

DIDACTIC PRESENTATION

Managing Challenging Behaviors

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[Recording](#)

[Presentation Slides](#)

CASE SUMMARY

In summary this is the complicated case of a 14 yo white 9th grade male who grew up out of state under his mother's care until he reached 5th grade and the father obtained emergency custody. He came onto the radar early in the year because he was failing all his courses. He is very detached around adults, will not converse and avoids eye contact.

KEY QUESTION

- How do we build relationships with this student without making him so uncomfortable that he shuts down?
- How do we engage this student in academics?

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS - Communication & Engagement

The fact that he's showing up is huge! Getting him connected to counseling and MaineCare are major accomplishments. The progress, even if it feels rather slow by your perspective is very encouraging. The behaviors he's exhibiting are totally in line with his history and an attribute of the trauma laden brain.

- His coming in to meet says so much, but he may not know how to engage. Find out if he has one adult that he can trust. Perhaps he can be connected with a youngish male mentor <https://www.somebiggs.org/>.
- Help him to understand what he can get out of engaging in services and try to get him to articulate what he wants.
- Counter the betrayal and lack of feeling like he mattered growing up by planting seeds with words of affirmation and repeatedly noting any positive aspects.
- Continue to offer empowering, non-language-based activities during your sessions, like sand therapy, Legos, or saying you need help fixing something.
- Limit options for a student who may be dealing with the effects of trauma (fight/flight/freeze). Rather than giving him the choice, maybe he would be more receptive if you just said "today we are going to play (whatever game - UNO, Battleship, etc.). If he does not respond to games, take him out into nature; say, "we are going for a walk to ____".
- Motivational Interviewing can be an effective tool to use with youth who have decision-making challenges. [School-Based Motivational Interviewing: Promoting Student Success One Conversation at a Time \(nasponline.org\)](https://www.nasponline.org/)
- Sometimes hidden issues, such as this student's gender identity, may be impacting their behavior. Do not ignore the fact that he mentioned being bisexual and be wary of pathologizing.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS - Academics

Leverage Peers: Since he has a much better connection with classmates and doesn't work as well with adults, perhaps he would work better one on one with another classmate to solve math problems, work through other classwork, or even teach younger, or other students about basketball 1:1.

Learn more about trauma impact on student's learning abilities. Address the trauma for this child in conjunction with addressing his academics. <https://www.nctsn.org/trauma-informed-care/creating-trauma-informed-systems/schools>

The potential substance exposure in utero may necessitate further assessments for cognitive functioning. Also consider assessments for psychological functioning, learning style and learning challenges.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS – Parental Support

It is important to check in with the caregiver to see how he is coregulating. Refer Dad to programs in the community for support and to understand his child's trauma.

- <https://gearparentnetwork.org/>
- <https://www.namimaine.org/>

Other Resources: a podcast called "[Conversations in Compassion](#)" which may help bring to the surface what inspires and motivates him.

PLEASE NOTE: *The recommendations in this document rely on the information provided during the relevant Project ECHO case consultation. Recommendations are provided to assist case presenters make decisions and may not be appropriate in all cases. Project ECHO® case consultations do not create or otherwise establish a provider-patient relationship between any MPBHP clinician and any patient whose case is being presented in a Project ECHO setting.*