vitality to her life or helps her grow.
4. She decides it does. This awareness gives her a better capacity to manage her feelings as she continues with the valued action. If she were to decide it didn't work, she would set about discovering something else to try.

It's most likely that the new activity will be somewhere between an absolute success and an absolute disaster. If Ruby remains open each time she notices her emotions and names them, she's likely to improve her ability to try new things. With each foray into valued action, she's allowing her feelings to be and discovering that, when she does this, nothing disastrous happens. Eventually, this feedback will help her become less afraid of her feelings. Notably, Ruby's choice to become a discoverer doesn't necessarily reduce her fear. Indeed, it may increase it at first. That's okay. In the DNA-V model, the aim isn't to make feelings go away. Many of our most important feelings arise when we try new things or step up to a new experience and receive feedback.

Returning to Values and Committing to Action

Chapter 2 addressed how to begin values work with young people. That discussion was brief because in the early stages of counseling, young people are often too upset to think deeply about their values or too caught up in avoidance patterns and bad habits to consider new possibilities. Once they learn basic DNA skills, they have a greater ability to expand their repertoire of valued actions. Specifically, expansion occurs when young people learn to do three things: unhook from unhelpful rules and evaluations (the advisor), rather than being pushed around by them; notice and allow sensations and emotions, rather than automatically avoiding them or reacting to them; and use workability as a way of selecting behavior, rather than being insensitive to the long-term consequences of behavior.

Connecting Values to Actions

When we circle back to values, we use several exercises to help young people connect deeply with what they care about and set goals in keeping with their values. These exercises can be done with individuals or in group settings.

We discussed the theoretical foundation of values in chapter 2, so we won't revisit that here. However, we will reiterate that in DNA-V, and in ACT more generally, values are distinct from goals. As a reminder, values are chosen life directions that we can always choose to enact but can't permanently achieve; goals are achievable actions we undertake in the service of our values.

Of course, it can be difficult to stay committed to goals. We all fail to achieve goals, including, at least occasionally, those that are important to us. In this chapter, we'll provide an evidence-based framework for helping young people to identify their values, derive goals from these values, and commit to their goals in a way that maximizes their chance of success.

Values Exercise 2: Values Card Sort

This exercise is a bit similar to Discoverer Exercise 4: Strength Spotting Card Sort, in chapter 5, in this case using cards with simple values statements, presented here and also available for download at <http://www.thrivingadolescent.com>. (Professionally printed cards with evocative images can be purchased at the same website, with all proceeds donated to charity.) You can use these cards to start conversations aimed at helping young people explore what they care about. Then they can use their values to guide their actions in the world.

The cards loosely fall into four domains: “caring for myself,” “connecting with others,” “challenging myself,” and “valuing in the presence of difficulty.” We say these categories are loose because any given card might fall into any domain depending on the meaning an individual derives from it. Note that some cards include phrases that wouldn’t be considered values as we formally defined that term in chapter 2. For example, “feeling different” or “valuing in the presence of difficulty” may not initially seem to be valued behaviors, but many young people choose these cards, and we have found that they lead to valuable conversations. For example, a young man with anxiety might choose struggling, which can open a conversation about how there’s value in working with his anxiety and standing up for what he cares about. When young people choose a values card, they’re simply saying it’s important. Your task is to help them turn this into valued behavior.

Card sorts offer at least two advantages over just asking questions, especially with young people. First, the physical properties of the cards provide an anchor. Young people can look at a card, hold it, and talk about it, which creates a bit of distance that may feel safer than talking face-to-face with you. Second, the wordings on these cards are simple, which allows young people to derive their own meanings. (The images on the professionally printed cards available at our website extend this still further.) For example, “embracing the moment” could lead to conversations about being mindful, enjoying carefree behavior, valuing friends, or even cherishing childhood memories when they arise. As always, listen for the valued content in young people’s words. It generally isn’t hard to find, as it lies behind almost all conversations you’ll have with them in a helping environment.

Sorting the Cards

Begin by explaining that the messages on the cards are based on values that are important to many people. Say something like “They

have no correct meaning; they mean whatever you want them to mean.” Then ask those you’re working with to sort the cards into three piles:

- Not very important now
- Of moderate importance now
- Most important now

Once the cards are sorted, ask them to choose the five cards that are most important to them from the third pile. Then discuss their choices, using questions along these lines:

- *What did you notice as you sorted the cards? Was it easy or hard? What was easy to leave out? What was hard to leave out?*
- *Were you surprised by any of the cards you chose to put in the “not very important” pile?*
- *What did you notice when you had to choose only five important cards? Did you feel as if you had to leave out a value from your life? (If they say yes, remind them that these are just cards, not their actual values, and that choosing five is arbitrary. You might go on to point out that this is a demonstration of how the advisor skews things, like looking at these cards as if they actually were the values.)*
- *Do you notice anything about the final five you’ve chosen? (Often young people think of the cards in terms of categories that are unique to them. They might have chosen one for independence, one for a problem they’re working on, and so forth.)*
- *What discoverer, noticer, or advisor skills would be required to help you obtain more of one of these values?*

Finally, discuss how values are reflected by actions we take in the world, not our feelings or wishes. This sets the stage for the next step: setting goals to move toward values.

An Alternative Sorting Activity

As an alternative, you can ask young people to sort the cards into either the categories we’ve defined or categories that are meaningful for them. If using this approach, be flexible. For example, it doesn’t matter if there are more in one category than another.

CARING FOR MYSELF

Getting physical	Accepting myself
Giving thanks	Seeing possibilities
Asking for help	Feeling pleasure
Finding peace	Understanding

CONNECTING WITH OTHERS

Trusting	Being loving
Being truthful	Admiring
Connecting	Appreciating others
Belonging	Being compassionate

CHALLENGING MYSELF

Dancing with joy	Imagining
Daring to dream	Creating
Seeking freedom	Achieving
Seeking knowledge	Embracing the moment

VALUING IN THE PRESENCE OF DIFFICULTY

Forgiving	Seeking wisdom
Letting it be	Struggling
Staying with uncertainty	Feeling secure
Saying good-bye	Feeling different

Valued Action Exercise 1: Setting Goals

Once young people have identified the valued actions they would like to engage in, the next step is to help them set goals. We use the following worksheet to achieve this. It focuses on the six patterns of valued activity outlined in chapter 2. We recommend allowing young people to choose whether to write about all the areas or just some of them. Also encourage them to add any categories that are meaningful to them if they have values that don't fit into the

categories on the worksheet. Values are, after all, an individual choice.

Setting Goals That Reflect Your Values

Below, you'll find descriptions of six areas of life that hold value for many people. Read through each and determine whether it's important to you. If it is, spend some time brainstorming goals you might set to bring your life more in alignment with your values in that area. Then write your goals in the space provided. Feel free to skip any areas that currently aren't meaningful to you. You can also add any categories that make sense to you.

Connecting with others. This might involve family, friends, neighbors, and so on. Think about some of the great times you've had with others.

Giving to others and having a positive influence. You may find it hard to believe that giving to others promotes your own well-being, but it does. Think of times when you did something for someone, such as thanking someone, paying someone a compliment, or helping someone work through a problem. Or maybe you gave someone a gift by just listening to or accepting that person. Other ways of giving include taking care of animals or the environment.

Being active. This includes exercise and sports, such as running, bicycling, weight lifting, playing tennis, or dancing. It also involves more moderate forms of activity and movement, such as walking or stretching. Think about some times when you've enjoyed physical activity or found it meaningful.

Embracing the moment. Think of times when you've been a noticer, paying attention with your five senses: touch, taste,

sight, sound, and smell. Maybe you were noticing something in nature, experiencing the flavor of something, or listening to music. Or maybe you were just fully engaged in a conversation with a friend. Think of times when you’ve paid attention to something or someone with openness and curiosity.

Challenging yourself and learning. Think of how you might challenge yourself or perhaps learn something new. What are some challenging activities that you find enjoyable, meaningful, or personally important?

Caring for yourself. Self-care includes anything you do to make sure your mind and body are working well. Examples include treating yourself to a fun activity after a hard day at school, being kind to yourself during tough times, eating well, and getting enough sleep. People often put self-care last on their list—something they’ll get to when all their other tasks are done. However, self-care supports everything else we do, so it’s worth devoting time to.

Using the DNA-V Diagram to Set Goals

Next, you can ask those you’re working with to use the “DNA-V Goal Setting Worksheet” for one or more of their values or goals. Have them fill out a separate worksheet for each goal or value, answering all of the questions on the worksheet. This exercise can help young people see how their goals and DNA skills support each other.

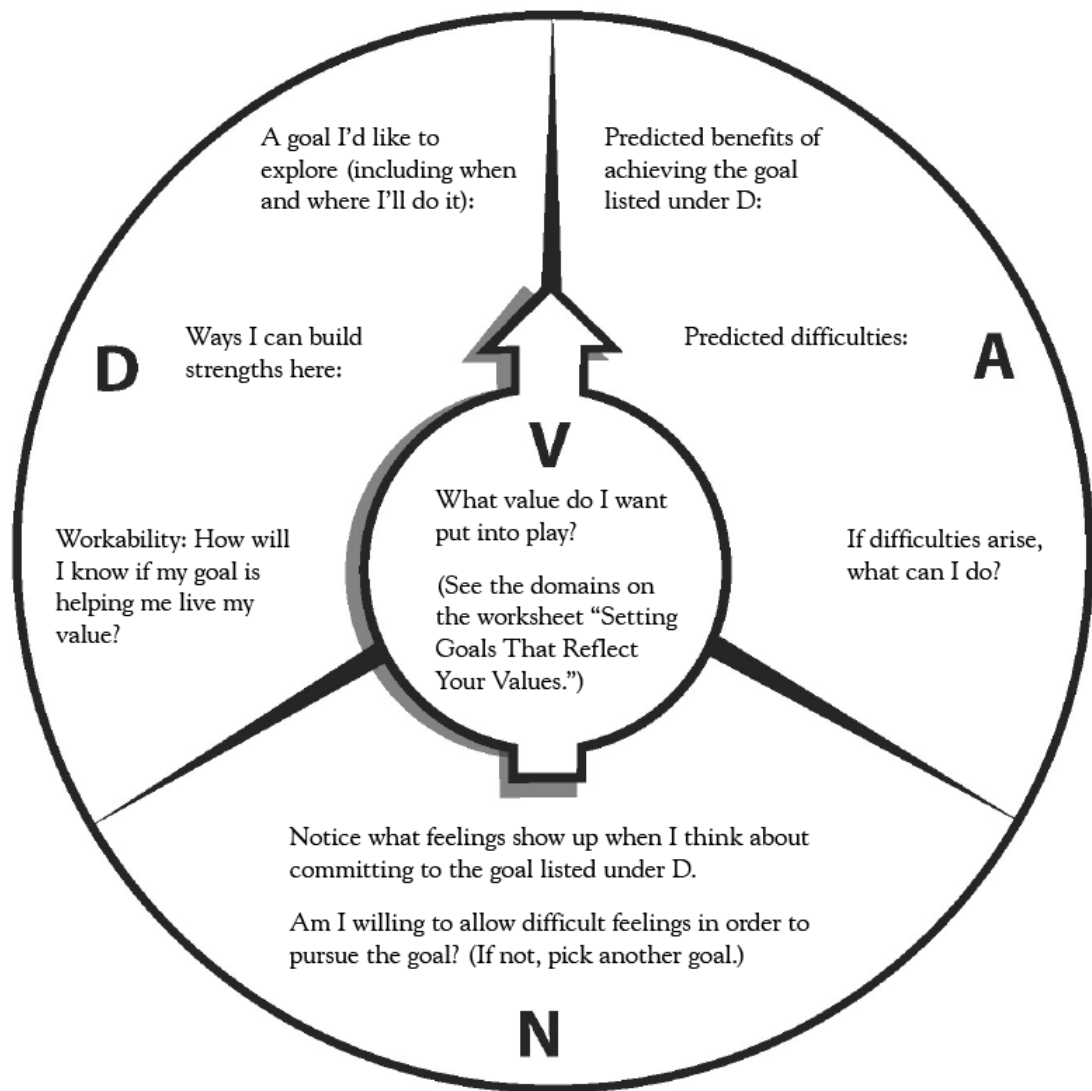


FIGURE 11. DNA-V Goal setting worksheet.

Valued Action Exercise 2: Contrast and Prepare

In helping young people set goals, remember this core principle of DNA-V: Don't seek to split the good from the bad. Suffering begins with the desire to feel good without ever feeling bad. To have the best chance at achieving goals, people need to recognize that the good and bad co-occur.

One way to psychologically keep the good and the bad together is to do something called mental contrasting, which basically means deliberately identifying the benefits of achieving a goal and the potential difficulties that doing so may create (Duckworth, Grant, Loew, Oettingen, & Gollwitzer, 2011). Research suggests that mental contrasting increases achievement of goals (Duckworth et al.,

2011). In the preceding goal setting worksheet, we encourage mental contrasting by asking young people to predict the benefits and difficulties of achieving a goal.

Research suggests that setting implementation intentions also increases achievement of goals (Gollwitzer, 1999). Implementation intentions involve two components: the first is identifying the actions you'll take to achieve your goals and specifying what will cue you to take those actions; the second is identifying potential barriers to achieving goals and how you'll deal with them. The key to implementation intentions is creating "if-then" statements every step of the way and coming up with specific behavioral plans to facilitate following through, even when barriers arise. The preceding goal setting worksheet incorporates implementation intentions in the form of the question "If difficulties arise, what can I do?"

Each time young people practice new actions, take risks, or set goals, they also need to notice what the world gives them in return—in other words, they need to track the workability of the behavior, as described in earlier chapters. This allows them to determine whether the goals they achieve are actually making their life more vital and meaningful. If a new behavior isn't helping them thrive, they can choose to pursue a different goal.

Now we'll set forth the key steps for setting goals, including mental contrasting of benefits and barriers and setting strategic "if-then" implementation intentions. We provide these instructions in a shorthand way, briefly suggesting what you might say at each step and offering guidance on the type of response to seek from those you're working with.

Step 1. Identify a Goal

- **Practitioner:** *What is your goal?* (Make sure the person sets a specific, measurable goal.)
- **Young person:** *My goal is _____. I plan to do the goal _____* [ideally, specify the time, date, place, or context for working on the goal].

Step 2. Identify Benefits

- **Practitioner:** *What are the benefits to achieving the goal?* (Ask the person to imagine the most positive aspects of achieving this goal.) *What would that look like?* (Encourage the person to elaborate.) *How would your goal link to your values?*

- **Young person:** *If I work toward _____[goal], it would _____[benefits]. It would connect to my value of _____.*

Step 3. Identify Barriers

- **Practitioner:** *What are the most critical obstacles to achieving the goal?*
- **Young person:** *I might experience anxiety, self-doubt, or temptation. I might feel I don't have enough time, or I might get distracted. I may also face practical obstacles, like lack of money, not having transportation, or not getting support from important adults.*

Step 4. Prepare for Barriers

- **Practitioner:** *What will you do if you encounter critical obstacles?* (Ask the person to be specific about what he or she will do to continue working toward the goal in the face of barriers. Examples might be noticing and making space for difficult emotions and persisting with the goal, or committing to part of the goal if the overall goal is too difficult.)
- **Young person:** *If _____[the barrier] arises, then I will _____[goal-supporting action].*

Step 5. Prepare for Opportunities

- **Practitioner:** *What opportunities might you have to take action on this goal that you haven't already mentioned?* (Ask the person to consider the situations that could facilitate achieving the goal. For example, if a person is interested in writing poems, he or she might look for opportunities to enter poems in a contest.)
- **Young person:** *If _____[opportunity], then I will _____[goal-related action].* (For example, "If I have some free time on Saturday after lunch, I'll spend an hour working toward my goal rather than watching TV.")

Step 6. Return to Workability

- **Practitioner:** *After you've tried these actions, step into discoverer space to see if it helped you connect to your values.*
- **Young person:** *Okay. Afterward I'll ask myself, "Did this work? Did it help me connect to my values?"*

Valued Action Exercise 3: Being BOLD

Finally, as young people go out to practice their new DNA skills and work toward their goals, we teach them a skill that uses the acronym BOLD. BOLD brings all of DNA-V skills together and is useful for centering in the moment when one feels anxious or worried about stepping into a new situation. Here's a brief explanation of the approach:

- **B = Breath deeply and slow down.**
- **O = Observe your thoughts and feelings. Observe what is around you.**
- **L = Listen to your values in this moment. What sort of person do you want to be?**
- **D = Decide on how you want to act in this moment. What would it look like if you were acting out your values?**

See *Get Out of Your Mind and Into Your Life for Teens* (Ciarrochi et al., 2011, p. 75) for a teen-friendly presentation of this skill, along with an example. In addition, a downloadable video with the BOLD steps is available at <http://www.thrivingadolescent.com>.

Bringing DNA-V Together to Develop Flexible Strength

The previous chapters discussed how to help young people develop discoverer, noticer, and advisor skills separately, along with identifying values and setting goals. In this chapter we'll bring the full DNA-V model together to demonstrate how you can promote *flexible strength*, our user-friendly term for psychological flexibility.

We begin with a question that's of interest to almost every parent, educator, and practitioner working with young people. How can we help young people develop psychological strengths? How can we assist them in developing traits like willpower, resilience, courage, persistence, and grit?

We consulted the psychological literature in search of an answer, and what we found was a complicated mess. Each psychological strength seemed to have its own independent body of research and set of books. For example, on the topic of willpower, we find books with titles like *The Willpower Instinct*, *Willpower: Rediscovering the Greatest Human Strength*, and *Willpower: Regain Your Self-Control and Rediscover Your Willpower Instinct*. There are literally dozens of books that feature the word "resilience" in the title. And many psychology titles focus on courage (for example, *Courage: Overcoming Fear and Igniting Self-Confidence*, and *Finding Inner Courage*) and persistence or grit (for example, *The Art of Persistence* and *Grit: The New Science of What It Takes to Persevere, Flourish, and Succeed*). Many of these books have good ideas. Do we therefore need to spend the next ten years reading all of them before we can understand how to develop young people's strengths?

We believe not. Developing strengths can seem overwhelming if we view each strength as an entirely separate thing. From that perspective, the number of separate things to be named and developed can be endless. However, we can simplify the situation by treating strengths as behavior, as discussed in chapter 5, and using the behavioral ideas in this book to increase strengths. We don't need to assume that people "have" courage the way they have shoes. They either behave with courage or don't behave with courage.

What determines when and how they act with courage is the context, which can be either current or historical. For example, some cultures heavily emphasize physical courage and therefore are more likely to produce warriors. Other cultures or subgroups, such as the Quakers, teach that war is wrong and therefore are less likely to produce people who express their physical courage through warfare. However, they may produce people who are willing to display psychological courage and to take large social risks in defense of their beliefs.

The DNA-V model provides a simple approach to developing flexible strengths. To illustrate this point, here's an overview of the DNA-V approach to promoting willpower, resilience, courage, persistence, and grit:

- **Willpower** involves the ability to control ourselves and determine our actions. Those with little willpower tend to be slaves to short-term temptations and impulses. DNA-V promotes willpower largely by teaching noticing skills. Young people learn to sense feelings, thoughts, temptations, and stimuli in the present moment without reacting to them. Noticing gives them the space to pause, plan, and choose actions based on long-term values.
- **Resilience** involves the ability to become strong, healthy, or successful again after something negative happens. DNA-V promotes resilience by reinforcing young people's ability to shift from the advisor's unhelpful worry and rumination about negative events into noticing and connecting with values in the present moment. DNA-V also encourages young people to accept the negative emotions that come naturally during the course of life, rather than fighting against those emotions, which only amplifies them. Finally, DNA-V encourages them to shift into discoverer space to find new ways to move beyond negative events.
- **Courage** involves the ability to do something that's known to be difficult or dangerous. DNA-V promotes courage by reinforcing the idea that thoughts and feelings are normal and not dangerous (training the advisor), and by encouraging young people to allow anxiety to come and go in the service of their values (developing noticer skills and willingness).
- **Persistence or grit** involves the ability to continue doing something or trying to do something even though it's difficult or even when others oppose it. DNA-V promotes these traits by encouraging young people to connect their actions to long-term

values, rather than short-term impulses, and to make space for setbacks and the difficult feelings that can arise when engaging in valued actions.

In summary, we argue that the development of DNA skills leads to the development of strengths. In chapter 5 we offered exercises for helping young people identify their strengths. But strengths aren't enough. People must apply their strengths flexibly if they are to be useful. For example, courage may be valuable when signing up for a difficult course, but it isn't when joyriding after a few beers. Persistence can be a strength if it promotes valued action, but a weakness if it leads to wasting time on meaningless tasks. Forgiving others and giving them a second chance may be a virtue in a loving relationship, but not in an abusive one, where forgiveness behavior invites more abuse.

Thus, no pattern of behavior is inherently strong or weak. Behavior can be considered strong when it helps a young person achieve valued ends. Again, the form of the behavior isn't what's important. What matters is the function—what the behavior does for the person.

The remainder of the chapter demonstrates how to help young people develop flexible strength. But first, let's consider the story of a young person who's wasting his strengths.

Steve's Story

Steve sits on the roof, arms folded, staring angrily down at his mom, who's yelling at him to come down. "Leave me alone!" he yells. *I'm not going to see a counselor, and I'm not getting down until they say I don't have to.*

Steve is a tall, bulky, awkward sixteen-year-old. He loves cars and engines and spends his days with his head under the hood, building, fixing, and getting things running. He can feel at peace then.

School is another matter. Kids always seem ready to push him and challenge him over stupid stuff. Steve wouldn't ever back down from a fight, but he wonders why he has to go to school in the first place. The only thing he enjoys at school is sports.

Steve loves his family. His mom is an organizer and helps him when he can't figure something out. She pulls the whole family together. She's always talking to him, saying he needs to do one thing or another. She never seems to stop talking, but Steve doesn't mind; he can easily tune her out.

His dad is different. Like Steve, he loves cars, and they've been working together in the shed on an old V8 Mustang, trying to get it running for when Steve gets his license. His dad loves beer and calls it "real man's water." His dad has a job and helps out with the local football team. He also does things with the family, but many nights he drinks a lot and gets into an angry mood. Recently Steve has been having a lot of yelling matches with his dad, mostly when his dad's been drinking.

Things came to a head about a week ago, when Steve's dad was screaming right in Steve's face. Steve couldn't take it anymore; he raised his fists to his dad and said, "I'm going to hit you if you don't back off." His dad stepped back and said through his teeth, "Bring it on." That scared Steve, and he stood down.

Other parts of Steve's life are just a pain, especially school. Steve is sure he's stupid, and school only makes him feel worse about himself. Lately he's lost his temper quite a few times and started getting into fights with other kids. Then he lost his temper with the principal and told him to piss off. That got him suspended, and the principal said he couldn't come back to school until he got lessons in anger management.

Steve doesn't want to go back anyway, but his mom has been starting to get on his case about it. *If they would leave me alone and not make me do stupid schoolwork or nag me, I wouldn't lose it*, he thinks. *I can't stand this anymore. I wish I was dead, or just somewhere else—anywhere.*

Reflecting on Steve

Steve seems quite immature for his age. He has angry outbursts, and because these are the kinds of events that grab attention, he's the kind of young person teachers and health professionals often see. People like Steve are often told they need to learn anger management skills. It's almost like they're being prescribed an instant-fix pill.

Take a moment to consider how you'd respond to Steve:

- What shows up for you when you're interacting with a young person like Steve? Consider your feelings, thoughts, doubts, and hopes.
- Shortly, we'll work step-by-step through a DNA-V case conceptualization. For now, just mentally note where you might start with someone like Steve.

In the DNA-V model, we assume all behavior is purposeful, so the task is to understand how Steve's anger is working for him. What does it give him? It isn't just that Steve doesn't know how to manage his feelings; he also has to deal with difficult family and academic issues. So Steve loses his temper a lot, and this actually works for him in many ways: he gets out of class and his family leaves him alone. A big part of Steve's problem is contextual. He's stuck in a system that doesn't suit him, his father is struggling, and Steve doesn't know how to manage his situation in any way other than by losing his temper.

Aggression and Risk Taking: The Norm, Not the Exception

In this chapter, we'll use Steve's story to bring the entire DNA-V model together. Let's start by taking a look at whether or not Steve's aggressive behavior is abnormal.

You might be surprised to discover that humans are aggressive until they learn not to be. The most aggressive humans are not adolescents, but toddlers (Tremblay, 2000). Years of longitudinal research shows that we start out using a lot of aggression. Then, as we're socialized during childhood, physical conflict slowly decreases. At twelve to eighteen months of age, 50 percent of interchanges between toddlers can be viewed as disruptive or conflictual, but this drops to 20 percent by two and a half years and continues to decline with age (Connor, 2002). Generally, as children get older, they're socialized to use words instead of physical actions to manage their emotions and get what they want. Although they continue to engage in aggressive behavior, the nature of their aggression changes. It becomes more verbal and less physical, more covert, and more about maintaining self-esteem than obtaining possessions.

Even so, physical fighting is still common in some societies. One US survey suggests that 42 percent of boys and 28 percent of girls aged fourteen to eighteen have had a physical fight in the past year (Marcus, 2007). An Australian survey suggested that 52 percent of boys and 15 percent of girls ages thirteen to fourteen have had a physical fight in the past month (Smart et al., 2003). Another US study found that over 80 percent of high school seniors reported worrying sometimes or often about violence and crime (Connor, 2002).

Physical conflict is just one of several risk-taking behaviors of concern in most modern societies. Other types of risk-taking behavior are surprisingly common. In one study focusing on individuals ages seventeen to eighteen, researchers found that 10 to 20 percent of participants had engaged in acts of theft or vandalism, 85 percent had consumed alcohol, 39 percent had smoked cigarettes, and 19 percent had used marijuana (Smart et al., 2003).

We can conclude that risk taking is quite normal among young people and that it may serve an adaptive purpose. For example, aggression can help young people develop social assertiveness, compete in games, and overcome barriers to their goals. Rejecting parental standards and taking adaptive risks may help young people develop independence and form strong supportive networks with their peers. Here are some questions that can help you identify the purpose of aggression and risk-taking behavior:

- What challenging situation is the young person facing?
- How does the behavior help the person get what he or she wants?
- Has the person been taught an adaptive repertoire for managing feelings and thoughts?
- What does the person care about? And what effect is the behavior having on his or her life?

Case Conceptualization and Intervention Planning

We'll begin by discussing how to conceptualize a person's presenting problem in terms of the full DNA-V model. Then we'll build on the conceptualization, showing you how to apply it in specific situations. We'll use the same case conceptualization worksheet we've employed throughout. We recommend that you test the knowledge you've acquired thus far before reading on. Try completing a blank case conceptualization worksheet for Steve using the information about him provided at the beginning of this chapter. (As a reminder, you can download a blank version of the worksheet at <http://www.thrivingadolescent.com>.) Then compare what you come up with to our version in figure 12.

Let's begin with Steve's values—the things that give him a sense of vitality. Steve has identified several things he cares about: cars, sports, and his family. This gives us some areas to start working on

immediately and opens the door to forming a supportive relationship with him. However, we need to remind ourselves that Steve's values may develop and change as we work with him. Indeed, as he builds discoverer skills, we'd expect his list of values to expand.

Next, we'll consider Steve's advisor behaviors. He has many negative evaluations and rigid rules about himself, others, and the world. Further, he seems to believe that his thoughts are always an accurate representation of the world. For example, he performs poorly in school and then believes his own thoughts that he's stupid. He doesn't contact his physical world to test this negative assumption; therefore, he discounts his superior mechanical skills and acts as if "I'm stupid" is universally true for him. In addition, Steve's thoughts are so distressing that he becomes furious just thinking them.

In regard to Steve's noticer skills, he shows little awareness of his emotions; rather, he reacts instantly and impulsively to his bodily cues. There's no evidence that he can label any feeling other than anger. It's likely that Steve experiences anger about other emotions, so when he's sad or frustrated, it comes out as anger. For example, he might feel sadness around his struggles with his father, and those feelings may be so scary for him that all we see is anger. It's important to remember that noticing skills involve two inseparable components: the ability to stay present with difficult inner experiences, and the ability to allow those experiences to be without reacting to them or attempting to control them. However, Steve often seems to be trying to escape his feelings. His escape behaviors include tuning out his mom, working long hours on his car, and getting into arguments and fights, not to mention climbing onto the roof.

Finally, Steve doesn't seem to build discoverer skills. He continues to repeat his unworkable behavior and doesn't track the long-term effects of that behavior on his life. He fails to explore the possibility of using coping strategies that don't involve physical and verbal aggression. Ultimately, he doesn't recognize or develop his strengths.

In addition to the core DNA skills, the case conceptualization sheet also has space for describing social and self-views and aspects of the individual's historical and social environment. Chapters 8 through 12 will cover these portions of the worksheet in detail. Here, we'll address these sections briefly to help round out your understanding of Steve and his situation. Concerning self-view, Steve has little self-

compassion and sees himself as equivalent to his negative self-evaluations. He thinks he genuinely is stupid. As long as his self-evaluations dominate, Steve will struggle to discover ways in which he can develop his intelligence. Steve also has definite challenges in his current social situation, as well as a lack of awareness about how his behavior affects others at home and school.

Current situation and presenting issue

Struggling academically.

Angry outbursts at school leading to suspension.

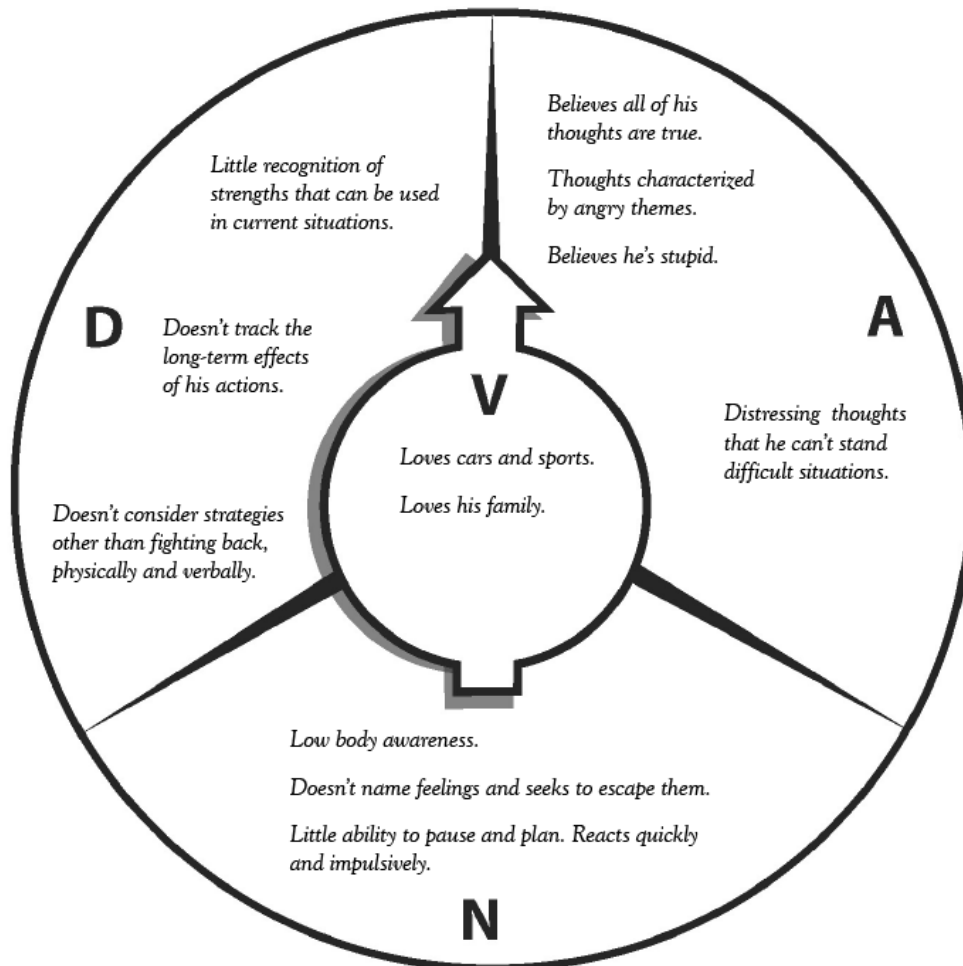
Anger at home.

Social and historical environment

Father drinks too much and is often angry.

Mom is warm but constantly talks and organizes Steve's life.

Doesn't seem to have someone to talk to when troubled.



Self-view

Hard on himself.

Lacks self-compassion.

Limited ability to see himself as separate from his self-evaluations.

Social view

Blames others in his world and says they need to change.

Doesn't see the social consequences of his behavior at home or at school.

FIGURE 12. Steve's DNA-V case conceptualization.

Introducing DNA-V Flexibility

Chapters 2 through 6 provided detailed guidance on how to implement interventions aimed at advisor, noticer, and discoverer skills, as well as values. Here we offer an in-depth explanation of how to bring the DNA-V ingredients together to help young people learn to shift flexibly between the three DNA spaces.

We'll begin by describing how to provide an introduction to all of the elements of the model—values, advisor, noticer, and discoverer—in one continuous discussion, rather than individually as in previous chapters. Inevitably, some of the material in this section is similar to what you've read in chapters 3 through 5. Our hope is that this repetition serves to cement and clarify the concepts and approaches. In chapter 1 we described what we call “the DNA-V walk of life,” a brief way of introducing the DNA-V model using four pieces of paper labeled “D,” “N,” “A,” and “V.” Here we offer an alternative way to introduce the model, in this case using the “DNA-V Walk of Life Worksheet.” (You can download a blank version at <http://www.thrivingadolescent.com>.) A fully filled-out worksheet appears in figure 13. It demonstrates a simple but effective way to introduce the model by giving an unskilled and high-skilled example for the discoverer, noticer, and advisor. In figure 13, we've illustrated the unskilled examples with arrows that create a loop that doesn't connect to or feed values. In contrast, the high-skill examples contribute to values. The following example script illustrates the process of completing the “DNA-V Walk of Life Worksheet.”

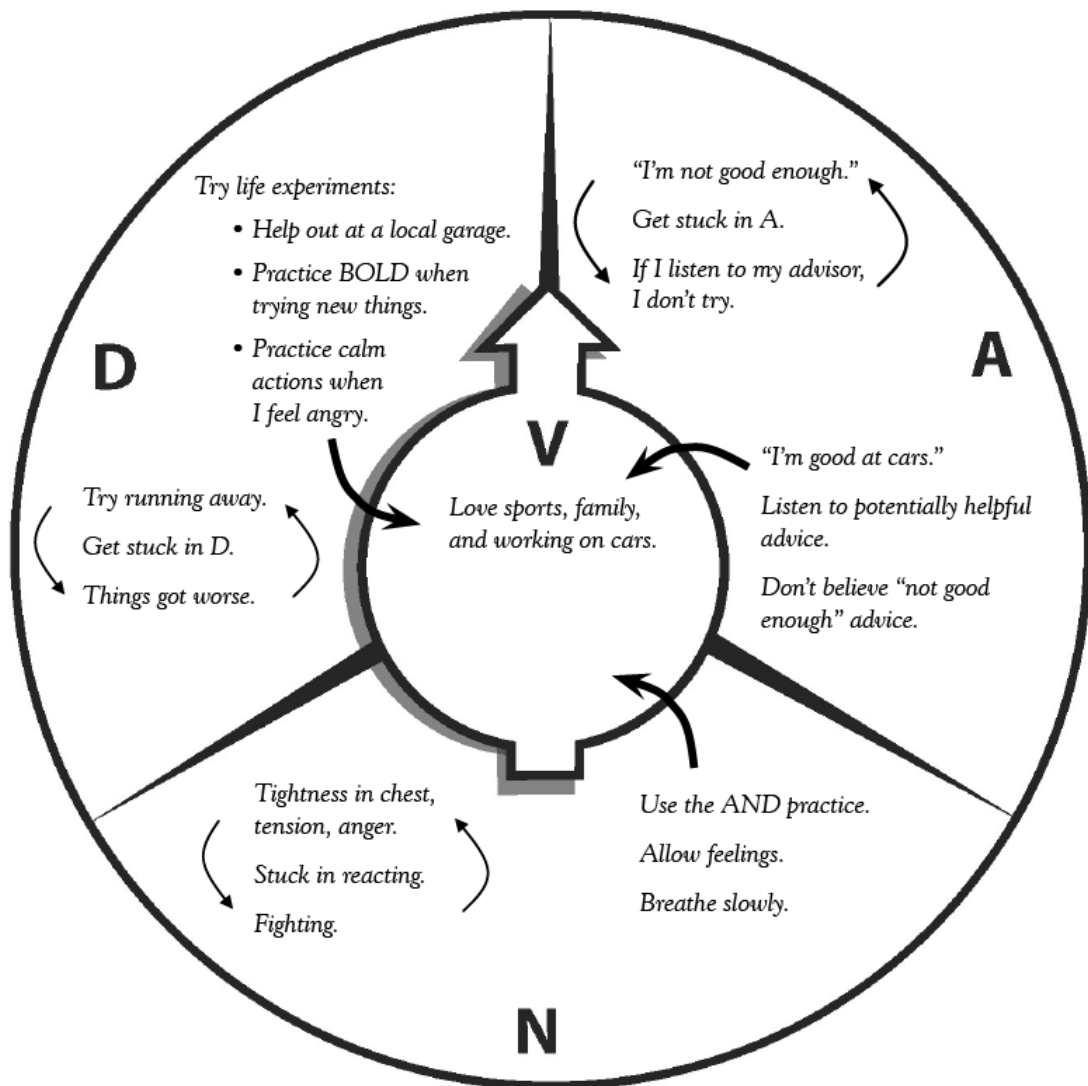


FIGURE 13. Using the “DNA-V Walk of Life Worksheet” to reveal unworkable behavior.

Step 1. Introduce Values

We begin by introducing values because they lie at the core of the model. Indeed, they are the purpose of DNA-V. For ease of illustration, throughout the scripts that follow we’ll assume that you, the reader, are the practitioner working with Steve. As you introduce the model in this way, using the DNA-V disk, point to the various areas as you mention them.

I’d like to take some time now to talk to you about our work together. Everything we do here is going to be about this V. The V stands for values. Values are what you care about and what you find fun, meaningful, or important. The work we do together will be about

you and what you want. Notice that the V is like a pointer in the diagram. This means we can point, or direct, our valuable energy in many directions. We get to choose.

It's crucial to help young people get in contact with what they're doing the work for—what they value. Since you'll probably be introducing the model fairly early in your work with a young person, you can simply write some initial ideas about his or her values in the center of the worksheet. Over time, both you and the young person can reconsider and refine the values.

When we work together, we need to connect with what you want and what you care about. Thus far, you've told me that you like working on cars and playing sports, and that you love your family. Is that right? Okay, I'll write these for V so we can remember that this is what our work is about.

As we talk about what's important to you and explore your options, you're bound to come up with more things that belong in the values area. That's totally cool. We can work on whatever is important to you. But for now, let's start with these things.

It isn't always easy to do what we care about. I'm not talking about just you and me. I'm talking about all humans. Let's see why being human can be so hard.

Step 2. Introduce the Advisor

Next, introduce the advisor:

Your advisor is your inner voice—the thoughts that are almost always running through your head. We all have thoughts running through our head a lot of the time, but most of the time we don't notice them. It's kind of like we have this little guy sitting on our shoulder all the time, telling us what we should do.

Let's experience the advisor right now. I'm going to say a few sentences. Your job is to just notice what happens inside your head when I say them. There's no right or wrong here, just notice what your advisor says as I speak each of these sentences. Ready?

I'm a good person.

I am valued.

I am complete.

I'm perfect.

Then debrief, simply noticing with curiosity what showed up. Usually these sentences will have elicited evaluations from the

young person, such as “That’s not true.”

Okay, so what your mind did just then—that’s the advisor. You didn’t have to try to think of a response; it just happened.

Everybody has an advisor. Sometimes we get good advice, sometimes we seem to get bad advice. We often have thoughts that just don’t seem to be of much use.

And in case you wonder, using the term “the advisor” is just a way of talking about how the human mind works. Here’s one of the most common things the advisor says.

Write “I’m not good enough” in the advisor area of the worksheet.

All humans have negative thoughts like this. As we work together, you’ll learn about why it’s normal for the advisor to say these kinds of things. But for now, I just want to give you an idea of what our work will be about.

So, what happens if you listen to these words? What happens if you really believe “I’m not good enough,” when, say, you’re doing schoolwork?

For this example, imagine Steve says, “I don’t try at school.” Write “If I listen to my advisor, I don’t try” below “I’m not good enough.” Then draw an arrow going from “not good enough” to “don’t try,” as in figure 13.

So, as long as you listen to the advisor, you don’t try at school.

Sometimes the advisor isn’t so useful. Sometimes it gives you advice that doesn’t help. For example, if you listen to this particular advice, you stop trying at school. But when you stop trying, you struggle even more.

I call this “being stuck inside your advisor.” (Write that on the diagram, and then draw a second arrow from “don’t try” to “not good enough” to depict the endless cycle.)

Can you see this cycle? As long as you follow your advisor’s rules, you get stuck in a loop of feeling like you aren’t good enough and not trying. Is this where you want to stay?

Yet sometimes the advisor is useful. For example, you love cars. (Continue annotating the diagram as shown in figure 13.) What happens when you tell yourself you’re good at working on cars? (Steve says that he feels confident and works on them for hours.)

Okay, so if you check with your experience of working on cars, you can see that your advisor is sometimes helpful. I describe this as

giving energy to what you value. (Draw an arrow from not believing the “not good enough” advice into values.)

Everybody gets stuck in advisor space sometimes. However, there's an easy thing we can do to get unstuck. We simply step into one of the other skills and see what happens. You can't always control what thoughts you have—what your advisor says. But you don't have to believe your advisor. Have you ever been given bad advice that you disregarded? It's like that. So instead of listening to the advisor, you can simply shift into noticer or discoverer.

Step 3. Introduce the Noticer

Now turn to introducing the noticer:

The noticer is a space we can always go to when we aren't sure what to do. It is kind of like neutral gear in a car. Sometimes we want to just pause and take a look around. There are times when it's better to be in neutral than to be speeding along in the wrong direction.

There are a couple of simple noticer skills you can learn to help you shift out of advisor space when the advisor isn't being helpful. Would you be willing to practice one now?

Get permission, then teach and conduct the AND practice as described in chapter 4. When Steve tunes in to his physical sensations, he names tightness in his chest and describes it as tension and anger. Write these sensations and emotions in the noticer section of the worksheet. At this point, seize every opportunity to normalize feelings—in this case, perhaps saying something like “All feelings are normal. We all carry tension in our bodies at times—sometimes almost continuously.” Then continue to introduce the noticer:

The noticer helps us tune in to signals within ourselves and see that our emotions are valuable and can be a source of information and strength.

Let's see what happens when we don't notice and allow our feelings. Let's say you have this anger. What happens if, instead of noticing it and allowing it, you just immediately act on your anger?

Steve says he gets into fights, so write that on the diagram and draw an arrow from “anger” to “fighting,” then draw attention to the implications:

Now, when you fight, does it make the tension and anger go away? I mean, does fighting make you feel better in the long run, or worse?

Steve will probably say that fighting leads to more negative emotions. Then you can write “Stuck in reacting” on the diagram and draw a second arrow from “fighting” back up to “anger” to depict that this too is an endless cycle:

Sometimes we react to our feelings without noticing. When our noticer skills are low like this, we react, get more negative feelings, and circle endlessly, stuck in reacting. Again, this is draining.

But there is an alternative to reacting: We can use noticer skills to help us connect back to our values. For example, you can use the AND practice that you just learned to notice your feelings, and then you can allow your feelings to be, without reacting right away. If you need to, take a few deep breaths to center yourself. This gives you time to reconnect with what you care about and choose a response that reflects your values. (Again, note all of this on the worksheet, including an arrow showing energy going back to values.)

When we’re in noticer space, we have another choice, as well. We can either go back into advisor space, or we can shift from noticer to discoverer. Are you willing to shift to discoverer space and see what’s there?

Step 4. Introduce the Discoverer

Once you have an agreement, you can begin to introduce the discoverer:

Discoverer space is where we explore and find things out for ourselves. We can experiment with life and see what happens. Whereas advisor behavior involves doing what we usually do, discoverer behavior involves trying something new.

Consider this: If we keep doing what we’ve always done, like following the advisor’s rules, we’ll always get the same outcome. If we don’t want the same outcome, we need to try something new.

As with the advisor and the noticer, there can be what you might call an unskilled version of the discoverer. An unskilled version would be trying something new and risky without thinking about it or linking it to your values. For example, let’s say one day you just get sick of everything and run away. (Write that in the discoverer area.) Would this help you live these values? (Point to V. Hopefully Steve will say the impulsive action isn’t helpful. Then you can note that and draw a loop between the impulsive action and the negative outcome.)

Would you be willing to try out discoverer space now? (We’ll assume Steve agrees. Point to the V and continue.)

Here are the things you told me you valued, right? For a few minutes here, just be playful and say whatever new things you might try that are consistent with your values, even ideas that seem crazy, okay? Try being a discoverer and coming up with new things you may want to do. Don't worry about judging your ideas as good or bad, or possible or impossible.

Encourage Steve to brainstorm new activities that could help him live his values. Point out that he's just thinking about doing new things and doesn't actually have to do them. You might write down his ideas on a separate piece of paper. Then, after brainstorming, have him choose one or two activities, or ways of responding, that he can do as an experiment. Then write these in the discoverer area, as shown in figure 13.

Trying new things is risky. Let's say you do these things. What could go wrong? (Elicit examples. Perhaps Steve comes up with failing as an apprentice mechanic or not being able to practice calm actions.)

It's true. Those things might happen. Your discoverer experiments may not turn out well. And sometimes they will turn out well. This is why it's called discoverer space. Discoverers try things out in the world and see what happens.

One important part of being a discoverer is that you're likely to be uncomfortable when you try new things. When we do stuff that's new or challenging, we often feel uncomfortable. Have you felt really nervous about doing something but did it anyway?

Elicit examples of Steve being uncomfortable when trying new things. Then reinforce the idea that we can take action even in the presence of discomfort. Importantly, when we try new things with our values in mind, we sometimes discover new things that make life more fun, meaningful, or vital. Our life experiments feed our values.

To conclude this step, consider offering a reminder about the BOLD practice (or teach this skill if you haven't done so yet):

As you go out and try these new things, there's a skill you can use that's often helpful. I call it being BOLD. It has four steps. (Describe this practice as outlined in Valued Action Exercise 3: Being BOLD, at the end of chapter 6.) This is a great tool to make use of when you set out to try new things.

Step 5. Summarize

Finally, bring the entire model together in a brief summary.

Okay, Steve, let's wrap it up. Our work together will be about helping you get more of the things in life that are you care about—the V that stands for values or vitality. You get to choose the purpose for our work.

Notice that there are two ways to use D, N, and A. One way leaves us stuck in endless loops. This is often the typical way we humans do things, so we can just call it “the typical way.” In the typical way, discoverer space involves trying something new and risky that isn't connected to your values, and noticer space involves just reacting to feelings without noticing or allowing them. And the typical way of relating to the advisor is to believe its unhelpful evaluations. We all do these things at times. Notice how these typical ways don't feed values. Instead, they produce more of what we don't want.

In contrast, entering these three spaces skillfully feeds our values. We learn to listen to the advisor but not believe unhelpful advice like “I'm not good enough.” We learn to use noticer skills and allow our feelings instead of reacting to them. We learn to try new things and use our experience to discover ways to live our values.

And here's the good news: You already have these DNA skills. You aren't lacking them. You already have the ability to be an advisor, a noticer, or a discoverer and to use DNA skills to build values. And you're the one who chooses which skills to use, when to use them, and why. What we're going to do in our work together is strengthen your ability to shift between the skills in the service of the things you care about. I'm going to help you to develop flexible strength.

The Flexible Strength of Water

Flexible strength involves the ability to shift between DNA processes in a way that promotes learning and growth. You can use water as a metaphor to help young people understand how this works.

Water adapts to every situation. When it's unhindered, it flows in a steady stream. When it's obstructed, it adjusts its course and flows around, over, or under the barrier. Water can be both gentle and fierce, sometimes flowing quietly and other times crashing in huge waves. It can smooth the surface of a rock or split it in half.

Flexible strength involves the ability to direct your energy, like water, toward whatever is fun, important, or meaningful to you. You learn to flow around the things you cannot change and crash like a wave through the things you can change. You learn to be both gentle and fierce.

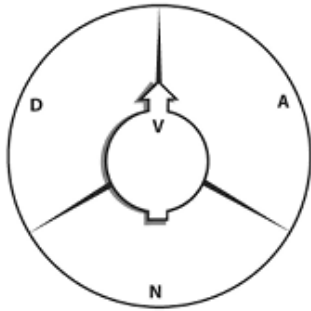
Water accepts whatever is outside of it by making space. For example, water in a glass makes space for an ice cube. Flexible strength also involves the ability to make space for what's outside you, including other people. You learn to share time and energy. You see that you, the water, and the other person, the ice cube, are both in the same glass, and that both of you are fundamentally made of the same stuff.

The Flexible Strength Found in a Single Word: Willingness

Flexible strength has many individual components: willpower, resilience, courage, persistence or grit, and more. Yet all have a common component: willingness to allow difficult feelings in the service of values. A persistent person is willing to allow the distress of slow progress, barriers, and setbacks in order to achieve long-term goals. A courageous person is willing to allow fear in the service of bold action. A resilient person is willing to make space for the negative feelings and thoughts that come with setbacks. And a person with high willpower is willing to allow the discomfort that arises when resisting temptations and impulses.

Therefore, a central question of DNA-V is how to promote willingness. One simple technique (introduced in S. C. Hayes, Strosahl, & Wilson, 1999) involves playing with two of the simplest words in the English language: “but” and “and.” Many of us live in a world filled with “buts.” We would go after our dreams, *but* we lack self-confidence. We would take a risk for love, *but* we fear others will disappoint us. We would write a great novel, *but* we currently lack inspiration. What if we could change all these “buts” to “ands”? This single word can radically change how we relate to our inner experience. We could go after our dreams *and* lack confidence. We could act effectively *and* have the advisor shouting discouragement. We don’t have to wait until the right feelings, thoughts, or level of confidence show up. We don’t have to turn our feelings into an enemy. We can act right now, *with* our feelings.

Intervention Planning



Let's return to Steve and look at how we might discuss his school suspension with him. The approach is illustrated in figure 14. Again, we use a blank DNA-V disk to illustrate both typical behaviors and DNA skills, but take a slightly different approach this time, utilizing spaces labeled "What I've been doing" outside the disk. Most of what you write in these areas will reflect low skill levels, or things most of us typically do when we feel stuck. Then, inside the disk, we record high-skill approaches the person could apply. Using the worksheet in this way provides a lot more space to record things people might try in daily life. There are probably many other ways to use the DNA-V disk.

We focus the conversation on willingness by asking a few simple questions and then guiding the young person to notice the answers written on the DNA-V disk. As before, we've provided scripts, and again they assume that you, the reader, are the practitioner working with Steve. As a reminder, the reason we provide scripts isn't to suggest that you must use exactly this language or that the disk must be used in a certain way, but rather to give some clear examples of what you might say and how you might use the disk. The script is somewhat long because it illustrates the entire process of promoting willingness. When working with young people, you might proceed more slowly. It could take a few meetings to work through all of this content. As ever, we encourage you to adapt your approach to suit the context and the individuals you work with.

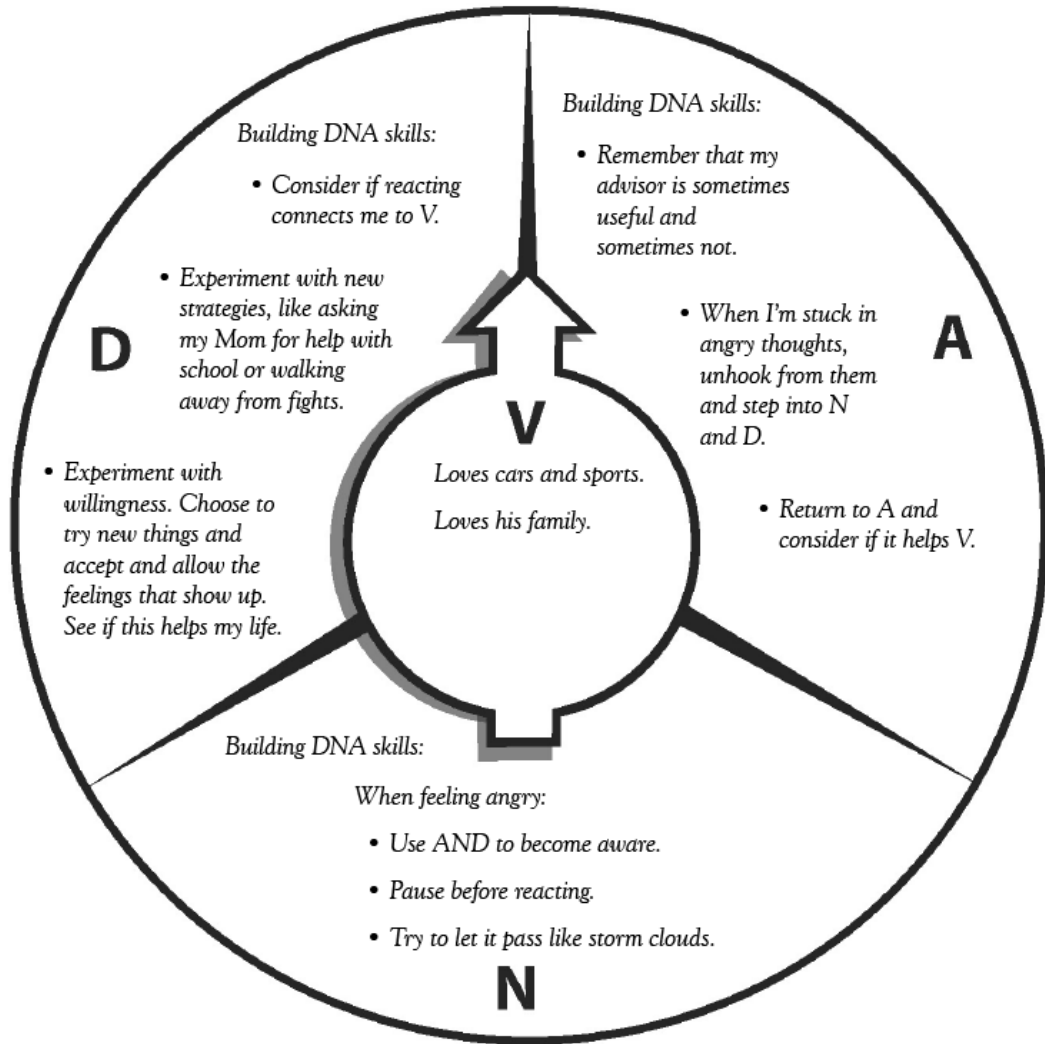
What I've been doing to try to make things better:

- *Confronting my dad.*
- *Climbing on the roof.*
- *Doing the same things over and over.*

What I've been doing with thoughts:

- *"I can't stand feeling this way."*
- *"I can't get pushed around."*

—If I listen to my advisor, I get in fights, tune out, and go into my own world so I can block out the pain.



What I've been doing with feelings:

- *Racing and feeling a surge of energy. Anger. Reacting to feelings by lashing out.*
- *Guilt about getting suspended. Missing school friends. Loneliness.*

FIGURE 14. Using the DNA-V disk to promote willingness.

Begin with Values

Begin by linking back to any previous work on values. In this case, Steve has zeroed in on connecting with friends and family as his primary value, as reflected in figure 14.

Address the Noticer

The next step is aimed at answering the question “What feelings are showing up?”

Steve, can we explore how we might use DNA-V to deal with your school suspension? (Get an agreement.)

Let’s start by shifting into noticer space. Do you remember the AND practice from last time we met? The noticer helps us observe our world and ourselves and make better use of our strengths.

Let’s practice noticing now. Let yourself recall when you were suspended from school. Try to imagine that you’re right back in that situation again.

First we become aware. Remember, that’s the A in AND. So as you think about getting suspended, become aware of the physical changes that you notice right now in your body. Scan your body just like a scanning wand is being passed over it from head to toe. What sensations are there?

If Steve offers a label, like “anger” (the describe part of AND), ask him to connect to his physical sensations and name those first. As mentioned in chapter 4, this is a way of loosening the advisor’s words, thoughts, interpretations, and evaluations and returning to physical sensations in the body.

What does anger feel like in your body? Where is it? Scan your body and see if you can sense it now. Then name whatever sensations you’re aware of. Use any names that come to mind.

On this occasion, Steve says, “I’m racing and I feel a surge of energy.” Record this in the “What I’ve been doing” area below the N. Then, within the disk, record the noticer skills Steve has learned. This clearly establishes which noticer skills Steve might use next time he gets angry. Then move to the describe step of the AND practice:

What will you call this racing sensation next time it comes along?

Steve is likely to say “anger,” since he already provided that label just moments ago. Record it after the associated physical sensations. He may also say something like “pushed around.” Since this isn’t an emotion per se, you wouldn’t record it as noticing. But as the work

progresses, you'd aim to build Steve's repertoire so he can also name and describe physical signs of sadness, frustration, and other emotions. "Pushed around" isn't a discrete feeling state, but it does capture a complex set of feelings that Steve can't quite articulate.

Use Noticing Skills to Draw Out the Unworkability of Control Strategies

Now you can proceed with the ACT approach termed "creative hopelessness." This refers to an experiential process whereby people learn that their attempts to control emotions are often "hopeless" or unworkable, and that letting go of the control agenda creates opportunity for new, valued action (S. C. Hayes, Strosahl, & Wilson, 1999). These kinds of agendas often involve rigid rules about how to "fix" things.

You'd begin this process by helping Steve track his behavior and consider whether his behavior has worked to connect him to his values or a sense of vitality. For example, you might ask Steve if emotion control strategies like lashing out or climbing on the roof have made his life better or worse. To facilitate creative hopelessness, guide the dialogue so that Steve realizes that his efforts to control thoughts and emotions are often problematic and rarely promote his values. He needs to see for himself, however, that letting go of control strategies can create space for new possibilities. Here's how you might start this conversation with Steve:

Okay, Steve. Let's say you react to these feelings. Let's say you really can't stand the anger and the feeling of being pushed around. What happens next?

Elicit any strategies Steve uses in an effort to feel better. In this case, Steve says he lashes out blindly without considering his alternatives. Write this after "anger." It belongs outside the disk below N because reacting in this way is an unskilled noticer behavior.

Continue to elicit strategies. Perhaps Steve next says, "I can't stand feeling this way" and "I can't let myself be pushed around." These seem more like unskilled advisor behaviors because they involve believing thoughts must be listened to and acted upon. So write them in the "What I've been doing" area outside the advisor section of the disk.

Use the Discoverer to Establish Creative Hopelessness

You've helped Steve see that he's been using strategies that haven't been especially effective. To help him see the possibilities that creative hopelessness allows, you need to enter discoverer space:

Now let's shift into discoverer space. Have you been doing new things, or have you mostly been doing the same things repeatedly?

In the “What I’ve been doing” area outside the disk near D, note any behaviors that sound like doing more of the same—in other words, not discovering. For Steve, confronting his dad might fall into this category. If he reports any new behaviors that don’t seem to promote his values, like fleeing to the roof, record those too. Finally, if Steve shares any new behaviors that are connected to his values, also write these outside the disk near D for now (we will return to this shortly). Then move on to the key question: workability.

Now, I'd like to ask an important discoverer question. This may be the most important question you ever ask yourself: Is all this working? Is this advisor behavior (point to what's written outside A) eliminating anger? Is reacting quickly to your anger (point to what's written outside N) helping? Are these behaviors (point to what's written outside D) helping you put energy into your values—the things you most want?

Try not to have your own agenda of convincing Steve that his typical strategies are wrong. They’re probably useful in some instances and less useful in others. Rather, help him notice the difference between strategies that work in the short run and those that work in the long run. And if Steve says that any of his strategies do connect with his values, you can move them inside the disk. In this instance, Steve will probably recognize that none of his strategies are useful in the long run.

If you have difficulty controlling your feelings and thoughts, you are not alone. I can't seem to make my negative feelings go away either, and it seems like I have at least some negative thoughts every day. They just sort of show up, like the weather. They especially seem to show up when I'm doing something that's really important to me or something that's difficult.

It’s important to help people get these points experientially, and there are a lot of ways of doing so (for alternatives see chapter 4 or S. C. Hayes, Strosahl, & Wilson, 2012). Here’s one approach for demonstrating, rather than explaining, the unworkability of trying to control thoughts and feelings:

You don't have to believe what I'm saying, Steve. You can look at your experience. Let's try a quick discoverer experiment. I'll do it with you. We'll walk around the room, and as we do, we'll both try not to think about our left foot. Here's the deal: Each time we think

about our left foot, we have to stop walking. Once we've gotten rid of the thought again, we can start walking again.

Proceed with the exercise for a minute or two. Stop walking regularly to illustrate the universality of the issue. Then ask Steve what he notices from his own experience. The answer you're aiming for is that it's hard to not think about his left foot. Avoid the temptation to tell him the answer. You can best support the development of discoverer skills by allowing young people to connect their own experience with new ways of understanding:

It's hard, if not impossible, to control what's going on inside us. Neither of us could stop ourselves from thinking about our left foot. So, returning to this behavior (written outside D, N, and A), is it working? Does it help you with your anger? Does it keep you from getting suspended?

Again, give Steve time to make the links himself. Your task is to shape his experiential learning, gently pointing in the right direction only as needed. Once Steve himself has acknowledged the unworkability of his behavior, you can begin to address it:

So listening to the advisor in this instance isn't helping you connect with others, and it might actually be increasing you negative emotions. For example, when you listen to your advisor and you get into a fight, do you experience negative emotions? What are they?

Let's say Steve mentions feeling guilty about getting suspended and being lonely because he hasn't been able to hang out with his buddies at school. These are feelings he's noticed, so write them outside N.

So not only was your advisor unhelpful, but listening to it brought on even more negative emotions than you started with, and it pushed you further away from your values. So here (point to "racing" and "anger"), you had emotions that came up just because you were living your life. And here (point to "guilt" and "loneliness"), you had emotions that came up because you tried to control your feelings.

Use the Discoverer to Promote Valued Living and Willingness

Now that you've established the unworkability of the control agenda, you can return to the heart of DNA-V—values.

Something else about many of these behaviors outside the circle is that they haven't been connected to your values—what you care about. You said that you care about not getting suspended from school and that the suspension hasn't helped your relationships with

family and friends. So even though the advisor is often very useful, we need to check it against our experience to be sure. In this instance, Steve, is your advisor helping? By listening to it, are you getting more connection or less?

Again, have Steve make the link that this isn't workable behavior. Give him time; try not to jump in quickly. If you allow silence and space, young people typically discover the connections themselves. Once they do this, you can begin to address willingness:

So your advisor is telling you to fight, in more ways than one. It's saying that you have to fight physically. It's also saying you have to fight your own feelings. And you're telling me this doesn't work. Do you recall what you can do if you're stuck in a DNA area, as you are with your advisor?

Hopefully Steve will mention shifting to noticer or discoverer space. If he doesn't, help him to notice the ability to shift, then proceed:

Yes, exactly. You can shift into discoverer or noticer space. But here's the tricky part. If you step out of advisor space, you have to leave control behind. Control is the advisor's specialty. In other words, you have to be willing to have anger and a feeling of racing, and do nothing. Does that sound tough—to have those thoughts and feelings and not do the usual things your advisor suggests you should do?

You can then use the worksheet you've been filling out to help Steve grasp willingness experientially:

Here's what I mean by being willing. Imagine this worksheet is all of your life. Your values are in the middle, and your skills surround it and build your values. But here lately, you've been outside the circle in the white space. You've been far away from your values. And what are you doing out here? Are you trying to escape your feelings by tuning out? Are you reacting to your feelings by lashing out?

It's like you don't want to let your feelings be inside the circle that is your life, so you fight to keep them out. Can you see how exhausting that is? All your energy is going into keeping these feelings from entering your life. That doesn't leave you much energy for other things.

So here's what I mean by willingness. Can you just step into the circle and bring your feelings with you, both the good and the bad? Can you just allow them all to be there without fighting them? Do you recognize that you're strong enough to hold all these feelings and do what you care about?

If we decide to try out willingness, we move around the circle flexibly, stepping from advisor to noticer or discoverer. There's no right or wrong answer here. But let's just say that you're willing to allow your anger to flow through you, like storm clouds across the sky. Imagine if, in the future, you don't try to get rid of your anger. Instead you allow it to flow through you—to come and go without reacting by starting physical fights. This would let you step into discoverer space and see what else you might do.

Write a brief description of willingness in the discoverer area, as shown in figure 14. In the same area, write potential new behaviors. Describe them as experiments:

Like I said, there are no right or wrong answers here. And being a discoverer has its downsides. For example, difficult feelings might show up when you engage in discoverer behaviors. What do you think some of those feelings might be?

Talk about the challenges of trial-and-error discovery, and point out that this is one of the reasons willingness is required for discovery.

As a result of this work, Steve can begin to see that control is often problematic, and that the key to solving his issues at school and with family and friends is being willing to have discomfort in the service of his values. This sets the stage for establishing goals and building patterns of valued activity, one small step at a time.

Part 2

Advanced Skills: Applying DNA-V to Our Self and Our Social World

Chapter 8

Our Self in Action

The topic of the self is one of the most important subjects for humans. What are your strengths and weaknesses? What kind of person are you? Are you flawed? Broken? Special? Ordinary? Unlovable? Powerful? Our answers to these questions often reflect what we think is possible for us in life. And we can struggle for years with negative self-concepts. The DNA-V model teaches an alternative: our labels are not us; they don't define us. In this chapter and the two that follow, we'll show you how to help young people finally let go of this struggle and negate the power of their unhelpful self-concepts. We'll also address how you can help them harness self-concepts when they choose to—when doing so allows them to respond flexibly to the demands of the world.

In this chapter, we'll take a closer look at the self and demonstrate the power of looking at the self through the lens of the DNA-V model. Then we'll discuss how our culture trains young people to believe that self-esteem is a thing that must be defended at all costs, and how this belief can lead to a failure to take on challenges, or persist in valued tasks. Finally, we'll present an alternative: our DNA-V model for understanding the self, which we call *flexible self-view*. This new approach, which is grounded in behavioral principles and relational frame theory, is both practical and easy to understand. Looking forward, chapter 9 provides exercises for developing a flexible self-view that can be used in all contexts with young people, from individual therapy to classrooms. Then, chapter 10 discusses working with young people who are struggling with more complex self-issues, such as those arising from abuse, neglect, or trauma. Chapter 10 also provides exercises for promoting self-compassion.

The Difference Between Self-Concept and Self-Esteem

The words “self-esteem” and “self-concept” are used to mean slightly different things in the scientific literature. “Self-esteem” refers to a general evaluation of the self, such as “I’m a worthless

person” (Marshall, Parker, Ciarrochi, & Heaven, 2014). “Self-concept” is typically used in reference to specific domains of self, such as perceived academic or physical abilities (Parker, Marsh, Ciarrochi, Marshall, & Abduljabbar, 2013) and can involve both evaluations, such as “I’m not good at math,” and knowledge, such as “I’m a law student.” In this book, we define self-concept behaviorally: it involves a symbolic self (“I”) being related (“am”) to a concept, such as an evaluation (“not good enough”), category (“American”), or description (“just like my father”). By this definition, self-esteem is subsumed under the notion of self-concept. Stylistically, we use the term self-esteem when we want to emphasize that we are targeting an attitude toward the self, rather than self-knowledge.

Why the Self Becomes a Problem

Self-concepts are constantly on the verge of becoming outdated. Life is transition. Over the years, we change jobs, attitudes, physical locations, friendships, and physical features. Young people experience particularly dramatic transitions, going from being dependent children to independent adults striving to make it in the world while also developing new networks of friends, colleagues, and acquaintances. Yet even as life changes, our self-concepts often remain static.

We derive our sense of self from what’s happened to us in the past. We experience academic success and failure and infer the extent to which we have attributes like intelligence. We experience acceptance and rejection from others and infer the extent to which we are likable. These self-concepts are helpful when they guide us toward things we want (appetitive stimuli) and away from things we don’t want (aversive stimuli). For example, if you’ve been good at sports and weak at chess, in the future you may join a sports team, and your self-concept will lead you to expect that you’ll perform well. However, you might avoid playing—chess, which wouldn’t matter in the least if you don’t care for the game. The point is, a self-concept is useful when it guides us toward activities that bring vitality and meaning.

Self-concepts become unhelpful when the self we construct from past experiences doesn’t guide us toward broad repertoires of valued behaviors. Instead, this self becomes something that fixes us in the past. In DNA-V terms, we become stuck inside the advisor. We fail to thrive in new environments and are unable to explore the present

and future as flexible advisors, noticers, and discoverers. For example, imagine a young man who is constantly put down by his father and, as a result, believes he's unlovable. After leaving home, he may continue to be guided by this self-concept and therefore avoid intimacy and socializing because he believes relationships will only cause him pain. Although intimacy is a basic human need, it becomes an aversive stimulus for him just because of a label he carries. His belief that he's unlovable leads him to take actions that preclude love. His history becomes a nightmare from which he must awaken; otherwise, he'll continually recreate his negative history in the present moment.

As discussed, the advisor is a constant, frequently critical companion whose purpose is to help us detect and avoid problems. It's extremely useful at detecting problems in the outside world, but it's less helpful when it relentlessly looks for problems in the inner world of the self, asking questions along these lines:

- Can anybody love me?
- Is something wrong with me?
- Are other people doing better than me?

These kinds of questions almost beg for negative conclusions. Put young people into an unsupportive environment, and the advisor will have no trouble generating unhelpful answers for them. How then can we help young people continue to grow, rather than becoming locked in a negative past laden with unhelpful self-concepts? A common and intuitive response is to build self-esteem with encouragement and positive statements such as these:

- You are lovable.
- Nothing is wrong with you.
- You're doing better than many people.

Does this strategy of boosting self-esteem work? Have you ever sought to encourage someone in this way only to have that encouragement refused or ignored? Think about that for a moment. Why would anybody respond poorly to encouragement? We'll shed some light on this in the next section, where we'll take a close look at how the self develops in most modern contexts, and explore what may sound like a crazy hypothesis: in some contexts, encouraging words can be decidedly unhelpful. We can create problems when we unintentionally teach young people that self-esteem is like a treasure

to be obtained and defended at all costs. This results in striving for self-concepts, rather than striving to live a life based in values.

What Is Self-Esteem?

Much of human thinking is metaphorical (Lakoff & Johnson, 2008). Love is war. Creativity is thinking outside of the box. Consciousness is a stream. Knowledge is built. Life is a journey. These are all metaphors. Self-esteem is a metaphor too. If we are to fully understand self-esteem, we must first understand the metaphor within which it is embedded. Metaphors can powerfully transform how we think about things.

Self-esteem is typically embedded in a computer information-processing metaphor. Figure 15 presents the type of information-processing model that's common in cognitive behavioral therapy (Ciarrochi & Bailey, 2009). The core idea of this metaphor is that a situation does not, by itself, determine how we react. Rather, what's important is how we process the information in the situation. As shown in figure 15, this positions self-esteem at the deepest level, with intermediate beliefs, automatic thoughts, and reactions flowing from it. Thus, when an ambiguous situation occurs, our beliefs and thoughts are activated; this elicits negative emotional reactions. In the example in figure 15, low self-esteem results in avoidance of a friend. The clear suggestion from this information-processing metaphor is that one way to improve behavior is to improve self-esteem. We can begin "upstream" by using cognitive techniques to help the person believe the statement "I am likable" or "I have many likable qualities." The idea is that if self-esteem is changed upstream, intermediate beliefs, automatic thoughts, and reactions will also change.

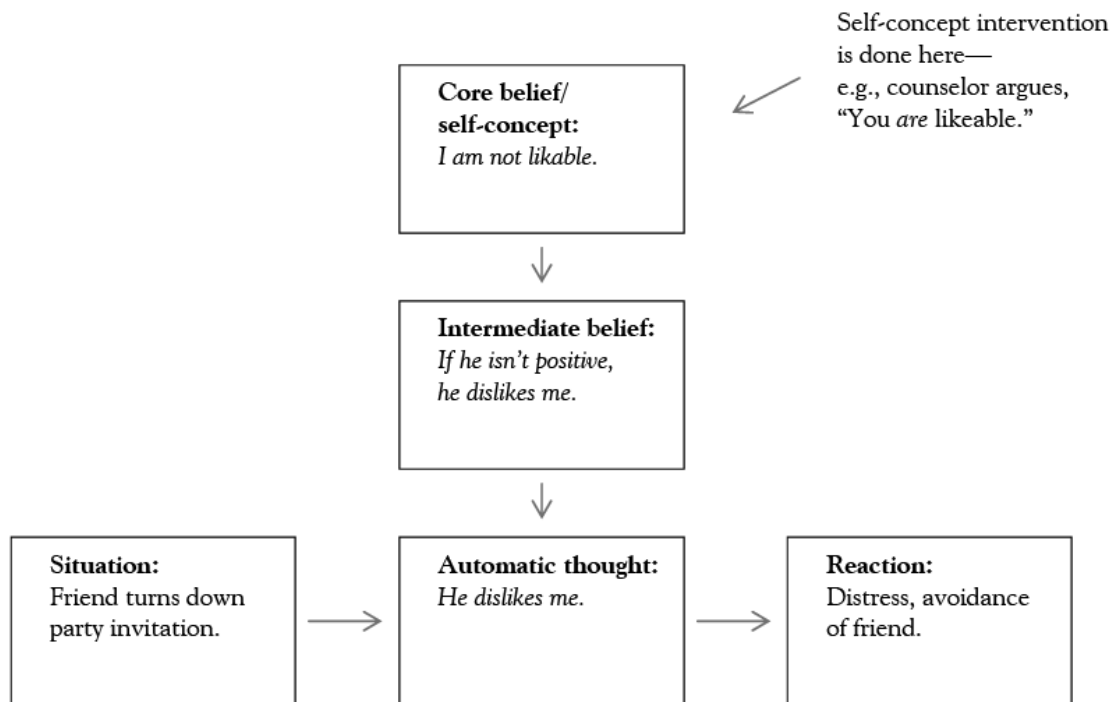


FIGURE 15. An information-processing view of the self.

As this chapter unfolds, we will show how the DNA-V approach differs from this view. It doesn't assume we must replace negative self-concepts with positive ones; rather, it aims to change how self-concepts function. First, however, let's consider where the self-esteem metaphor has taken our society.

Is There Such a Thing as Too Much Self-Esteem?

Prior to the 1960s, phrases like “self-concept” and “self-esteem” were rarely written about, as indicated in figure 16. However, by the mid 1960s, the idea of self-esteem had firmly lodged itself into the culture, and its popularity steadily grew, as indicated by an increase in the use of the phrase in books (Google Books Ngram Viewer, 2015), as well as magazines and newspaper articles (Twenge & Campbell, 2008). The idea of self-esteem seemed to make sense intuitively. People noticed that when they struggled with problems, they also experienced the symptoms ascribed to low self-esteem, which included doubt, insecurity, and tension. It took merely one small step to conclude that these symptoms were the cause of problems.



FIGURE 16. Frequency of the appearance of terms “self-concept” and “self-esteem” in English books. (Google Books Ngram Viewer, <http://books.google.com/ngrams>, March, 2015.)

Subsequently, programs were set up all over the world to boost young people’s self-esteem (Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, & Vohs, 2003). Self-help books filled the shelves, telling us that all we needed to do was “obtain” self-esteem or “awaken the giant within,” and great things would follow (Robbins, 2012; Schweiger, 2010). The self became something precious and vulnerable and in need of constant protection. We began to monitor young people’s level of self-esteem and tried to protect them from psychological threats. For example, we stopped letting young people lose in sports; everybody was now declared a winner. If one child teased another it was more than bad behavior; teasing was an almost criminal “wounding” of the child’s self.

Nevertheless, there was a downturn in the use of the word “self-esteem” in books starting around 1995. What happened? Did people just get bored with the construct? We think it’s more likely that there was a reaction against the unrealistic claims made in the popular press—which suggested, for example, that self-esteem could bring you unlimited power (Robbins, 1998) and make you unstoppable, irresistible, and unafraid in every area of your life (Tracy, 2012). Eventually, researchers began to raise serious issues about self-esteem (Baumeister et al., 2003), asking whether low self-esteem was just the consequence of negative experiences, rather than the cause. If so, perhaps there would be no value in boosting self-esteem; it would be like managing the heat from a burning house by turning up the air-conditioner instead of fighting the fire.

People even began to argue that there were downsides to some forms of self-esteem training. First, boosting self-esteem may

unintentionally send the message that self-doubt is bad and should be avoided (Ciarrochi & Bailey, 2009). We've already spoken about how avoiding internal experience can have the paradoxical effect of increasing distress and self-doubt. Second, telling young people that they're special no matter what might actually lead them to become more antisocial because their "goodness" is no longer contingent on good behavior. Their thinking patterns can become, *I'm good inside even when I do bad things* (Baumeister et al., 2003). Third, seeking to boost self-esteem might unintentionally increase people's narcissism or self-absorption, manifesting in a sense of superiority and a belief that they should receive special treatment (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). Sadly, there is now some evidence supporting all of these notions. During the decades in which our culture has earnestly sought to increase self-esteem in young people (after the 1950s), narcissistic personality disorder increased by 194 percent, student expectations that they would own much more than their parents increased by 156 percent, plastic surgery increased by 490 percent, and children receiving uncommon names increased by 73 percent. At the same time, selflessness seemed to decrease; people became less trusting of others and less willing to serve in the government (Twenge & Campbell, 2008). These data suggest a shocking possibility: perhaps attempts to boost self-esteem have done nothing but boost selfishness.

Scientists who study the self have argued for a different conclusion (Marsh & O'Mara, 2008). They've pointed out that there isn't just one self-concept—self-esteem—but many self-concepts related to many domains, such as math, reading, physical appearance, physical ability, and relationships with family and peers. These self-concepts are only slightly related, meaning that a person can have a positive self-concept in one domain and a negative one in another (Marsh & Shavelson, 1985). Further, there's clear evidence that when a specific self-concept is paired with behavior in the relevant domain, the concept can predict behavior. For example, academic self-concept clearly predicts grades (Marsh & Craven, 2006; Marshall et al., 2014), whereas social self-concept predicts the development of positive social networks (Marshall et al., 2015). In addition to this longitudinal evidence, reviews of experimental work suggest that self-concept interventions have positive effects across many domains (Haney & Durlak, 1998).

Given that the proponents for and against self-esteem seem to be at a standstill, what are we to believe? Should we deliberately try to increase young people's self-esteem, or will this only make them

selfish and narcissistic? This seeming standstill can be resolved by recognizing that there are, in fact, many different methods employed in an effort to boost self-esteem, and some are perhaps less useful than others. That's why DNA-V looks at the function of a self-concept for a specific individual. There can never be a self-concept that's inherently good for all people in all situations.

Teachers, parents, and scientific studies aren't always on the same page about how to develop self-concepts. For example, we know from scientific research that praising talent can have negative effects, motivating young people to protect their sense of talent and avoid taking risks that would help them learn. Yet this research doesn't stop adults from repeatedly telling young people that they're talented—nor should it. There are times where it might be sensible to tell a young person she's talented, and there may be times when it isn't a good idea. The scientific evidence can't tell us exactly what to do for any individual at any given moment in time. How then do we decide what to do?

Self-Esteem Is Behavior

The first step is to learn to see self-esteem in a new way, not as a thing, but as a kind of behavior. When we view self-esteem as a thing, a concrete part of us, this implies that if a person's self-esteem isn't functioning well we must fix it. Yet self-esteem isn't a physical object. No surgeon could find it anywhere in your body.

Problems arise when we assume that self-esteem is a thing we need for success. The overbearing advisor would be likely to make the following inferences:

- If you don't have self-esteem, you can't succeed.
- Self-esteem is a valuable thing. Therefore it can be stolen from you or damaged.
- You need to be constantly on guard to protect your self-esteem.
- If someone does something that lowers your self-esteem, that person is doing something wrong, given that self-esteem is valuable and necessary for success.
- You shouldn't allow negative experiences to damage your self-esteem or influence it in any way. You should defend against and ignore negative experiences.

This leads to one conclusion: as long as we think of self-esteem as an essential thing, we're trapped into trying to boost it. There are no

alternatives. However, once we think of self-esteem as behavior, we increase the ways we can intervene.

Applying Behavioral Principles to Examining the Self

In our model, self-esteem is a type of “self-behavior” that involves relating oneself to a description. Thus, it will follow the operant principle of relational responding: the descriptions of oneself are in a relational frame and can be strengthened or weakened contingently. For example, a girl called Jane has no physical property that defines her as Jane other than a history of reinforcement. “Jane” is not a part of her. She could just as easily be reinforced for responding to another name—say, Mary—but regardless of the arbitrary name we associate with her, she is still the same person. However, although the sound “Jane” is arbitrary, it doesn’t remain neutral for long. Jane will come to identify with her name. Research suggests that if she likes herself, she may come to like the name, and she may especially like the letters j, a, n, and e (Koole, Dijksterhuis, & van Knippenberg, 2001).

Our self-concepts can function similarly to our names, becoming emotionally powerful as they are repeatedly reinforced and strengthened. They can also be weakened if people learn to relate to them as normal advisor behavior—that is, as internal dialogue that comes and goes. When working with young people, we aim to help them see their self as behavior, rather than reifying their labels as part of them.

As we’ve emphasized, no behavior is inherently good or bad; rather, behavior is more or less effective in specific contexts. This assumption holds true for self-behavior. For example, assume a young man values friendship but also has the self-concept “I’m weird. People will reject me.” If this self-concept guides him to avoid engaging in situations that might lead to friendship, we would say his self-view is narrow and unhelpful. If, in contrast, he’s able to view his self-concept from a certain psychological “distance” and not let it affect his seeking out friends, we would say that his self-view is flexible. Flexible self-view allows young people to go beyond narrow self-concepts and grow.

We can go one step further and look at how contexts, antecedents, and consequences shape people’s self-views. Let’s look at two

examples, one assuming a narrow self-view and the other assuming a broader and more flexible one.

Context 1: A teen who values connecting with friends, and who also has a narrow self-view, invites a friend to a party.

Antecedent: Her friend turns down her invitation.

Values-inconsistent behavioral pattern:

- She fails to notice her emotional signals.
- Her advisor immediately says, “I’m unlikable. He doesn’t like me.”
- She’s unskilled at unhooking from her advisor and responds as if what it says is literally true. In other words, she doesn’t ask, “Could this just be my advisor making judgments? Are there other perspectives?”

Consequences:

- She avoids the relationship to reduce negative emotions.
- Short-term implications: She escapes from social rejection.
- Long-term implications: She fails to develop the friendship.

Context 2: A teen with similar values but a broad self-view invites a friend to a party.

Antecedent: Her friend turns down her invitation.

Values-consistent behavioral pattern:

- She notices her physical distress: “This is upsetting to me.”
- She notices that her advisor is saying, “I’m unlikable. He doesn’t like me.” She remembers that the advisor’s role is to be critical, and that the advice could have been useful in the past but may not be useful now. She sees the advice as an event that comes and goes and doesn’t have to be obeyed. It can be tested for workability.

Consequences:

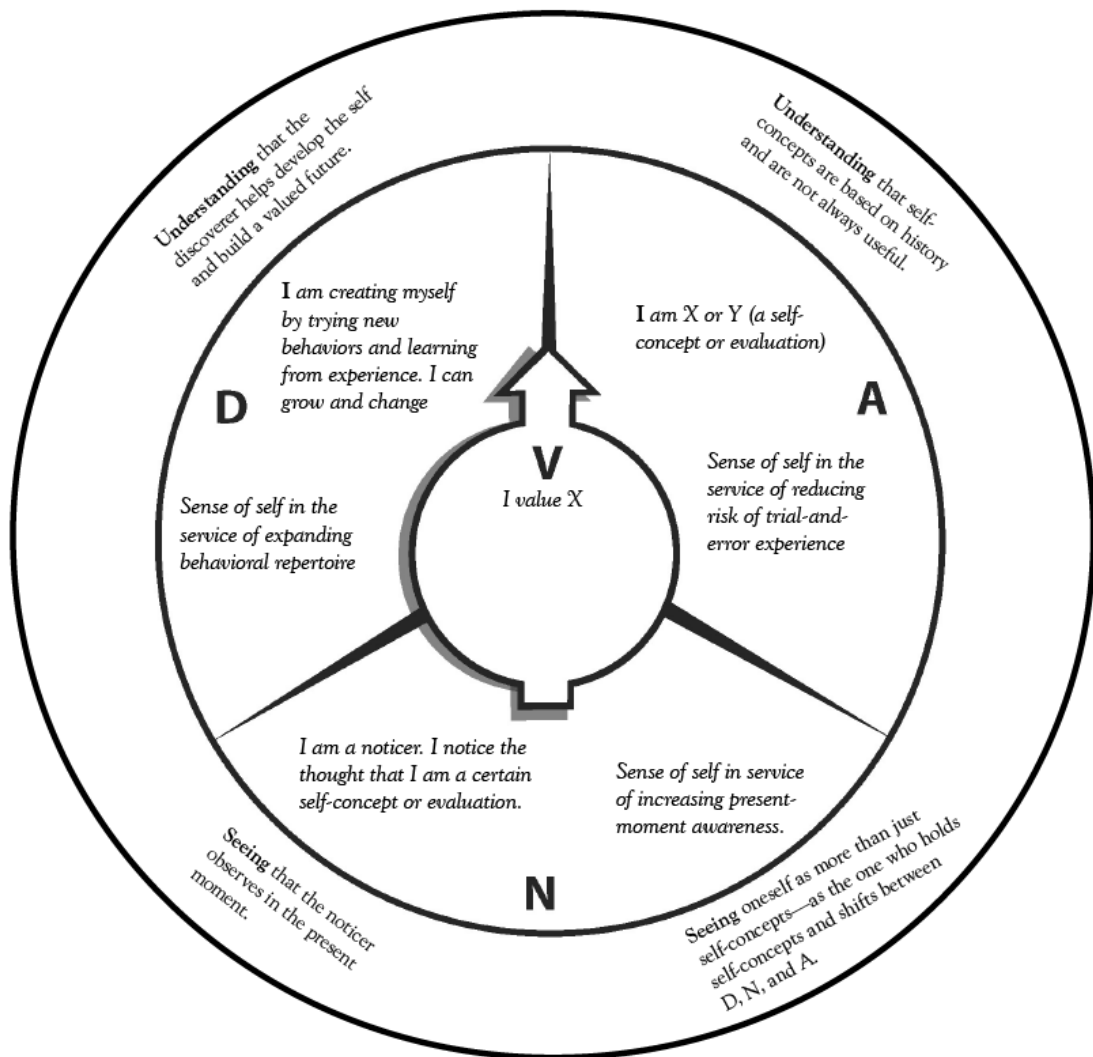
- She chooses to allow the distress and not react to it. She doesn’t avoid the relationship.
- She steps into discoverer space and asks her friend why he turned down the invitation.
- Short-term implications: She risks experiencing social rejection.

- Long-term implications: She develops social skills and gives herself a chance at friendship.

When we see self as behavior, we no longer assume that self-concept causes outcomes. Rather, we expect that the same self-concept can be associated with quite different outcomes, as the examples above indicate. We can then change the outcome by teaching DNA skills, which allow people to behave effectively when having evaluative thoughts like “I’m unlovable.” To cast the preceding examples in behavioral terms, we would say that in the first case, negative self-concepts had an aversive function, prompting the teen to engage in social withdrawal. In the second example, negative self-concepts were still aversive, but the presence of DNA skills gave the person a broader choice: she could withdraw, or she could engage in flexible advisor, noticer, or discoverer behavior. Self-view loosens the grip of unhelpful self-concepts.

Self-View in DNA-V

Self-view doesn’t involve new DNA skills; rather, it’s a way of using DNA skills holistically to see the self being created and changed. The four primary self-behaviors are shown within figure 17 and link to D, N, A, and V.



Flexible Self-View

FIGURE 17. Taking a flexible self-view: seeing patterns of self-behavior as part of oneself.

In the absence of broad self-views, we typically see ourselves as fixed concepts, as shown in the inner advisor area in figure 17. For example, people often have the thought *I'm unlovable* and believe this to be a literal description of themselves. It's as if "unlovable" describes their essence—some true part of themselves. By developing DNA skills, we help young people develop workable self-concepts that can create hope and foster growth. However, before we can reinforce workable self-concepts, we often have to loosen the grip of unworkable self-concepts through training in flexible self-view.

We begin teaching flexible self-view skills by showing young people that the advisor is merely a quick and efficient way of interpreting the world and events using past experience. Then we explore how using noticer skills can help them unhook from rigid self-definitions. This entails noticing the advisor as it generates content. Instead of being hooked by thoughts like *I'm unlovable*, the noticer is oriented to the present and translates this experience into *I notice a thought that I'm unlovable*. Noticing also involves awareness of nonverbal content, such as sensations of emotional pain. Finally, we teach two other types of self-behavior: discoverer self-behavior, which links to trying new things and testing things out in the physical world, and values self-behavior, which links to values statements, such as "I care about other people."

Putting all of this together, flexible self-view primarily involves perspective taking: seeing all the ways we engage in self-behavior. In traditional ACT parlance, the most flexible self-view is seeing the self as context rather than content. That is, if you-here-now see that you-there-then had a certain thought, then you aren't the same as your thoughts. In the same way, you aren't the same as your judgments, your stories, or even your valued behavior. There is a *you* noticing what you do. As young people become familiar with the DNA-V model, they come to see that they create their advisor, noticer, and discoverer behaviors.

Flexible self-view is a way of taking advantage of the brain's amazing ability to change psychological perspectives. You can take a flexible view and watch your own thoughts and feelings without even moving. You can return to your childhood and, to some extent, view events as you would have back then. You can just as readily zoom into the future and see yourself at the end of your life. You can also rapidly shift perspectives to view the world from another person's eyes. You can even view humans from the perspective of a dispassionate alien. The common element in all of these perspectives is that it is always you that is viewing, and no matter how many times you change perspectives, you are always there, able to change perspectives again.

Practicing flexible self-view can foster radical changes in the way people respond to themselves.

Putting Self-Concept into Context

Chapter 9 will demonstrate how to use self-view exercises to undermine the power of rigid self-concepts. In this chapter, we'll describe optimal ways to develop self-concepts—in other words, high-skill advisor behavior.

The most common way our society trains young people in self-behaviors is via direct attempts to improve the positivity of self-concepts. Yet as discussed previously, such training can lead to narcissism and selfishness, and this has led a number of researchers to question whether such training is beneficial. However, this question becomes absurd when we reframe self-concept as behavior rather than a thing. In doing so, we must recast the question “Do young people need a positive self-concept?” as “Do young people need to engage in self-concept behavior?”—a question that only makes sense if we consider context, antecedents, and consequences.

Consider the question “Do we need to boost young people’s ability to jump?” We can’t answer this question without looking at the contexts for jumping. If you’re training basketball players, jumping improves performance, so the answer is probably yes. If you’re training computer programmers, the answer is probably no. To look at the question in a different light, boosting math self-concept is useful if it’s done in a way that increases the amount of effort a young person puts into math. But if this boosting is done in a way that an individual finds aversive, it can result in avoiding math challenges.

The take-home message is this: If we seek to improve a young person’s self-concept in a particular domain, we need to be sure to do at least two things. First, we need to link the self-concept to observable, values-consistent behavior. Second, we need to use our own discoverer skills and test whether our efforts to boost self-concept are useful for the young person. This is measured by whether improved self-concept is linked to values-consistent behavior. The remainder of this chapter will expand on these two points.

Building a Growth Mind-Set

How do we motivate young people to grow and develop? We know that criticizing them usually isn’t motivating, but what about encouraging them to believe they have talent? Consider whether the following statements are motivating:

- You're so clever.
- You've got real talent.
- You're going to be a great artist.

Surprisingly, research suggests that these statements are often demotivating (Yeager & Dweck, 2012). Praising talent or describing someone in terms of a category (for example, "artist") tends to be reinforcing at first, but it can lead young people to derive all kinds of unhelpful evaluations and rules. To illustrate this point, let's return to Matt, from chapter 3. Matt aspires to be a writer. Let's say Matt writes an excellent short story and his teacher says, "You're so clever." Here are a few rules Matt's advisor can derive:

- If I write well, then I'm clever.
- If I don't write well, I'm not clever.
- It's extremely important to be clever.
- I can lose my cleverness if I perform badly.

Matt may feel pleased by his teacher's encouragement and he's likely to want to hold on to the idea that he's clever. After all, it's one of the nicest things anybody has ever said to him. But if we look at the rules Matt derived, we can see that there's a risk that wasn't there before. If Matt doesn't write well, he can "lose" the evaluation that he's clever.

In general, praising talents can lead to two problems. First, it can make us cling to the idea of being talented. We want our advisor to be telling us how talented we are all the time, and we become afraid of doing anything that might make us think negatively about ourselves. We might even avoid challenging situations. But when we don't challenge ourselves, we don't grow. Second, if we become convinced that our good performance indicates talent, what does bad performance indicate? It must follow that bad performance indicates lack of talent. Then, when we experience failure we feel deflated and our self-worth feels injured. And once again, we aren't necessarily motivated to grow or improve.

Recent research illustrates the dangers of telling young people they're talented (Yeager & Dweck, 2012). Imagine two groups of kids that are similar in verbal ability. You ask both groups to solve a series of problems. No matter how they perform, you tell one group that they're talented at solving the problems, and this reinforces a fixed talent mind-set. You tell the second group that they're hardworking, and this reinforces a growth mind-set. Sometime later, you offer both groups a chance to do easy puzzles or hard puzzles,

and something interesting happens. Research reveals that the kids praised for their talent choose to do easy puzzles, whereas those praised for being hardworking choose to do hard puzzles. The kids in the first group weren't going to take any chances with losing their "talented" self-concept. In contrast, kids in the second group didn't have a fixed self-concept to lose; their target behavior was trying hard.

This research also suggests that praising talent can increase the extent to which kids get upset with failure. Further, kids praised for talent are more likely to blame tests or others for their bad performance. This makes sense in the DNA-V model because praising talent feeds the advisor's tendency to grab labels, whereas praising growth promotes the discoverer. Finally, kids praised for talent tend to be less persistent. They're essentially working for self-esteem, rather than working to be highly effective at the task at hand (Dweck, 2000; Dweck, Chiu, & Hong, 1995; Mueller & Dweck, 1998; Yeager & Dweck, 2012).

Thus, teaching people to believe they're a concept, such as talented or special, trains the advisor to become attached to these concepts, seeing them as parts of the self—fixed things that can be won or lost. However, with a flexible self-view, it becomes clear that "I'm special" is just an evaluation—just the advisor chattering.

The way to prevent young people from becoming attached to self-concepts is to focus praise on the process, rather than the person. In the above example, telling young people they were hardworking reinforced the process of devoting effort to the task and persisting.

Here are four effective ways to praise and give feedback (Yeager & Dweck, 2012):

- **Praise effort:** When a young person gets a top mark, you can say, "Wow, you worked hard at that. You didn't give up."
- **Praise strategy:** When a young person is careful in making a tough decision, you can say, "It's great that you considered many options before making that decision."
- **Praise choices:** When a young person stands up for a friend, you can say, "It must have been hard to stand up for your friend, but it's clear that friendship is important to you. Good for you."
- **Give corrective feedback:** When a young person does poorly on a test, you can say, "Your study time may have been too low for this exam. How can you go about increasing your time commitment?"

The last strategy, corrective feedback, is particularly important because it shapes behavior in valued directions and develops strengths. Corrective feedback isn't aimed at reinforcing a self-concept; rather, it seeks to reinforce values-consistent behavior. To understand the difference, consider these examples: When someone makes a mistake, you can inadvertently reinforce self-concept by saying something like "Your problem is that you're lazy." Corrective feedback would instead seek to identify the behavior that could be corrected and, as shown in the example in the preceding list, suggest new or alternative behaviors the person could engage in.

In using praise, it's important not to excuse suboptimal behavior. For example, if a child is performing poorly at school, a parent may be tempted to blame the teacher; this may even seem to be in the child's best interests. But it implicitly teaches the child's advisor a new rule: "If I fail, it's because I was treated unfairly by others." This can train young people to ignore feedback and blame others. Instead, we need to help them open up to useful feedback and recognize that they can grow and improve.

The general formula for encouraging growth in any domain of life is to help young people notice what their advisor says and then shift into discoverer space, as in the examples below.

Advisor: *I'm bad at this and can't improve.*

Discoverer: *I value growth. I choose to assume growth is possible and discover what happens.*

Advisor: *Learning new things about this doesn't make me better at it.*

Discoverer: *I choose to value learning about this. I'll discover what happens when I learn.*

Advisor: *No amount of practice will make me better.*

Discoverer: *I choose to value practice.*

Advisor: *If I struggle at this and find it hard, that means I'm bad at it.*

Discoverer: *I choose to value setbacks because they help me discover how to improve. I recognize that my advisor will say negative things when I fail. I'll make space for that negativity and keep growing.*

Freeing the Self from Rigid Rules

The ultimate goal of the DNA-V model is to teach young people how to use language flexibly so they can get more out of life. Self-view exercises can give young people these skills by showing them that rules are best held lightly. There are many ways to take new perspectives, and we provide many exercises for doing so in chapter 9. Here, we show how to open a dialogue that allows young people to discover new ways of seeing.

Below is an example, again using Matt, that looks at how to “disempower” the unhelpful rule “Getting a good grade in creative writing makes me a good writer, and getting a bad grade makes me a bad writer.” We begin by revealing that he has more choices than this rule suggests. We then address the idea of workability, and engage in a discussion that helps him discover potential values. As you’ll see, the emphasis in regard to rules isn’t on their truth or falseness. Rather, rules are evaluated in terms of their utility. Does listening to the rule bring more of what the young person wants in life? If the answer is no, can the young person consider letting the rule go?

Phase: Revealing that choices are available

DNA-V approach: Loosen rule governance with metaphors, in this case showing that new ideas are possible:

Example: *The advisor is just like an overly strict teacher that says we must follow the rules “or else.” But what would you do if this teacher said you had to study math and only math all the time? Would you think you had to listen to that teacher?*

Phase: Returning to workability

DNA-V approach: Ask the basic workability questions: *How has that behavior been working? Do you think it’s helped? If you do more of this behavior, what’s likely to happen?*

Example: *How has following the rule that you must always get good grades been working for you? Has believing it helped your writing or held you back?*

Phase: Discovering possibilities

DNA-V approach: Help the young person take perspective on the advisor’s judgmental thoughts: *You aren’t the same as the advisor. This is just one possible way you can behave. You also can be a noticer or discoverer. In this instance, what if you decided to be a discoverer?*

Example: *Assume that the advisor is telling you that you're a lousy writer. What if you unhooked from the advisor and didn't listen to it? What if, instead, you shifted into discoverer space and decided to try to write? What might happen?* (Acknowledge that writing could be good or bad, or mix of both. Also point out that if he listens to his advisor, he probably won't write, and he'll never know how good he could be at writing.)

Phase: Discovering values

DNA-V approach: Explore values by asking young people to step into discoverer space: *What is it about this that you like? What are the parts that make it exciting for you? Let's explore all those parts and see if we can find what it is you care about in there.*

Example: *So it seems you like the creative parts—sitting down and writing ideas. Then you get scared about the final writing and find it easier to draw or doodle. What do you think that's telling us about the rule "I'm not good enough." Does it work? What if you were to create a new rule that would help you with the final writing? What would that be? And how could you flexibly use this new rule?*

Promoting Hope

Perhaps one of the most devastating beliefs young people can have is that nothing they do will improve their life; this is sometimes referred to as learned helplessness (Maier & Seligman, 1976). The term comes from rather cruel animal studies (before the days of rigorous ethics reviews) that involved shocking dogs and then either giving them a way to avoid the shock by pressing a lever, or removing all means of avoiding the shock. The dogs in the latter group eventually gave up trying to escape the shock. Even when the experiment was changed and the latter group was given a means to avoid the shock, they still did nothing to escape. They demonstrated a helpless, depressed response.

In humans, the verbal rule "I'm hopeless" can act in a similar way. Young people who believe this rule rarely seek to improve their situation, even if an opportunity offers itself. There are two major types of hopelessness rules, and they align with two key aspects of the DNA-V model:

- **Social view:** A low sense of social worth appears in statements like "I'm unlovable; therefore, it's useless to try to form social relationships."

- **Self-view:** A low sense of self-efficacy appears in statements like “I’m ineffective; therefore, it’s useless to try to achieve goals.”

Young people too often believe one or both of these rules, which can have disastrous consequences, such as failing to develop social networks or failing to strive for important goals. The DNA-V model suggests two routes to overcome these rules. One is practicing flexible self-view, especially using noticer skills when hopelessness arises and building discoverer skills to try new experiences. The next chapter has many exercises to promote this. The second is practicing a flexible view of others, which promotes behaviors that build relationships (addressed in chapter 11).

The DNA-V approach to hopelessness is not to negate it and provide reassurance, but to create a context in which young people develop a sense of hope that links to trying new behaviors. (We discuss the pitfalls of providing reassurance in chapter 10.) We don’t want young people to develop hope in a way that’s totally disconnected from reality or that reinforces a desire to have self-esteem at all costs. How then can we help them develop verbal rules that give them hope and encourage them to strive? To examine this, we’ll once again consider Matt’s aspirations to write. For the sake of this example, we’ll assume that developing the rule “If I work hard, I can write a good story” would be helpful for him. Here are several strategies that might help him develop this new, hope-promoting rule.

Set Up Opportunities to Experience Success or Mastery

It’s important that early attempts at new behavior be reinforcing, so choose small steps that have a high likelihood of success yet are still meaningful. In Matt’s case, you can encourage him to write more short stories and perhaps even enter them in a school contest. Or if a contest is too big a step, it might be enough to encourage him to write for various class projects and then help him recognize the effort he puts into his better pieces. This instills hope by establishing a clear correspondence between a rule (“If I work hard, I can write a good story”) and the outcome: entering a contest or seeing improvement in his work.

Emphasize That Success Is About Acting with Values, Not About Outcomes

From the DNA-V perspective, it’s important to reinforce the understanding that success lies in acting in alignment with one’s

values. Thus, even if Matt enters a story into a contest and loses, you can still point out that he succeeded by acting consistently with his desire to work hard and improve his writing.

Importantly, the aim here is to establish the behavior of trying as inherently reinforcing. So you'd help Matt notice how much he enjoyed the act of writing. Then he can learn hope-imbued rules, such as "If I throw myself into things I care about, I'll enjoy myself even if I don't get every outcome I want" and "I have the power to act consistently with my values."

Identify Role Models Who Successfully Live by Values Rather Than Talent

Encourage young people to connect with mentors. If they don't have good role models in their environment, they can look to their heroes. This is one of the virtues of language: it allows us to imagine possible worlds and ways of being even if we've never observed them firsthand. Thus, we can work to create a world for ourselves that has never existed. We can even use imagination to create hope when the world around us is unsupportive. Because Matt longs to be a writer, you could encourage him to read an autobiography of someone from a similar background—someone disadvantaged who worked hard and became a successful writer.

Encourage and Believe in the Person

Humans are intensely social animals, and we often take our cues about ourselves from important others. Thus, one of the most powerful things we do for young people is believe in them. Research underscores this. When teachers are told that their class is filled with gifted students, they act differently toward their students and their students perform better (Jussim & Harber, 2005; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1992). It's important to express this belief in a way that encourages young people to connect with valued activities, and not to merely tell you what you want to hear. Also, note that your belief must be genuine, as young people will readily pick up on false belief.

In Matt's case, let's assume you're giving him feedback on an essay that received an above-average grade but not a top mark. To praise the behavior and the effort (rather than the person or the talent), you might say, "Matt, this essay shows a lot of potential. It looks like you worked hard." To reinforce social connection and shape the behavior of working hard, you might go on to say, "I enjoyed reading it, and I can see that you could become a good writer if you work at it." To further shape his behavior, you might point out the

most well-written part: “Well done. I especially enjoyed reading this part.”

Discourage Relating Experiences of Failure to the Self

We all experience setbacks and failures, and when we do, we sometimes see our failures as evidence in support of a negative self-concept. To bolster young people against this tendency, teach them to use DNA skills to broaden their self-view. Then they can experience failure, listen to the advisor making self-evaluations, and know that they are not equal to those evaluations. For Matt, this would involve encouraging him to see that failure is an experience—and really just a label for an experience—and that he isn’t the same as the label “failure.” Perspective-taking exercises to help develop a flexible self-view can be useful here. In Matt’s case, Self-as-Noticer Exercise 1: A Cup Full of Words, in the next chapter, would be a good place to start.

Developing Flexible Self-View

This chapter and the next offer an in-depth exploration of how to help young people develop a flexible self-view. We've adopted "flexible self-view" as a user-friendly term for perspective taking focused on the self. Flexible self-view can help young people develop workable beliefs (advisor skills), tune in to signals they receive in their bodies when interacting with people and the environment (noticer skills), and find new ways to develop and grow (discoverer skills).

Exercises for Developing a Flexible Self-View

This chapter is devoted entirely to exercises that are useful for building a flexible self-view in either clinical or classroom settings. The next chapter focuses on creating a flexible self-view among young people with complex histories, such as abuse or neglect. You probably don't need to utilize all of the self-view exercises with a given young person. As ever, match the interventions and how you deliver them to the needs of the person you're working with.

Self-as-Advisor Exercise 1: How Do You View Your Self?

We typically begin conducting self-view exercises by assessing young people's current self-talk. How do they see themselves? Do they mostly look through the lens of the advisor? Do they have self-concepts that suggest they are fixed and unchangeable? Do they have flexible or rigid rules for themselves?

We've provided two worksheets for this exercise (available in downloadable format at <http://www.thrivingadolescent.com>). Both reveal young people's self-behavior and help them explore the benefits of developing DNA skills. We encourage you to do this exercise yourself before conducting it with young people.

Is Change Possible?

Here's a quick, thirty-second quiz. Read the following statements, then rate the extent to which you agree with each using a scale of 1 to 6, where 1 means "strongly agree" and 6 means "strongly disagree":

- _____ People don't change.
- _____ I can't improve my intelligence that much.
- _____ If I'm bad at something, it probably means I'll never be good at it.
- _____ I can't develop talent at something. I either have it or don't have it.

Score: If you tended to answer 4 or higher, your answers reflect a flexible self-view. If you tended to answer 3 or lower, your answers reflect a fixed self-view.

With a fixed self-view, you're stuck in the advisor's rules, which make it seem as if you can't change or improve. With a flexible self-view, you have rules that help you to grow, and you're able to let go of rigid rules when they aren't useful. Having a fixed self-view keeps you stuck inside your advisor space, whereas having a flexible self-view allows you to use all of your DNA skills.

We all step into a fixed self-view sometimes and see only constraints, rather than possibilities. For example, most adults have bought into the self-concept "I'm too old for this." How often do we adults hang from a monkey bars, roll on the ground in play, or do cartwheels? If we buy into that "too old" concept, we're unlikely to ever do these kinds of things.

The second half of this exercise, covered in the following worksheet, can help young people identify self-concepts that may be self-limiting.

Stepping from a Fixed Self-View to a Flexible Self-View

Think about something that's important to you but you often find hard to do. Choose an activity that you believe you aren't good enough at—math, English, science, a certain sport, being a friend, dancing, or whatever fits for you.

Getting to Know Your Fixed Self-View

Using the activity you identified above, complete the following sentence:

I believe I'm not good enough at: _____

When you attempt this activity, and the going gets tough, what do you tell yourself about it? Let your advisor come up with criticisms, such as "not smart enough," "too slow," "too unskilled," "not interesting enough," "too weak," or "too undisciplined." Let the

advisor hit you with its best shot: “useless,” “lazy,” “stupid,” or other name-calling.

_____.

_____.

_____.

_____.

Now assume that you’re totally stuck in just the negative aspects of the advisor, and whatever your advisor says will define how you act for the rest of your life. Complete the following statement for several of the advisor’s messages:

When my advisor says _____,
for the rest of my life I must _____

_____.

When my advisor says _____,
for the rest of my life I must _____

_____.

Now repeat the negative advisor messages to yourself and really try to believe it. As you do this, step into noticer space and scan your body for sensations and feelings. What sensations show up in your body? What emotions show up?

_____.

_____.

_____.

Exploring a Discoverer’s Way

Now imagine that you have great discoverer skills and can easily shift to using them—that you can step into and out of your advisor space easily. How might you approach this activity now, if anything was possible? What new things might you try to become better at your valued activity?

_____.

_____.

_____.

Then, broadening from those activities, what would you be doing if you assumed you could explore, discover, and try new things for the

rest of your life?

_____.

_____.

_____.

Are you willing to take a leap of faith and assume that you can explore and change, even if it's only a small step? If yes, well done! You've taken a powerful discoverer step. If no, that's okay. Just keep in mind that you get to choose. You have the power to change if you're willing to unhook from self-limiting beliefs and step into discoverer space.

In this exercise, you can see movement from advisor space to discoverer space as shifting within the DNA-V model. The advisor basically says, "I can't grow or get better, because I am X" (for example, "a loser"). Shifting involves using noticer skills first to pause and unhook from the advisor self-talk of "I am X"—which happens to some extent in simply writing the advisor statements down and looking at them. The next step is to notice and allow emotional reactions in the body. The final step is to shift into discoverer space. Practicing shifting in this way helps young people see that they have many options around their self-talk. They don't have to obey it; they can choose new approaches, test them, and see what happens.

Self-as-Advisor Exercise 2: Seeing from the Eyes of the Advisor

One way to teach young people flexible self-view is to contrast it with what it's not: it isn't a self-concept. This exercise (which requires pencil and paper for writing) promotes that perspective by having young people purposefully see through their advisor's eyes. Once you have their advisor "in the room," you can guide young people to practice seeing their advisor from different viewpoints.

In many cases there's no need to pointedly ask young people to come up with advisor criticisms. The content will readily be there; you need only encourage them to get immersed in some idea they have about themselves (as in the previous exercise). For example, you can have them talk about something they're currently struggling with. It may be necessary to do a fair amount of normalizing so they'll understand that their struggle doesn't make them weird or defective.

Here's one example of how you might help young people experience the advisor within a current struggle:

The advisor often creates stories about us. These stories have “I am X” as the main theme. A common story is “I’m not good enough.” This is something the advisor tells us when we feel we’ve messed up. We’re often hard on ourselves and create stories about how we’re broken, defective, or inferior in some way. All of us have these “I’m not good enough” stories. And if we fail to recognize them, we’re likely to be pushed around by them.

If, for example, I think I’m hopeless at kicking a soccer ball, I may avoid practicing kicking, but then I can’t get any better at it. The “I’m lousy at kicking” story can get in the way of trying. Everyone does this type of thing. Some people tell themselves they aren’t likable and then avoid making friends. Others tell themselves that they can’t do anything right, and then they don’t try.

Take a moment to recognize an “I am X” story of your own. (For this example we’ll just call it a “not good enough” story.)

Think about the way you sometimes beat yourself up, and then take some time to write down your “not good enough” story. Don’t worry about punctuation or spelling; just write whatever comes to mind. When you finish writing your story, give it a title, like “The Loser,” “The Unlovable,” or “Mr. Out-of-Control.” (Wait until the story is written to proceed.)

When is this “not good enough” story likely to come up in your everyday life? At school? When talking to friends? When doing a particular activity?

This is a small exposure exercise that normalizes the advisor’s stories. Once you’ve helped young people see their self-stories, you can start conducting exercises that explicitly create a more flexible self-view. Any of the following exercises can be used for this.

Self-as-Noticer Exercise 1: A Cup Full of Words

This exercise and the next allow young people to connect with their noticer self. This one is a writing task that makes use of the following worksheet to help young people loosen from a rigid sense of self by seeing that they aren’t the same as their advisor’s statements. From this perspective, they don’t have to defend their content or cling to it, nor do they need to refute it. They can make peace with the advisor, understanding that it creates verbal content that comes and goes, and that they are the container for that content, but not the content itself. (For a downloadable version of the worksheet, visit <http://www.thrivingadolescent.com>.)

Who Are You?

Instructions: This is a five-minute timed task. Please write whatever comes to mind for each statement. There are no right or wrong answers. Just notice how you complete each sentence.

You	Connect yourself to	The content (words)	
		Answer 1	Answer 2
I	am		
I	am not		
I	am a		
I	value		
I	love		
I	hate		
I	believe it's important to		
I	am unable to		
I	am able to		
I	am lovable because		
I	am unlovable because		
I	am good because		
I	am bad because		
I	am strong because		
I	am weak because		

After doing the timed task, debrief as suggested in the following dialogue.

- **Practitioner:** *Who connected the words up?*

- **Young person:** *I did.*
- **Practitioner:** *Correct, you are the one who connects yourself to words. And who uses words?*
- **Young person:** *I do.*
- **Practitioner:** *Yes. You are the user of words and you are the connector of words. You are not the words. And no matter how many times you connect “I am” to other words, you’ll still be the one doing the connecting. Your “I” is always there. You hold these words as they come and go, the same way a cup holds different liquids. You can put orange juice in the cup, but that doesn’t change the cup. You can put milk in the cup, and still the cup stays the same. Now imagine that we were to cut up all the words you wrote above and put them in a cup. (You can do this physically if you like.) Would that change the cup? What if we put all the positive things in the cup—would that change the cup? What if we put all the negative things in there? No matter what we put into it, the cup would still just be holding the contents; it wouldn’t change. Now consider this: If we were to fill you up with positive thoughts, would you be the container for them all?*
- **Young person:** *Yes.*
- **Practitioner:** *And if we filled you up with negative thoughts, would you be the container for them too?*
- **Young person:** *Yes.*
- **Practitioner:** *So you’re always there?*
- **Young person:** *Yes.*
- **Practitioner:** *And as the words change, you are there. This is awesome because it means that you’re more than the words in your head. No matter how negative or true the words seem, you are simply holding them. You are more than them. You can let them come and go without having to fight them or change them.*

This exercise is just one of many ways to help young people notice themselves as the container of their experience. You could achieve something similar by having them reflect on the advisor, noticer, and discoverer as parts of their self:

You can become aware of your advisor, hold it, and carry it. Therefore you are not your advisor. You can pause and notice that you are here noticing your emotions and physical sensations.

Therefore you are not just your emotions or the sensations in your body. And you can watch yourself explore and discover new ways. Therefore you are not just the discoverer. You are the person who is capable of stepping into the advisor, noticer, and discoverer spaces. You are the one who shifts between the DNA skills. Does that make sense? If you can see yourself as the DNA shifter, you're taking a flexible self-view.

We are liberated when we become aware that labels and evaluations need not imprison us. We can see that there's no reason to try to have some words ("I am special") and not others ("I am not good enough"). The words are not us.

Self-as-Noticer Exercise 2: Developing a Flexible Self-View by Shifting Perspectives

The advisor's stories can rule our lives if we're totally immersed in them. It can be a bit like being submerged in a smelly swamp. This exercise is a way to step out of the swamp and gain some wise distance. There are many ways to accomplish this. We'll outline two in this exercise (inspired by Grossman, Na, Varnum, Kitayama, & Nisbett, 2013; and Kross & Grossman, 2012).

The first approach is to have young people take a third-person perspective on their situation. To simplify the example script, we'll assume the practitioner's name is Maria, and that she's working with Steve, from chapter 7:

Steve, let's do an exercise that allows you to see yourself in different ways, okay? We'll start by identifying a difficult event in your life, something that you're struggling with. Can you describe this event now? (Maria allows time for Steve to describe the event.)

Okay, now let's do something a bit different. Imagine this same event is unfolding with you as a distant observer. One way to do this is to simply talk about yourself in the third person, referring to yourself by name. For example, I struggle to balance my work life with my home life. So if I was a distant observer, I might say, "I see Maria struggling to do everything she needs to do at work and at home. I see her worrying that she's going to let people down."

Does that make sense? Okay, so now bring that difficult event to mind and metaphorically take a few steps back from yourself. Here are some questions that might help you to connect with this observer perspective and talk about yourself in the third person.

"How does Steve feel in this situation?" "What thoughts does Steve have in this situation?" "Is Steve getting caught up in his

thoughts?” “What does Steve look like when he’s caught up in his thoughts?” “Is Steve aware of how he’s feeling?” “Is Steve aware of his values?”

The purpose of this task isn’t to challenge what young people think and feel; it’s to get them to see their rigid advisor and step into noticer space. If they’re able to genuinely speak of themselves in the third person, they’ve managed to change their viewpoint. This type of shift in perspective is often a precursor to behavioral change. Using the language of perspective taking, the young person is *here*, looking at the “not good enough” story *there*. This creates space between the self and the story, and within that space, change is possible.

Talking about oneself in the third person is just one of many possible ways to notice and create distance from unhelpful verbal material. Here’s another simple approach. This one is particularly helpful for those who are struggling to deal with past events.

We’ve been talking about this event from the past that’s troubling you. Let’s try to experience it from a variety of perspectives.

This is an eyes-closed exercise. So get comfortable, then close your eyes. Take a few moments to focus on your breath.

First, look at this event from an immersed view, as if you were there, at the center of the action. Imagine the event unfolding before your eyes as if you were back there, at that time. Take a few moments to do that.

Now view the same event from a wise distance. Imagine the event unfolding again, but this time imagine that rather than being in the scene, you are a distant observer. It’s as if you’re watching yourself. From that distance, observe what you look like. Also observe what others are doing. Again, take a few minutes to do that.

Following the visualization, ask whether the person experienced the event differently in the second scenario. Emphasize that there’s no right or wrong answer. Then explain that the exercise is about learning to see more choices. When young people can see such events from a distance, they’re free to let those experiences be and turn to choosing actions that improve their life. It’s important to connect this activity—and all of the activities in this book—to values and vitality.

Self-as-Discoverer Exercise 1: Seeing Yourself as Changing and Growing

This exercise makes use of the following worksheet, “Strengthening My Self-View,” and requires paper and pencils or pens for drawing or doodling. In this approach, flexible self-view is further developed through conversations and questions that help young people to shift from one time period to another. This creates temporal relations within which they can experience themselves as changing, evolving humans, rather than fixed concepts. For example, you might ask them to see themselves as they were in childhood or to imagine themselves as they might be in ten years. Here’s how you might describe the task:

This exercise aims to help you create some new ways of seeing yourself. I say “create” because when we discuss ourselves, we often create our self at the same time. You create you, and that’s both liberating and scary.

I’d like you to take some time to doodle or draw different aspects of your experiences. I say “doodle” because it doesn’t have to be beautiful artwork. When drawing, include four roles you play in life, such as sibling, student, and friend. Also include three self-concepts that are positive, and three that are negative.

You can also write sentences, but getting a little creative and using images makes for a richer experience. Express yourself however feels right to you, with only one rule: don’t use your name.

Here’s a sample worksheet, showing what a young person might draw, followed by a template you can offer to young people. (The template is available for download at <http://www.thrivingadolescent.com>.)



FIGURE 18. Example of a completed "Strengthening My Self-View" worksheet.

proceed. Allow plenty of time for those you're working with to consider the questions.

Start with the four roles in life, asking the following questions:

- *Cast your mind back ten years. Did you have each role ten years ago? For those you had, were they the same back then?*
- *Imagine yourself ten years from now. Will you still have these roles? What do you imagine you'll think about each role in ten years?*
- *Did your view of yourself change when you looked at these roles from the past and the future?*

Next, turn to the three positive self-concepts with these questions:

- *Recall yourself ten years ago. Did each of these self-concepts fit you ten years ago?*
- *If any of these self-concepts did apply to you ten years ago, are they exactly the same now as they were then?*
- *Do you imagine you'll have these self-concepts in ten years? If not, what will happen to them?*
- *What do you imagine you'll think about each of these self-concepts in ten years?*
- *How did these self-concepts change when you looked at them from different time perspectives?*

Next, explore the three negative self-concepts using the same questions as for the positive self-concepts.

Lastly, discuss the drawing as a whole and model flexible self-view along these lines:

What is the common element in all of the parts of this drawing? (The answer you're looking for is "They're all about me.")

How can you be just one of these things? Did you notice that your roles and self-concepts can change or get stronger or weaker over time?

One way to think about this exercise is that all these concepts and ideas you've drawn are the content of your life. You're like the page that holds all of this content. You're like an infinitely wide and long piece of paper that can hold any content, whether it seems positive, negative, or neutral. And if your content changes, you have plenty of space to hold the new content. This is flexible self-view.

As you work your way through this exercise, occasionally have those you're working with practice noticing. Also ask whether they knew the answers to some questions immediately? That kind of speedy response is a sign that the advisor is probably at work, relying on history to describe the self. This is fine when it's applied flexibly, but we do recommend a bit of inquiry to see if a speedy response reflects a rigid self-view.

The final step is to bring values into the conversation and help build discoverer skills:

Now consider each self-concept as something you can use. Then ask yourself if it's helpful to you in terms of living in ways you care about. If your answer is yes, then let the self-concept guide you. If your answer is no, it doesn't work for you, you'll probably want to unhook from the self-concept. By "unhooking," I mean you notice the concept but don't react to it.

When any self-concept comes up in the moment, you can look at how it's working by asking yourself, "Is my advisor helping me do what I care about?" If the answer is no, this is a cue to step out of advisor space and into discoverer or noticer space.

Finally, did it feel like in some ways you were creating your self as you went? If it did, then you caught a glimpse of the ability you have to discover and create yourself. I hope you saw that you aren't as fixed as you might think. You can create yourself. That's simultaneously cool, scary, and wonderful.

Self-as-Discoverer Exercise 2: Broadening the Discoverer Self with Poetry

This exercise also takes a creative approach to entering discoverer space and contacting self-view. It involves asking young people to compose a brief poem. You can call this reflective writing if the label "poetry" seems daunting. Use the following format:

1. One of the advisor's negative self-concepts that begins with an "I am" statement (for example, "I am not good enough").
2. One statement of what it's like to be a noticer, feeling and allowing the sensations that arise in response to the advisor's negative evaluations.
3. One or two statements about how the person could be as a discoverer—how the person would grow, change, or develop by trying new things.
4. One line that describes how the person's life is centered around his or her values.

Before young people begin to write, emphasize that the suggested format is just that—a suggestion—and that there isn't a right way to do this exercise. Encourage them to just relax and let themselves write. This isn't about being a great writer. You might also ask them to notice if the advisor comes out with critical comments and hinders their creativity. Generally speaking, young people express themselves freely in this kind of task because they regularly write at school. But as with all exercises in DNA-V, choose specific exercises based on the individual before you. Not all exercises work for everyone.

Here's an example.

I listen to my advisor say "I am broken."

*I become a noticer, seeing, smelling, hearing,
even as the advisor tries to pull me back to "broken."*

*I began my journey through an unknown land
allowing my experiences to light the way
toward value.*

Flexible Self-View Exercise 1: Connecting the Self to a Verbal Metaphor

For the final two exercises in this chapter, we help young people see that they encompass all aspects of DNA—discoverer, noticer, and advisor. We recommend always beginning with metaphor when discussing flexible self-view so you won't get entangled in complex verbal discussions that create confusion or feed the negative advisor. Of course, DNA is a metaphor itself, so if you've introduced that, you've already begun.

Here are a few metaphors we have found to be particularly effective for cultivating flexible self-view.

The DNA shifter. This metaphor underlies our model and is utilized throughout our interventions. Here, we show how it can be used to create flexible self-view:

Just as we are all made from biological DNA, our sense of self is built from all the D, N, and A skills. Sometimes we think of our self as just being what our advisor says. For example, we hear the advisor statement "I'm not good enough" and believe we really aren't good enough.

But this statement "I'm not good enough" isn't our whole self. For example, you could unhook from the advisor and step into discoverer

space to find ways to improve yourself. If you can step out of advisor space and into discoverer space, you can't be just this advisor statement. Similarly, if you can step into noticer space and become curious and aware of the statement "I'm not good enough," you can't be "not good enough." You are always much more than what your advisor says you are.

This raises a question. Who are you if you aren't what the advisor says you are? You are the one who holds the DNA skills, the one who shifts between the DNA skills, and the one who expresses the DNA skills. You are possibility.

The DNA-V disk. You can add the DNA disk as a visual accompaniment to the DNA shifter metaphor. The self is the entire circle, or flexible self-view. The discoverer, noticer, and advisor are within the circle, and values are the central hub. All are needed to make up the circle, and none are the entire circle.

A cup and its contents. In this metaphor, outlined more fully earlier in the chapter, the self is a cup, and thoughts, feelings, and sensations are its contents. The cup stays the same no matter what it contains.

The sky and the weather. In this metaphor, you are the sky, and your thoughts, feelings and pain are like the weather. Sometimes the weather seems bad and sometimes it seems good, but it always comes and goes. You hold all the weather and are more than the weather. (For a full elaboration of this metaphor, see Kabat-Zinn, 1990, p. 127.)

The chessboard. In this metaphor, the self is the chessboard, and positive and negative feelings are the pieces. The board contains the pieces without being the pieces, and it remains the same no matter how the chess match proceeds. (For a full elaboration of this metaphor, see S. C. Hayes, Strosahl, & Wilson, 2012, p. 231.)

You can even have young people come up with their own metaphors for their experience of flexible self-view. (You may wish to revisit the section on metaphors in chapter 4.) Both you and those you work with will gain skill in this with practice and creativity. We've found that drawing, poetry, and even doodling can facilitate this process, as in the next exercise.

Flexible Self-View Exercise 2: Creating Your Own Visual Metaphor

This exercise helps young people view themselves more flexibly and holistically. It involves creating a self-view that's unique to the individual. It requires paper and colored pencils, pens, or other art

supplies. (You can see some examples of drawings from young people at <http://www.thrivingadolescent.com>.) Here are some suggested instructions:

Today we're going to do some drawing to learn about ourselves and create a more flexible self-view. The bigger our self-view, the less likely we are to let our negative ideas about our self stop us from doing what's important to us.

Here are some pointers about what we'll do. The first thing is that the task involves drawing, but you aren't trying to create great artistic work. Just draw, doodle, or make abstract images without evaluating them. Try to use color and shapes as a way to express yourself instead of talking. It doesn't make any difference whether you consider yourself to be an artist; this task isn't about the art.

Let's draw (show an example) something that resembles the DNA-V disk. Start by drawing a big circle—as big as will fit on the paper. Now draw a smaller circle in the center. Then divide the bigger circle into equal thirds.

Designate one of the thirds for your advisor, and in that area, draw your advisor at work—calling you names, problem solving, giving you advice, judging you, or whatever. You can use its labels that are most self-critical if you want to, but also consider the useful things you can do with the advisor, like applying past learning in an effective way and following helpful rules. You can make your advisor into a character if you like, but it can also just be an image or something abstract. Just don't draw a picture of yourself. Remember, you aren't just your advisor. Draw the advisor as a fantasy or metaphorical image. (For this drawing and the next two, allow about five minutes. If someone you're working with gets stuck, encourage the person to draw in the abstract, with colors, shapes, or sketches.)

Next, draw your noticer self—the self that sees the world, feels, and takes in experiences through the senses, the self that pauses. Again, do this in any way that seems to work, whether with images or doodles—just don't draw a picture of yourself.

Now draw your discoverer self—the self that sees adventure, tries new things, and explores new landscapes. This part also tests things and, over time, helps you spot your strengths and identify your values. Follow the same guidelines as for the previous two parts of the drawing.

Lastly, in the center circle, write or draw some things that show what you deeply care about—what's most important to you.

After the drawing is complete, have those you're working with share what they've created, then discuss it together, saying something along these lines:

Now try on a flexible view of yourself. Consider this: Who made all of these images? Who drew your advisor, noticer, and discoverer? Who filled in the values in the center?

Of course, the answer is you: You're the one who created this image. You have the power to focus on any of these three DNA skills as parts of yourself. In this way, you can explore and create yourself in the world. You are also the one who chooses what to care about. This drawing illustrates flexible self-view. You encompass the roles of advisor, noticer, and discoverer. Now add a title to your picture, perhaps "My Flexible Self-View."

Wrap up the task by offering a reminder that everybody has fixed ideas about their self sometimes. It's totally normal. The key is to become aware of these fixed ideas and step into noticer or discoverer space to loosen from these self-concepts so they don't serve as barriers to doing what we care about.

From Self-Abuse to Self-Compassion

The self is an ongoing stream of behavior that changes as we grow. Yet we are always being tempted to see the self as fixed. In chapter 8 we discussed how the verbal advisor clings to self-evaluations and labels as though they were physical parts of us, like our heart or limbs. In chapter 9 we provided many exercises to help young people disentangle themselves from these notions of self as fixed. These exercises promote letting go of unhelpful self-evaluations, allowing young people to create flexible self-views that lead to growth and valued living.

This chapter is devoted to extending that approach into helping young people who have experienced abuse, neglect, shame, or stigma. Such young people have typically grown up in environments where expressions of unconditional love or compassion were rare. We believe the antidote to such a history is self-compassion (a focus of this chapter) and developing the capacity to forge new, loving relationships (chapters 11 and 12). Throughout this chapter, we'll use Maya's story to illustrate our approach. As you'll see, she comes from a seemingly good family and therefore provides an excellent example of how neglect can be invisible to outside observers.

Maya's Story

Maya slumps down into her chair in the therapist's office, her eyes red from crying. "I've screwed up again," she says, "this time seriously. I'm so scared."

Maya describes what happened. Two nights ago, she'd been drinking and driving when she crashed her car and ran from the scene. When she awoke, she couldn't remember what happened. "If only the amnesia had stayed," she says. She

describes how she was eating breakfast with her family when someone pounded on the front door. It was the police. They said she was to be arrested for reckless driving and leaving the scene of a crime. Her parents looked at her like she was some hateful stranger. She'd felt like throwing up.

Maya starts crying and says, "I've done it this time. I've really fucked up. I could have killed someone. I might even go to jail."

Maya is only nineteen, but she has a long history of reckless behavior, alcohol abuse, stimulant use, and driving too fast. She seems to have no restraint. Once she leapt out of a train after a fight with a girlfriend, nearly breaking her spine.

Maya says she doesn't really like her life. She claims she doesn't want to be like her "boring" friends who have one drink and then go home. She says the rush of being excited and living on the edge is the only thing that makes her feel alive.

Maya also has a two-year-old son, Josh, whom she loves dearly. She states that she only stays alive for him.

But now things have gone terribly wrong.

Maya says her whole life has been about getting into trouble and pushing boundaries. Her parents are upper-class professionals and, from the outside, had seemed to be perfect when she was little. Maya learned from her parents that she was always to make the family look good—dress well, have flawless manners, and be a big success in school.

But her parents weren't all they seemed, especially her dad. Maya recalls being about ten years old and seeing her father kissing a young woman in a parking lot. When Maya brought it up, her father denied it. He said she was making things up and accused her of trying to destroy the family. Those events were the beginning of a downward spiral in which, in private, her dad was cold and abusive, yelled at her, criticized her, and occasionally slapped her. Maya's mother, meanwhile, was distant and preoccupied with her career. She came home late and was disinterested in both Maya and her father.

In front of friends or family members, both parents acted like model parents. But in private, whenever Maya got upset, both of her parents would try to shut her down with comments like “Get over it. Stop being a baby.” She learned that it was bad and even dangerous to feel sad, afraid, or confused.

Maya says she keeps trying to shut down her feelings, but it doesn’t work. She just gets more upset and does more stupid stuff. Sometimes she deliberately does dumb things as a way of saying, “Screw you,” to her parents. She desperately wishes she had the money to move into a place of her own, but she feels stuck living with her parents, especially because they support her and Josh financially.

Now Maya finds herself on the verge of going to jail. “I don’t know what’s wrong with me,” she says. “I’m just a screwup, and now I’ve screwed up my life.”

Reflecting on Maya

Before we delve deeper into Maya’s story and consider interventions, take a moment to reflect on the questions below. This will sharpen your DNA-V assessment skills and give you some in-depth practice.

- How would you describe Maya’s advisor?
- What DNA skills do you think Maya is weak at?
- What DNA skills does she seem to be good at?
- What would you do about Maya’s self-concept? Should you try to reassure her or persuade her that she isn’t a screwup?
- What do you think would happen if you directly asked Maya to be kind to herself?
- What is the function of Maya’s self-talk? What does she hope to accomplish?

The Birth of an Abusive Advisor

When Maya was growing up, her parents coerced her into pretending everything was okay in her family. She became reckless and started “screwing up,” perhaps as an act of

rebellion. She screwed up so much that “I’m a screwup” became a well-learned self-concept.

Why does Maya blame herself in this situation? She’s intelligent and knows that her father is in the wrong and her mother is cold. But intellect alone can’t overcome the dilemmas she faces in her relationships with them. She depended on her father for love—something all children need from their parents. Sometimes he lavished affection on her, especially when others were around, but other times he lashed out.

Now she hates her dad, which seems reasonable, but she also hates herself. It’s as if her dad’s abusive voice has become internalized. She no longer “needs” her dad to criticize her. Now she does that all on her own. She probably even sees the self-criticism as something that will help keep her safe and stop her from doing stupid stuff. Maya, like many young people in similar situations, might be described as clinging to her abusive advisor as if it was a protector.

Finding safety in self-abuse can seem mystifying to practitioners. They may try offering praise or reassurance, but with this approach, people like Maya tend to continue to fall into predictable self-destructive patterns, even though they involve abuse. In the next section, we’ll explain why.

Why Reassurance Can Backfire

One common way to deal with self-abuse similar to Maya’s is to directly challenge people to think differently. For example, a well-meaning adult might ask Maya to question her evaluations of “I’m a screwup” by recalling instances when she did something positive. Another potential approach is to point out that, logically, no person is any one concept all the time. Yet another possibility is directly reassuring Maya by telling her that she does many things well and has plenty of potential. However, all of these options can backfire if we don’t attend to how Maya’s self-abuse functions for her. We need to look at what happens when we argue from evidence or

logic. Do we make progress or just get more and more entangled in advisor activity?

For example, if we seek to argue Maya out of her negative self-concepts, she's likely to respond with anger and counterarguments. She might say, "How can you tell me I'm not a screwup? I just got arrested for drunk driving and I'm about to go to jail. What do you know about my life?"

Many people fight reassurance, at least some of the time. This seems especially to be the case among young people who have a history of abuse or neglect in early childhood. Have you ever experienced this kind of paradox, when someone you're trying to help resists or misunderstands you? Perhaps you had a friend who was going through a tough time and beating himself up, and when you sought to reassure him, he argued against you. It doesn't seem to make sense does it? Why would anybody argue against reassurance? Reassurance seems nice, even pleasurable.

Living Inside the Advisor

We can best understand this resistance by revisiting relational frame theory, which casts light on how our individual histories shape us to derive unique meaning from reassurance—a meaning that can be very different from what was intended by the speaker. We must therefore go beyond what we hear and the content of what people say to themselves and return to function by asking, "*Why* is the person saying this? How does it work for this person? What derived relations might the words have for this individual? In Maya's case, we'd ask why she finds it reinforcing to tell herself, "I'm a screwup." We know it must be reinforcing, because she does it often.

For nonverbal animals, reinforcement is fairly simple. It usually comes in the form of a discrete thing found in the physical world, and it functions to increase the frequency of subsequent behavior. As an example, consider calling your dog by name. Initially, the dog doesn't come, but one time she does, and you reward her with a treat or by saying "good doggy." Now the dog is more likely to come when you call her next time. Treats and the "good doggy" tone of voice are

reinforcers that are easily trained in most dogs, and once trained they work most of the time.

The situation is considerably more complex for humans. Imagine trying to change Maya's behavior by giving her a treat when she does something adults deem "good." Or, worse, imagine trying to reinforce her by saying "good girl" in an exaggerated, "good doggy" tone of voice. She would probably throw a heavy object at your head.

Reinforcement is so much more complicated in humans because we respond not only to things in the world, but also to our verbal relating of things. For example, dogs might experience great joy at escaping from a cage and running free, whereas humans can experience great joy at the mere *idea* of escaping a cage. Humans can even try to buy the idea of freedom, just like when a middle-aged family man purchases a loud motorcycle to demonstrate his independence. There's nothing like a loud motorcycle to symbolically tell the world, "I don't care what you think. Kiss my ass." The dog would notice the loud motorcycle as it rumbles by, but wouldn't get that the man is "being independent." The ideas of independence and freedom are entirely invisible to the dog, which only understands the physical independence of getting out of a cage and running around the neighborhood. For humans, on the other hand, freedom can be entirely symbolic, with few links to the physical world.

Social connection is another example of how reinforcement can be complicated by symbols. A dog loves to be with a pack of other dogs. Those other dogs are physical. You can weigh them, see them, and pet them. In contrast, a human can be pleased by mere symbols of social acceptance, such as having five hundred friends on Facebook or a certificate that confers social status. These are social symbols that may be connected to real relationships with other humans ready to provide affection or support. Or they could be mere words that have no link to relationships in the physical world. And humans often have trouble telling the difference between real relationships and symbolic relationships, explaining why so many of us tend to desperately seek the symbolic approval of strangers and acquaintances.

Why Self-Rules Are Reinforcing, and Why Reassurance Can Go Terribly Wrong

The situation is most complicated when we develop rules about the self. Research has shown that rules are reinforcing to follow, even if the consequences are dire. In other words, we're reinforced by rules when we follow them, even if their content makes life worse (S. C. Hayes, 1989). Say you develop the rule "I'm not smart." You then begin to behave in ways that satisfy the rule, so when challenging material comes along, you don't put in much effort. You live by your self-concept rule. When it comes time to take a test, you don't study for it, so you fail. You feel bad about failing the test, but you're reinforced for following your rule: "I'm not smart, so of course I failed." And the fact is, you might even feel okay about failing. In this way, self-concept rules gain strength when we continue to live by them.

While we may only have a few ways of reinforcing a dog's behavior, the power of language allows humans to be reinforced in countless symbolic ways. And this statement has a corollary: that humans can also be punished in countless symbolic ways. The advisor can make a complex mess of things, especially when responding in a young person who has not experienced parental love.

With this in mind, let's take a closer look at how sticky our self-rules can become, and why something that seems positive, like reassurance, can fail to reinforce people and can even make them cling to their self-concepts more tightly.

In all of the following examples, the context is that a young person has said "I'm a screwup," and the antecedent is that we've tried to reassure the person that he or she is not. We then provide the person's verbal behavior in response to our antecedent and the potential verbal rule underlying it. The hypothesized verbal relation or rule is expressed in parentheses. We then hypothesize the function of their resistance. In all cases, following the rule seems to help the person escape something aversive, so rule following is reinforced.

Self-statement following reassurance: “If I try to do something right, I’ll just mess it up, and then I’ll hate myself for trying.”

Potential verbal rule: Trying leads to failure, and failure leads to self-hate (causal relation).

Function of resisting reassurance: I don’t want to fail again or hate myself, so I won’t try, and I won’t believe you when you say I’m good enough.

Self-statement following reassurance: “You want me to be a nice girl, but I’m going to be a screwup to spite you.”

Potential verbal rule: If I become a nice girl, you’ll gain control of me (causal relation).

Function of resisting reassurance: I don’t want to feel controlled, so I’ll do the opposite of what you want (counterpliance).

Self-statement following reassurance: “Person X made me a screwup. The worse I am, the more that person is to blame.”

Potential verbal rule: My being a screwup is person X’s fault (causal relation), and person X deserves to be punished (rule: bad actions must be punished).

Function of resisting reassurance: Your reassurance is a way of letting person X off the hook. I can’t let you do that.

Self-statement following reassurance: “I just don’t know if I’m good enough” (said repeatedly in various forms).

Potential verbal rule: My self-concept is what you think (equivalence relation). Your reassurance will make me feel better (causal relation).

Function of resisting reassurance: You need to keep reassuring me so I feel better. If I let you know I feel reassured, you’ll stop reassuring me. So I outwardly disagree with the reassurance while inwardly seeking it.

Self-statement following reassurance: “Because I really am a screwup, I couldn’t help myself.”

Potential verbal rule: My self-concept describes who I really am (equivalence relation), and because of who I am, I must act in certain ways (equivalence and causal self-concepts equal true descriptions, and cause behavior).

Function of resisting reassurance: You're saying I don't have to act in certain ways. If that's true, I'm to blame. I don't want to feel blameworthy.

Self-statement following reassurance: "I can't be kind to myself. If I'm hard on myself, it will make me stronger."

Potential verbal rule: My critical self-concept leads to strength (causal relation).

Function of resisting reassurance: I want to avoid weakness

Self-statement following reassurance: "The fact that I'm a screwup is consistent with the evidence from my entire life."

Potential verbal rule: My self-concept provides a coherent account of my life (equivalence relation), and incoherence means danger and unpredictability (equivalence relation).

Function of resisting reassurance: Incoherence is too dangerous. There's plenty of evidence that I'm a screwup; therefore, I'll hold tighter to the rule.

We hope these examples show that using reassurance, logic, and evidence with young people can get you further entangled with their advisor and lead you into complex, confusing discussions that seem to go nowhere. When you get entangled in their verbal world, you have two choices: You can continue to reassure and hope that you'll eventually persuade them that their self-concept is wrong, or you can shift out of advisor space and into noticing or discovery.

Shame as a Shield

In Maya's case, shame isn't merely her reaction to her past experiences; it's a behavioral pattern that's been reinforced because it protected her from potential danger—more abuse from her father. When she was little, her shame signaled that she had a "deep flaw" and needed to "hide herself" so that

others like her father didn't hurt her. This appeared to keep her safe. Her father controlled her with abuse, so she avoided danger by being wary and getting mad at herself when she let her guard down. Over time, she too came to believe that she needed her abusive advisor.

Unfortunately, when it comes to the advisor, things are never simple. Maya thinks she needs the abusive advisor, and she also unconsciously hates it. She reacts to it by acting out and pushing boundaries. It's like she's saying to her advisor, "You can't shame me, I'll do whatever I want." She's stuck in a battle, sometimes thinking she needs to escape her advisor through defiance. But she can't escape. The advisor is inside her. As we will see, the solution for Maya is to learn to make space for the advisor without reacting to it, either by clinging to it or fighting it.

When young people develop a belief that their self is defective and bad, they often engage in a number of control moves:

- **Clinging to the abusive advisor.** They believe that criticizing the self is beneficial and not criticizing the self is dangerous in some way.
- **Disconnecting from the self.** They attempt to escape the "bad" parts of the self, often by using drugs, engaging in distractions such as video games or social media, or escaping into a world of fantasy.
- **Disconnecting from others.** They withdraw from people because they see themselves as deeply flawed, and believe that others will hurt them because of these flaws.
- **Fixing the self from the outside.** They try to convince an abusive caregiver that they're "good enough." Young people sometimes believe that if they can convince others that they're good enough, they too will feel good enough.
- **Defying the shame.** They try to act in a way that seems totally inconsistent with shame, as a way of "defeating" it or trying to prove it doesn't matter.

Leaving the Abuser Behind

We may think that we need our inner abuser to keep us motivated and in control, but research suggests that the exact opposite is true. People who engage in substantial self-criticism and abuse have lower well-being, more extreme reactions to negative life events and failure, and less motivation to improve (Leary, Tate, Adams, Batts Allen, & Hancock, 2007; Neff, 2011; Neff, Hsieh, & Dejitterat, 2005).

Clinging to self-criticism is like insisting that advisor skills are your only means of protecting yourself—that you lack noticer or discoverer skills. Yet self-criticism is a natural part of being a human and needn't be automatically associated with negative outcomes. The key issue is not whether young people criticize themselves, but how they relate to that criticism. Research with adolescents suggests that self-criticism leads to the development of poor mental health, but only among those who lack self-compassion for their flaws and imperfections (Marshall et al., 2015). In contrast, self-criticism has no negative developmental effects on adolescents who are able to respond to themselves with kindness and compassion.

Exercises for Loosening Self-Rules and Building Self-Compassion

Self-compassion is an essential ingredient for resilience. It helps young people bounce back from setbacks and self-criticism and recommit to valued goals. In the self-compassion exercises in this chapter, we seek to accomplish three things. First, we help young people notice the critical advisor and acknowledge that self-criticism seems to be protective, so it tends to be what we humans do. Second, we help young people notice and allow the sensations and feelings that show up in the body when the advisor is being abusive. This helps them practice being in the presence of their self-abuse without seeking to escape it or react to it. In other words, they practice allowing the advisor's abuse without getting hooked by it. Third, we help them connect with the fear of leaving a critical advisor behind—a dynamic that's been referred to as fear of self-compassion (Gilbert, McEwan, Matos, & Rivis, 2011). Once they recognize that they're reacting to a fear of self-

compassion, they're more willing to give self-compassion a chance.

Self-Compassion Exercise 1: Seeing Self-Rules by Changing Perspective

Exercises that involve perspective taking can create major psychological shifts during therapy. In this case, we'll demonstrate the intervention with a dialogue. As you'll see, these kinds of self-view exercises aren't magic pills that will fix everything, but they can begin to loosen the advisor's rigid rules and people's damaging concepts of themselves. If you remain flexible and connected to the people you work with, you can help them see themselves from many views.

In this example, the therapist asks Maya to imagine that the little girl she once was is in the therapy room. There are many other ways to promote shifts in perspective, and we've listed a few below this sample dialogue.

Therapist: Maya, are you willing to take a look at yourself as a little girl to see how you were struggling? (*Maya nods.*) Okay, close your eyes and imagine that you're going back in time... Imagine that you're in your family home... Now imagine that you're seeing little Maya in her family as she watches her parents argue... Can you see what it's like for little Maya? Tell me what she looks like.

Maya: I see this little girl with a perfect dress, shiny shoes, and her hair done up perfectly. She has good manners—she had to. I see her standing at her bedroom door watching her parents fight. Her mother slaps her father across the face. Her father turns and sees Maya watching, and she's paralyzed with fear.

Therapist: What's it like for little Maya in that moment?

Maya: They don't even think I matter. It's like I don't exist. (*Sighs.*) If only... If only that little girl had been loved. If only she had known what to do. If only she hadn't been so naughty.

Therapist: Now imagine that little Maya is here in the room with us. What do you see?

Maya: I see somebody who is pretty, curious about the world, and perfectly groomed, as always.

Therapist: Imagine little Maya is looking at you and asking for help. She's asking how to be happier. What might you say to her?

Maya: (*Speaks angrily.*) I want to slap her face.

Therapist: Really? Why?

Maya: (*Speaks a bit less angrily.*) I want to tell her to just be good, to follow the rules.

At this point, the therapist sees that adult Maya is hard on her younger self. As long as she continues to buy into her advisor's idea that she's bad and needs to be controlled, she may have trouble behaving in compassionate ways. So the therapist helps Maya shift perspective again, this time invoking Maya's son, Josh. Maya wants Josh to have things she didn't have—most of all, a better life.

Therapist: Thank you for letting me see your anger at your younger self. I want to look at this one more way. Is that okay? (*Maya nods.*) There's no right or wrong here. Whatever you come up with is fine. Can we try something else and see what happens?

Maya: Okay.

Therapist: Let's try a new viewpoint. Imagine Josh is in the room. Josh is sad because he's gotten into trouble for breaking the rules. He's broken something he was asked—repeatedly—not to touch. He's broken the rules. What would you say to him?

Maya: (*Smiles briefly.*) Well he's just a little boy. Of course, he needs to learn. I might be cross, but I'd tell him, "It's okay. I'll help you." I would hug him. (*Maya looks at the therapist with surprise as she becomes aware that there's a big difference between how she would treat Josh and how she'd treat herself.*)

Therapist: (*Speaks gently.*) Is slapping little Maya what she needs?

Maya: (*Shakes her head, with tears in her eyes.*) Yes, I know they're just kids. Little Maya, she was just a kid.

Therapist: I can see how much you love Josh. I think that's amazing. I can see how you want to treat him with kindness. Maybe it's possible to bring some of that kindness into your life—even regarding the mistakes you've made?

Maya: I don't know.

Therapist: Shall we see what happens? Do you think we can look at Maya in many different ways? Can we look at her through kind eyes, as well as angry eyes? We might discover something new. (*Maya nods and agrees to try.*)

Time and again we've seen this type of exercise open the door for people to see things in surprising new ways. There are many techniques for shifting perspective. You can ask the person you're working with to switch roles in any way that seems useful. Here are some ideas:

- Have the person imagine that the two of you switch roles, so the young person is you—the professional—and you are him. What would he say to a person in the same position he's in? Have him say the words to you.
- Have the person imagine that her best friend has the same problem. How would she respond to her friend? What would she say?
- Have the person imagine that he's a child. What does the child need? Would he give the child what he needs?
- Have the person imagine that she's ten years older. What will her future self think about this problem?

Self-Compassion Exercise 2: Using the Noticer to Unmask the Abusive Advisor

This exercise is a visualization task that helps young people pause, step out of the abusive advisor's perspective, and use their noticer skills. They visualize their inner abuse as an object and “physicalize” it. Then they turn their awareness to the corresponding physical experiences using the AND practice from chapter 4 to notice and allow these sensations, in essence engaging in a mild form of exposure to their self-concept. (You can use any of the techniques in chapter 4 to accomplish this, focusing on self-concepts or “I am” types of

behavior.) As you'll see in the follow suggested presentation, it's a two-step process: first describing the abusive advisor, then noticing the fear of having it, letting go of it, or both.

I wonder if you'd be willing to help me better understand your inner critic. (You can use any term the two of you have generated collaboratively: abusive advisor, negative inner voice, or whatever.) This is an exercise that involves pretending that your inner abuse is a physical thing that we could see out in the world. It can look however you want it to. Use your imagination.

Gently close your eyes or look at a spot on the floor. Now imagine that your inner abuse is a thing outside of you. What shape would you give it? What color would it be? What temperature is it? Hot, cold, warm? How big is it?

Now as you look at this thing, take a moment to scan your body and do the AND practice. Become a noticer. Be aware of your body, name any sensations that are there, and, if you want, describe what emotions these are connected to.

Okay, let's continue. Watch it for a little longer and breathe gently as you do this.

The purpose of this exercise isn't to get rid of the abusive advisor or to argue with it. The purpose is to help you notice it. Because if you notice it, you start to have a choice about whether or not you listen to it. It's important to remember that stepping into noticer space also involves allowing things to show up—including the abusive advisor. When negative experiences show up, you can allow them to just be without having to fight or defeat them. They will come and they will go. If you fight them, that often gives them more energy. (If necessary, ground young people in the present by asking them to notice their feet on the floor, your voice, or their body in the chair.)

You're the one who gets to choose whether the advisor's information is helpful in your life or unhelpful.

Now ask yourself what would happen if you behaved kindly toward yourself. Take a moment now to imagine yourself acting kindly toward yourself... What feelings show up?

Perhaps fear or anger? Notice these too. Breathe. Then allow your feelings to just be there, like weather in the sky. Sometimes the weather is pleasant. Sometimes the weather is unpleasant.

Now ask yourself this question: Are you willing to have your fear or other strong feelings in order to grow? Are you willing to shift out of negative advisor space and take a kind view of yourself? All humans have stress and self-criticism flow through them many times a week. This is what it means to be human. We can't always stop the self-criticism, just as we can't stop the weather. But we can recognize when we're being hard on ourselves, and we can accept that this is what humans do sometimes. We can choose to be kind to ourselves even when our advisor is being negative.

If those you're working with say they'd like to develop more self-compassion, discuss how they can shift from advisor space by practicing being a noticer, using the AND exercise, and then allowing feelings, as described in chapter 4. If they say they aren't willing to have fear or whatever other feelings are coming up, let them know that this is okay too. Move to other noticer exercises or the self-view exercises in chapters 8 and 9 and return to self-compassion later.

Self-Compassion Exercise 3: The Elements of Self-Compassion

This quick, thirty-second quiz offers insight into self-compassion. You can take it yourself to increase your understanding, ask young people to complete it, or simply use it to consider the behavior you see in those you work with. (A downloadable version of this quiz is available at <http://www.thrivingadolescent.com>.)

Self-Compassion Quiz

Rate the extent to which you agree with each of the statements below, using a scale of 1 to 5 in which 1 means "never," 2 means "rarely," 3 means "sometimes," 4 means "often," and 5 means "always."

- _____ Do you accept that you'll often fail to live up to your ideals?
- _____ Do you accept that when you fail to live up to your ideals, you'll often experience self-criticism and discomfort?
- _____ Are you willing to mindfully make space for self-criticism and discomfort and allow them to come and go like bad weather?
- _____ Do you value treating yourself with kindness?
- _____ Do you use kindness to motivate yourself when you experience setbacks?

If you were able to answer 4 (often) or 5 (always) to all of these questions, you're skillful in the use of self-compassion. However, many people respond to at least a few of these questions with numbers below 4. That's okay. This quiz isn't another excuse to beat yourself up. Just use it as a gentle way to increase your awareness of the aspects of self-compassion that are difficult for you.

Self-Compassion Exercise 4: Time Traveling

This exercise is designed to help young people start looking at their life situation differently and to enhance their willingness to respond to their situation and their flaws (whether real or perceived) with kindness. You can conduct the entire exercise, or use either the past or future component by itself. While it's presented here as a visualization, you can also conduct it as a role-play.

Let's discover some new perspectives by playing a time travel game. We'll pretend to travel to the past, then back to the present, and then into the future. Gently close your eyes and settle into your chair.

First, let's imagine traveling back to the past to visit a younger version of you. Think of a time when you were just a kid and really struggling with something. Maybe think of yourself about five years ago. Take your time and reconnect with a period of your life when you were struggling. Now imagine that you, in your present form, could go back into the past and

say something to your younger self. What would you say? Talk to your younger self now.

Now let's return to the present moment. It's just you and me in the room now. We sit here together seeking to see the world and ourselves in different ways. Who knows what we'll discover together. Let's use these moments to be discoverers together.

Okay, now let's step into the future. Imagine that you're much older and you've had the good fortune to become wiser. Don't worry about the details of how, just know that you've become wiser. Imagine this older, wiser you can travel back in time to the present moment and see you struggling now. (Briefly describe the person's current struggles.) Your future self would like to say something to help you. Let that older, wiser self speak to you in this present moment, in your current situation. What does your future self most want to say to you?

Now let's return to the present moment. We'll take a few moments to notice by doing the AND practice. First, become aware of your body, then name any physical sensations you're experiencing, then describe your emotions if they're strong. (This can be done either out loud or silently.)

Now let's return to the present moment. As you open your eyes, really be a noticer and curiously look around the room as if you're seeing it for the first time.

Afterward, debrief with the young person, drawing his or her attention to how a past or future perspective might have been helpful in seeing things differently. Perhaps they even noticed their cruel advisor sneak in. Look for opportunities to reinforce ways of viewing that promote any of the following:

- Seeing feelings and evaluations as normal and okay (for example, "I would tell my younger self, 'It's okay to feel this way.'")
- Seeing feelings and thoughts as transitory (for example, "I would tell my younger self that he will feel better someday.")
- Testing thoughts against workability (for example, "I would tell my younger self that he might be smarter than

he thinks he is, and that if he keeps trying, he'll discover what he can do.”)

- Encouraging valued actions in the face of distress (for example, “I would tell my younger self to keep going and things will get better.”)
- Formulating or clarifying values statements (for example, “I would tell my younger self that he’s getting caught up in stuff that isn’t going to be important in a year.”)

Self-Compassion Exercise 5: Speaking Out for Love

The preceding time traveler exercise often helps loosen the grip of unhelpful self-criticisms and promotes self-compassion. However, sometimes young people struggle to find ways to act gently toward themselves and their past, especially if they’ve never experienced unconditional love.

Here’s an alternative exercise that might work in these instances. First ask the young person to identify a loved one. This might be a friend, a parent, or a boyfriend or girlfriend. Friends are often a good choice because they’re less likely than parents to have a long, complex, ambivalent relationship with the young person. Then role-play how the young person might respond if this loved one was in a situation similar to what the young person faces. You’ll play the role of the loved one, and the young person will play himself or herself to facilitate self-discovery. For the sake of simplicity, in this example we’ll use Maya, who has chosen her friend Catherine as her loved one. Here’s what you might say:

Imagine I’m Catherine. I’ve come to see you, my dearest friend. I’m struggling with self-doubt and self-criticism. I have an abusive advisor that’s running the show. I’m really struggling with feeling like I’m a screwup and never do anything right. What would you say to me if I were Catherine?

Allow the young person time to speak, and let any silence be okay. This is crucial for supporting the creation of new verbal behavior toward the self, so let the young person discover a new perspective. You can be completely silent, or you can use verbal prompts, taken from the young person’s own words in earlier interactions. Here are some common examples of what

you might say when role-playing the loved one (manifesting problems of the young person you're working with). Notice that we focus on the self and creating more flexibility around rigid verbal rules about the self:

- *I'm bad [a loser, worthless, a failure, dumb, and so on].*
- *I'm broken. There's something wrong with me for feeling this way.*
- *I'm worthless. Why can't I just get over it?*
- *I feel like giving up.*
- *I hate myself.*
- *I hate my life.*
- *No one really loves me.*

Next, ask the young person to take a few moments to notice whatever is happening for him or her, using the AND practice from chapter 4. Then debrief, creating space for discussing what happened in the exercise.

With self-view exercises, it's important not to insist on dramatic changes in the content of young people's thoughts. You're simply aiming to loosen the grip of unhelpful self-concepts—a process that can be quite subtle—not erase these concepts. The aim is to help young people discover a more flexible view of the self and see the self in entirely new ways. Whatever their experience of the exercise, it's important to validate them and encourage them to stay open as they practice new perspectives.

Your task is to notice changes to how young people are responding to their content. You're looking for changes in the function of words, not changes to the words themselves. For example, it's one thing for Maya to say, "I'm a screwup," as she clenches her teeth and then rages for ten minutes. It's another thing for her to say the same words and have sadness flash across her face, along with a few tears, and then start talking about what she can do. In both cases there are negative emotions associated with "I'm a screwup," but in the second example the function has changed; Maya has brought some kindness to herself, and the result is that these words are less constricting. She's having the thoughts *and* moving forward.

Spotting the changing function of the words will allow you to help young people develop and grow. In this instance, you might even validate Maya by saying, “I see that you’re feeling sad and a bit hopeless, and yet you’re willing to look for ways to improve your life. That takes courage.”

Self-Compassion Exercise 6: Becoming a Friend to Yourself

This simple exercise helps young people look at how they typically respond to self-criticism and encourages them to take different perspectives on their self. It utilizes the following worksheet, “Becoming a Friend to Yourself,” which you can download at <http://www.thrivingadolescent.com>.

Becoming a Friend to Yourself

Your Mistakes

Think of a time you made a mistake, failed, or did something you considered to be wrong. Briefly state what the mistake was here:

Now get in touch with how you responded to the mistake and answer these questions:

Did your advisor criticize you?

- Yes _____ Somewhat _____ No _____

Did you call yourself names like stupid, lazy, or weak?

- Yes _____ Somewhat _____ No _____

Did you blame yourself?

- Yes _____ Somewhat _____ No _____

Were you hard on yourself for a long time, like more than a day or two?

- Yes _____ Somewhat _____ No _____

A Friend's Mistakes

Now think of a time when a close friend made a mistake, failed, or did something you considered to be wrong. Choose a mistake that didn't hurt you or impact you negatively. (You might choose something like failing a test or being fired from a job.) Briefly state what the mistake was here:

Now get in touch with how you responded to your friend's mistake—what you said or thought about your friend.

Did you criticize your friend?

- Yes _____ Somewhat _____ No _____

Did you call your friend names like stupid, lazy, or weak?

- Yes _____ Somewhat _____ No _____

Did you blame your friend?

- Yes _____ Somewhat _____ No _____

Did you stay angry at your friend for a long time, like more than a day or two?

- Yes _____ Somewhat _____ No _____

Comparing Your Ratings

How did you do? If you answered yes to three or more questions about yourself, you're being hard on yourself and may want to give kindness a try. How did you rate your friend? When you compare your ratings, is there a difference? Is it easier for you to be kind to a friend than it is to yourself?

One way to practice self-kindness is by taking the perspective of a friend. In other words, treat yourself as you'd treat a friend who made a similar mistake. Can you be a friend to yourself? Try stepping into discoverer space and giving self-

kindness a try, just to see what happens. You can always go back to self-criticism.

Also, bear in mind that self-kindness isn't self-indulgence. It works to the extent that it helps you overcome setbacks and recommit to your valued path.

Self-Compassion Exercise 7: The Kindness Creed

This exercise takes advantage of language—and the advisor's love of rules—to instill a new set of self-kindness behaviors that bring all of the DNA skills together flexibly. Basically, it involves helping young people create an individualized creed using the following formula:

1. State how you view your problem.
2. Describe what you notice when you practice AND in the presence of thoughts and self-concepts about the problem.
3. Normalize responses by acknowledging that this is the human condition and then allow difficult feelings to just be.
4. Choose to value yourself.
5. Forgive yourself, recommit to values, and come up with a plan to act differently in the future.

Here's an example from Maya:

1. *I feel like I screwed up by drinking and crashing my car.*
2. *When I think about how I screwed up, I experience tightness in my chest and stomach, which I describe as anxiety. Other times my entire body just feels heavy and I feel tears coming on, which I describe as sadness.*
3. *I recognize that I'm a human, not a perfect robot. I will make mistakes, like all people do. When I make mistakes, I'll feel bad, and I can make space for those feelings. My advisor will be critical, and I can see this rather than be this criticism, knowing that's an important part of being human.*
4. *I choose to value myself.*
5. *I'll forgive myself and recommit to my valued goals. I'll seek to prevent this setback from occurring again by*

choosing not to drive after I've been drinking.

Friendship and Love Are in Our DNA

We spend years teaching young people how to solve math problems, write essays, and understand biology or physics. How much time do we spend, in comparison, teaching them the skills they need to build and maintain friendships? It's as if we assume young people will just know how to do this. The premise of this chapter is that friendships and social connection are too important to be left to chance.

This chapter focuses on a set of relationship-building skills that we refer to with the umbrella term “social view.” Social view brings together two seemingly contrary abilities: the ability to guess what it's like to be in another's shoes, and the ability to hold those guesses lightly while using noticer and discoverer skills to learn about others.

Research suggests that humans are pretty good at guessing what's going on inside others. For example, people are generally good at detecting others' personality, sexual orientation, skill level at tasks, and socioeconomic status from observing their behavior for less than five minutes (Ambady, Hallahan, & Conner, 1999; Ambady, Krabbenhoft, & Hogan, 2006; Carney, Colvin, & Hall, 2007; Kraus & Keltner, 2009). However, our guesses about others can also be wrong, especially when we're experiencing anger, sadness, or anxiety (Ambady & Gray, 2002; Crick & Dodge, 1994). For example, sad people are less able to accurately detect the intentions and affect of others (Ambady & Gray, 2002). Aggressive children are more likely to see hostile intentions in others (Crick & Dodge, 1996). And adolescents with social anxiety disorder are more likely to overestimate that a social interaction will turn out badly (Rheingold, Herbert, & Franklin, 2003).

In our model of social training, we seek to take advantage of the power of the advisor to make accurate guesses about other people, while also taking advantage of noticer and discoverer skills as a way of checking and improving on our advisor's guesses. Here are the key DNA-V components of social view:

Advisor

- The ability to use past learning to predict what others feel and do (“When I’ve been in this kind of situation, my advisor has often said X and I’ve often felt Y. Maybe now this other person is experiencing something similar.”)
- Recognition that past learning isn’t always useful, along with the ability to unhook from advisor’s preconceived beliefs and predictions (“Maybe my ideas about this person are wrong.”)
- The ability to recognize being stuck in advisor space and to unhook from preconceived beliefs (“I keep worrying that my friend hates me now. All this worrying is getting me nowhere. Maybe I should just talk to my friend.”)

Noticer

- The ability to recognize one’s own emotions in a social situation (“I feel butterflies; I am nervous talking to her.”)
- The ability to differentiate one’s own emotions from others’ emotions (“I’m sad, and the other person is disappointed.”)
- The ability to use others’ facial expressions and tone of voice, as well as other social stimuli in the present moment, to make a reasonable guess at what others are feeling

Discoverer

- The ability to test whether acting according to preconceived ideas and judgments supports one’s values
- The ability to test whether reacting to one’s emotions supports values
- The ability to experiment with social behavior to find new ways of living in alignment with social values

Young people need to have a flexible social view in order to effectively navigate the journey out of their familiar social world, beyond their families and childhood friends, and into the wide world of new relationships, partners, and social networks. As they progress through adolescence, they seek less support from their parents and more from friends, typically arriving at a point where the level of support from both sources is similar (Furman & Winkles, 2010; Helsen, Vollebergh, & Meeus, 2000). In later adolescence, social support often shifts again, away from peers and toward romantic relationships (Connolly, Furman, & Konarski, 2000).

So much new learning is taking place, which can be simultaneously terrifying and exhilarating. Young people quickly learn that the

deepest pain arises in struggles to get along with others, to be heard, to have their needs met by those closest to them, to feel loved, to feel important, and to feel like they're making their way in the world. Likewise, their greatest joys lie in relationships, whether it is best friends making eye contact to exchange a silent secret, the kiss of a new lover, or a parent's comforting hug. They all long for these moments.

We want to help them have these moments. If young people are taught how to engage in social perspective taking, they'll be better able to create genuine friendship and love, build powerful social networks that will help them function at their best intellectually and academically, and create warm, caring communities. This chapter will discuss why social connection is so important to young people and provide exercises to help them develop a flexible social view so they can strengthen important relationships. But first, let's see what's likely to happen when young people lack this skill.

A Leading Cause of Death

There's one psychological problem that can bring on all of the following conditions. Can you guess what that problem is?

- Heart disease
- Obesity
- Impaired cognitive performance
- Poor sleep quality
- Poor immune function
- Mental health problems
- Poor self-control

Research suggests that all these health problems can be brought on by chronic loneliness (Hawkley & Cacioppo, 2010; Heinrich & Gullone, 2006). Social connection is a biological need. Disconnect people from their group, and their health deteriorates.

Loneliness is a signal telling us that we're unsafe and need to reconnect to our family or tribe. It's a healthy and essential response. However, for as many as 15 to 30 percent of people, loneliness is a chronic state, and this is decidedly unhealthy (Hawkley & Cacioppo, 2010). Chronic loneliness involves stress, hypervigilance to social threat, and an increased likelihood of seeing other people's behavior as negative. All of these processes can lead lonely people to avoid

others, thereby creating a vicious cycle of increasing isolation and loneliness.

Young people report the highest rates of loneliness in any age group (Hawkley & Cacioppo, 2010; Heinrich & Gullone, 2006). One study found that 79 percent of those under eighteen reported feeling lonely sometimes or often. This finding may seem strange when we look at young people in their environments, where they are generally surrounded by family, siblings, peers, teachers, and coaches. However, loneliness is determined by perceived social isolation, not objective social isolation. Young people feel lonely because they perceive that their social needs aren't being met.

Young people face two difficult social challenges that make loneliness more likely. First, they're psychologically separating from their parents and moving outside the comfort and safety of those familiar relationships. Second, with peers, they long to move beyond activity-based relationships to relationships based on loyalty, support, intimacy, and shared values. The problem is, many young people don't have sufficient skills to initiate or maintain such relationships. As a result, they may end up feeling dissatisfied with relationships that seem superficial and fake, or they may inadvertently destroy relationships by misunderstanding others' intentions or feelings.

There are also many environmental factors today that can reduce opportunities for social connections. For example, kids no longer have to play with other humans; they can fill their time with electronic gadgets or television. They often aren't allowed to play outside because of fears for their safety, even though the greater danger lies in remaining inside and being socially isolated. Young people don't need to look into a friend's eyes to socialize anymore; they can just update their status on a social networking site and take pride in how many "friends" they have. In our modern world, the opportunities for face-to-face recreation and connection seem to be shrinking.

This problem pervades Western cultures, which have typically promoted individualism. The proportion of people living alone has increased from 17 percent in the 1970s to 27 percent in 2012, while the proportion of family households has dropped from 81 percent to 66 percent (Vespa, Lewis, & Krieder, 2012). Between 1984 and 2005 in the United States, the average size of people's genuine social network reduced by a full person, and the number of people

saying they had no one with whom to discuss important matters nearly tripled (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Brashears, 2006).

Further, people often turn relationships into tasks instead of opportunities for genuine connection. Consider child raising: caring for babies is often scheduled, multitasked, or outsourced to professionals. Parents may feel too pressured to stop and gaze into their babies' eyes when feeding them. Work is calling, so they may choose to prop a baby up with a bottle. Many parents don't have relatives or close friends nearby who can share the nurturing role and help raise their children. We parent under pressure.

To be clear, we aren't saying the above examples of modernity are entirely bad; we're simply saying that they may not meet our needs. They're often driven by consumerism, and they can't begin to replace human connection and contact. We believe the time has come for people to understand that social connection is critical to human development and to see that teaching skills for social connection is essential.

Fighting for Love

Let's take a more concrete look at loneliness and social connection using the five young people described in this book thus far: Matt, Bree, Ruby, Steve, and Maya. We'll present a brief vignette for each, this time depicting their social world. As you read the vignettes, consider the following questions:

- Do they feel they belong?
- Do they feel unconditionally loved?
- Do they know how to give and receive friendship, kindness, and love?
- Do they feel valued?

Matt sits in class fidgeting, staring out the window, and imagining he's pitching for the Cleveland Indians. As the teacher drones on about math, Matt has just pitched the last batter out and the crowd is going wild, cheering, "Matt! Matt! Matt!"

Bree sits in the back row of class scowling and thinking, *I can't stand this anymore. This teacher is so boring. And look at my so-called friends, passing notes about boys again. Their relationships are so fake. Nobody cares about what I like or what I want.* She quietly sinks her fingernails deeply into the palm of her hand.

Ruby is sure she's dying, being sucked down into a black lake. Her father is gone and her mother is lost in despair. Ruby dreams of becoming a surfer and hanging out with the in-crowd, but she can't seem to do anything to stop the loneliness.

Steve doesn't hear a word his mother is saying. He gave up on trying at school a long time ago. Now he's sitting on the roof brooding about his fight with his dad. He can't stand his father's drinking anymore. Around and around in his head swirl images of his father screaming into his face and Steve saying, "I'm going to hit you if you don't back off."

Maya, the oldest of the group, has screwed up once again and is afraid of going to jail. She feels ashamed. "If only I had been brought up with more love," she says. "If only I'd known how to control my feelings. If only I hadn't been such a rebel." Her longing for a different life seems painful and endless.

Everything these young people try leads to greater isolation: they fight, yell, disconnect, and push people away. Their behavior seems downright antisocial. Given that these are all too common examples, it's no wonder that many adults respond to young people with anger and criticism. For example, Matt absentmindedly fails to bring the right color of pen to class one day, and his teacher tells him he's being disrespectful in front of the other students. Bree's mom accuses her of throwing her life away and not caring about anybody but herself. Maya's father says she's acting stupidly and needs to control herself. The adults in their lives become impatient, and these young people retreat further from life.

Yet their seemingly antisocial behavior can be deceiving. If we look for the function of behavior, we can discover that yelling doesn't always mean "I hate you"; it can mean "Please love me." If we pay close attention to young people and what their behavior reveals, we might discover that they really want what every human wants: to be loved, cared for, and valued. Punishing them cannot meet this need.

The difficulty is that many young people are unaware of how to signal their relationship needs, or may not even recognize that they have such needs. This can leave them feeling overwhelmed and hopeless. And even when they do know what they want, they often don't have the skills to build relationships or tell others how to help them. They fear rejection and cope with that fear by lashing out, hiding their feelings, pretending they don't care, or ridiculing others.

Consider what the function of seemingly antisocial behavior might be for the five young people described thus far. Bree seethes with

anger at everyone, but beneath this lies a longing to find people who are like her. Maya seems stuck in a cycle of trying to please an abusive parent. Her violence, anger, self-harm, and maladaptive risk taking are ways of dealing with her longing for love. Steve is simultaneously angry and powerless to restore his connection with his dad; he's unable to label and understand his emotions, feels disempowered, and lashes out as a coping strategy. Lastly, Matt and Ruby both retreat into fantasy as a way of coping with a world that's painful and harsh. Isolating themselves seems safe, but that coping strategy only makes them feel lonelier.

These young people illustrate the paradox that can arise between observed behavior and its function. We shouldn't be fooled by their angry, selfish, self-centered, or withdrawn behavior, and it's false to assume they don't care. These young people are not to be blamed. They aren't broken, and the answer isn't to "fix" them. They're responding to their environment in the only way they know how.

Why Social Connection Became Essential to Humans

Imagine you could travel three thousand years back in time and observe two groups of humans in a game called "survival of the fittest." Let's call one group "cooperative" and the other "selfish." Imagine that both groups live in a harsh environment, consisting of too many dangerous animals and too little food. Which group would you put your money on to have more of its members survive?

The cooperative group consists of humans who coordinate their hunting and gathering, build shelters, and protect their territory. Perhaps most importantly, they work together to protect, teach, and nourish their young (Hrdy, 2009). Meanwhile, the selfish group is a collection of people who have no empathy and no particular affection for each other; they work together only as long as it serves their individual interests. The strongest members get almost all of the scarce food, and some of the physically weak members die of hunger. Children are poorly cared for and die at a higher rate than in the cooperative group.

The survival prize goes to the cooperative group. Clearly, they would have more members survive than the selfish group (Szalavitz & Perry, 2010). This has an important implication for all humans: genes that support social bonding and communication tend to get passed on to the next generation (D. S. Wilson, 2007, 2011). These

genes don't eliminate selfishness, which is still necessary for survival, but they do give humans the capacity for perspective taking, compassion, love, and altruistic behavior, all of which strengthen the group.

Of course, being part of a cooperative social group conveys a survival advantage even today. People with stronger social relationships have a 50 percent higher chance of survival than those with weaker social relationships (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2010). There appear to be several reasons why social connection promotes health. First, cooperative relationships provide many benefits to individuals, including financial support, informational support (advice, guidance, and so on), and emotional support during difficult times (Cohen, Gottlieb, & Underwood, 2000). Second, social relationships may directly encourage or model healthy behaviors, such as when a loved one encourages you to eat your vegetables. Third, social relationships provide people with meaningful roles and a sense of purpose in life. All of this makes one thing clear: friendship and love are crucial to young people's development and well-being.

Social View Begins in the Infant

Our social connections begin at birth as we gaze into the eyes of our mother and she gazes back. This small moment is critical for our survival. Raising human babies is hard work, so nature gave infants a powerful way to engage adults and capture their affection and attention. If you're a parent, pause and recall that moment when your newly born infant first scanned your face, seeing you for the first time and drawing you in. Even as infants, humans are already skilled at creating connections.

A large portion of the human brain is devoted to tasks that build social connections, such as recognizing facial expressions and vocalizations. Infants gaze at faces and especially eyes longer than any other stimulus. Newborns begin imitating adults almost immediately. Researchers have recorded infant imitation of adult facial expressions as early as forty-two minutes after birth (Meltzoff & Prinz, 2002). Stick your tongue out and a baby will stick her tongue out too. Open your mouth and a baby will too. These infant behaviors tell us that connection is essential for human survival and is built into our genetic inheritance.

As children grow, they continually seek social connection. By six months of age, infants readily show the same emotions as adults

who are caring for them. By the time they're toddlers, they recognize other people's distress and spontaneously attempt to help them. Neuroscience has revealed that when we witness an emotion in someone else, our brain patterns display that same emotion (Jabbi, Swart, & Keysers, 2007; Lieberman, 2013). When we watch someone perform a skill, such as eating, the area of our brain responsible for that skill is activated (Hrdy, 2009). These behaviors are evidence that we humans are biologically primed to build supportive social connections. We feel what others feel, and we do what others do.

However, our biology isn't, by itself, sufficient for social skills to fully develop. We also need to receive nurturing or see it modeled. For example, in a now classic study, Meaney (2001) found that rat pups whose mothers licked and groomed them and gave them more nursing time (the rat equivalent of human gaze) showed measurable changes in their brains—they were fatter, grew faster, were less anxious, were smarter, and had calmer stress systems. To ensure this effect wasn't merely genetic inheritance from relaxed rat mothers, Meaney removed pups from highly nurturing mothers and gave them to less nurturing mothers to raise, and vice versa. What he found was startling. The fostered pups behaved like their foster mothers, not their biological mothers. That is, calm foster mothers had calm foster pups, and stressed foster mothers had stressed pups. Then, the pups went on to mother as they had been mothered. There was no genetic effect. What's more, Meaney found that neglected rat pups had permanent changes in their stress response.

This study has profound implications for young people. The popular media often erroneously links genes to behavioral or emotional problems. Genes are seen as causes, and young peoples' problems therefore seen as internal; in other words, they are defective. Yet Meaney's studies clearly show the profound effects of nurturing versus neglectful environments.

Social Skills Emerge from Relationships

Research has consistently shown that mothers and their infants must form a strong emotional bond if the infant is to develop in a healthy way (Bowlby, 1979; Ainsworth, Bell, & Stayton, 1971, 1974). Bowlby characterized attachment behaviors as biologically based repertoires that ensure the survival of infants. Such behaviors include crying, smiling, clinging, and proximity seeking.

Further research has demonstrated just how distressing disconnection between infants and caregivers can be (Tronick, Adamson, & Brazelton, 1975). In a series of experiments, mothers of three-month-old babies were instructed to look at their babies with a still face, without responding to the baby in any way. Their babies quickly got anxious, raised their arms, and nonverbally implored their mothers to respond. Eventually, the babies withdrew and looked away. Their distress was so great that they were unable to keep eye contact with their expressionless mothers. Furthermore, mothers in these studies also reported that their experience was highly distressing. All this distress occurred within just a few minutes. Clearly, security of infant attachment has profound effects, and this continues throughout life, with poor attachment being linked to problems in adolescence, internalizing and externalizing problems, and relationship-focused psychopathologies, such as borderline personality disorder (Agrawal, Gunderson, Holmes, & Lyons-Ruth, 2004; Brumariu & Kerns, 2010).

What of adolescents—what type of nurturing attachments do they need? As it turns out, the developmental effects of attachment during adolescence mirror those of infancy. Young people who have a secure base in nurturing relationships can engage in the exploration needed for cognitive, social, and emotional development and tend to have fewer problems in almost every regard, including lower rates of mental health problems, risky maladaptive behaviors, conduct problems, pregnancy, weight problems, drug use, and suicidality (Cooper, Shaver, & Collins, 1998; Figueiredo, Bifulco, Pacheco, Costa, & Magarinho, 2006; Greenberg, Siegel, & Leitch, 1983; Lessard & Moretti, 1998). Notably, secure attachment doesn't mean absence of conflict. Some conflict is inevitable as young people test their boundaries and explore. However, securely attached young people have strong relationships with their parents, are able to express their opinions even while disagreeing, and can validate their parents' opinions and show empathy (Moretti & Peled, 2004). Thus, young people continue to need a solid relationship with their parents that facilitates communication and allows exploration while also providing fair rules and boundaries.

Our Default Mode Is Thinking Socially

Research now shows that the ability to understand others, interpret their behavior, socialize, and connect are the foundation on which higher cognitive skills are built. Let's consider research on brain

activity and social connection. During experiments in which participants were lying in a brain scanner waiting to be given a cognitive task, researchers became aware that an area of the brain was often active. This area became known as the default network, because it was thought to be active when one is doing nothing. However, recent research (Lieberman, 2013) found that participants in scanners were rarely doing nothing. Rather, they were thinking of others. And they weren't just thinking about other people objectively; they were considering others' minds, thoughts, feelings, and plans. Lieberman concluded that the default network is synonymous with social cognition. In other words, whenever we aren't doing a cognitively challenging task, we're thinking about our social world. Moreover, when we activate the social part of the brain, we deactivate the nonsocial part, and vice versa, reflexively switching between thinking about others and doing tasks that involve problem solving and reasoning (Lieberman, 2013).

Babies show this type of default network activity from birth, supporting the hypothesis that social thinking is that early. Lieberman even goes so far as to argue that Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs may be upside down—that social connection is as important for infants as food, water, and shelter. Harry Harlow's classic study showed this as early as the late 1950s, when monkeys preferred to cling to an inanimate, cloth-covered monkey figure without food than a wire monkey with food (Harlow, 1959).

To sum up, our brains are hardwired to connect with others, and we tend to engage in social thinking in any spare moment we have. We emphasize this point because it is often lost in the business of raising modern youth.

An Academically Smart and Emotionally Stupid World

Given the importance of social connection, a key question arises: Are we, as a society, doing enough to help young people build friendships and love? We believe the answer is no. So much focus is now placed on academic achievement that we've neglected young people's social and emotional development. Indeed, sometimes the push for academic achievement actually stunts development.

Our culture strives to build young peoples' cognitive skills above all else, teaching them math, science, and literature and focusing constantly on grades. Young people must take standardized tests, and

then they're ranked so everyone knows exactly how "good" they are. Teachers are often encouraged to spend substantial time teaching students how to take these tests in order to make their school look good in comparison to others. Ambitious parents engage tutors to give their children an edge. In short, we've created a world where young people spend twelve years developing their academic intelligence. Meanwhile, social skills receive short shrift, typically being squeezed into school curriculums when there's spare time, and neglected when there isn't.

Academic reasoning is a tool, not a valued end. It's a hammer, not a house. Everyone is understandably pleased when a child gets a top grade, but the grade itself isn't valuable. Rather, it points to a possibility—perhaps the child will someday use the associated academic skills to do some good for himself and the world.

Once we recognize that academics are merely a tool and that academic success simply reflects a promise of what might be, we can focus on what's actually important: How are young people using their academic reasoning? Are they using it in a way that makes their life better or worse? Here are three brief vignettes that illustrate what can happen when young people are oriented primarily toward academic achievement.

Chloe is humiliated at school after admitting she has a crush on a popular boy. Her girlfriends laugh at her and then tell the boy. She has nobody to talk to about it at home. Her father is a coal miner and is often away for weeks on end, and her mom works shifts and needs to sleep during the day. After the humiliating event, Chloe continues to go to school and earn straight A's, but the whole time she feels fake and disconnected because she's ashamed and feels like the "weird one." One day she hangs herself in the garage.

Ethan has parents who idealize him. He's taught to believe that he's great at everything, entitled to special treatment, and a winner. One day, he loses at an important sports competition. He searches for blame and concludes that he lost because somebody cheated. He reacts with rage, hits another boy, and is suspended from school.

Noah has come to believe, due to his parents' influence, that academic success is more important than anything else in life. He isolates himself in his room and studies for hours. He believes that playing with other kids would be a frivolous waste of time, so he never learns to make friends. He wants to get top grades so he can get into medical school, but ultimately his grades aren't quite good enough. Initially, he's depressed, then he decides to enter the next

most prestigious career—law. He devotes himself fully to studying but finds that he hates law. Despite getting good grades, he becomes increasingly depressed. He has nobody to talk to about his struggles. He definitely can't talk to his parents, who would just be disappointed in him. After three years of study, he drops out of college and begins seeing a psychiatrist for his depression and anger toward his parents.

These young people don't have a deficit in academic reasoning. All three are academic stars. But what use is their academic knowledge if they can't get their most fundamental social needs met? Young people aren't computers that need to be programmed with information; they're passionate, social human beings who need, above all, to feel connected and loved.

Two People, Two Advisors

An infant's attempts to connect with and imitate others is the beginning of a lifelong effort to read people's minds in order to understand their intentions. We're constantly assessing whether others are going to hurt us or help us—whether they're allies or enemies. Mind reading helps us decide if we should open up and share or protect ourselves and play it safe. It can also increase our bonds with others because it allows us to anticipate their interests and needs and support them. Mind reading is so important that our brains have areas devoted to the task (Lieberman, 2013).

To frame this within the DNA-V model, noticer skills are the first ones we have when we're born, and they're constantly in use, put to the task of interpreting whether others are available to connect with us or are out to hurt us. Meanwhile, we develop an advisor that's constantly trying to interpret social information and give us advice about others based on our past experience.

Can you see the problems that might arise from overreliance on the advisor or noticer? For one thing, because we rarely know or understand the learning history of others, we're forced to predict their motives based on our own learning history or physiological signals. Sometimes we're right, and other times we're wrong—sometimes very wrong. Here are a few questions that will make this point clear:

- How often do you think others really know you?

- How much does your best friend know about your learning history, particularly how past relationships might influence how you respond to him or her?
- Do others know your motives, desires, thoughts, and fears?
- If your answer to any of those questions was that many others don't know you well, would it be okay to assume that you can't know others' motives and intentions as well as you may think you do?

Essentially, the problem we all face is that our advisor has only limited information. We form our opinions and guesses based on ourselves and what we think we know about others, and we can be amazingly correct or terribly wrong—and we may not know which. So a key part of improving our social view is to recognize that we don't know everything about others.

Exercises for Developing a Flexible Social View

The rest of this chapter is devoted to exercises to help young people build social connections and develop a more flexible social view when facing social dilemmas. The exercises help young people explore their current social world, build social connections, broaden their social view, and consider their values in regard to their social relationships.

Social View Exercise 1: Circles of Connection

This simple exercise can give you a snapshot of young people's social world and their sense of connection and disconnection from others around them. It requires pencil and paper for writing.

Begin by asking those you're working with to draw something that looks a bit like a dart board, with the word "me" as the bull's-eye. They'll start by drawing a small circle in the center of the page, and writing "me" inside it. Then they'll draw two concentric circles around this one, about a paper clip's width from each other. The result should be an "inner circle" closest to "me" and an "outer circle," with space outside both circles. Next, ask them to write the names of people who play some role in their life in the diagram, putting people nearer to the center or farther out depending on how close the relationship is, reserving the area nearest the center for those they're closest to. By closest, we mean they trust the person, like the person, or feel they can turn to that person in times of need.

Encourage them to put all the people they connect with somewhere on the diagram, even if far from the center. The result provides a psychological snapshot of their social world, close and distant.

A variation on this task involves writing names on small pieces of paper and then arranging the pieces on a similar diagram with concentric circles. This variant allows young people to arrange groups in clusters, such as family members, friends who know each other, teachers, and so on.

Next, engage in a curious, open conversation to help you understand their circles of connection. Try to do this with a DNA skills approach, encouraging young people to explore and express themselves, rather than just giving you socially accepted answers. Here are some questions you might ask:

- Who is important to you? What is it about a particular person that makes that person important?
- Who do you think you can seek help from in times of need?
- Which people in your network are you in conflict with?
- Who has disappointed you?
- Was there anyone you left out?
- Is there anyone you put near the outer edge of the circle that surprises you?
- Were you once close to any of these people who now seem distant? What's that like? How do you feel about that change?
- Is there anybody in this diagram you want to be closer to?
- If this person (indicate someone near the center of the circle) was to do this same exercise, where do you think that person would place you?

This exercise can be used to explore developmental patterns and change. For example, after creating this present-moment circle of connection, you can ask young people to fill out a similar diagram showing their social connections five years ago. This can help you see which relationships are newer and whether any have grown more distant or been lost.

Social View Exercise 2: The DNA of Social Connection

This exercise helps young people apply their DNA-V skills to building social relationships. Figure 20 is a useful guide for conducting this exercise. It includes questions a young person might consider in regard to a specific relationship. You can complete a blank DNA-V Walk of Life Worksheet with young people as you conduct this exercise. (For a downloadable version, visit

<http://www.thrivingadolescent.com>.) Or you can simply use a dialogue along the lines of the script that follows. Also, note that in this script we focus on difficult thoughts and feelings because this is often the area that needs support. However, you can also ask questions about positive predictions and feelings if this seems useful.

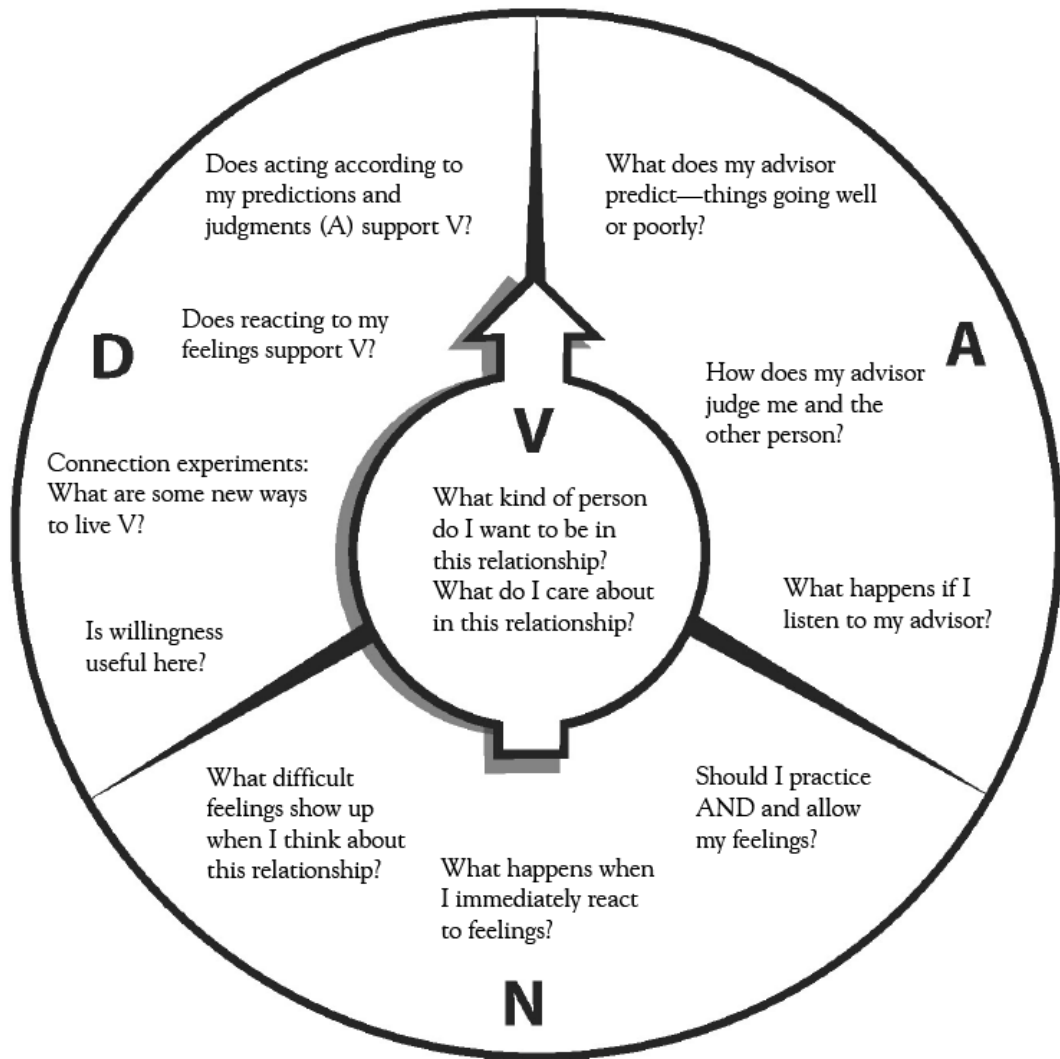


FIGURE 20. Example questions for building social connections.

Setting the Stage

Begin by briefly introducing the exercise:

Let's do a simple noticing task. Your job is to notice, with curiosity, what shows up as you answer some questions. These questions are about relationships, so first think of someone you really care about. (This works well when it's a relationship the young person is seeking help with.)

Step 1. Identify the Value of Connecting

Once the young person has chosen someone, begin to orient toward and explore values:

Recall a time when you were really connecting with this person.

Take your time and find a good memory with that person.

Would you be willing to share that memory with me? (Elicit the details of the memory and try to bring the vitality of the connection into the room. Avoid simple information gathering; try to be present with the person's experience.)

Okay, here's what I'd like to ask you next. What sort of person were you being in that moment? How were you behaving? (Elicit examples of valued behavior, such as helping, connecting, giving, sharing, or being fun, supportive, loyal, or honest.)

Excellent. I'll write a few of these in the V area. These are values—ways of behaving that you value or that give you a sense of vitality.

Step 2. Identify Difficult Feelings and Thoughts

Next, move to an exploration of noticer and advisor behaviors:

It isn't always easy to connect with others. Yet if we are to live in alignment with our values, we have to be willing to experience conflict and discomfort. There's no way to be with other human beings and not have some conflict. (Depending on the individual, you might want to take some time to discuss this and help the person see that no human relationship is free of conflict.)

Now bring that same person to mind and think of a time when the two of you were in conflict.

Now let's practice AND: Gently scan your body to become aware of sensations, name any sensations, and then describe them as emotions. (Write these under N.)

Now let's take a look at your advisor behavior in this situation. What positive and negative judgments showed up? What did you think of the other person? What did you think about yourself? (Write judgments, evaluations, and predictions under A.)

It can be tough to recall a conflict with someone we care about... (Allow time and display empathy.) Anytime we experience strong emotions and want to center ourselves, noticing is a great go-to skill. So pause now and take a few slow, deep breaths. Just notice your breath: the inhalation, the exhalation, and the pause.

Step 3. Look at Typical Reactions to Thoughts and Feelings

Now take some time to explore the person's typical reactions to difficult thoughts and feelings, writing those on the blank worksheet as well.

Okay, let's say the advisor gives you those predictions or judgments and you listen to it. What happens when you listen to it? What do you do?

Likewise, let's say those difficult feelings show up. What happens when you immediately react to these feelings? What do you do? (Look especially for behaviors that seek to escape difficult emotions.)

Step 4. Use the Discoverer to Explore Workability and Willingness

Finally, explore workability, willingness, and potentially new values-based behaviors. If you've been writing the young person's responses on a blank worksheet, you can refer to those responses to illustrate what you're saying:

We can see that being with people is something you care about. And sometimes it's hard, too. It's like we don't get to choose what shows up inside us. What we do get to choose is our actions. We can choose to act according to our values even when the advisor is judgmental and our emotions are unpleasant. We can carry our feelings and our thoughts with us as we act in valued ways.

Let's first explore the workability of what you've been doing. Has your advisor been working to help you to connect to your values? Has the way you've been reacting to feelings been working? What do you think will happen if you react in these same ways the next time you have a conflict with this person? (Help those you're working with recognize for themselves that the same behavior is likely to keep resulting in the same outcome.)

Are you willing to experiment with doing something new or a bit different from what you typically do?

Okay, I'm going to ask you to try new ways of connecting with this person, just to see what happens. You aren't going to do just anything; you're going to choose experiments that are consistent with your values and who you want to be.

Let's take a few minutes now to brainstorm, generating ideas about how you might connect with this person. Try not to judge your ideas. Just let them flow out rapidly, regardless of whether you think they're good or bad.

Step 5. Be BOLD and Try It

Brainstorm for a while, then identify some experiments the person might be willing to try. For example, Steve might propose to help his mom with some task around the house or watch her favorite TV show with her. Remind young people that BOLD (Breathe, Observe, Listen to what you care about, Decide what to do) is a helpful practice when trying new things. You might introduce the experiment along these lines:

Okay, so you might decide to try this connection experiment. But it probably won't be easy, because it isn't what you usually do. Trying something new is risky. Your advisor might show up with negative predictions and judgments. You might experience difficult emotions. Let's take a moment here to practice BOLD as you imagine yourself doing this experiment.

So here's the tough question, and only you can answer it: Are you willing to have these thoughts and feelings in order to do your experiment? If you're willing, you can give the experiment a try. If not, let's look for another experiment that you are willing to try.

Key Willingness Questions

The word “willing” is likely to become one of your best friends in working with young people. Here are some questions to help foster willingness:

- *Are you willing to experience difficult feelings in order to act in ways that help you build friendships and love?*
- *Are you willing to feel frustration and anger and still act respectfully?*
- *Are you willing to assert your needs—without trying to punish or hurt others?*
- *Are you willing to feel afraid of what other people think of you and still do what you care about? Can you walk away from peer pressure? Can you stand up for what's right?*
- *Are you willing to feel shy and still introduce yourself to people and make friends?*
- *Are you willing to feel embarrassed about doing something wrong and still apologize?*

Social View Exercise 3: Experiential Role-Play to Broaden Social View

Sometimes young people may have an idea of what they want to do in a given social situation but not know how to implement it. You can use this experiential role-play exercise (inspired by Bilich &

Ciarrochi, 2009) to help them practice new social behavior, such as asking for support, being assertive, giving help, asking for feedback, or asking someone out on a date.

Seeing these role-plays in action conveys their power far better than written instructions. So we'll start with a dialogue using this approach with Steve, then provide some general instructions.

Therapist: Try to remember when you were up on the roof. Can you remember what thoughts you were having about your family? What was your advisor saying?

Steve: My family doesn't care about me. They make it worse.

Therapist: Okay, those are strong thoughts. What happens when you really believe them? (*Steve shrugs.*) It isn't a problem if you don't have an answer. When that happens, there's something we can do. Can you remember the first thing to do when you get stuck with thoughts?

Steve: You're gonna say that noticer thing again, aren't you?

Therapist: Yep. That's exactly right: step into noticer space whenever you're stuck with thoughts. I know it's kind of uncomfortable, but are you willing to practice it now as we talk? (*Steve nods.*) All right. First, remember that all feelings are okay. They're a message—not always nice, but okay. So let's practice AND. First, look at the floor and imagine you have a scanner looking over your entire body, like in an airport. This is A—awareness. Now name whatever physical sensations you notice.

Steve: I guess I have tight fists and shoulders.

Therapist: Great. Can you describe what feeling that might be?

Steve: I guess it's anger. I'm really mad at Dad.

Therapist: Good. There's a new step we can do now. First you need to decide if you want to do anything else, or if just identifying the emotion is enough.

Steve: I want to do something. I want to find a way to stop his drinking.

Therapist: Okay, to do something new, we go into discoverer space. We do something new in the service of what we care about. Do you remember how we talked about values last time we met?

Together, Steve and the therapist recall some of what came up when they explored values: that he loves his mom and dad, that his anger

at the drinking is because he loves his dad, and that he wants to build his personal strengths and learn to manage his anger.

Therapist: Okay, now let's try a new skill. It's called flexible self-view. It's a bit like trying to work out the other person's DNA. It's a bit weird. I want you to imagine that you are your dad, and I'm you. Okay?

Steve: I guess so.

Therapist: (*Role-plays Steve in a fight with his dad.*) "Dad, just stop. Quit fucking drinking."

Steve: (*Role-plays his dad.*) "Steve, I'm trying. I just get so stressed."

Therapist: (*Continues to role-play Steve.*) "I hate it! You're wrecking our family."

Steve: (*Pauses for a long time, then continues to role-play his dad.*) "Steve, I'm trying."

Therapist: Okay, Steve, just return to being you and tell me what you noticed.

Steve: Jeez. I hate being Dad.

Therapist: What do you think your dad's advisor might be saying to him?

Steve: It's probably beating him up big time.

Therapist: Yeah, it sounds like it's hard on all of you. Do you want to link this to some discoverer behavior Steve? You said you love your mom and dad. Based on that, what do you think you could try?

Steve: (*Shrugs.*) I don't know. Maybe I could tell him quietly instead of yelling, and say how I understand a bit why he drinks. I still want him to quit drinking though.

Therapist: Great. Can I say that back to you with some willingness words, just to make it clear?

Steve: Yeah.

Therapist: It seems like you're saying, "I will quietly but seriously explain to Dad how upset I am the next time he's been on a binge. I'm likely to feel... (*Pauses so Steve can say how he might feel.*) I'm willing to have that feeling in order to fix this problem."

Therapist: Okay, Steve, one last tip: As you try it your experiment, remember that the BOLD skill is there to help you in tough

situations. As you walk in to speak to your dad, breathe, observe, listen to what you care about, and then decide what to do, using your new discoverer skills.

Instructions for Role-Playing to Broaden Social View

- 1. Understand the current situation. Before you conduct this role-play, it helps to have a somewhat detailed understanding of the young person's social situation, values in the situation, and thoughts and feelings.**
- 2. Role-play several scenarios. Role-play a difficult social situation several times, each time trying a different approach and often trying different roles. For example, the practitioner and the young person can take turns playing the other person. The key to making this a discoverer task is to keep verbal feedback to a minimum so as not to create excessive rule following or judgments. Aim to reinforce learning through experience, rather than exclusively through reasoning and problem solving.**
- 3. Rate the effectiveness of various social behaviors. Have the person rate the effectiveness of each social behavior on a simple scale from 1 (extremely ineffective) to 10 (extremely effective). There's no need to give a detailed explanation of the scale; the ratings can be based on gut feelings or intuitions.**
- 4. Reinforce DNA skills. Look for opportunities to practice DNA skills during these role-plays. For example, if a role-play is starting to heat up, you might keep going and ask what advisor thoughts are showing up, and then reinforce awareness of or unhooking from the advisor. Alternatively, you can slow things down by shifting into noticing and doing the AND practice.**
- 5. Commit to practice using BOLD. At the end of the exercise, hopefully both you and the young person will have identified some new ways of behaving. Ask whether the person is willing to commit to experimenting with these new behaviors in a difficult social situation, as the therapist did in the dialogue above. Here's an example of how this commitment might be phrased, using the BOLD acronym, where the D can refer to either discovery or doing valued action:**
 - “I can be BOLD as I go into this social situation.
 - B: I will pause and take a few slow, deep breaths.

- O: I'll observe my feelings and thoughts, which might be [insert difficult emotions or thoughts].
- L: I'll listen to what's really important to me.
- D: Then I'll discover new ways to live my values by [insert new behavior]."

Social View Exercise 4: DNA Shifting in the Social World

This exercise helps young people experience social relationships from all three aspects of DNA. It's especially useful for groups of young people. Ask the questions below in an exploratory way, pausing to allow for thoughtful responses. Take time to listen, and try not to fill the space with chatter.

Let's shift into discoverer space just to see what shows up. I'll ask some questions that will help you think about things in new and unusual ways. I'll give you plenty of time to respond to each one:

If you could be anywhere in the world right now, where would you be?

What would you be doing?

Would you be with anyone or alone?

Now let's shift into advisor space and see what that's like. I want you to let the advisor do its thing, even if you don't believe what it's saying. Just let the advisor generate its judgments.

Think about someone you recently had an argument with. Judge that person as good or bad.

Think about someone who did something nice for you. Judge that person as good or bad.

Think of three reasons why you can't trust everybody.

Think of three reasons why you should trust everybody.

When we're judging and making conclusions about people, we're in advisor space. Let's take a step out of that space now and shift into neutral, or noticer. Just pause and take a few slow, deep breaths... Now scan your body for any sensations... And notice that you and I are here together, both of us working together to connect and get along... And now let's shift back into discoverer space:

What's the greatest gift you've received in life?

What's your greatest sadness?

Have you ever felt completely alone?

Think of a time you felt genuinely happy.

Now let's add something to each of those questions:

When you received the greatest gift you've had in life, were you alone or with others?

When you experienced your greatest sadness, were you alone or with others?

When you felt completely alone, were you by yourself or with others?

When you felt genuinely happy, were you by yourself or with others?

Explore how often the most significant events in our lives are connected with others. Gently guide the young person to see that, for most of us, our greatest hurts and our greatest joys occur in the context of being with others.

Now ask yourself this: How will you use your DNA skills to build your strengths in connecting, being with others, and seeking understanding?

Building Strong Social Networks

The previous chapter focused on how to help young people build supportive individual relationships. This chapter is geared toward expanding their social network and offers approaches to help them participate effectively in larger social networks, such as among peers and in school and community groups.

To lay a foundation for this chapter, we'll discuss why social networks are so important. Then we'll combine our DNA-V model with Elinor Ostrom's Nobel prize-winning principles for effective group functioning. Finally, we'll provide concrete exercises that help young people learn how to build values-guided and supportive groups for themselves. These skills will be useful to them not only in navigating school situations, but for well-being and success into adulthood.

We'll begin with the story of Lena, a young person with few social connections. You may notice that the tone of this story is somewhat different from those earlier in the book. That's because one of the activities later in this chapter involves reading this story to the young people you're working with.

Lena's Story

Lincoln High was buzzing with the energy of a new school year. One small, shy girl stood completely alone outside the school gate, looking into the school grounds. *Oh jeez*, she thought.

The ninth-graders were all dressed in smart new uniforms. The seniors' uniforms were another story—scuffed shoes and school dresses showing way too much thigh. Meanwhile, Lena wasn't wearing a uniform. She was dressed in her best casual clothes. At home she thought she looked pretty, but now she felt ridiculous. She stood at the gates watching. Sooner or later

she'd have to go into the school, and everyone would be staring—everyone.

The bell rang, followed by an announcement to attend an assembly. The other students, noisy and excited, hustled into the assembly hall. Lena waited as long as she could, then snuck into the back of the auditorium and took a seat. The principal stepped up to the podium and called the students to attention. He spoke about schedules, after-school activities, and then rules, including rules about school uniforms: no dresses above the knee, boys in regulation trousers, no sneakers, and so on.

The seniors groaned audibly. They had heard all of this before and were masters at breaking the rules. What can a girl do if her legs have grown so long that her dress is now too short?

Then Lena was shaken by these words from the principal: “Would the student not in uniform please come to my office after assembly?” Lena was mortified, and the whole school turned to see her—all seven hundred students. She wanted the ground to open up and swallow her. She tells herself she will forever be known as the girl who’s too poor to afford a uniform.

When Lena entered the principal’s office, he gently asked, “Why are you out of uniform?” Lena just stood there, red faced and ashamed. She couldn’t bring herself to tell the truth—that her family couldn’t afford the uniform—so she just stood there.

The principal sighed and said, “Okay, you have two weeks, then you must be in uniform if you want to come to this school.”

Those first days she was asked endlessly about her uniform. Most of the kids were just being curious, but she was afraid everybody was finding fault with her and thinking she was weird. She burned with shame. Throughout, Lena never made a friend, and she never told her mother.

She came to hate the school, the teachers, and the kids, some of whom excluded her from day one and then began to bully

her. Before the two weeks were out, Lena just stopped going to school.

Reflecting on Lena

Lena sees other people as threats. She doesn't have any friends and has no idea how to make friends. Her advisor provides just a few dominant rules about how to navigate the world: avoid, don't seek help, and tell no one. What do you think about Lena's situation?

- Are Lena's views of the other students useful? (Recall that in DNA-V we don't emphasize evaluations of whether people's views are true or false.)
- When she engages in mind reading, what thoughts and motivations do you think she ascribes to others?
- What DNA skills do you think Lena needs to develop? Which skill would you focus on first?

The Challenges of School Environments

We begin our discussion of broader social connections using the example of Lena's school experience because school is where young people spend the majority of their time. This is where they learn most of their lessons on social groups. It's also where many problems emerge.

Like Lena, many young people arrive at junior high or high school poorly prepared for the new social milieu. Big school systems can feel unsafe or stressful. Many young people are bullied, ignored, or even abused. They often feel they must choose to either be tough and survive through aggression, or withdraw into themselves. Some avoid school altogether. Parents' attempts to help can fall short as they find themselves underinformed, shut out, or overextended and just trying to survive. Or they might downplay the significance of their child's school problems by saying everyone gets bullied and that their kid just needs to toughen up.

No matter what the situation is, we cannot assume that exclusion and bullying are just normal behavior and that we can't do anything about them. Dramatic social change is

possible. For example, the last century has seen improvements in the rights of minority groups, women, and children. These rights have driven down rates of lynching, rape, gay bashing, spousal abuse, and child beatings (Pinker, 2011a, 2011b). We don't have to accept that one of the most important contexts for young people—school—has to be threatening or unsafe.

Twenty years of research into prevention programs and policies show one common thread: that successful environments are nurturing (Biglan, 2015). How is it then that we aren't shouting from the rooftops that sending young people out into potentially hostile territory every day without support and social skills is unacceptable?

Lena has problems, but they aren't hers alone. Her problems are both individual and contextual, in equal parts. In this chapter, we address a final, crucial aspect of the DNA-V model: the wider social context. Humans aren't just separate entities; they're interconnected with families, peers, classrooms, sports teams, schools, workplaces, communities, and online networks. If we are to improve the lives of young people, we must improve their social contexts.

Social Connections Make Us Stronger

Groups are so valuable to us that they can be considered a kind of social capital, defined as the “goodwill that is engendered by the fabric of social relations and that can be mobilized to facilitate action” (Adler & Kwon, 2002, p. 17). A number of findings suggest that if young people have the skills to build social capital they will have several advantages in adulthood:

- **Support in reaching goals.** People are more successful at goals when supported by a group. In groups where members support each other in achieving health goals, people succeed more often (Wing & Jeffery, 1999). Social capital facilitates entrepreneurship and the formation of start-up companies (Adler & Kwon, 2002). It also increases career success (Adler & Kwon, 2002; Gabbay & Zuckerman, 1998; Lin, Ensel, & Vaughn, 1981; Podolny & Baron, 1997).

- **Physical and emotional support.** Social capital is associated with greater satisfaction in life and better physical health (Helliwell & Putnam, 2004).
- **Accomplishment.** Groups allow us to produce more than we could individually. For example, the free website Wikipedia is created by a large group of individuals, and a recent study suggests it's as good as the costly *Encyclopedia Britannica* (Giles, 2005).
- **Greater access to ideas and knowledge.** Each of us has access to only so much information, and we all have blind spots. We are experts in some things and complete novices in others. Few of us have time to become experts in every aspect of our chosen field. Groups allow us to be part of a larger, diverse network of information.

Thus, groups matter because together we do more, achieve more, and are happier and healthier. Groups are so powerful that the handful of species that rely on group cooperation dominate this planet (E. O. Wilson, 2014). For example, highly cooperative eusocial insects such as bees, termites, and ants make up only 2 percent of known insect species, but 75 percent of insect biomass (E. O. Wilson, 2014).

With all of these advantages to cooperation, we clearly need to help young people develop skills that allow them to belong to and build cooperative groups.

Guilt, Fear, and Prosocial Behavior

Adults often stereotype young people as frightening, selfish, or lazy (Bolzan, 2003). Such stereotypes underestimate the extent to which young people, and indeed all humans, find prosocial behavior to be both natural and reinforcing. For example, one-year-old children will comfort others in distress, take joy in participating in household tasks, and help adults by pointing to out-of-reach objects (Svetlova, Nichols, & Brownell, 2010).

Preteens who perform three acts of kindness per week experience a boost in well-being and peer acceptance (Layous, Nelson, Oberle, Schonert-Reichl, & Lyubomirsky, 2012). And adults who give to others and participate in a community have

the highest levels of positive affect, health, and sense of meaning in life (Aked et al., 2009; Greenfield & Marks, 2004).

We also share our resources. Human infants spontaneously share their food with adults, delighting in the game of taking one bite each. By way of contrast, research on bonobos and chimpanzees hasn't shown this kind of spontaneous sharing. Chimpanzees may allow others to take some of their food, but this is considered to be "tolerated theft," rather than genuine sharing (Hrdy, 2009). Thus, researchers have concluded that sharing is unique to human primates, is present early, and appears to be spontaneous.

Prosocial behavior doesn't just help others; it helps us to feel good, too. Neuroscientists have shown that dopamine-related pleasure centers in the brain are activated when we perform generous acts. For example, spending money on other people has been shown to have a more positive impact on our happiness than spending money on ourselves (Hrdy, 2009).

In summary, we know that young people are biologically prepared to be prosocial. The question, then, is how to help prosocial behavior emerge. We can't make young people prosocial through pressure, guilt, or mouthing clichés about behaving well. However, we can promote this behavior by modeling it. And importantly, we can provide contexts where prosocial tendencies can grow, through experiences that help them see for themselves the benefits of prosocial behavior, that gently guide them to discover that they're more similar to their peers than dissimilar, and that help them discover through experience that giving, cooperating, and being together bring their own rewards. Given that context is the place where all of this can happen, we need to consider the contextual space adolescents hold in larger social groups—the topic of the next section.

Integrating Young People into Modern Society

For millions of years, human adolescence was probably just a brief period of physical maturing during which young people

learned adult roles, mostly from adults (Hawley, 2011). Anthropological studies with humans across 187 countries indicate that in the majority of countries, young people went through a phase that could be characterized as adolescence (Schlegel & Barry, 1991). In traditional cultures, adolescence was brief: females got married within two years of puberty and males within four years. Young people spent their time in groups of mixed ages, learning adult roles directly from elders, caring for babies, and playing with younger children. In the last few generations—just an eyeblink in the timeline of human history—adolescence has dramatically changed in many cultures.

Adolescence now typically lasts ten years or longer. During this period, young people spend the majority of their time at schools or colleges with peers of a similar age. They have few interactions with the breadth of humanity. They may have never connected with a baby or an elderly person, let alone cared for one. Families are now smaller and more disconnected from their community, reducing opportunities to socialize with extended relatives (McPherson et al., 2006). Time with adult family members is at an all-time low, often only an hour or two in the evening after work and school (Popenoe, 1993). There isn't any evidence that these environmental changes are better for young people. Conversely, we do know that interacting with other age groups helps young people develop key social skills, such as empathy and altruism. For example, researchers noted decreased disruptive behavior and increased empathy when they gave kids the opportunity to observe and interact with babies in the classroom (Gordon, 2009).

Unfortunately, young people are growing up in a world where belonging and community are often secondary to profit, materialism, and industry. They have less exposure to the spectrum of humanity, fewer opportunities to develop empathy and compassion, and little time to learn from people who are different from them. The good news is, those of us who work with young people can turn the tide. We have the capacity to teach young people that love and kindness matter, other people matter, and togetherness means thriving rather than just

surviving. To be clear, whatever we do, young people will adapt to the context we create. Our task is to create spaces where they grow and flourish with others, connecting, belonging, and behaving empathically and compassionately.

Managing the Tension Between Giving and Taking

Although we've been emphasizing the human capacity for prosocial behavior, it's crucial not to underestimate the human capacity for selfishness. Humans steal, cheat, lie, manipulate, and harm others to get what they want. Even many of the social virtues, such as sharing and loyalty, can be put to use in the service of selfish motives. History shows that a soldier can have great empathy for his comrade but little for the enemy. We are able to act with great altruism or depravity; the type of behavior that is expressed depends upon context.

Consider the case of aggression and social dominance. In less social species, individual dominance has obvious value, providing greater access to resources, from food to mating opportunities. However, in modern societies, aggression has few obvious physical advantages. An aggressive young person doesn't necessarily get more food or mating opportunities. Indeed, research has shown that individuals who are aggressive are more likely to be shunned or avoided by their social groups (Coie & Dodge, 1998). If a young person is behaving aggressively, it's usually because of the presence of short-term reinforcement, such as brief admiration from peers and temporary increase in status. Long-term, direct aggression appears to be less useful because it disrupts individuals' ability to work with and harness the power of groups.

How can we help young people fulfill their individual needs without becoming aggressive? We start by recognizing that prosocial behavior works similarly to aggression: both can function to increase an individual's status and power. Therefore, the role of practitioners is to create contexts where young people can obtain reinforcement for prosocial behavior rather than aggression.

Targeting Individuals and Social Networks Simultaneously

In our modern world, young people are at significant risk of psychological distress, with up to one in four young people experiencing clinical levels of distress (McGorry, 2012). Attempts have been made to ameliorate this situation by adapting individual models of psychotherapy to school-wide programs. Unfortunately, benefits are often short-term and weak (Merry et al., 2011). Why have we experienced so little success in efforts to increase well-being in entire populations of young people?

We believe this has happened because, in psychology, methods often focus on the individual and ignore the social environment. For example, many youth programs target what's "wrong" with individual young people or attempt to instill "good" thinking in them without changing their wider social context in any way. Meanwhile, evidence indicates that effective youth interventions are those that have a nurturing quality, with a focus on helping young people discover the value of cooperation and feel a sense of belonging. One example is the approach to classroom management known as the good behavior game (see Biglan, 2015).

We believe that if we are to help young people, we must change their social environments. Although we can take young people out of their current classroom settings and teach them how to build positive social networks, these skills will diminish or disappear if they're seldom modeled by adults, or if the environment doesn't reinforce prosocial behavior—or worse, if it reinforces antisocial behavior.

An additional consideration is that many approaches ignore group effects. In the earliest interventions for deviancy, groups of young offenders were put together until it was discovered that this context gave them the opportunity to share their knowledge and become more deviant (Dishion, Ha, & Veronneau, 2012). They became a group. Yet even though it is widely known that such environments become training grounds, we still do it—not just in juvenile detention centers,

but also when we group similar kids together within schools and other settings.

When we recognize the importance of social context for the well-being of young people, we may naturally ask how we can possibly change peer groups, families, or communities. We often don't have the power to make parents use a warm and supportive parenting style, to stop peers from bullying, or to make teachers model prosocial behavior. Fortunately, the link between groups and individuals is reciprocal. Just as the group changes the individual, the individual can change the group. This is where we can work, providing young people with skills that help them shape their social context.

Helping Young People Create Their Own Prosocial Community

Young people often feel like junior high and high schools are holding cells, places where they have to wait until they're old enough to do something of value. Meanwhile, adults seek to impose order on them to reduce bullying, Internet addiction, social exclusion, mental health problems, and more. Perhaps the problem is that these are attempts to change young people's behavior from the outside in.

This raises an important question: Have we been wasting a valuable resource by not empowering young people to change their environment from the inside out? What would happen if we put groups of young people in charge of their social problems? Even contemplating this approach is likely to provoke a great deal of anxiety in most adults. If young people are left to their own devices, won't they engage in selfish and destructive behavior? We can answer this question by looking at how economists have addressed similar questions in regard to larger social groups.

Economists used to argue that, if left to their own devices, people would always behave selfishly—that the typical response would be to grab as many resources as possible, leading to a so-called tragedy of the commons in which mutual resources were depleted or destroyed (Lloyd, 1833). It was

assumed that each individual in a fishing village, for example, would greedily catch as many fish as he could, resulting in a tragic wipeout of the fish population. One possible solution to this problem is to have some external force, such as government, restrain individuals from depleting or abusing common resources. Translating this line of thinking into young people's context, we would assume that adults need to tightly regulate young people's behavior or they'll be selfish and won't behave prosocially.

Elinor Ostrom (1990) won a Nobel Prize for decisively challenging this assumption. She showed that many groups around the world succeed at managing common resources and cooperating without the need for external control—that people don't behave selfishly if certain environmental conditions are present. Ostrom identified eight environmental principles that maximize the chance that a group will be effective, cooperative, and supportive. These principles have since been generalized to apply to groups across the globe (D. S. Wilson, Ostrom, & Cox, 2013).

Ostrom's design principles apply equally to young people. (See a youth-friendly form in the worksheet "Creating a Strong Group," which appears later in this chapter.) They provide a framework that allows young people to feel that the group belongs to them, that the group will be fair and provide benefits, and that they will be safe. Perhaps most importantly, this framework allows young people to cooperate and create their own environment. (For more on Ostrom's principles, see D. S. Wilson et al., 2013.)

There are at least four clear benefits to allowing young people to regulate their own environment. First, young people may be better able to monitor their own environment from within.

This is especially important in contexts where the majority of their behavior, both positive and negative, occurs outside the view of adults (Tokunaga, 2010). Second, prosocial peers can positively influence other young people's behavior. They can, for example, respond to bullying by refusing to be bystanders and thereby signal that bullying behavior is neither admired or approved (Frey, Hirschstein, Edstrom, & Snell, 2009; Salmivalli, Kaukiainen, & Voeten, 2005; Stevens, Van Oost, &

De Bourdeaudhuij, 2000). Third, prosocial groups can provide social support to young people, especially in circumstances where they refuse to seek help from adults (Parker et al., 2014; Tokunaga, 2010). Lastly, self-regulation of peer groups provides practice in adult roles, serving as a training ground for becoming a social citizen.

Exercises for Building Social Networks Using Social View

The remainder of the chapter is devoted to exercises to help young people develop and maintain effective prosocial groups.

Social Networks Exercise 1: Recognizing the Value of Prosocial Groups

The first step in using the DNA-V model with any group is to establish cooperative group behavior as a common value. Some groups, such as sports teams, have a clear understanding of the value of working together. This value may be less apparent for other groups, such as therapy groups, school groups, or clubs. Therefore, the starting point is to help young people understand the benefits of being in the group in the first place.

The purpose of this exercise is to help young people find common ground and see that we humans are more similar than different. We use storytelling and conversational dialogue, along with metaphor, to promote sharing among young people. The aim is to show them that the DNA-V model doesn't apply just to individuals and their own thoughts and feelings, but to interactions between people, which is beneficial for everyone. Begin by describing this aim:

It is pretty easy for us, as individuals, to feel that we're unique in our worries and that other people are all doing much better than we are. You may look at other young people and think they're doing well—that they're carefree and confidently making their way through life.

However, research makes it clear that this just isn't so. For example, as many as one in four young people can experience

depression or anxiety. There are lots of kids going through difficult times, with family problems, struggles at school, worries about the future, trouble with friends, bullying, feeling insecure about their appearance, and the list goes on. Adults have this too. We can't always avoid difficult times, but we can get better at dealing with them.

As you may have started to see from our DNA-V work, the human mind is largely focused on problems and finding things that are wrong with us. So all of us, at some time, feel we're not good enough, not smart, not attractive, or whatever. And as individuals, we tend to feel alone in this, often because we can't see how other people are thinking and feeling.

Using DNA skills in this group will give us a chance to find other ways to see ourselves and others. So today we're going to work on a project that will help us take a social view of our group. There just might be some surprising things we notice in ourselves as we do this.

It's easy to think that the world is a coldhearted place and that each of us is too small to change things, but this isn't so. I want to tell you a story about shifting perspectives. As you listen, think about different ways in which the events of the story might be viewed.

Next, read one of the two following stories, then give the group time to discuss it through the lens of DNA-V using the questions that follow.

Sample Story A: Lena's Story

Read Lena's story from the beginning of this chapter aloud, then facilitate a group discussion of Lena's DNA-V behaviors as outlined below. The aim is to help the group consider how a social context might influence Lena's challenges and outcomes. You can do this as a group discussion or have group members jot down their ideas and then share them.

Exploring Multiple Perspectives

- *What is Lena's perspective?*
- *What's the principal's perspective?*

- *What about the other students—do you think they were all evaluating and judging Lena?*
- *What are the others likely to be thinking about?*
- *How long are the other students likely to think about Lena?*

Exploring Advisor Skills

- *What does Lena's advisor say to her?*
- *What does Lena's advisor say about others? Are her guesses at their thoughts likely to be accurate?*
- *Is Lena able to unhook from her advisor, or does she typically follow her advisor?*

Exploring Noticer Skills

- *What are Lena's emotions and physical sensations?*
- *How good is she at noticing them?*
- *Do you think Lena is aware of her feelings?*
- *What could Lena do when she feels shame in the principal's office?*
- *What emotional reactions might other students be having? How might the other students feel toward Lena?*

Exploring Discoverer Skills

- *Does Lena engage in any discoverer behaviors? Does she try new things to find a way to improve her social connection?*
- *What could she do that might test how helpful her advisor is being?*
- *What about the other students? Is there discoverer behavior they could engage in?*
- *Could the principal engage in discoverer behavior?*

Exploring Values

- *What does Lena long for?*
- *What would make her life richer? What might she care about?*
- *What about the principal, what might he value?*

- *What about the values of the school student body?*

Then engage in discovery by asking questions along these lines:

Imagine that you have a magic wand and can change Lena's school in any way to make it support her better. What might you do? What would you want her school to look like?

Sample Story B: The Starfish Thrower

Read the following story to the group and have them reflect on the questions that follow. (The story, author unknown, is widely available on the Internet; this particular version is inspired by Eiseley, 1969.) This story can help groups consider the importance of taking small steps to improve their world.

Once upon a time, there was a wise man who used to go to the ocean to write. He had a habit of walking on the beach before he began his work. One day he was walking along the shore. As he looked down the beach, he saw a human figure moving like a dancer. He smiled to himself to think of someone who would dance to the day. So he began to walk faster to catch up. As he got closer, he saw that it was a young man and he wasn't dancing. He was reaching down to the beach, picking things up, and gently throwing them into the ocean.

As he got closer, he called out, "Good morning! What are you doing?"

"Throwing starfish into the ocean," the young man replied while picking up another starfish.

"I guess I should have asked: Why are you throwing starfish into the ocean?"

"The sun is up and the tide is going out. If I don't throw them in they'll die."

"But young man, don't you realize that there are miles and miles of beach and starfish all along it? You can't possibly make a difference."

The young man paused. Then he bent down, picked up another starfish, and threw it into the sea, past the breaking waves.

“It made a difference for that one,” he said.

Discuss the story and what it suggests about how taking a social view might influence us as individuals and groups, using the following lines of inquiry and conversation.

Exploring Multiple Perspectives

- *What are the multiple views you can take in this story?*
- *What occurs to you about the perspectives of individuals and how they can differ?*
- *What did the older man and the younger man each think?*
- *What about within our group? Do we all have different perspectives on our group?*

Exploring the Benefits and Power of Groups

- *Why might working as a group be better than working as an individual?*
- *Why might it sometimes be worse?*
- *Why might coming together as a group for a common purpose sometimes feel like an overwhelming task?*
- *What are some small steps we might make for change in this group?*
- *Why might these changes be important for our group?*

Social Networks Exercise 2: Building a Cooperative, Effective Group

This exercise is a step-by-step process for bringing a group of young people together to develop a shared purpose. It can be used for social connection in a new classroom or therapeutic group, or it can be applied to a specific task, such as raising money for a charity. Note that this is a fairly lengthy intervention, and several meetings may be required to accomplish all of the steps:

1. Orient the group to the values and challenges of being in relationships.
2. Identify and promote group values using the DNA-V disk.

3. Collaboratively complete the worksheet “Creating a Strong Group.” (It appears a bit later in this chapter and is available for download at <http://www.thrivingadolescent.com>.)
4. Select group goals and put them into action.

Step 1. Orienting to Values and Challenges in Relationships

To orient the group to their values in relationships and the challenges all of us face in interacting with others, you might begin with an exercise similar to Social View Exercise 2: Building Social Connection, in chapter 11, adapted here for groups.

Think about someone you care about and like to spend time with. Can you think of anyone? If you can't think of anyone in the present, consider someone from your past. Let's take a moment now to look at that relationship to see if it can teach us something about relationships in general.

Think about a time when you felt like you were truly connecting with this person. What was happening? What did it feel like? What were you doing? (Get lots of responses and write them on a whiteboard for the group to see, doing so in a way that draws out the similarities.)

Okay, now think about this same person, only this time recall a time the two of you were in conflict. What was happening? What did it feel like? What were you doing? (Again, record lots of responses on the whiteboard, drawing out the similarities.)

What do you notice about these responses? (If need be, help the group see the common elements.) It looks like most of these relationships had some awesome moments and also some really crummy moments.

Maybe you've left some relationships when the going got tough. What happens when we do this? In contrast, what happens when we stay in the relationship even when things are tough?

What if all relationships are like this? What if they all have their good times and bad times? I know all of my relationships

have been like this. What about yours?

What this means is that if we're going to be in relationships and get the valuable stuff, we also have to be willing to risk conflict. We have to risk feeling bad and... (Insert other examples from the group's responses.)

It comes down to a key question. (Write the question on the white board.) Am I willing to risk the difficult stuff in order to have relationships involving... (Again, insert examples from the group's responses: love, connection, fun, excitement, and so on.)

So relationships are an unpredictable adventure. Are you ready to start an adventure now? Are you ready to build a group together?

Step 2. Promote Group Values Using the DNA-V Disk

In this step, we use yet another variation on the DNA-V disk, as illustrated in figure 21. (A downloadable version of the worksheet is available at <http://www.thrivingadolescent.com>.) This time the questions and prompts on the disk are oriented toward identifying and promoting group values. You can offer the worksheet as a handout or just record responses on a whiteboard. Again, neither the script nor the worksheet is meant to imply a procedure that's set in stone. Indeed, as you'll see, there are some variations between the script and the worksheet to indicate the flexibility of the approach. Note that the script below assumes all group members have learned the basics of the DNA-V model. If they are unfamiliar with the model, use the DNA-V Walk of Life exercise described in chapters 1 and 7 to introduce it.

3	3	3	3	3	3	3
3	2	2	2	2	2	3
3	2	1	1	1	2	3
3	2	1	You	1	2	3
3	2	1	1	1	2	3
3	2	2	2	2	2	3
3	3	3	3	3	3	3

Eliciting Values

Begin by inquiring about group values, asking what participants care about in the context of the group and what they'd like to get from it. Also ask what they'd like to see the group achieve or do. As participants offer values, write them in the center of the disk.

Examining the Advisor

Next, inquire about what participants' advisors are saying:

So we all have a lot of hope for the group. Yet sometimes there are also fears. So let's step into advisor space and think about what could go wrong in the group. First, what kinds of actions could create group conflict? (Gather many examples and write them outside the disk in proximity to the advisor area.)

When you think about what could go wrong in the group, what judgments does your advisor make? What predictions? (Write these responses within the advisor area.)

Shifting into Noticer Space

Now help the group enter noticer space:

Now let's shift into noticer space. Take a moment to imagine that your worst expectations come true. So we're all on the same page, let's imagine the scenario where... (Insert one of the predictions written in the advisor area.) We'll all imagine that situation and connect to it by using the AND practice. Start by scanning your body for sensations... Now silently name any sensations you feel in your body... If you can, describe these sensations as an emotion.

Now let go of imagining the situation and take a few slow, deep breaths. Notice any noises around you and gently bring yourself back into the present moment.

Ask group members what emotions showed up, and write them in the noticer area.

Shifting into Discoverer Space

At this point, you can guide the group into discoverer space:

Now let's be a bit playful. Let's think about things we might do to build group connection and help us work toward our group values. What might we try? (Gather examples and write them within the discoverer area.)

Now we need to look at our willingness levels. Are all of you willing to risk having this stuff the advisor says and the difficult feelings the noticer observes in order to take these actions to promote our group values?

If yes, you can continue with steps 3 and 4 using the following two worksheets as a guide. As the work proceeds, help the group minimize conflicts and stay focused on values.

If some group members' answer to the willingness question is no, this may reflect that they don't want to be in the group—something that should be taken into consideration. You may need to help them develop willingness, allow them to leave the group if feasible, or seek alternative support for the young person if needed.

Step 3. Collaboratively Working Through the “Creating a Strong Group” Handout

This step involves working with the group to answer the questions posed in the handout that follows, “Creating a

Strong Group.” (A downloadable version of that handout is available at <http://www.thrivingadolescent.com>.) Present the questions in a dynamic way, provoking discussion and collaboration rather than simply gathering and filling in answers. You might have individuals write their responses on separate pieces of paper, or the group can choose someone to record the group’s ideas, perhaps on a whiteboard. Have the group share, brainstorm, and write their individual ideas. You might have individuals write their responses on separate pieces of paper, or the group can choose someone to record the group’s ideas, perhaps on a whiteboard. If appropriate, you can assign one group member the task of collating the answers and helping everyone contribute to the discussion.

Creating a Strong Group

Who are we? What is our purpose?

- What do we care about?
- What kind of group do we want to be?
- What can we do to remind ourselves of our group purpose? Should we give the group a name, write a mission statement, create a logo, or represent our identity in some other way?

What are the costs and benefits of being in the group?

- What are the benefits of working hard in the group?
- What are the costs of working together?
- If one person works harder than another person, will that person receive greater benefit?

How will we make decisions?

- Will the group have a leader? If so, how will a leader or leaders be chosen?
- How will decisions be made? Is a majority vote enough, or does everybody have to agree unanimously?

How do we keep track of our progress?

- Who’s responsible for each action item?

- How can we know how much work each person is doing? Can we observe everyone's work or will it sometimes go unseen?

What happens if someone is acting selfishly?

- What will we do if someone is being selfish or disruptive?
- How will we resolve conflicts?
- What consequences will we set for moderately problematic behavior?
- What consequences will we set for more severe problematic behavior?

What is our relationship to adults and other groups?

- How will we work with our facilitator or other supporting adults?
- Are we part of a larger group? If so, how will we work with that larger group to get things done?
- How will we work with other groups?

Step 4. Selecting and Working Toward Group Goals

Based on all of the preceding work, the group is now ready to select some goals and put them into action. As with the preceding step, this one should be a dynamic, collaborative process. You might direct group members to examples gathered in step 2, when they generated advisor, noticer, and discover content. You can fill out the following "Group Goal-Setting" worksheet or assign the task to a group member. If the group has more than one goal, use a separate copy of the worksheet for each goal. (For a downloadable version, visit <http://www.thrivingadolescent.com>.)

Group Goal Setting Worksheet

Write down a group goal for the next few weeks (or whatever time period is relevant).

Our goal is _____. We plan to do the goal _____ [ideally, specify the time, date, place, or context for working on the goal].

Who is in charge of coordinating our efforts as we work toward this goal?

Benefits: What would the most positive aspects of achieving our goal look like? How does the goal support our values?

Barriers: What are the most critical barriers to achieving our goal?

What will we do if we encounter critical barriers?

If _____ [barrier] arises, we will _____ [goal-supporting action].

If _____ [barrier] arises, we will _____ [goal-supporting action].

Social Networks Exercise 3: Discovering the Value of Kindness

The previous two exercises, based on Elinor Ostrom's group design principles, can be used for any group and purpose. In this exercise we extend the approach by helping groups learn about the value of kindness and giving. (The script is based on a school intervention but can easily be modified to suit other contexts.)

Start by having the group brainstorm actions they can engage in to spread kindness or connection over the next week. Note that for this exercise to be successful, the group must take ownership of the task and generate the ideas. Begin by revisiting the group's values:

Let's start this exercise by thinking about the kind of community you want to live in. If you could choose, what would you like your school to be like? How would you like kids to treat each other?

Allow plenty of time to discuss values, then turn the discussion toward helping group members understand that they have a great deal of power in creating change in their community:

Young people sometimes feel like they have no power to change the world. It may seem like adults are in charge of

everything and you have to wait until you get out of school to start doing things that are important. What if this whole idea is wrong? What if you have more power and influence than you think? Who says you can't change your world now? What do you think about that idea? (Allow time for group discussion.)

Research shows that you can have more influence than you may realize. It indicates that everyone has what's called three degrees of influence. Here's what that means. (Draw a seven by seven grid like the one shown below and write "you" in the box in the center.)

Each of you is in the center of a lot of people. Now let's say that over the course of a day, you're kind and supportive to eight people. (Write the number 1 in each box contiguous to the center one, as in the example.) If you are kind to these eight people, they're likely to be kind to the people around them too. (Write the number 2 in the sixteen boxes contiguous to those with a 1.) So if you're nice to Juan, Juan will probably be nice to his friends and maybe his sister and brother. Now here's the cool part: The people Juan is kind to, those represented by the number 2, they're people you didn't even interact with. Yet they're also likely to be kind to the people around them. (Write the number 3 in the remaining boxes.)

This is how you can change your community. In this example, you make an effort to be kind to the eight people. This can influence sixteen more people—the 2s. And they can influence twenty-four more people—the 3s. So in this example, you were kind to eight people and ultimately had a positive influence on forty-eight people. Pretty cool, isn't it?

So being kind is a way to improve the environment around you. And the great thing is that being kind is likely to make you feel good too. That's what research shows. You don't have to take my word for it. Let's do an experiment so you can see what it does for you.

I'd like all of you, as a group, to come up with kind actions you can do over the next week. You get to come up with the task. It can be anything.

Help the group brainstorm, and make sure they own the ideas. A key part of your role will be to help group members think about how to implement their ideas on a practical level. Ask them to come up with small actions, and to be sure to choose tasks they actually do—behaviors—not thoughts or feelings. Also establish that at the next group meeting, everyone will share what they actually did and what they noticed about how it worked out, with a focus on DNA skills. If appropriate to the group, you can hand out the following worksheet for group members to use to record their experience. (A downloadable version is available at <http://www.thrivingadolescent.com>.) The questions in the worksheet can help them observe their DNA skills before, during, and after performing kind actions. This cues them to look to their direct experience for the benefits of kindness.

Weekly Acts of Kindness

Your acts of kindness for the week:

As you fill out the rest of this sheet, bear in mind that things don't always go as you expect, so you can record both positive and negative experiences here.

Advisor: What thoughts did you have before and after you did kind acts?

Noticer: What feelings showed up as you did kind acts?

Discoverer: What did you discover as you engaged in kind actions?

Social Networks Exercise 4: Using Conversation Cards in Groups

This exercise helps build empathy and sharing as a group. It's designed for groups of six or fewer, but you can certainly use this exercise with larger groups; just organize them into groups of six or fewer first. You'll need one set of the conversation cards from Values Exercise 1. Converse and Appreciate, in chapter 2, for each group.

Have each small group turn their set of conversation cards upside down. Then have them draw one card for the entire group at random and read the question. Encourage each

member of the group to answer the question, but also establish that everyone is free to choose how much they say. Also point out that they can answer in ways that don't feel too risky or disclose too deeply; it's totally their choice. (Before engaging in any group exercise that may involve personal disclosure, be sure to establish group rules on confidentiality and respect.)

As they discuss the card, cue group members to consider their DNA skills using the following prompts:

As you answer, notice your DNA behaviors. For example, what does your advisor have to say? See if you can step into noticer space. What physical sensations and emotions arise as you share? Also step in discoverer space and be curious about sharing. Does it bring you closer to others? Are you learning things about yourself? Are you learning about others in the group?

Once everyone has answered the question for one or two conversation cards, ask them to engage in a shared discussion. Here are some questions to guide this phase of the exercise:

Advisor Questions

The aim of these questions is to facilitate a discussion that helps the group experience how similar our advisors are:

- *What advice did your advisor offer?*
- *Did any of you find yourselves problem solving, evaluating, and so on?*
- *Let's take a social view: How similar are our advisors, across the group?*

Noticer Questions

The aim of these questions is to facilitate a discussion that reveals the physical sensations and emotions we all feel when we answer questions in a group:

- *What sensations or emotions did you notice as you answered before the group?*
- *What's similar about everyone's noticer experiences?*

Discoverer Questions

The aim of these questions is to help group members talk about how it felt to take risks and answer the question, and to show that people tend to be similar in this respect:

- *What strengths did you need to use to participate and answer these questions?*
- *Did any of you take a risk in answering the question?*
- *Did any of you do something you don't normally do when talking with others?*
- *How might sharing allow us to work together on things we value?*

If you've broken a large group into smaller working groups, have everyone come back together. Then debrief as a group, discussing how easy it is to find common ground in the kinds of questions on the cards. This discussion is likely to reveal that DNA-V shows up in everything we do, and that we're all alike in that. Finally, ask the group to discuss how this exercise might help them understand and connect with others.

Eight Tips for Becoming a DNA-V Expert

We believe the DNA-V model can help young people live extraordinary lives. This possibility is at once exciting and nerve-racking: exciting because you're in a place where you can turn a young person's life around, and nerve-racking because you could mess up or miss your opportunity. It doesn't matter if you're a novice or an expert. Each time you're given the opportunity to influence a young person's life, you're likely to feel hope and fear—the lightness of possibility and the weight of responsibility. We have no cure for that fear. All you can do is act boldly and in alignment with your values. The lives of young people depend on you.

As discussed in chapter 1, DNA-V is derived from contextual behavioral science, takes a functional contextualist view, and uses evolutionary and behavioral theory. We have provided many techniques for putting this scientific foundation into practice. This final chapter is designed to fortify the links between this foundation and the practice of DNA-V. Our hope is that this will allow you to become more flexible and fluid in your practice and create your own exercises.

We begin with an interaction between a therapist and a young person. Throughout the chapter, we'll build on this vignette with behavioral principles and therapist skills.

Robyn and Jasmine's Story

Robyn looks at her new client, Jasmine, who sits next to her mom. Jasmine is clearly irritated and wants to be somewhere else. "Jasmine really needs to see someone," her mom is saying in an exasperated voice. "I don't know what to do anymore. She's dropped out of school and has been sneaking out of the house and going to who knows where. I suspect she's having sex and smoking pot." The mom does most of the talking during the session. Jasmine says the occasional "yep" or "nah" but little else. She clearly doesn't want to be there. Toward the end of the session, Jasmine's mom mentions, almost casually, that Jasmine's brother died two years ago in an unexplained car accident, and that it might have been a suicide.

Now the second session is approaching and Robyn will be seeing Jasmine alone. She hopes it will be different this time. Robyn feels nervous: *Will she speak to me? How can I help this girl? What techniques should I use? Or maybe I shouldn't use any techniques—just be human with her.*

Robyn takes a deep breath and heads out into the waiting room. Jasmine's head is down. Her long hair is half black and half dyed blond and looks like it was cut with rough shears. She wears huge glasses without lenses and looks tough and cool. The cord for earphones are coming from under her hair, music is pumping into her ears, and her thumbs are flying across the phone screen.

Robyn thinks, *I have to get her attention, but tapping her on the shoulder just won't be cool.* Fortunately, Jasmine seems to sense Robyn's presence and looks up. *Thank goodness.*

Jasmine slinks into the office, slumps into the chair, and looks totally disgusted. "I'm here for Mom, that's all. You won't be able to help me. No one can."

"Okay," Robyn said, "Still, my value in being here is to do my best. Our session isn't about your mom, it's about you and what you care about."

The two begin some gentle chatter. Robyn is mindful not to grill Jasmine with questions, yet she has to find a way to soften Jasmine's hard protective exterior and connect with her. After a while she asks Jasmine about her brother, and for the first time there's a flicker of change in Jasmine's expression—just a hint of sadness, and then she puts her tough mask back on. Robyn sees this. She knows that flicker has a function, that Jasmine's emotions popped up but were quickly squashed down again.

Robyn takes a deep breath and decides to see what this is about. There is something important hidden behind that flicker of sadness. "I'd like to know what your brother was like," she says.

Jasmine shrugs. "We don't talk about him much. Everyone gets too upset."

"Okay. Families do that," Robyn responds. Then, using a gentle voice as a tool to settle Jasmine, she asks, "What was he like? Do you have any memories of being with him or things you did together?"

Jasmine nods and Robyn takes this as encouragement to continue. She speaks softly to encourage Jasmine and asks, "Would you tell

me about a time you remember?”

Jasmine nods again, not overly willing. Robyn asks her to think about her brother quietly for a minute, allowing her mind to wander over all her memories of their times together before settling on one specific time she remembers being with him. Robyn is exposing Jasmine to the pain of losing her brother. This is risky territory.

Cautiously, Jasmine begins to speak of a time when they were in their backyard shed. She was twelve and her brother was sixteen. He had let her come in to watch him work on his trail bike. They decided to paint it together.

Robyn offers more encouragement, saying, “Help me to see it, like I was just standing there watching from a corner of the shed.”

Jasmine shares how they painted his bike in many colors and designed a logo together.

Robyn facilitates the discussion, smiling, keeping her words to a minimum, and being mindfully present so the story can unfold. All the while, Robyn’s own advisor is shouting instructions: “You’re not doing enough. You have to do something bigger.” Still, Robyn continues to just be mindful and appreciate Jasmine. This allows Jasmine to get her first practice at stepping into noticer space, though Robyn doesn’t label it in that way—she models it instead.

Jasmine talks about how she and her brother laughed as they painted, and how they mucked around and painted each other. They also made a secret symbol and painted it on the shed. She laughs as she tells the story.

Robyn can see that Jasmine and her brother had a deep, heartfelt connection, and that sharing this story is slowly revealing Jasmine’s love and her loss.

Finally, Robyn asks Jasmine to notice what it’s like to talk about this special memory. Jasmine says that it’s good to talk about her brother but also hard. At home, he’s spoken of less and less. “It’s too hard to talk about him with Mom.”

Then she suddenly becomes angry and says, “I’ve looked at a suicide teen webpage. It’s all about how we can save our loved ones from dying. It’s about writing and talking about suicide and saving people.”

Robyn asks her to say more about that, and Jasmine floods the room with talk of writing, speaking out, and being a journalist someday. She imagines a positive future, just for a fleeting moment, and then

her face clouds as she remembers that she isn't in school anymore. She says, "I've fucked everything up."

Robyn responds, mindfully staying present, "Do you think our work could be about that? About speaking out for love? About helping you find a way to do that? To cherish your brother by living?"

Jasmine looks up through her hair and nods.

Robyn feels herself connecting with Jasmine and knows that she and Jasmine have made a start together.

Reflecting on Robyn and Jasmine

In this book, and in our model, we aim to help practitioners have an open heart and courage. A central tenet is that by practicing DNA-V, you help not just your clients but yourself as well. Consider what you see in the preceding interaction. What DNA skills does the therapist display?

- Does Robyn show appreciation and empathy for Jasmine, even though she's behaving in ways that can be unpleasant for a practitioner?
- Does Robyn work with the form of what Jasmine says—her words, such as "I don't want to be here"? Or does she look for the function of those words, noticing that perhaps Jasmine's tough talk is about a struggle to avoid difficult feelings and discussions.
- Is she explaining DNA-V, or demonstrating it by modeling the skills?
- Does Robyn allow herself to stay hooked by her own advisor, or does she boldly step into her own noticer and discoverer spaces?

This chapter brings DNA-V together with eight tips that will help you become an expert in this approach. This will allow you to create your own exercises, develop unique metaphors, steer clear of canned interventions, and confidently shape new behaviors in the young people you work with. We believe this is essential for using the DNA-V approach fluidly and flexibly. As you'll see, these tips cover broad territory, from the therapist's stance and building a therapeutic alliance to how to conceptualize young people's difficulties and build and execute intervention plans.

Tip 1. Begin with a DNA-V Case Conceptualization

Early in your work with young people, map their behavior onto a blank DNA-V case conceptualization worksheet (figure 3 in chapter 1, which is also available for download at <http://www.thrivingadolescent.com>). Keep these key points in mind:

- How skilled is the young person in DNA-V?
- Look for behavior that makes the person's life smaller and appears to be repetitive, rigid, stuck, or withdrawing.
- Look for behavior that broadens and builds new skills and resources, opens up experience, and expands patterns of valued action.
- Consider overt behavior—what you see.
- Consider covert behavior—thoughts and feelings—as reflected by verbal and nonverbal behavior.
- Consider the young person's environment and how he or she has adapted to it.

In the lists that follow, we offer descriptions of skilled and unskilled behavior in each aspect of DNA. Because areas of more limited skills tend to be the target of interventions, we also provide examples of unskilled behavior for each facet of the model. However, note that although these example behaviors are often unhelpful, that isn't always the case. Remember, in the DNA-V model, the form of any behavior (how it looks) is always less relevant than its function in context. (You can also download a user-friendly table on this at <http://www.thrivingadolescent.com>.)

Advisor Behaviors

Highly Skilled

- Uses verbal beliefs based on past experience, reasoning, and teaching as guides for effective, valued action
- Can notice when the advisor is unhelpful and unhook from it
- Understands that emotion control efforts are often problematic

Unskilled

- Relies on verbal beliefs based on past experience, reasoning, and teaching even when they are unworkable in terms of value and vitality

- Doesn't make use of verbal beliefs that are workable and might serve as a guide for effective action
- Uses verbal processes such as rumination, blaming, worry, and fantasy to control emotions in a way that interferes with valued living

Examples of Unskilled Advisor Behavior

- Low sense of social worth or self-efficacy interferes with valued action
- Judgments and beliefs about others (for example, excessive blaming or self-entitlement) interfere with the development of valued social relationships
- Has negative evaluations of emotions and is intolerant of emotions
- Sees thoughts and feelings as barriers to valued action
- Is attached to unhelpful rules
- Makes extreme or too-general conclusions about the self, others, or life (for example, "I'm always screwing up") that don't aid valued action
- Experiences excessive worry or rumination

Noticer Behaviors

Highly Skilled

- Is able to notice and label sensations and feeling states
- Is able to allow feelings and sensations to come and go without reacting to them or controlling them
- Is able to flexibly direct attention to both the inside and outside world, with purpose and curiosity

Unskilled

- Is unable to notice and label physical sensations, emotions, or both
- Is afraid of physical sensations or feelings
- Reacts to internal sensations without pausing or awareness
- Seeks to turn his or her attention away from feelings and is unable or unwilling to direct attention to the inside or outside world

Examples of Unskilled Noticer Behavior

- Tends to somatize, mistaking psychological distress for symptoms of a medical condition
- Disconnects from or hates his or her body
- Uses cognitive terms to describe emotions in broad, undifferentiated terms (for example, “I feel bad,” instead of “I feel angry”)
- Is unable to use specific emotion labels when upset
- Overreacts or reacts impulsively when upset
- Is unable or unwilling to focus on or talk about emotions
- Has facial expression that don’t reflect reported emotions or a disconnection between an emotional situation and reported emotions
- Is easily distracted and struggles to stay focused
- Seems to be on automatic pilot in important situations

Discoverer Behaviors

Highly Skilled

- Tests the workability of behavior
- Tries new things in the service of finding what works best
- Identifies and builds values and strengths
- Develops willingness, choosing valued action while making space for difficult emotions or thoughts that arise

Unskilled

- Fails to test workability
- Repeats old behaviors even when they clearly don’t work
- Acts impulsively
- Doesn’t identify or build values and strengths
- Fails to explore the utility of willingness in different contexts

Examples of Unskilled Discoverer Behavior

- Keeps using unworkable strategies and doesn’t try new things
- Explores in ways that don’t connect to meaning and purpose (for example, unhelpful sensation seeking and risky behavior)
- Refuses to even think about trying something new
- Refuses to engage in experiential learning; tries to solve everything in the “safety of the mind” (for example, through worry, rather than exploring what works in the world)

Now we’ll outline skills that promote flexible self-view and social view. For each, you can ask yourself whether those you’re working

with are making use of skills in all three realms—discoverer, noticer, and advisor—or whether they're limited to a few responses. In the latter case, their narrow repertoire indicates the need for development of the relevant skills.

Self-View

Highly Skilled Discoverer

- Uses perspective taking to see the self as more than the advisor's self-evaluations and categories
- Sees the self as the one who has discoverer, noticer, and advisor behaviors—as more than just the advisor and its evaluations; and sees the self as more than thoughts and feelings—as the container of these inner experiences
- Is able to experiment with self-compassion and find contexts where self-compassion helps with valued action

Unskilled Discoverer

- Identifies primarily with the advisor (for example, “I am bad” versus “My advisor is saying that I am bad”)
- Is unable to see the self as the one who has discoverer, noticer, or advisor behaviors
- Is unable to experiment with self-compassion or discover the value of self-compassion

Highly Skilled Noticer

- Notices self-evaluations as they come and go

Unskilled Noticer

- Fails to notice self-evaluations

Highly Skilled Advisor

- Has a growth mind-set, with effective beliefs about having hope and being able to grow, improve, and develop
- Recognizes that self-criticism often occurs after failure and that it need not be listened to or believed

Unskilled Advisor

- Has a fixed mind-set, with ineffective beliefs about being hopeless and unable to grow, improve, or develop

- Overidentifies with self-processes that are shaming, stigmatizing, or abusing

Social View

Highly Skilled Discoverer

- Is able to spot the link between social connections and his or her own vitality and values
- Is able to explore multiple possible viewpoints of a given social situation by standing in another's shoes
- Is able to test assumptions about others through skillful social interaction

Unskilled Discoverer

- Doesn't search for or find value in social relationships
- Doesn't explore multiple ways of seeing social situations
- Doesn't test assumptions and evaluations about them

Highly Skilled Noticer

- Is able to notice others as they are in the present moment, including facial expressions and body language
- Is able to notice the activity of his or her advisor in a given situation, and not react to it
- Is able to hear judgments directed at the self without reacting to them

Unskilled Noticer

- Fails to see others as they truly are in the physical world and instead relies on preconceived ideas of others
- Is highly reactive to the advisor's social judgments (for example, having the thought that a person is bad and then always seeking to punish the person for this "badness" even when doing so is values-inconsistent)
- Is highly reactive to what others say

Highly Skilled Advisor

- Recognizes that mind reading is imperfect
- Is able to use past learning history to quickly understand and take perspective on others in the present context

- Understands that he or she can choose whether to listen to the advisor's evaluation of a person or engage in discovery by interacting with the person
- Understands his or her role in relationships and accepts responsibility for his or her actions

Unskilled Advisor

- Thinks mind reading is always accurate
- Relies on past learning history that doesn't provide a good basis for understanding people in the present context
- Believes the advisor's evaluations of others are always accurate
- Blames others and lacks a sense of personal responsibility

Now we can use all of the information outlined above to consider Jasmine's current issues and presentation and come up with a case conceptualization.

Current situation and presenting issue

Not in school.

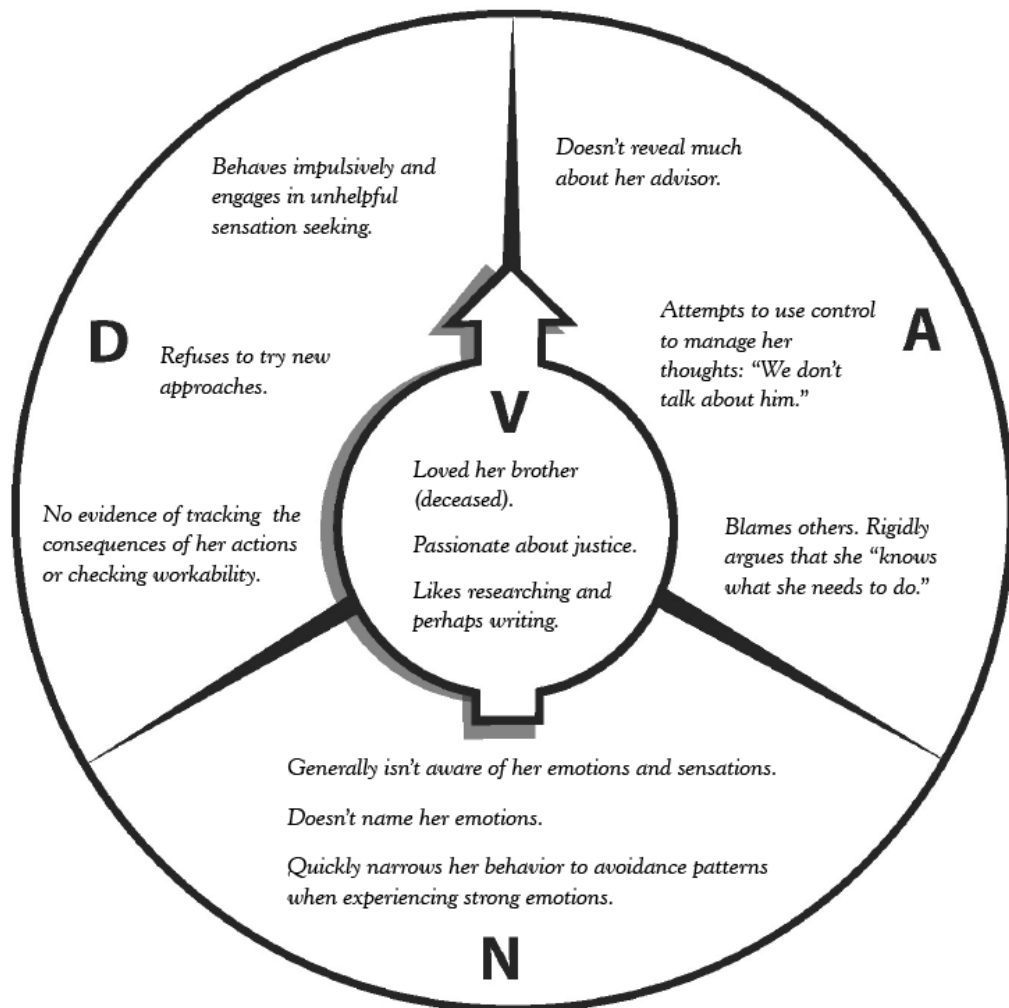
Promiscuity.

Substance use.

Social and historical environment

Brother died.

Family conflict.



Self-view

Fixed self-view: "You can't help me; no one can."

Many self-evaluations.

Social view

Blames others.

Doesn't see others' perspectives.

Has difficulty connecting with others.

FIGURE 22. Jasmine's DNA-V case conceptualization.

The advantage of DNA-V is that we don't need to infer what's going on in young people's lives. We can focus on the patterns of behavior

that occur in our interactions with them. In Jasmine's case, observing her behavior in the room suggests poor noticer skills (when emotions arise, she quickly changes the topic to avoid them), weak discoverer skills (she's impulsive and acts out rather than exploring what the therapist might offer), and a critical advisor (she uses her words as a defense). And what we can glean about her behaviors in day-to-day life matches this. She's removed herself from life by not attending school and not socializing with her old friends. She's shut down, and to some extent this allows her to avoid her feelings. However, her avoidance has a price: It's reduced her ability to feel in every way. She's lost her ability to be present, attend school, and hope for a future—in short, she's lost her life. She appears to be stuck in impulsive, unvalued actions.

We can now move to using the remaining tips in this chapter to help Jasmine.

Tip 2. Appreciate Young People and Their Ability to Adapt

Young people are experts at adaptation. They are not problems waiting to be solved; they are whole, complete humans who have adapted to their environment as best they can. Yet, instead of focusing on how well they've adapted to an all-too-often deficient environment, our professional training often focuses on their weaknesses.

Given this context, when you approach young people seeking help, they're likely to think you're just another adult who sees them as broken and in need of fixing, just as Jasmine did with Robyn. That doesn't set the stage for an effective intervention. In fact, it creates resistance. How do we know? You can discover it yourself with this thought experiment (inspired by K. G. Wilson, 2009).

Pause for a moment and ask yourself whether you've ever been someone's problem. What was that like? How did it feel when someone tried to "fix" you? Even now, as an adult, what's it like when your partner or a loved one tells you how you ought to be? Sit with these feelings for a moment.

Now take a moment to step into a different place. Have you ever been appreciated by someone? Have you ever been accepted exactly as you are? Has someone ever really seen you? What was that like?

Begin your DNA-V work from this place of appreciation. Sure, the young people you see have problems, and you can help them with those problems, but they themselves are not the problem. This stance was evident in the work Robyn did with Jasmine. She went slowly and allowed Jasmine to show up, rather than immediately moving to problem solving. She used noticing skills to see Jasmine's experiences and reveal her values.

This tip is simple: When you work with young people, appreciate them first, and keep doing this until they can appreciate themselves. If your interactions aren't long-term, you may not be able to directly observe the benefits of your efforts. However, if you open your heart to them, for the rest of their lives they will probably remember that you were someone who reached out and saw value in them when they couldn't see it in themselves.

Tip 3. Start Wherever You Can Create Some Space

With the DNA-V model, there's no "correct" place to start. You can be sensitive to what the young person in front of you needs in the moment and start there.

With Jasmine, we could start with values and stepping into discoverer space, as the therapist did in talking with Jasmine about things she deeply cares about. Notice that Robyn never asked, "What matters to you?" Instead she led Jasmine to a place where her values became apparent. Jasmine expressed fierce anger at the loss she experienced and a desire to discover all she could about suicide from her Internet surfing, and she explicitly stated that she wanted to do something about the problem of young people committing suicide. All of this points to discovery work that can help Jasmine build awareness of her values. Valuing is, of course, the heart of our work.

In Jasmine's case, another good place to begin might be with noticing skills. We could help her allow the sadness of losing her brother, as well as other feelings she hasn't yet revealed. As long as she says no to her emotions, she must say no to large parts of her life. Noticer skills will increase her willingness to experience her full range of sensations and feelings.

We could also start with some advisor experiments to help her see that her advisor's job is to solve problems and avoid discomfort. But

for Jasmine, starting with the advisor might not work. She isn't committed to self-disclosure yet, and her lack of noticer skills may make it difficult for her to honestly speak of her thoughts.

As you see, there are many roads into DNA-V. If you come up against a roadblock, just try another route.

Tip 4. Do DNA-V, Don't Talk DNA-V

Working with young people brings unique challenges. Unlike adults, many young people won't politely tell you what they think you want to hear. They are tough critics and won't hide their scorn. This goes back to the dynamic described earlier, in which part of their struggle is that adults seem to be focused on controlling them. Therefore, they'll probably be quick to assume that you're doing this too.

This is one reason why it's crucial to make DNA-V experiential. Experiential exercises don't dictate that young people listen to you. Rather, they encourage young people to discover what's true for them by using their own experience as a guide to workability. Unfortunately, in their enthusiasm to help, practitioners often lose track of the importance of experience and instead turn to explanations or exhortations. Or they might start with experiential exercises and then, when an exercise doesn't quite go as hoped, shift to explaining what "should" have happened. None of this is best practice. Simply put, talking DNA-V isn't doing DNA-V.

We admit that we both did too much talking when we first start practicing ACT—too much explaining and too few experiential approaches. We recall conducting exercises that didn't go according to plan and leaping into explanations about the mind, how it makes reasons, and what "should" have happened in the exercise, only to have a young person respond with something like "You know, your lips are moving, but all I can hear is blah, blah, blah"—an embarrassing moment for us as professionals. Even now, we sometimes still fall into "being the expert" and trying to control the situation. This is understandable. Most adults have a cognitive orientation, and most practitioners love to talk or explain endlessly. Don't fall into this. It doesn't work well with young people.

Young people have taught both of us important lessons: Shut up and stop explaining. Step up and be willing to lean toward experiential exercises and being in the present moment.

The advisor seeks to interpret every new experience in terms of past rules, beliefs, and assumptions. This is why therapists who try to tell young people to see themselves differently are often unsuccessful.

There's no "right" way to complete experiential exercises. Just do them with openness and without insisting that those you work with should respond in a certain way or have a specific realization. We've found that one surefire way to do this is to call experiential exercises "experiments in weirdness," as illustrated in the following dialogue, which revisits and expands upon an approach described in chapter 3.

Therapist: Do you know what an experiment is—like the things you do in science class?

Young person: Yeah.

Therapist: Great. So can you tell me what an experiment is, or rather, what the purpose of doing an experiment is?

Young person: You do stuff to find things out.

Therapist: That's right. And are you supposed to know in advance exactly what will happen?

Young person: No, that's what the experiment is for.

Therapist: Right. So in an experiment, you don't know the answer beforehand. You just do something in order to see what you discover. Correct?

Young person: Yep.

Therapist: Okay, we are going to do the same. We are going to do some experiments, and your only job is to discover something. It doesn't matter what you discover. But when you notice something, tell me what you notice. Okay?

Young person: Sure.

Therapist: Okay, so the last thing I need to tell you is that some of my experiments are a little weird. So you might feel weird, but I'll be doing it too, and I'll probably also feel weird. Actually, I'll probably feel weirder because I'm going to be asking you to do some unusual things, and you might think I'm silly for asking. But I'm okay with that. So, are you willing to try out some weird experiments together and see what we discover?

Young person: Sure.

Therapist: Remember, anything you discover is fine. There's no right answer here.

The important point here is that anything that happens is fine. This type of setup removes any expectation that there's a right way to answer or a right experience to have. It also saves both you and those you work with from embarrassment when experiments yield unexpected results, as they often do.

No matter what the outcome of an exercise, your task is to think functionally about the behavior you saw. Also ask those you're working with what they noticed; this will guide you in how they use language and understand their world. In all situations, you can generalize what you learn about individuals and use it in your subsequent work together. It's all about identifying function and working with it—which leads us to the next tip.

Warning! Behavioral Terms Ahead

If you've worked in classrooms or with large groups of kids, you've probably had some experience with behavioral principles. You may have become bored with them or tried various versions of positive reinforcement only to find that they don't always work. However, having a basic knowledge of behavioral principles will provide a strong foundation for the work you do, so please bear this in mind as you read on. Our aim is to give you enough of a basic understanding of behavioral principles that you can see young people through the lens of the DNA-V model and then access these principles as you think about and plan how to influence their behavior.

Tip 5. Become a Function Spotter

All behavior has a function—a reason why we do it. Function spotting involves asking whether a given behavior is under the control of an appetitive or aversive stimulus. In other words, is the behavior about approaching a pleasant or desired event or stimulus (appetitive), or about avoiding or escaping from an unpleasant event or stimulus (aversive)? Two behaviors can look exactly the same but have completely different functions. For example, saying “I love you” can be done in the service of bringing a desirable person closer to you because you enjoy that person's company (appetitive control). Or it can be done to escape the fear of being alone (aversive control). For that matter, both forms of control can be in play in a given situation.

Young people are far less likely to engage in broadening and building behaviors when they're under aversive control. Aversive control generally leads to narrow, inflexible patterns of behavior and

insensitivity to consequences (K. G. Wilson, 2009). To demonstrate how this works, let's say you're sitting on a park bench surrounded by a beautiful forest. You're looking around at the butterflies and ancient trees when a giant king cobra slithers out from behind a tree toward you. Your attention will suddenly become quite narrow. You will no longer be curiously looking around at the forest; every resource you have will be focused on escaping the snake. You'll tune out a lot of information (narrowing), but you'll also be incredibly sensitive to anything that helps you escape the aversive threat. For example, you might notice a large stick nearby that you could use as a weapon. When it comes to poisonous snakes, having a narrow behavioral repertoire makes a lot of sense.

Humans, however, are often dealing with aversive stimuli that don't pose a physical threat. For example, we may be taught that our self-esteem is precious and needs to be defended at all costs. As a result, we don't engage in challenges that might risk loss of self-esteem, and therefore we fail to grow. Or we may decide that rejection is intolerable and avoid socializing. Indeed, we might become incredibly creative at avoiding socializing, making up clever stories about why we can't socialize or how we'll socialize in the near future, once we've become "good enough" (for example, once we lose weight or get a degree). In the (often eternal) meanwhile, we fail to broaden our social networks. There seems no end to our capacity to avoid aversives that are more symbolic, and in our heads, than real.

In contrast to aversive control, many forms of appetitive control result in relatively broad patterns of flexible behavior (Fredrickson, 2001; K. G. Wilson, 2009). The mere possibility of something pleasant makes us curious and exploratory. For example, if we go into a social situation in order to enjoy the company of other people, we're more likely to chat, be curious about others, interact pleasantly, and build relationships. If we go into the same situation anticipating rejection, we're likely to be guarded, less spontaneous and playful, and focused on protecting ourselves rather than getting to know others. Values work generally attempts to put behavior under appetitive control through verbal means ("I want to connect with others") and through contact with the environment (experiencing positive social events).

Function spotting involves noticing aversive or appetitive responses. Perhaps the simplest way to become a function spotter is to think in terms of the C-ABCs of behavior: context, antecedents, behavior, and consequences. Here are the key features of the C-ABC model,

which can be mapped clearly onto the DNA-V model. (A worksheet for mapping behavior is available for download at <http://www.thrivingadolescent.com>.)

Links Between DNA-V and the C-ABC Model of Behavior

C-ABC components and example questions	DNA-V components
Current Context 1. Environmental conditions that impact the behavior but don't necessarily have a close temporal link to it. Examples might include sleep deprivation, recent family troubles, or stressful life events. 2. Historical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and prior learning factors that precede the behavior.	Context + past support for DNA-V skills + past support for self and social understanding
Antecedents—Immediate Where and when does the behavior occur? Who is present? Does something happen just before the target behavior?	Immediate context
Target Behavior What is the behavior we hope to influence?	Discoverer, noticer, or advisor behavior
Consequences What events or actions follow the behavior? Look for function. What are the intended outcomes: approaching something rewarding, or avoiding or escaping something aversive?	Valued and/or nonvalued outcomes

Asking the C-ABC questions will help you stay focused on behaviors and their function. This allows you to think about what circumstances or situations might bring on a given behavior, what keeps it going, and, importantly, how you might change it. Function simply means acknowledging that all behavior is done for a purpose, and that this purpose can change across contexts. A valuable bonus is that once you can see the function of a young person's behavior, you're unlikely to get caught up in your own emotional reactions to the behavior because you can see the behavior as an understandable response to the situation.

Tip 6. Learn How to Undermine the Traps of Language

Relational frame theory is the hardworking engine underneath the hood of DNA-V. RFT is simply about how we use language or symbols to understand ourselves and the world (S. C. Hayes, Barnes-Holmes, & Roche 2001).

Within RFT, all language is viewed as operant behavior—that is, behavior that’s evoked by context and under the influence of consequences. RFT suggests that verbal behavior (such as saying “I am unlovable”) comes under two types of contextual influence: the relational context (Crel) and the functional context (Cfunc):

- The relational context governs the relation that is derived between two stimuli. For example, if a young person experiences rejection by a peer, he may think, *I am unlovable*. In this case, the rejection is part of the context that has prompted him to relate “I” and “unlovable” in an equivalence relation. Returning to the metaphor of DNA, we might say that the Crel is a context that prompts the advisor to start relating, evaluating, judging, and predicting.
- The functional context governs how these related words function, as demonstrated in figure 23. For example, in some contexts “I am unlovable” leads to high distress and social withdrawal. Metaphorically, we might say that the Cfunc is what determines whether the advisor has power over our actions.

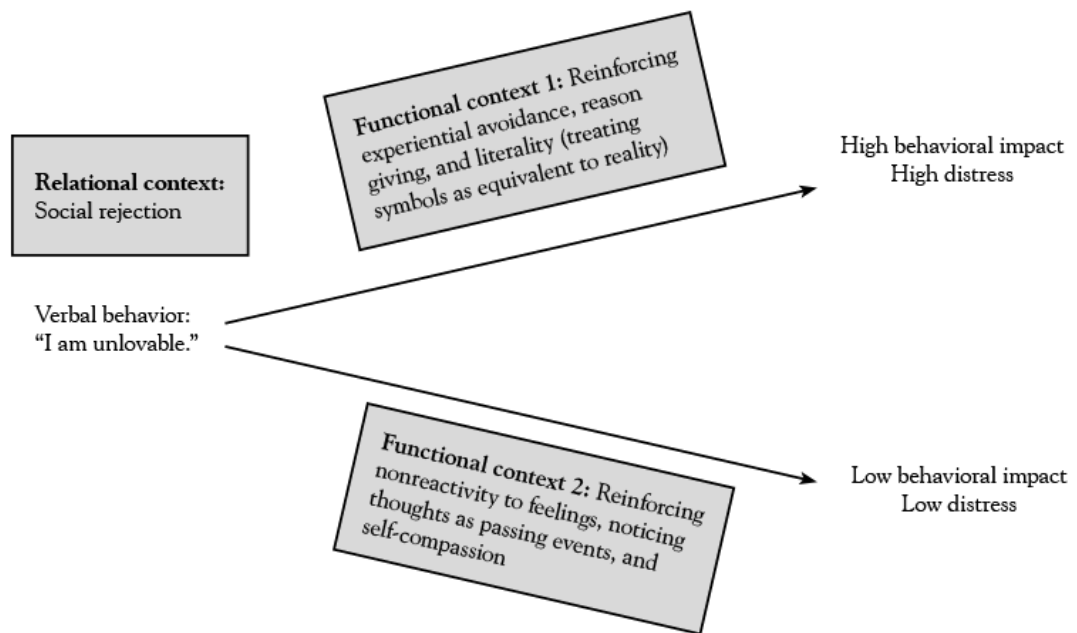


FIGURE 23. A contextual model of different ways of relating to difficult thoughts (inspired by Marshall et al., 2015).

A number of functional contexts are hypothesized to increase the impact of verbal behavior, particularly contexts that have reinforced any of the following: seeing thoughts as reasons for doing things or not doing things, taking thoughts literally, clinging to thoughts, or avoiding thoughts. Thoughts have a strong impact when the individual, the social community, or both see them as being literally true. Professionals who work with young people are in the position to change these contextual influences.

We can create contexts that reduce the impact of verbal behavior. For example in DNA-V, young people learn to relate to verbal behavior in new and more flexible ways:

- They can regard thoughts as an advisor, hold this advice lightly, watch thoughts come and go, see thoughts from a psychologically distant perspective, or elaborate thoughts in a way that reduces their impact. (Many exercises for promoting these skills appear in chapter 3.)
- They can use noticing to experience emotions as they are, seeing them as passing sensations rather than toxic states that must be avoided.
- They can use discoverer skills to become curious about thoughts and test them for helpfulness or unhelpfulness rather than habitually obeying them.

- They can develop a flexible self-view, coming to see themselves as the container holding their self-evaluations, rather than being literally equivalent to their self-evaluations. From this perspective, self-concepts are seen as passing events, rather than fixed realities.

These contexts decrease the impact of negative thoughts in a simple way: by allowing young people to treat verbal behavior as an object of curiosity, rather than assuming it literally means what it says.

The distinction between relational and functional contexts is important because it suggests two ways we can intervene. We'll illustrate this using Jasmine's example. Jasmine was failing in school and dropped out. She loves writing but struggles with math. In the past, a fellow student told her she was stupid. That prompted her to relate "I" with "stupid" ("I am stupid") and is therefore part of the relational context (Crel).

Some might say the solution is to create an environment where everybody wins and no one fails. The goal would be to not have thoughts like "I am stupid" show up in young people's minds. Unfortunately, as discussed in chapter 3, it's impossible to create an environment where young people never have negative self-evaluations. The human mind doesn't work that way. The mind's purpose is to compare, evaluate, and look for problems.

Some approaches (not ACT or DNA-V) try to delete this kind of relating. They may advocate not thinking about the negative evaluation or counter with "You are not stupid." But verbal relations are an additive process. We cannot delete the relationships we've learned (Bouton, 2002).

So, what's an alternative way to help Jasmine deal with the thought "I am stupid"? Let's consider two functional contexts (Cfunc).

- Functional context 1: Jasmine's mom tells her that she should just push the thought out of her mind and not worry about it. Although this is well-intentioned, Jasmine's mom inadvertently teaches her that "I am stupid" is a dangerous thought and needs to be controlled. This merely increases the importance of the thought.
- Functional context 2: Robyn validates Jasmine's feelings and thoughts as being normal in this situation. She then shows her that because another student said "You're stupid," Jasmine now has "I am stupid" bouncing around in her head; but the thought

doesn't have to influence her. Together they practice using her DNA skills to choose what to do when it shows up in her head.

Many DNA-V exercises change the functional context of verbal behavior and could be used to help Jasmine expand how she relates to this verbal material. Robyn could engage in Advisor Experiment 3: Is Your Advisor All-Powerful?, from chapter 3. This could help her see that the thought can't make her do things; she can choose. Then Robyn might help Jasmine create a plan to return to school and practice attending math classes even when "I am stupid" shows up. Another exercise could be to have Jasmine write "I am stupid" on a piece of paper, along with many other words that express her self-evaluations, which she could then use to do Self-as-Noticer Exercise 1: A Cup Full of Words, in chapter 9.

The point is, there's no need to be afraid of words. By establishing new functional contexts, it's possible to influence the impact they have on us and learn to relate to words in new and more helpful ways.

Tip 7. Let Antecedent Stimulus Control Be Your Window Into a Hidden World

Although people generally like to think they respond uniquely to new situations, we often rely on well-learned patterns of behavior. Consider this scenario: A female client walks in to your office. You smile and say, "Hi, how are you today?" She replies, "Good, thanks." Then, when the session gets under way, you find out that she isn't good at all—she's depressed and suicidal. So why did she say she was good? The answer has to do with stimulus control. Years of repetition have paired the stimulus "How are you?" with the response "Good, thanks."

Antecedent stimulus control is just a technical way of talking about stimuli that have appeared so often that they prompt habitual responses. A good way to understand how powerful this can be is to find examples in your own life of stimuli that bring a habitual response. Here are some common examples:

- When Sara wakes up, she always reaches for her phone to check messages. She decides to change this and plans not to check her phone before 9 a.m. But each morning, she finds that she can't stop thinking about her phone. Her hand even reaches

out for it. Waking up is the antecedent. Sara feels out of kilter until 9 a.m. arrives.

- Rodrigo gets home from work and dresses in casual clothes. He immediately feels that he's stepped out of his role as an executive and become a dad. Occasionally, he goes to the office in casual clothes, but he finds he can't settle in and get his work done.
- For John, coffee on Monday morning is his signal to start work, whereas coffee on Saturday morning is his signal to relax and read the newspaper. The stimulus is the same, but it elicits different responses in different contexts.
- Natasha dresses up for a date night at home with her husband. Her toddler sees her change out of her casual clothes and begins to cry. To him, her dress is a signal that she's leaving him in child care to go to work.

Looking for stimulus control gives you a window into young people's life because it can show you how they respond to their world. For example, if you smile at Steve and say something positive and you notice that he smiles back, this is evidence of a social-view skill. Or perhaps you see powerful but barely perceptible emotions arise as Bree talks (swallowing, blinking back tears, and so on). Each time this happens, she begins to rapidly tell stories, providing evidence of her inability to stay in noticer space. You may never see the young people you work with outside your office, but their behavior within your office can reveal how they might be responding out in the world. It can also give you valuable information about how you can shape variation in their behavior.

Let's look at Jasmine's situation to illustrate how antecedent stimulus control could be used to understand her patterns of responding and shape new behaviors. Jasmine tells Robyn that she feels sad all the time and can't explain why. She says the sadness is just always there. Observing Jasmine in school would be extremely helpful, but Robyn doesn't have the opportunity to do that, so Robyn begins some detective work with Jasmine in session.

Robyn begins by mentally noting the stimulus and response patterns, recorded in the table that follows. For this example, we've deliberately used a subtle pattern of behavior between Robyn and Jasmine to demonstrate how important it is to watch for small changes in young people.

The Problem: Jasmine Feels Sad

Context	Antecedent	Jasmine's statements	Robyn's observations
Jasmine appears calm as she comes into the office and has a spring in her step.	Robyn asks, "Jasmine, how are your art classes going?"	"Okay."	Her voice is light, and she makes direct eye contact.
She's sitting upright in her chair, spinning a little.	Robyn asks, "How about your classmates?"	"Okay."	Jasmine shrugs and her voice is a bit softer.
Jasmine takes control of the conversation.	Robyn listens.	"I got good comments on my life sketch."	Once again her voice is light, and she's making good eye contact.
Robyn takes control of the discussion.	Robyn asks, "What about friends? Met anyone in class?"	"Oh, everything's fine there."	Jasmine shrugs again and looks at the wall over Robyn's shoulder.

Once you've seen a few examples of the target behavior, including the antecedents and consequences, you can begin to develop hypotheses about its function and ways to intervene.

In the preceding example, Jasmine's target behavior is self-reported sadness. The context is the counseling session, her history of dropping out of school, and her negative views of herself and others. The therapist's questions about Jasmine's art classes evoke open, positive responses; however, questions about social interactions lead to small but detectable change in Jasmine's voice, speech patterns, and body language. Behavioral patterns seen in session offer clues as to how young people operate out in the world. These clues are worth testing.

Our suggested DNA-V plan would be to test whether Jasmine has a pattern of avoiding physical sensations or emotions evoked by social connection or lack thereof. Robyn could begin in session by asking Jasmine to pause and connect with her body whenever she sees this pattern arise. Robyn can then teach broadening using the AND practice or mindful breathing exercises. She can also model noticing and emotional acceptance in her own body. ("You know, when you

talk about your friends, I feel confused and I notice a heaviness. It seems like sadness is in me too.”) Robyn could then encourage Jasmine to generalize this small sequence outside their sessions. In this way, in-session behavior offers a glimpse of how young people may interact with their world. This can provide a foundation and understanding for effecting change.

Looking for antecedent stimulus control is simply looking for patterns and then testing hypotheses to find useful places to create change. When we see behaviors that limit young people’s lives or leave them rigid or stuck, we help them develop DNA-V skills to broaden their responses. The best way to do this is during the moments when you’re interacting with them.

Tip 8. Focus on Broadening and Building

Our next task is to reinforce behavior that will bring greater vitality or valued living. When working with young people, the key question we need to ask ourselves is whether their behavioral repertoire is useful. That is, are they stuck in patterns of unhelpful thinking and behavior? If the answer is yes, our job is to help them to behave in new ways and reinforce this whenever we see it.

We can link this to DNA skills in the following ways:

- Discoverer skills involve broadening our repertoires of behavior through trial and error exploration. We test new behaviors in the physical world in order to develop strengths, improve resources such as social support, and create meaning and value.
- Noticer skills involve expanding the ways in which we react to our own inner experience. Young people often start out with a narrow way of responding to their physical sensations and emotions, reacting to them with impulsive behavior or destructive avoidance strategies. Noticing skills help them respond and relate to their inner experience in new ways, allowing emotions to just be, without reacting to them. In the process, they discover that emotions come and go with time, are a valuable source of information, and aren’t toxic.
- Advisor skills involve developing rules of thumb that aid exploration. For example, we might teach young people rules such as “If one thing doesn’t work, try something else” and “If you always do what you’ve always done, you’ll always get what you’ve always got.” Advisor skills also include unhooking

from unhelpful, narrowing rules, such as “I must have everything figured out before I can act” or “Nobody can be trusted.”

Below is a sample from Jasmine’s history at the beginning of the chapter in which, we’ve labeled each response as broadening or narrowing. Broadening means she’s responding in new ways to her feelings or her situation. Narrowing means she’s shutting down the possibility of something new.

Robyn is mindful not to grill Jasmine with questions, yet she has to find a way to soften her hard protective exterior and connect with her [expanding]. After a while, she asks Jasmine about her brother, and for the first time there’s a flicker of change in Jasmine’s expression—just a hint of sadness, and then she puts her tough mask back on [narrowing]... Robyn takes a deep breath and says, “I’d like to know what your brother was like” [attempted broadening].

Jasmine shrugs. “We don’t talk about him much. Everyone gets too upset” [narrowing].

“Okay. Families do that a lot,” Robyn responds, then asks, “What was he like? Do you have any memories of being with him or things you did together?” [shaping broadening].

Jasmine nods and, after some gentle guidance from Robyn, she cautiously begins to speak of a time when they were in their backyard shed [broadening].

Robyn offers more encouragement, saying, “Help me to see it like I was just standing there watching from a corner of the shed” [shaping and reinforcing further broadening].

In this small sample, you can see that Robyn is working on opening up Jasmine’s ability to relate to her painful memories in new ways. She’s attempting to shape Jasmine’s behavior of talking about her brother, reinforcing her response to her memories so they become linked to values. She’s trying to give Jasmine her memories back. These kinds of interactions are like a dance between you and those you work with, and they afford endless opportunities to help young people expand the way they respond to themselves and their world.

Our Eight Tips for Becoming a DNA-V Expert

1. Begin with a DNA-V case conceptualization.
2. Appreciate young people and their ability to adapt.
3. Start wherever you can create some space.

4. Do DNA-V, don't talk DNA-V.
5. Become a function spotter.
6. Learn how to undermine the traps of language.
7. Let antecedent stimulus control be your window into a hidden world.
8. Focus on broadening and building.

Conclusion

We can't leave young people's development to chance. We can't expect that the adults around them will always care about them and show them love. We can't simply send them to school and expect that they'll know how to build friendships and handle bullies. We can't assume that young people will automatically look beyond materialism and discover what's genuinely of value to them. What we can do is create contexts that protect and nurture our young people. You, dear reader, and we are part of those contexts. Together, we can change the future, by helping young people in the present moment to thrive.

Appendix

List of Downloadable Materials

For downloadable audio recordings:

www.thrivingadolescent.com/audiorecordings

For downloadable video recordings:

www.thrivingadolescent.com/videorecordings

For downloadable drawings and images:

www.thrivingadolescent.com/creativeartwork

Worksheets and printable resources from this book:

DNA-V Case Conceptualization Worksheet

Values Exercise 1: Converse and Appreciate—Conversation Cards

Discoverer Exercise 1: Tracking Workability—How Did It Go? Worksheet

Discoverer Exercise 2: The Advisor vs. the Discoverer—The DNA-V of Your Life Worksheet

Discoverer Exercise 3: Making Your Life About Values—My Valued Journey Worksheet

Discoverer Exercise 4: Strength Spotting Card Sort—Strengths Cards

Values Exercise 2: Values Card Sort—Values Cards

Self-as-Advisor Exercise 1: How Do You View Your Self?—Is Change Possible?

Self-as-Advisor Exercise 1B: How Do You View Your Self?—Stepping from a Fixed Self-View to a Flexible Self-View

Self-as-Noticer Exercise 1: A Cup Full of Words—Who Are You?

Self-as-Discoverer Exercise 1: Seeing Yourself as Changing and Growing—Strengthening My Self-View

Self-Compassion Exercise 3: The Elements of Self-Compassion— Self-Compassion Quiz

Self-Compassion Exercise 6: Becoming a Friend to Yourself— Becoming a Friend to Yourself

Social Networks Exercise 2: Building a Cooperative, Effective Group— The DNA-V Disk for Groups

Social Networks Exercise 2: Building a Cooperative, Effective Group—Creating a Strong Group

Social Networks Exercise 2: Building a Cooperative, Effective Group— Group Goal-Setting worksheet

Social Networks Exercise 3: Discovering the Value of Kindness— Weekly Acts of Kindness

Examples of Skilled and Unskilled DNA-V Behavior Table

Links Between DNA-V and the C-ABC Model of Behavior Table

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