

## SKEWING THE FRAME

WHAT'S WITH THESE SOUND BYTES? Typical statements made by parents, social workers, teachers in response to the behaviors of children.

Text: "We have to do something!"

Subtext: "I'm afraid. I don't know what to do. I will look bad if I don't do something."

Source: Culture in which action has more value than analysis.

Effect: Act before you think it through. At least, you will feel better.

Better response: "How can we figure out what is the best thing to do?"

Text: "He needs intensive one-on-one individual counseling", or, "He needs to see the psychiatrist", or, "He needs a psych eval".

Subtext: "He has a severe problem. Somebody needs to help him."

Source: Culture of dependence on specialists with technical solutions, quick and easy solutions, and "silver bullets".

Effect: Shift responsibility for the problem to the "expert".

Better response: "What is our role? What are the drawbacks of using an expert?"

Text: "He needs an intensive evaluation."

Subtext: "Get him out of here. I can't deal with this anymore."

Source: Culture of there's a fix-it shop somewhere.

Effect: Send him to the hospital.

Better response: "Do we have a crisis plan? Are we following it?"

Text: "Safety first."

Subtext: "I don't want to take responsibility for this problem."

Source: Culture of no tolerance for taking risks.

Effect: Over reactions involve use of force and an increase in "false-positives".

Better response: "What is the danger? Can we find a way to manage it?"

Text: "The county needs to do something."

Subtext: "Then he can be placed in foster care."

Source: Culture in which people blame the parents for the child's behavior problem, even when they don't know the situation at home.

Effect: Alienation of the parents, or frustration with the county department.

Better response: "What can we do collectively to address these needs?"

Text: "He needs to work through his feelings."  
Subtext: "This will take a long time."  
Source: Belief that feelings are always the issue, and that psychotherapy has to be in-depth to be effective.  
Effect: Miss what can be done to change the structure in the child's life right now.  
Better response: "What other options do we have to address these needs?"

Text: "He needs treatment."  
Subtext: "Refer him to somebody who does this."  
Source: Culture of mental health black boxes and belief in technical solutions.  
Effect: Nobody has the same understanding of what happens in "treatment".  
Better response: "Let's talk about needs and how these will be addressed."

Text: In the middle of a discussion that is getting intense, someone says: "I'm just trying to be fair."  
Subtext: "I disagree with your opinion."  
Source: Attempt to guilt trip or shame your antagonist.  
Effect: Sets up pattern of distrust.  
Better response: "We disagree on this and how can we resolve it?"

Text: "He needs to take some responsibility."  
Subtext: "He deserves nothing from us."  
Source: Culture of judging people morally.  
Effect: Alienation, anger, continued failure.  
Better response: "How are we all responsible for this?"

Text: In response to a child having a problem: "Have you taken your pills today?"  
Subtext: "You can't control yourself."  
Source: Belief that all misbehavior is the result of medical pathology.  
Effect: Relieves the individual of developing responsibility for his actions.  
Better response: "What happened so you did this?"