

EYES WIDE OPEN DISCUSSIONS

APPENDIX D

GOAL:

It is essential to help everyone on our team know what they're getting into. Think of this as our team's introduction to basic "due process" or "contract law." In other words, if we truly want to be compassionate teammates, we should be honest and transparent from the outset about our situations. When we inform everybody what they're in for, this allows them time to think constructively about the situation and decide whether they're up for it (or not).

STEPS:

Step 1: Establish a clear vision with the team.

- Most of the student situations you and your team will encounter (if you're reading this book, anyway) will involve: Severe noncompliance, aggression, chronic disruption, elopement (aka running away), and avoidance.
- It is critical to take some time and think about the best possible outcome for the student and the team (refer to the Prospection section in Chapter 5 on those steps).
- Simply share the prospective vision you have for the student and the team. Remember: Don't share it if you don't believe it. We are not in the "B.S." business. We're in the optimism business, and we need to believe in the visions we share.

Step 2: Rewrite any unwritten contracts.

Most of us sign a basic contract of employment. Rarely (if ever) do these contracts inform us of all the occupational hazards of working with children exhibiting aggressive and/or dangerous behavior. Those hazards typically fall under "unwritten" or "invisible contracts." As such, we must work to rewrite these unwritten contracts to help our team.

- When behaviors like severe noncompliance, aggression, chronic disruption, elopement (aka running away), and avoidance are in play, there's a good chance you and your staff may be exposed to the following:
 - Slaps
 - Hits

- Kicks
- Spits
- Yelling
- Running
- Pinching
- Grabbing
- Scratching
- Biting
- Choking
- Property destruction
- Take a moment to visit as a team (and even individually) to discuss the overall comfort level with (a) the vision and (b) the safety measures of the plan (see Appendix E for safety protocols). Discuss transparently what it may take and what the team may be exposed to. Be prepared to hear from a teammate (or two) requesting a transfer. If teammates are open to helping but unsatisfied with safety measures, simply work with them to establish a consensus about safety.
- PRO-TIP: It's a good idea to include your building administrator on this step. As far as public schools go, the building administrator should be aware of (a) what your team is facing, and (b) how some employees may (or may not) be uncomfortable with it.

Step 3: Build team relationships by supporting one another.

If you are fortunate enough to have a team sign on for all the good, bad, and ugly of working with challenging student situations, it's important to celebrate them. Rapid rapport-building is essential—and simple! Simply take the time to take the time. It's the little things that matter here. Get to know each other's interests away from work. Attempt to learn birthdays, favorite snacks, etc. We don't have to become best-of-friends, but we do owe it to each other to care for each other. It's a jungle out there, like, for real.

REMEMBER:

This step is all about the conversation. We just want our teammates to know and understand what we'll be facing together. We don't want to sugarcoat anything, but we also don't want to scare them off. We want to be optimistic, and that starts with our belief (and subsequent vision) for the situation.