

WORKING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE



SOME INITIAL MUSINGS

- This training has been about working with adults: approximately 21 and over
- This conversation is about sharing some distinctions when it comes to working with and understanding young people who are approximately 14-21 years old
- We will not be talking about kids below this age group as it is highly specialized to work with such population and beyond our scope
- With that said, working with teenagers is also more specialized and it is not advisable to work with them in a professional or intensive way without prior or further specialized training
- And, as a coach, it's good to know some useful distinctions for this age group...

WORKING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

- Assume you can do some useful and important work with them
- Assume you cannot “fix” or take away a young person’s pain, or their eating challenge
- Young people are on a journey
- Your insistence on fixing them and making it all better and making their eating challenge go away is an ineffective approach that will leave them feeling more broken and confused
- Of course we want them out of pain and suffering
- And they must go through their journey, whatever that may be for them...

WORKING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

- Please remember:
- Our teenage years have turmoil and challenge
- There is so much self definition wanting to happen
- There is inner chaos
- There are the struggles of “fitting in” with friends and peers
- Young people by definition have not found themselves yet, found their core, their center, their quiet place, their sense of self authority and true confidence. That’s just the way it is
- From this place, and given the toxic programming of media and culture, food and body challenges are predictable

WORKING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

- Young people are learning to grow through their insecurities
- They often need to experience some “extremes” to learn about life
- Allow them their journey
- Allow them their rocky emotional world
- Of course we are here to support them
- But you cannot “rescue” them
- You cannot save them from hurt and upset
- We must be able to see the big picture of their journey...

WORKING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

- **Here's some ways we can be of help:**
- Young people need positive regard
- They need adults who get them
- They need allies
- They need mentors
- They need lots of approval
- They need to feel loved
- They need you to see them
- They need you to pierce through their veil and connect with them on their terms, not yours

WORKING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

SOME THINGS TO CONSIDER WITH TEENS AND EARLY 20'S:

- They are way better actors than you are
- They won't necessarily tell you everything
- They may be feeling lots of shame
- Even though they need help and guidance, they won't necessarily know how to receive it or let it in
- So your wish to help them, though noble, is inherently difficult to put into action



ONE OF THE GREAT WAYS TO HELP YOUNG PEOPLE

- Have young people who are close in age group to them be their mentors
- Young people will more easily relate with someone nearer to them in age
- That's just the way it is...
- They will eagerly listen to someone young who has gone through the journey they are going through...
- This can be a huge win for them
- So, it's a great idea to find and identify such a mentor, or someone they can have a conversation or two with...

FOR PROFESSIONALS ALREADY IN THIS REALM

- Before working with a young person, please consider that your initial work with them happens with their parents
- In other words, meet with the parents first, without their child
- You may need to work with the parents for several sessions
- You may also wish to gather information, if possible, from their teachers or friends or others who know them well...
- Your work with the parents is key
- Here's why:

WORKING WITH THE PARENTS

- Many parents want a professional to “fix” their child
- It’s like bringing in a broken car to a mechanic - here, fix this...
- Parents don’t always realize that they may have a role to play in their child’s unwanted challenges
- They can even be closed to this idea
- The more you can understand about the parents themselves - who they are, their work life, the health of the parent’s relationship, the problems they face, how they view parenting and their child, what they think “the problem” is - the more you can truly be of service to the young person
- I always like to assume that 50% of the work that needs to be done is strictly about the parents, not the young person...

WORKING WITH THE PARENTS

- It's helpful to assume that your young client is the product of their family environment, and they have their own journey within it
- It's not about blaming the parents, even though so many young people have very difficult challenges at home...
- If a parent expects you to fix their child, you'll need to do a gentle and sweet intellectual intervention at some point around this being something that the family needs to heal into, not just the young person
- Working with parents in an ongoing way is often as important as working with the child...

ONCE YOU'RE WORKING WITH A YOUNG PERSON

BE WILLING TO BE THEIR CONFIDANT:

- Promise them confidentiality
- Let them know you are on their side
- Let them know you will be loyal to them
- Be very clear that you are your young client's advocate
- This is so big for creating trust and doing good work
- You need to have an agreement with parents and their child around what kind of information can flow back and forth...



WORKING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

BE WILLING TO DO THINGS A LITTLE DIFFERENT:

- Meet your younger client outside for a walk
- Go to a cool hangout or coffee shop - pay for them
- Find an environment where they would feel most comfortable
- In other words, sitting in a professional environment and being a talking head is not so effective...



THE INNER WORLD OF TEENS

- They often have very few, if any worthy role models
- They might be lacking in trustable authority figures
- They can often feel very very alone
- They want to feel accepted
- They are very susceptible to peer pressure
- They can often make foolish choices if they think they will win friends, love or approval
- There's a lot that they simply don't want you to know...

THE INNER WORLD OF TEENS

- **They often have secrets:**
- Drug use
- Sex without parental approval
- Bulimia
- Binge eating
- Body hate
- Stealing
- Heartbreak
- Sexual abuse or confusion: at home, school, parties, friends...
- Suicidal thoughts

WORKING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

Hint: Oftentimes, the way you relate with teenagers or any young person is the way you relate with your own inner teenager. The way you see them or feel around them is a reflection of where you felt unseen and unmet and how you believed the world saw you when you were that age...



WORKING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

WHEN TALKING TO YOUR YOUNGER CLIENT:

- Please don't talk "down" to them
- Never underestimate their intelligence
- In fact, assume they are as smart as you, if not more so. They are simply younger than you
- See them as equal to you as a soul
- You can speak to the adult in them
- And speak to the young person in them who is hungry to be seen...



WORKING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

THE WORLD NEEDS TO HEAL ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUTH:

- We often don't trust them
- We throw them to the wolves
- We don't track them
- We're often afraid of their energy
- We think they're "dangerous"
- We forget that we were once "them"



WORKING WITH GIRLS: SOME MUSINGS

- They can be profoundly susceptible to viral beliefs about food & body
- They are in a psychically vulnerable time in life
- We often fail to protect them - indeed it is difficult to protect them
- Young girls are easily overpowered by the collective momentum of dieting, disordered eating and perfectionism
- We must remember that disordered eating is not their fault or their problem - the problem belongs to the world - family, culture, religion, humanity - and it personalizes in our young people
- Remember: in this life stage, princesses especially need outside words of praise and approval...

WORKING WITH GIRLS: SOME MUSINGS

- Young women are so often expressing the pain and challenge of the Feminine as it currently stands on planet earth
- Young women tend to mature faster than their male peers. This can cause them to play down their needs, their maturity, their inner knowing
- For parents: they need to hear constant praise and affirmation about beauty and lovability from day one. Constancy and consistency is key here. We are doing our best to balance out the overpowering negative memes and message and images of the world that would easily overwhelm them and pull them into poor self image and self loathing

WORKING WITH GIRLS: SOME MUSINGS

MANY YOUNG WOMEN:

- Are very open and interested to learn about nutrition
- Are enlivened by healthy eating and cooking
- Are ready to have a good resource for healthy eating
- Enjoy hands on learning
- They need to be taught in an inspiring way...



GIRLS & EATING CHALLENGES: WHAT TO DO?

- Play a long game - it may take years
- Love them through it
- Let go of fixing and believing they are broken
- Lots of talk...
- This too shall pass
- Well timed intellectual interventions
- Encourage any kind of good peer support and conscious community
- "This is here to help you grow..."
- Identify their areas in life of pain and concern...

FOR GIRLS: AREAS OF PAIN & CONCERN

- Fitting in with peers
- Boys
- Toxic beliefs about appearance
- Problems at home
- Individuating from parents
- Finding sexual identity
- Sexual abuse and hurt
- Lack of love, not feeling seen

WORKING WITH GIRLS

AN IMPORTANT TOOL, STRATEGY & GIFT:

Let your young woman client know, with your eyes, words, energy, emotion, and your whole being - that you see them, feel them, and know how hard it is for them. Let them know you get them, and get their world. They are not alone...



SOME DIRECT STRATEGIES FOR GIRLS

- Help them create a good peer support system
- Help them better manage their social world when it comes to friends who encourage disordered eating
- Support them in finding creative outlets that inspire them
- Eating rhythm
- Macronutrient balance
- Slow eating
- Ritualized binge
- Intellectual interventions around calorie restriction
- Encourage authentic communication, big time...

WORKING WITH GIRLS: SOME MUSINGS

If you are a woman working with a young woman client, use their challenges as an inspiration to get where you need to be with food and body a little faster. They need you to heal. The sooner you heal, the sooner they heal...



MUSINGS ON YOUNG PEOPLE & WEIGHT LOSS

- If truly overweight, it's likely that they eat from the junk food universe
- They are often "rebellious" by gaining weight
- They are often crying out for help by gaining weight
- Their extra weight may simply be the total combined stress of being a young person in this world
- Their extra weight can be related to sexual fear or wounding
- Their physiology is likely more responsive and sensitive to sugar
- Overweight young people generally live in a version of social hell

MUSINGS ON YOUNG PEOPLE & WEIGHT LOSS

- Restrictive and punishing strategies are futile and not sustainable
- Blaming them for bad habits is generally unproductive
- They are a product of their environment
- As with adults, each young person must be seen as extremely unique in terms of why they have gained extra weight and how to unwind it
- All the same key nutrition strategies for weight that apply to adults apply to teens: food quality, macronutrient balance, meal timing, use of caffeine & sugar
- Young people who are eating excessive amounts of food are using food to regulate their emotional metabolism

MUSINGS ON YOUNG PEOPLE & WEIGHT LOSS

- Always make them right - they often have extra weight for good reasons - and those reasons are often linked to their personal world
- See if you can discover any of those reasons. And if you do, you can actually let them know about it and make the connections for them. Some part of them will hear it. Affirm that they have created a very reasonable strategy by gaining weight. And there are other alternative choices they can make if they want
- Please know that you can only help them if they wish to be helped...
- It might not be their time yet...
- Or maybe they are ready, but afraid...

MUSINGS ON YOUNG PEOPLE & WEIGHT LOSS

- If you work with kids in the ages of approximately 14 - 21, your job is to be positive, a light, upbeat and approachable. Seriousness will not work so well...
- Kids are not interested in your "clinician" or "nutritionist" or "therapist" archetypes. Be real, be authentic, be casually hopeful and optimistic, be someone who knows how to assist them if they want help
- Young people like easy-to-understand scientific & nutritional mind cookies that will pertain to them and empower them
- Dramatically limiting food amount and caloric intake is a recipe for failure. Kids will need to feel they are eating "enough" food
- Higher fat, higher protein, lower carb & sugar is a great strategy
- Slower eating is also a helpful practice - but you have to explain the simple science as to how it will help them

FINAL MUSINGS

- Working with young people is not so easy when it comes to unwanted eating challenges and excess weight
- The professional universe has traditionally treated them as broken and in need of fixing. This makes things far worse for the young person
- When in doubt, love them through it all
- Do your best to find a peer for them who can offer words of encouragement and advice and support...
- Young people have a journey to go on. Sometimes, the best we can do is be by their side and watch for all the little ways we can help them as they search for their identity and find a place in the world...

WORKING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

THIS IS THE END OF
Working With Young People

PLEASE GO TO:
Timeless Wisdom & Professional Practice

