

*The*  
STRESSED  
YEARS *of*  
THEIR LIVES



*Helping Your Kid  
Survive and Thrive During  
Their College Years*

B. JANET HIBBS, PH.D. &  
ANTHONY ROSTAIN, M.D.

# Stress and Resilience in Adolescence: Building Healthy Minds for Life's Transitions

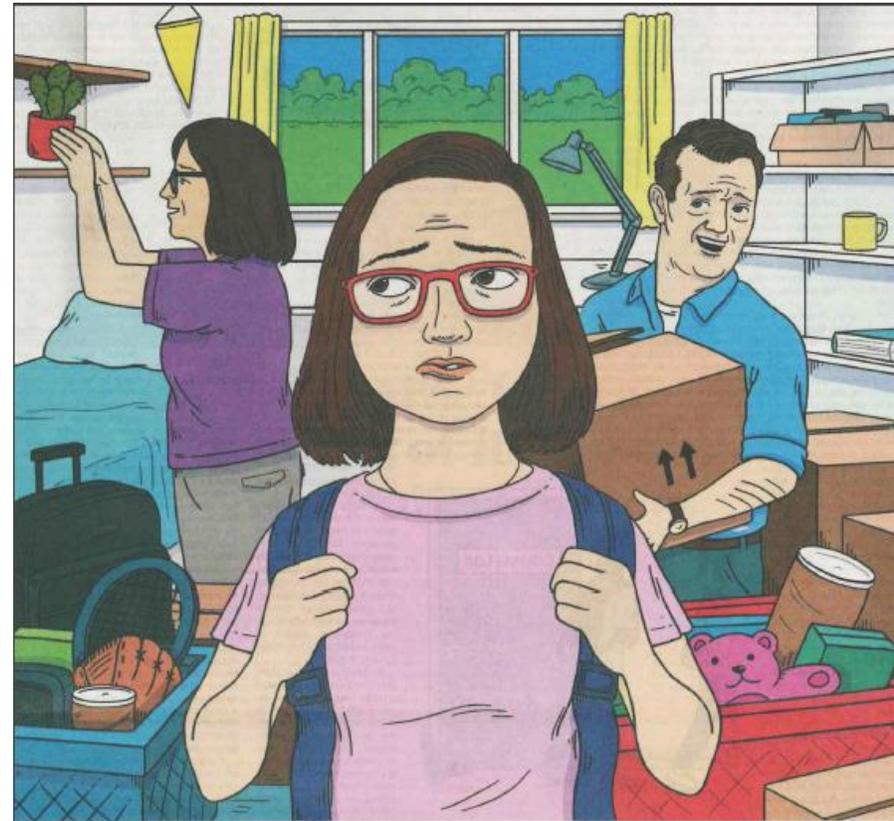
Anthony L. Rostain, M.D., M.A.

Professor, Psychiatry & Pediatrics

University of Pennsylvania Perelman School of Medicine

***Annual Meeting, Mental Health Association of New York State  
Nov. 1, 2019***

# Introduction



**A**ugust brings the familiar ritual of parents and soon-to-be college freshmen packing up for move-in day. Amid the final flurry of preparations, there's one task that shouldn't be overlooked: anticipating and discussing the challenges ahead. Despite their academic talents and extracurricular achievements, many teenagers now headed to college lack the emotional maturity for their first real encounter with adult independence.

Parents may feel confident about the transition because their teen has gotten this far; perhaps the family has worked up to navigate the arduous path to success in high school and in the college application process. If the new collegian is headed to a school that's a good fit, the hard part may seem over.

But the ascent from high school to college is filled with new complications, and the more that parents have done along the way to help their teens prepare, the less ready their offspring may be to handle problems without their help. Parents will face a new dynamic in trying to understand from afar whom to intervene and when to hang back. And colleges, whose privacy rules about students' academic and health information can often keep parents in the dark, can't be relied on to step in as watchdogs or caretakers.

As parents of former college students ourselves and as mental health professionals dealing with this age group, we have

## Is Your Child Emotionally Ready For College?

For many students, the transition to adult independence is unexpectedly difficult. Here's how parents can help.  
By Anthony Rostain and B. Janet Hibbs

observed the rising rate of mental illness on campus with growing concern. Both of us have seen young patients with crippling anxiety, depression, bipolar disorder, eating disorders and even incidents of self-harm who have been unable to adapt to the demands of college life.

More than 85% of college students described feeling "overwhelmed," and 51% reported feeling, at some point in the past year that "things were hopeless," according to the American College Health Association's annual survey in 2018. Last year, fully a third of college students received treatment at campus counseling centers, according to the latest annual Health Minds Study, a web-based student survey of 155,000 students from nearly 200 campuses.

What explains the emotional fragility of today's college students? Many factors have contributed to the problem. Family life in the U.S. has come to feel less stable in the face of globalization, the home and job losses of the Great Recession, income insecurity and significant rates of divorce. The 1990s saw the emergence of the internet and, soon

*Please turn to the next page*

*Dr. Rostain is a professor of psychiatry and pediatrics at the Perelman School of Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania. Dr. Hibbs is a marital and family psychologist. They are the authors of "The Stressed Years of Their Lives: Helping Your Kid Survive and Thrive During Their College Years" (St. Martin's Press).*

# Outline

- STRESS & ANXIETY AMONG YOUTH
- DEVELOPMENTAL TASKS OF ADOLESCENCE
- SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL READINESS
- COPING TO MANAGE RISKS
- EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING
- FAMILY ISSUES
- OVERCOMING MINDSET BARRIERS
- SAFETY NETS FOR STUDENTS

# Fault Lines in the World of Today's Youth

## MENTAL HEALTH OF GEN Z

LEAST LIKELY TO SAY THEIR MENTAL HEALTH IS EXCELLENT OR VERY GOOD

STRESS IN AMERICA™  
GENERATION Z

OCTOBER 2018

**Gen Z**

45%

**Millennials**

56%

**Gen Xers**

51%

**Boomers**

70%

**Older Adults**

74%

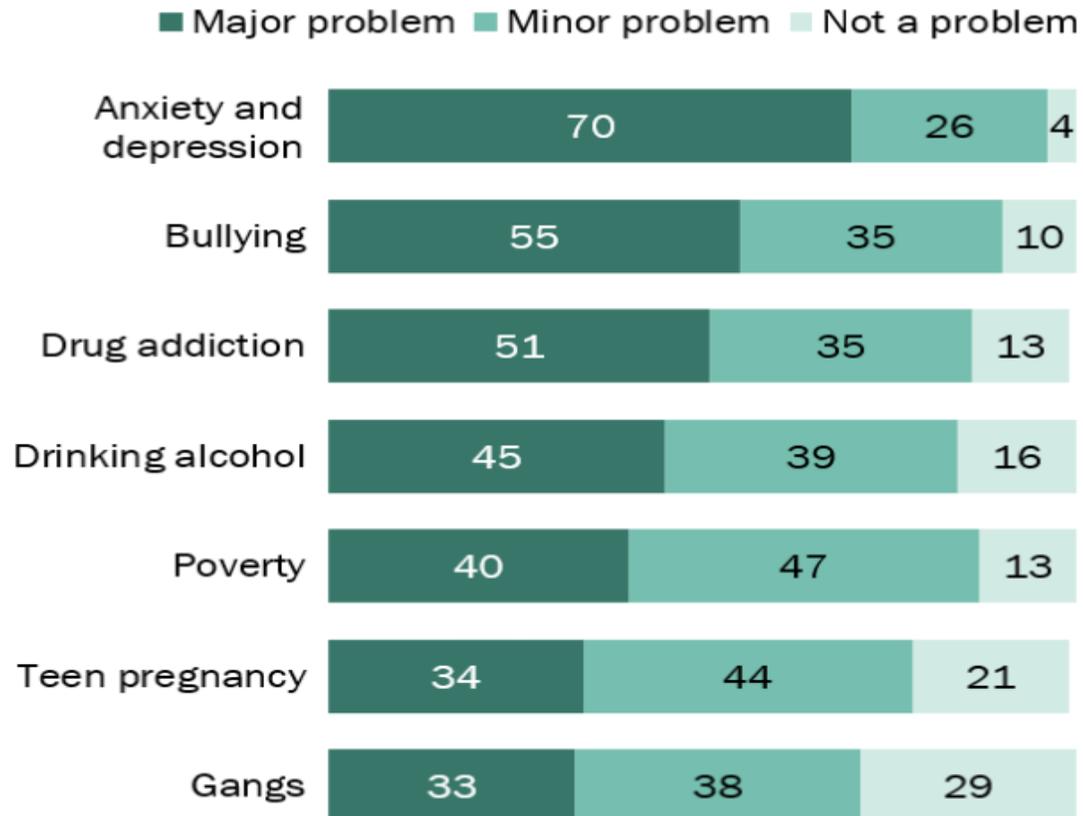
% REPORTING EXCELLENT OR VERY GOOD MENTAL HEALTH

© American Psychological Association

# Fault Lines in the World of Today's Youth

## Anxiety and depression top list of problems teens see among their peers

*% of teens saying each of the following is a \_\_\_\_ among people their age in the community where they live*



## PEW RESEARCH CENTER STUDY

Source: Survey of U.S. teen ages 13-17 conducted Sept. 17 – Nov. 25, 2018

# Sources of Anxiety for Gen Z

- Historical events since turn of the century
  - 9/11 – Afghan and Iraq wars
  - Economic recession of 2008
  - School shootings
- “Globalization” - economic uncertainty & competition
- 24/7 news cycle – continuous media exposure
- Internet and its influences on identity development
- Growing concerns about global warming
- Institutional stresses: schools, colleges, universities

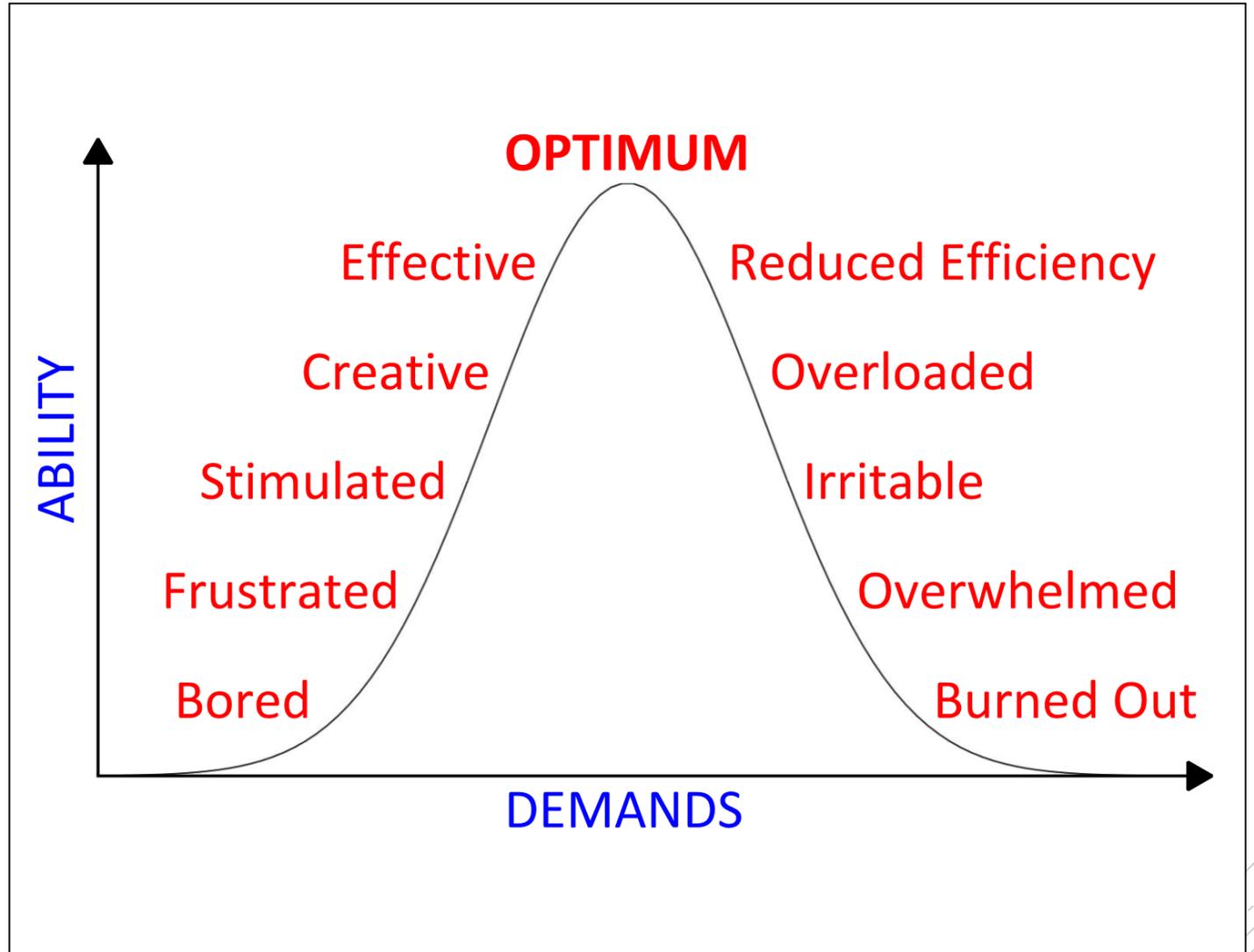
# Anxiety in Modern Life

A civic culture whose  
prominent affect is  
**FEAR**

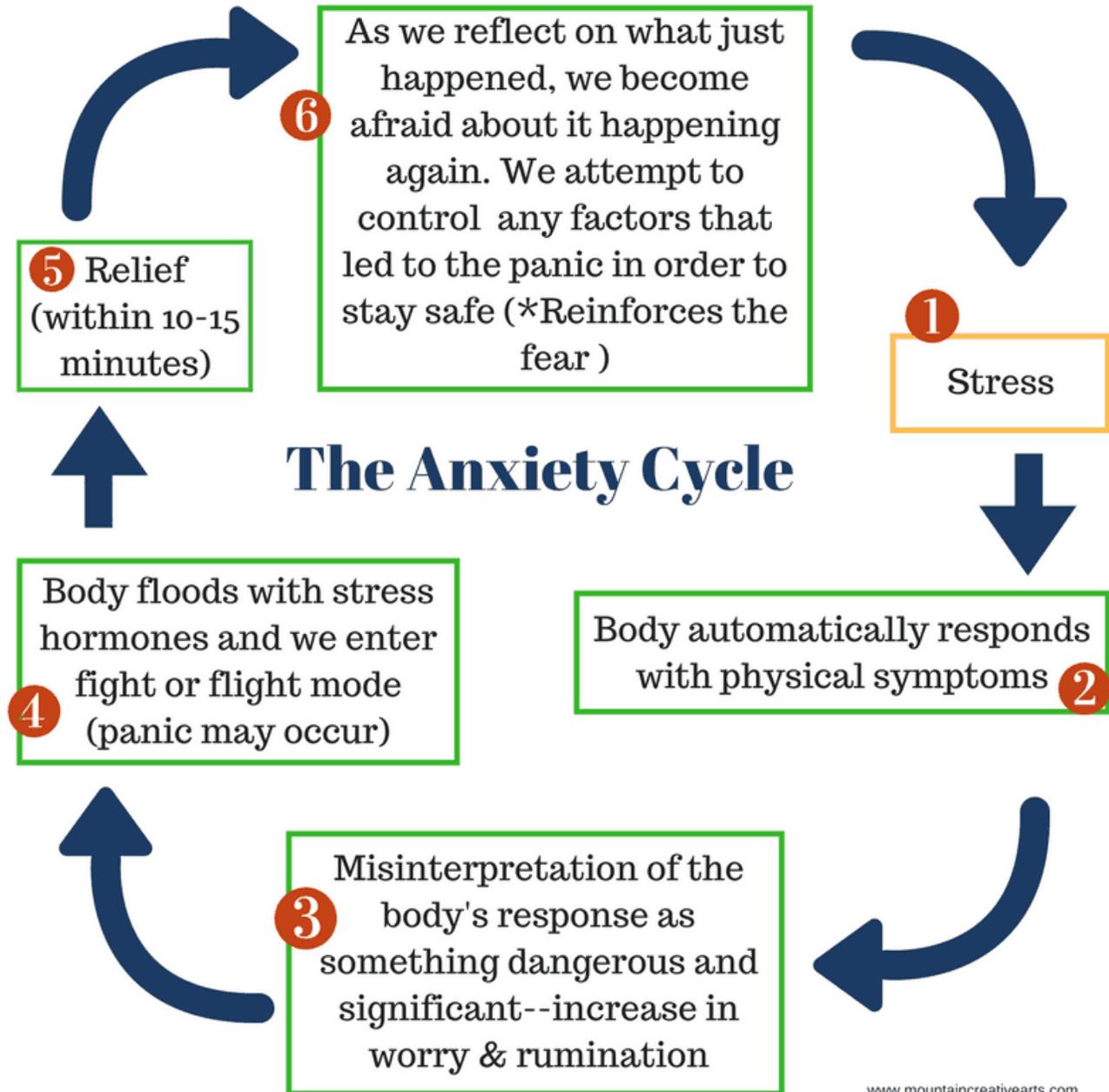
Creates widespread  
**cognitive distortions**  
and promotes  
**excessive anxiety** in  
everyone



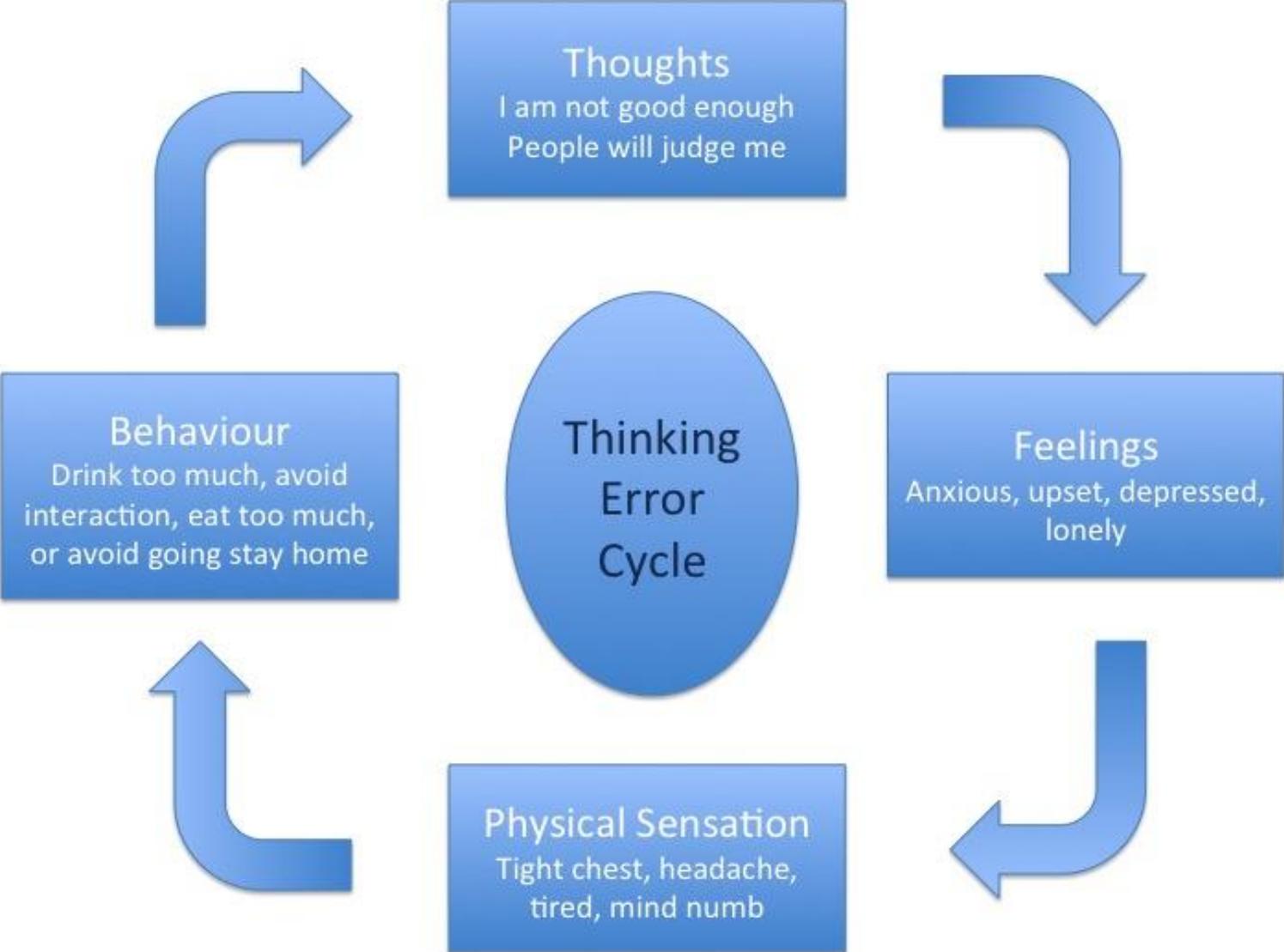
# The Stress Response



# Stress and Anxiety



# Dysfunctional Thinking



# Resiliency

- Resiliency: “The ability to recover strength, spirits, good humor, etc. quickly; buoyancy”
- Reduces the impact of adverse effects of disappointments, setbacks and the curveballs life throws
- Resiliency is not only an individual feature - it is embedded in the contexts of our families, communities and social contexts

# Social Emotional Readiness

- Conscientiousness
- Self Management
- Interpersonal Skills
- Self-control
- “Grit”
- Risk Management
- Self-acceptance
- Open mindset/Help-seeking

# Social Emotional Readiness

## 1) **Conscientiousness** = Owning one's actions

- Saying what you mean – doing what you say – owning up to your mistakes
- Vignette - Alan

# Social Emotional Readiness

**2) Self Management** = Ability to take care of day-to-day activities on one's own

- Waking up on time – preparing for the day – remembering tasks and following through on them – developing a routine – making adjustments as needed – falling asleep at a reasonable time

# Social Emotional Readiness

**3) Interpersonal Skills** = Making & keeping friends - getting along with others – handling conflicts appropriately

- Social skills inventory: friendship circle (clique), social strengths vs vulnerabilities, level of trust and intimacy, ability to handle disagreements, romantic involvements, etc.
- Internet/social media: usage, profile, problems

The background features several sets of concentric, curved lines in shades of gray, some solid and some dashed, creating a sense of motion and depth. A blue rectangular box with a white border and a small white triangle pointing downwards at the bottom center is positioned on the left side of the slide.

## Social Emotional Readiness

**4) Self-control** = Ability to set limits and resist urges/desires

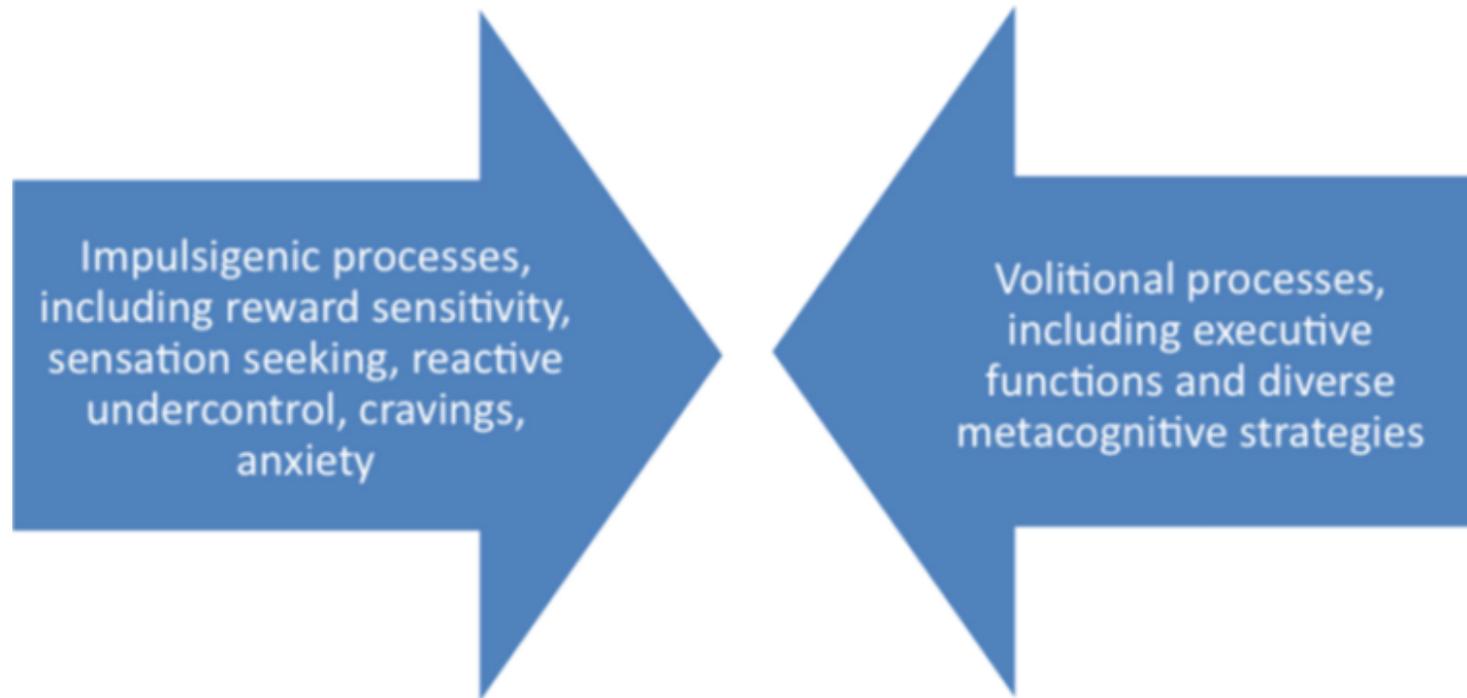
- Marshmallow test

# We value self-control

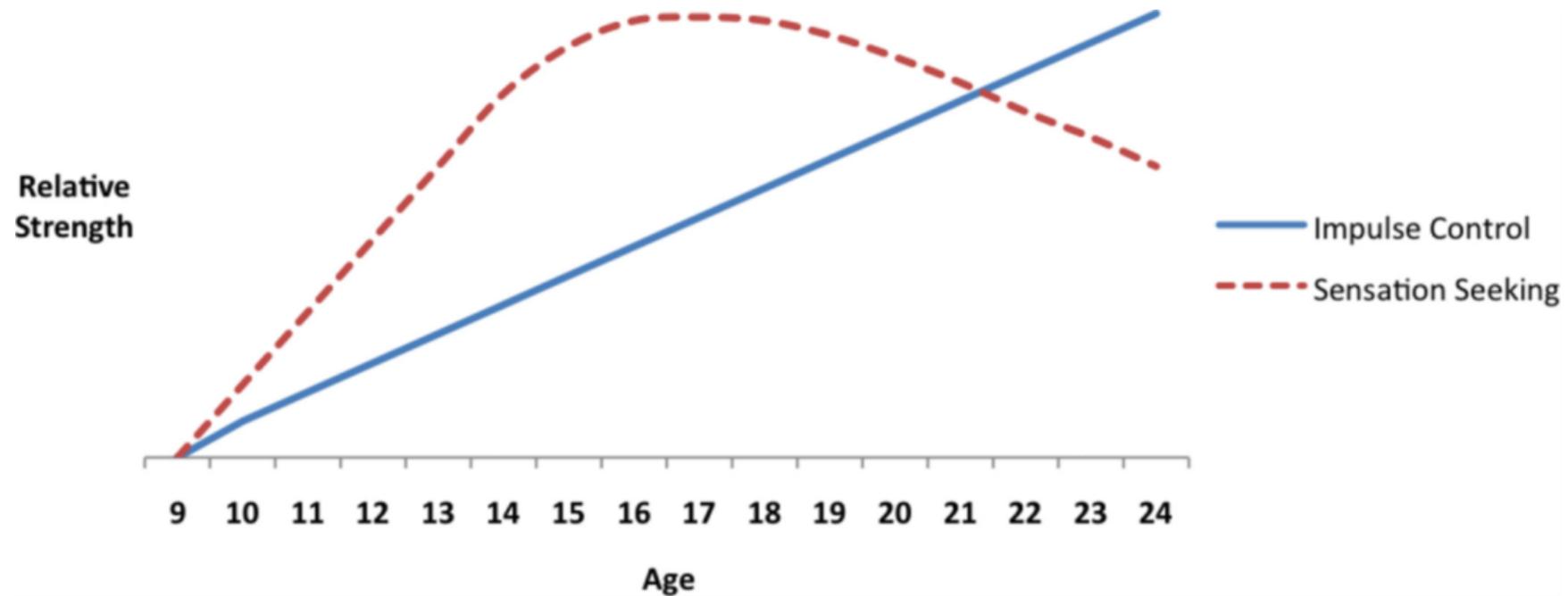


# Self Control Results From the Interaction of Two Processes

“Will power is trying hard *not* to do something that you really want to do”  
*Frog and Toad Together*, A. Lobel, 1979



# Self Control Results From the Interaction of Two Processes



Different developmental trajectories characterize the growth of sensation-seeking and impulse control during adolescence.  
Duckworth and Steinberg (2015) *Child Dev Perspectives*

# Social Emotional Readiness

**4) Self-control** = Ability to set limits and resist urges/desires

- Marshmallow test
- Graded, practical experiences in exercising autonomy
  - Self-limiting time spent on social media/internet
  - Maintaining healthy eating habits
  - Managing sleep-wake cycle

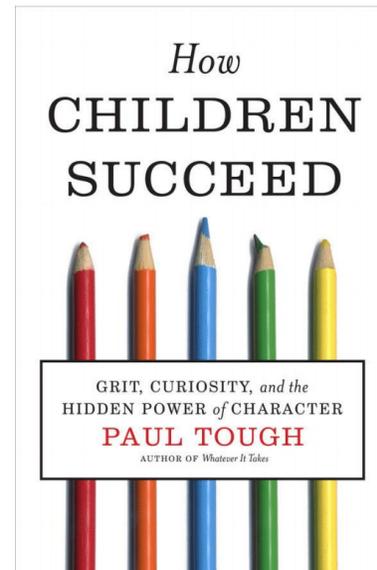
## Social Emotional Readiness

5) **“Grit”** = Ability to cope with frustration, disappointment and failure and to persist in the face of setbacks & obstacles

- Persistence toward goal attainment – motivation in the face of delayed gratification or hardships – key component of resilience – can be fostered via experiential learning

“Grit”

## Recent studies of delayed gratification: “Grit” or persistence and stamina (Duckworth, et al, 2007)

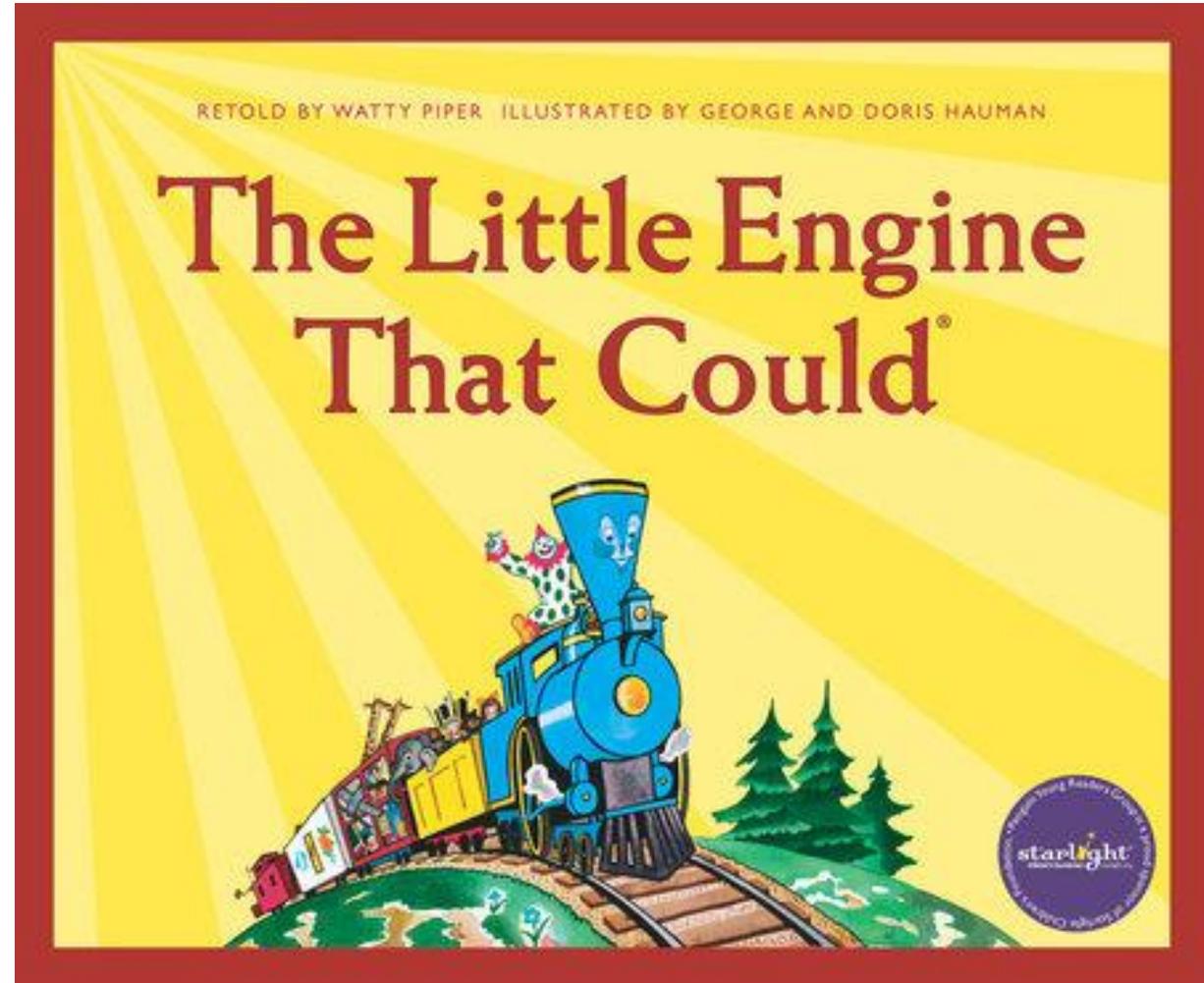


**Key Question:** Why do some individuals achieve more than others of the same intelligence?

**Grit** – “perseverance and passion for long-term goals”

"sticking with things over the very long term until you master them."

“Grit”





**“Perseverance is not a long race; it is many short races one after another.”**

Walter Elliott



**“Perseverance is not a long race; it is many short races one after another.”**

Walter Elliott

# Social Emotional Readiness

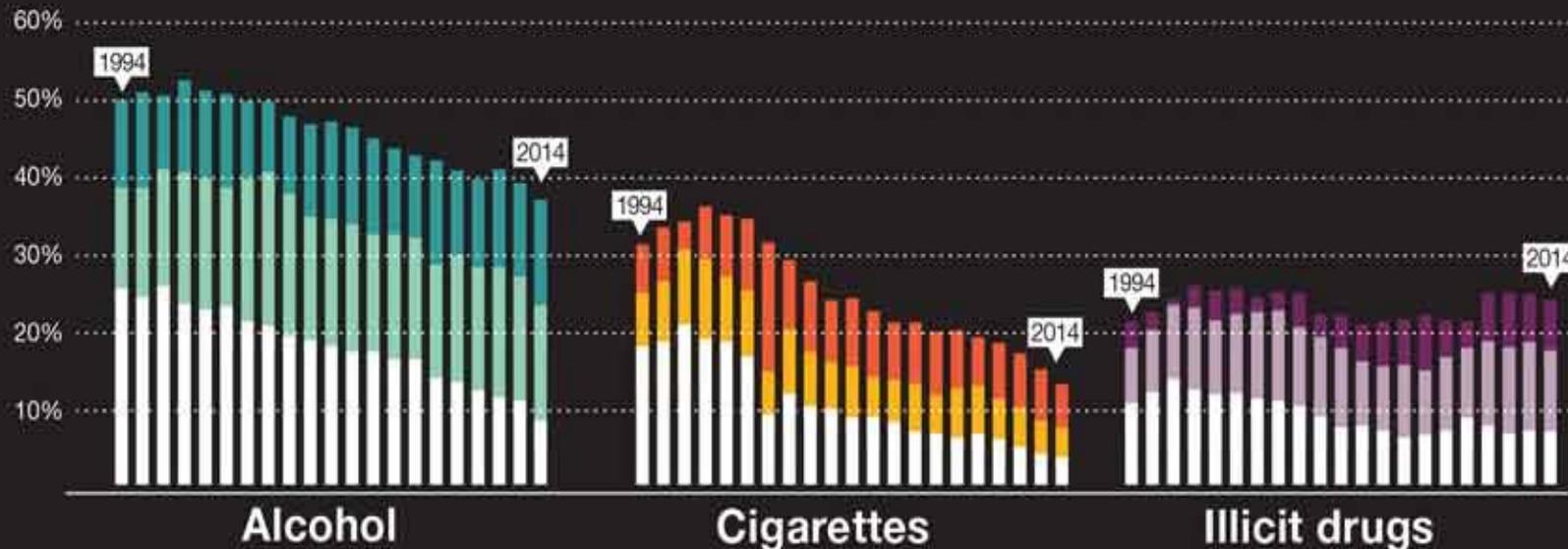


**6) Risk Management** = Ability to have fun without taking too many risks – acceptable versus dangerous experimentation



# LAST TWO DECADES OF ALCOHOL, CIGARETTE, AND ILLICIT DRUG USE\*

\*Past 30 day use.



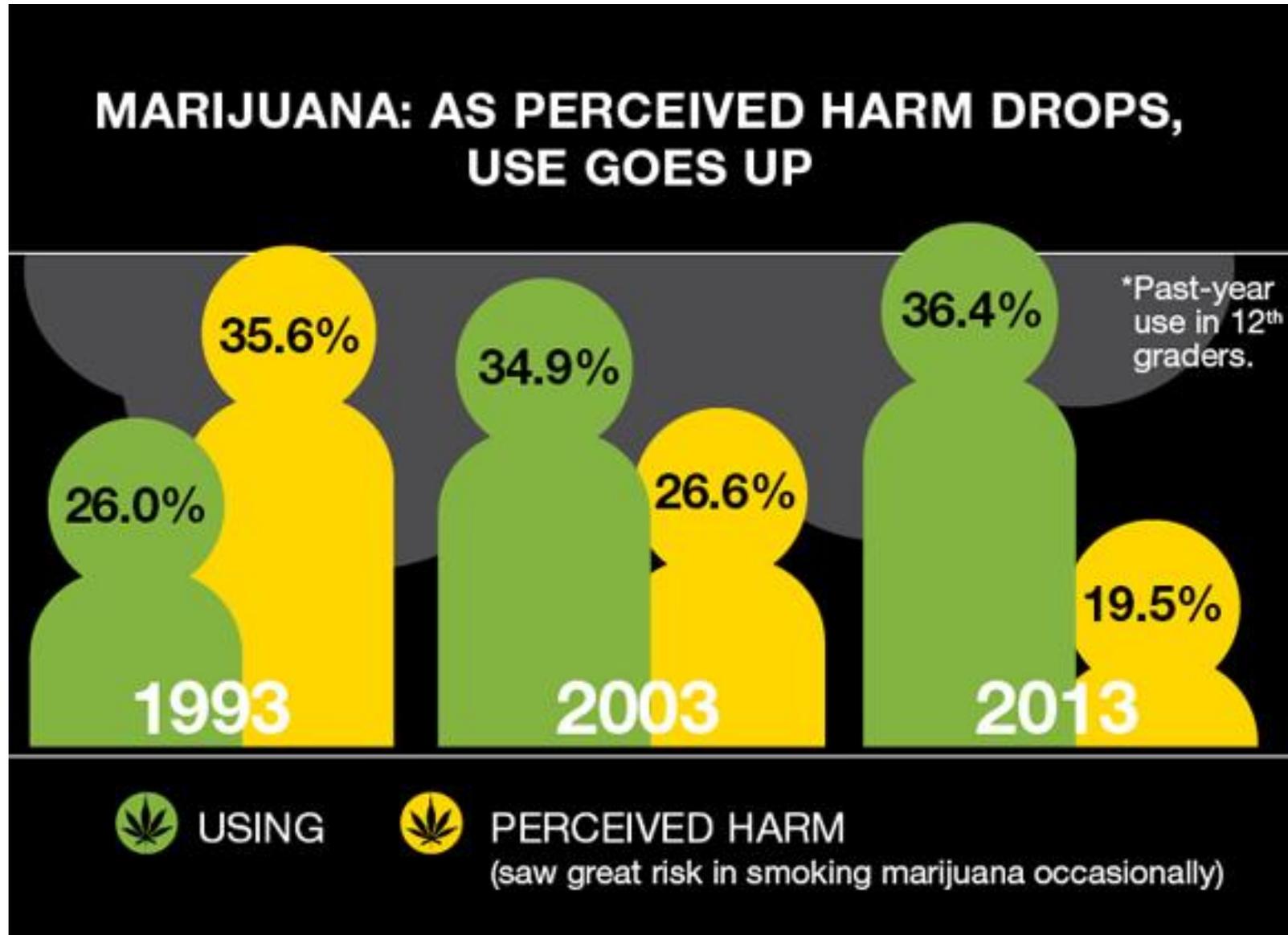
2014

 37.4% OF 12TH GRADERS  
 23.5% OF 10TH GRADERS  
 9.0% OF 8TH GRADERS

 13.6% OF 12TH GRADERS  
 7.2% OF 10TH GRADERS  
 4.0% OF 8TH GRADERS

 23.7% OF 12TH GRADERS  
 18.5% OF 10TH GRADERS  
 8.3% OF 8TH GRADERS

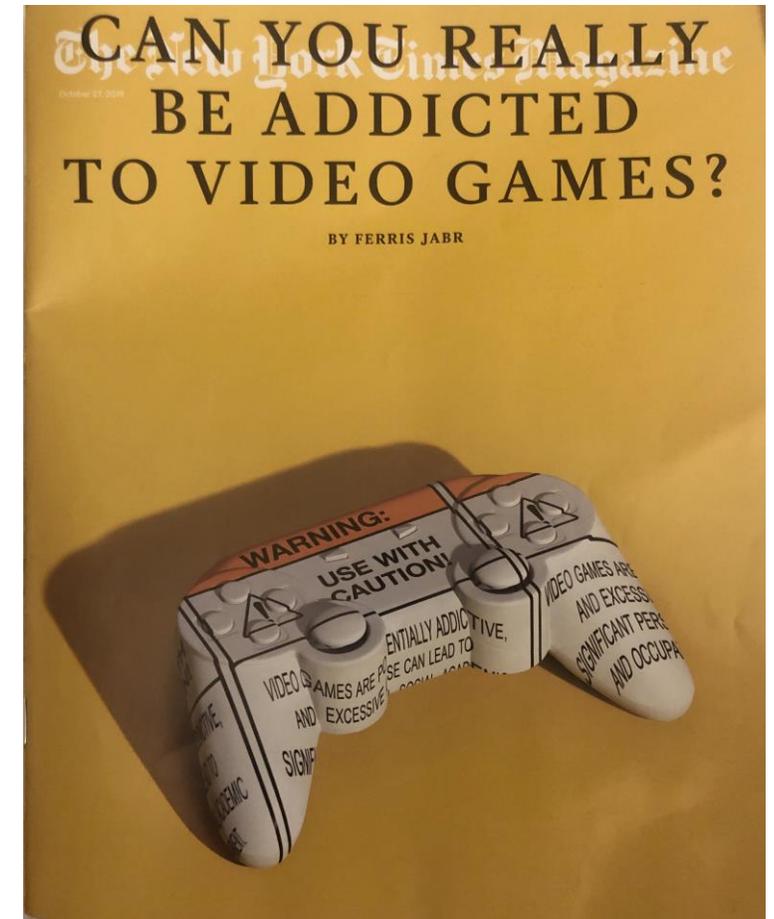
# Perception of Marijuana Harm



# Insidious Impact of Shiny Screens

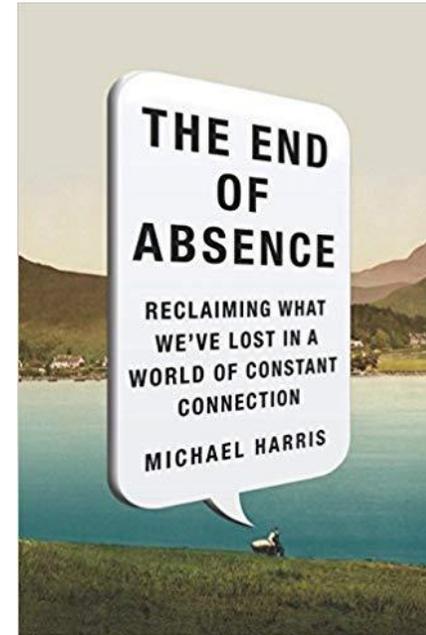
**“The complete dominance of the smartphone among teens has had a ripple effect across every area of iGen’ers’ lives from the social interactions to their mental health. They are the first generation for whom the Internet access has been constantly available, right there in their hands.”**

**-- Jean Twenge, *iGen***



# Continuous Partial Attention (Linda Stone, 1998)

- The (now common) state of having ongoing multiple simultaneous attentional pressures.
- *“It is motivated by a desire to be a LIVE node on the network. Another way of saying this is that we want to connect and be connected.”*



“There's no true "free time" when you carry a smartphone. Today's rarest commodity is the chance to be alone with your own thoughts.”

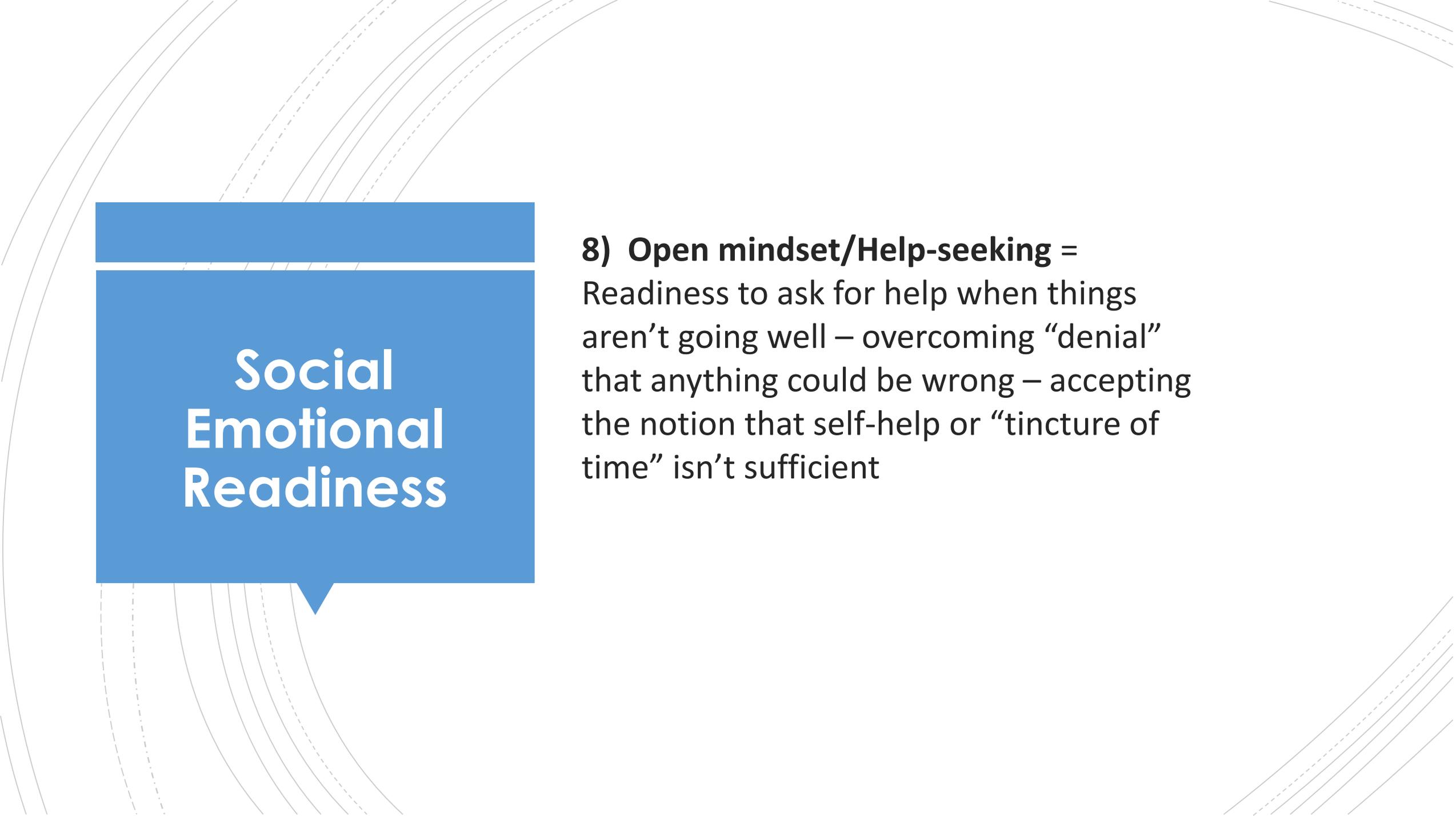
## Social Emotional Readiness

**7) Self-acceptance** = Ability to accept one's faults, tolerate one's mistakes and deal with problems without excessive guilt/shame

- Destructive perfectionism
- Myth of "infinite perfect-ability"

# Learning From Mistakes Promotes Resilience



The background features several concentric, curved lines in shades of gray, some solid and some dashed, creating a sense of motion and depth. A blue rectangular box with a speech bubble tail at the bottom center contains the text.

## Social Emotional Readiness

**8) Open mindset/Help-seeking =**  
Readiness to ask for help when things aren't going well – overcoming “denial” that anything could be wrong – accepting the notion that self-help or “tincture of time” isn't sufficient



# SELF-COMPASSION

## ON THE BENEFITS OF KINDNESS



# SELF-COMPASSION

I Don't Have To Feel Better Than Others To Feel Good About Myself



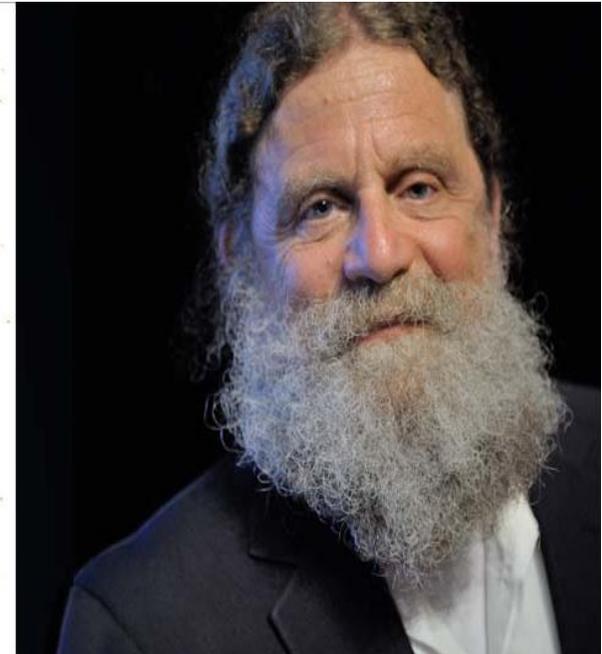
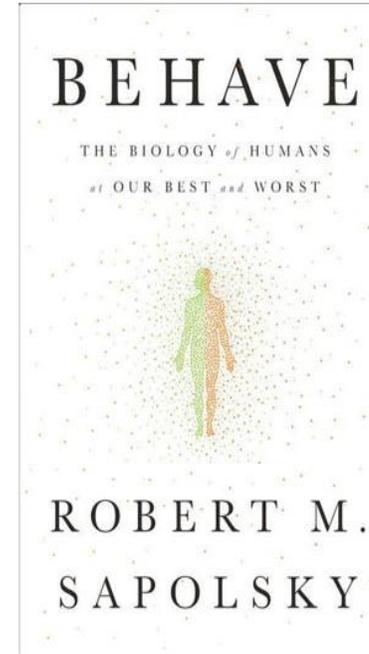
Learn How To See Self Esteem Through The Lens of Self-Love and Mindfulness and Cultivate The Courage To Be You

# Executive Functioning

## Definition

“The frontal cortex (and EFs) makes you do the harder thing when it’s the right thing to do” (p.45).

Sapolsky (2017). *Behave*. New York. Penguin.



# Executive Functioning

EF usually emerges as a single factor (“how efficiently do you do what you set out to do”), but there are five semi-distinct domains that emerge in ratings of daily functioning:

- Self-management to time
- Self-organization and problem solving
- Self-restraint (inhibition)
- Self-motivation
- Emotional regulation

Barkley, R. A. (2011). *Barkley Deficits of Executive Functioning Scale*. New York: Guilford.

# Practicing Executive Functioning

- EF skills should be demonstrated “in vivo” prior to end of senior year
- Gap year may be a good way to practice EF skills
- “Implementation intention strategies” are very helpful for achieving immediate and long term goals that can be elusive
- Weekly monitoring plan should be instituted at outset of transition to college to increase likelihood of success
- Beware the power of social media, online gaming, YouTube, etc.

## Social Emotional Readiness & Executive Functioning

Social emotional readiness combines with executive functioning to produce:

- Good feelings about yourself
- Insight into interpersonal situations
- Ability to realistically evaluate others
- Attentiveness and openness to experience
- Flexibility in problem solving
- Integration of thoughts, feelings and behaviors

# Family Stress/Anxiety Cycle

“polarization”

Parental  
Stress

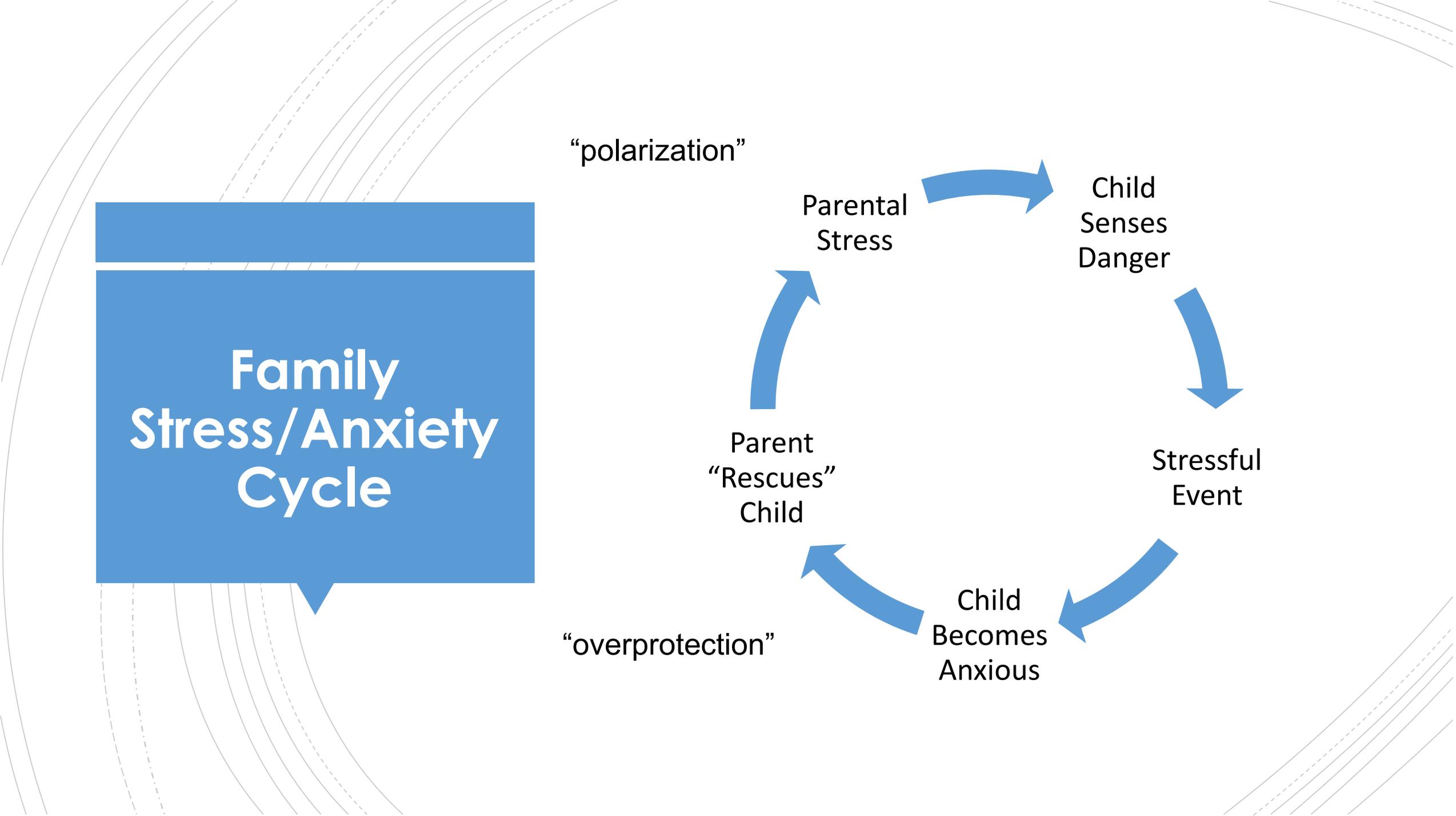
Child  
Senses  
Danger

Stressful  
Event

Parent  
“Rescues”  
Child

Child  
Becomes  
Anxious

“overprotection”



# Intensive Parenting Mistakes

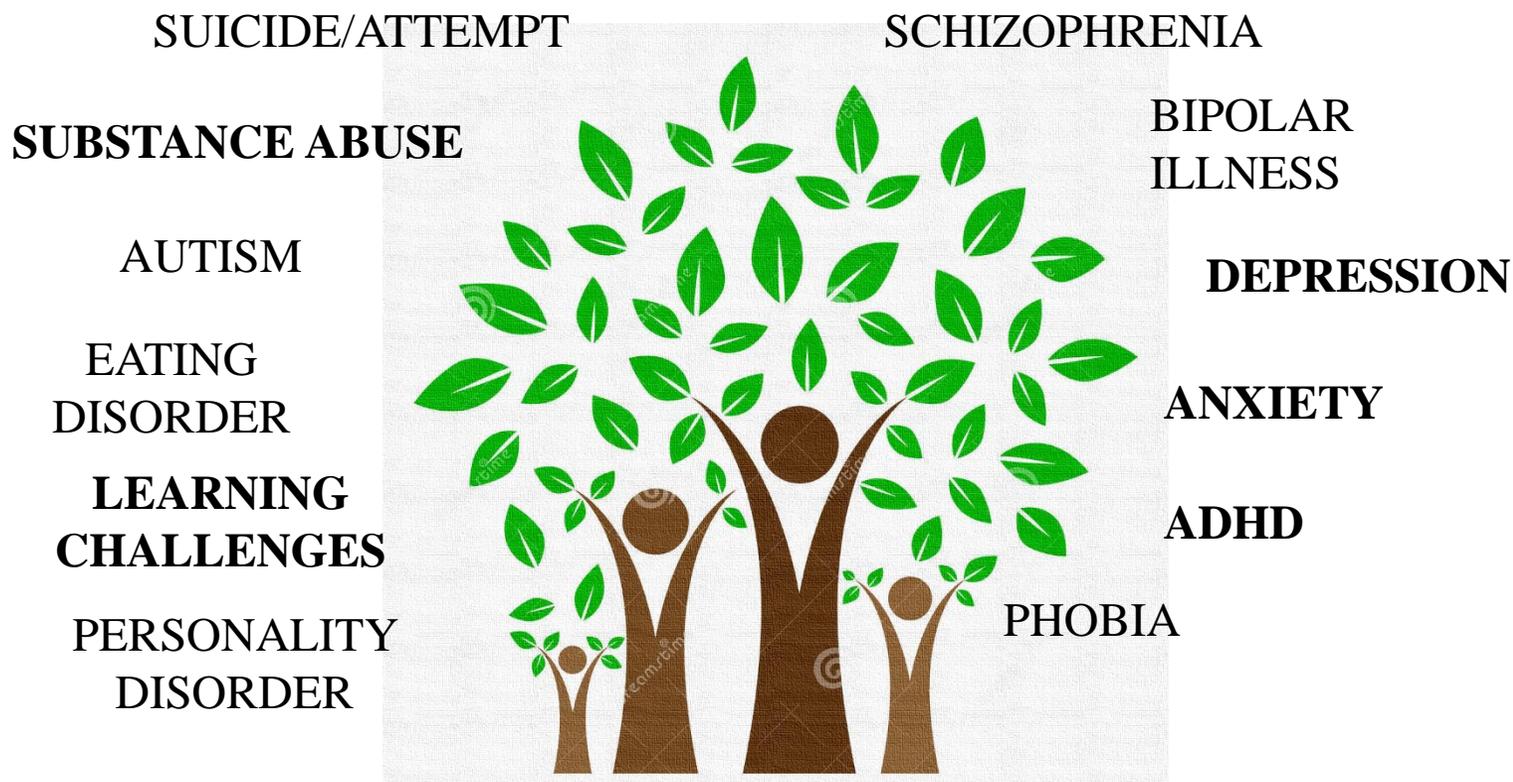
- **Over-Preparation**
  - Taking too many AP classes and extra-curricular activities
  - Overemphasizing grades and test scores
  - Pushing kids to excel in every domain of life
- **Over-Parenting**
  - Helicopter, snow-plowing or “curling” parenting
  - Protecting, hovering, scaffolding to excess
- **Over-Investment**
  - “Wanting the best” = losing sight of one’s motivations
  - Child’s achievements = fulfillment of parents’ dreams and/or unfulfilled desires

# Intensive Parenting Mistakes

## Impact on Children

- Destructive Perfectionism
- Abject Fear of Failure – Risk Avoidance
- Self-Branding – emphasis on “externals”
- Anxiety and Depression

# What Runs in the family? Fighting Stigma



# Challenging Mental Health Stigma

## Message to parents:

1. Learn about mental health and illness by educating yourself and others.
2. See the individual not the illness - strive to listen, understand, and tell your own story to others. Get out of the shadow of shame.
3. Join a support group. Get help for yourself.
4. Take action - spread the word, raise awareness, and make a difference.

The background features several sets of concentric, curved lines in shades of gray, some solid and some dashed, creating a sense of motion and depth. A blue speech bubble shape is positioned on the left side, containing the title text.

## Successful Transition

- Clarifying expectations
- Enhancing communication
- Forging alliances
- Thinking through the specific steps
- Learning advocacy skills

# So, is Max Ready?

And he sailed off, through night and day, and in and out of weeks, and almost over a year...

*Where the Wild things are, M. Sendak*



# Challenges Facing College Students

## ***Developmental Skills***

- Balancing independence & interdependence
- Self-awareness, identity formation
- Mastering new technologies
- Facing anxiety about the future

# Challenges Facing College Students

## ***Coping Skills***

- Time management, organizational skills
- Decision-making, priority-setting, implementation
- Motivation, persistence

Overcoming  
Mindset Barriers  
Chambliss &  
Takas, 2014

***FEARS OF:***

- Not Belonging (“social rejection”)
- Not Making It (“perfectionism”)
- Being Different (“mental health issues”)
- Disappointing Parents (“family pressures”)

# Interaction with Friends Promotes Resilience

- Real-time friends protect against loneliness
  - Provide a buffer from “screen/virtual, always happy friends”
  - Promote Social bonding
- Most friendships begin within a group of 40 or fewer
- Dorms with shared hall bathrooms are more social than suites
- Making friends first year is trial and error
- Make new friends, but keep the old...

Technology and Resilience: College Student Mental Health  
Lattie, Lipson, Eisenberg, 2019

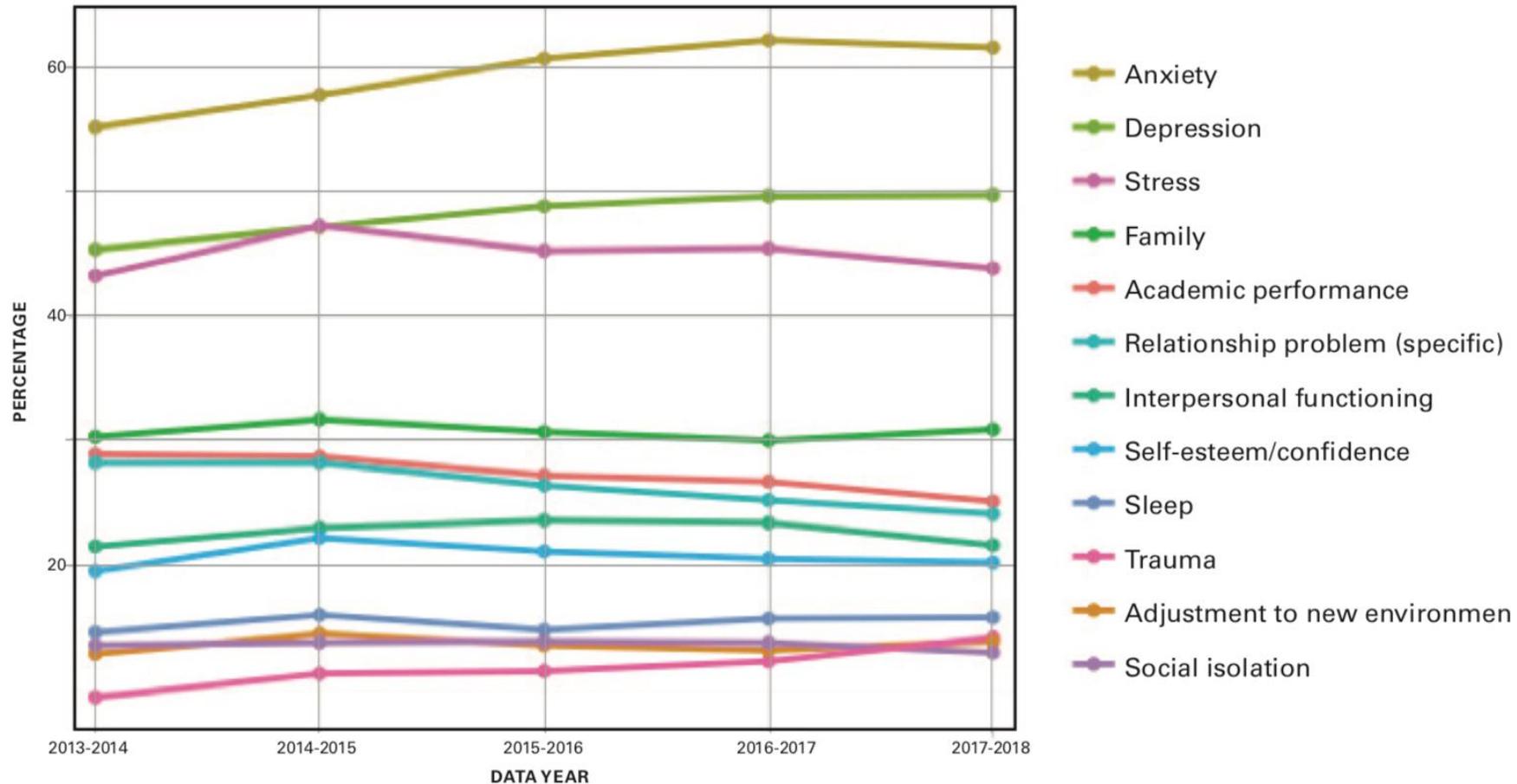
**Table 1**

Summary of findings.

<b>Proposed negative effects of personal computing technology use on mental health</b>	<b>Proposed positive effects of personal computing technology use on mental health</b>	<b>Existing technology-enabled interventions</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fear of missing out</li> <li>• Hyper-connectivity with peers</li> <li>• Peer comparison</li> <li>• Decreased face-to-face social interactions</li> <li>• Impairment of social skill development</li> <li>• Decreased inhibition of anti-social behavior</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Active engagement with peers</li> <li>• Expanded social networks</li> <li>• Venues for personal disclosures</li> <li>• Peers can serve as “gatekeepers”</li> <li>• Access to mental health intervention programs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Online support groups and message boards</li> <li>• Module-based web interventions (e.g., MoodGYM, Beating the Blues)</li> <li>• Skill-building apps (e.g., Headspace, Pacifica) for resilience, coping skills, mindfulness</li> </ul>

# Mental Health Trends on Campus

CLICC Trends (Check All That Apply): Percentage of Clients with Each Concern from 2013 to 2018



# College Student Mental Health Problems

- College mental problems, (e.g. depression, anxiety, and eating disorders) are associated with lower GPA and higher probability of dropping out of college.
- Anxiety is the most common problem cited
- >80% of college students felt overwhelmed by all they had to do, and 45% felt things were hopeless.
- 1/3 of all college students report having felt so depressed that they had trouble functioning in the last 12 months.
- Minority students are less likely to seek treatment.

# College Student Mental Health Problems

- Suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death among college students, claiming the lives of 1,100 students each year.
- 67% of college students tell a friend they are feeling suicidal before telling anyone else.
- More than half of college students have had suicidal thoughts and 1 in 10 students seriously consider attempting suicide.
- Half of the students who have suicidal thoughts never seek counseling or treatment.
- 80–90% of college students who die by suicide were not receiving help from their college counseling centers.

# Resistance to Help

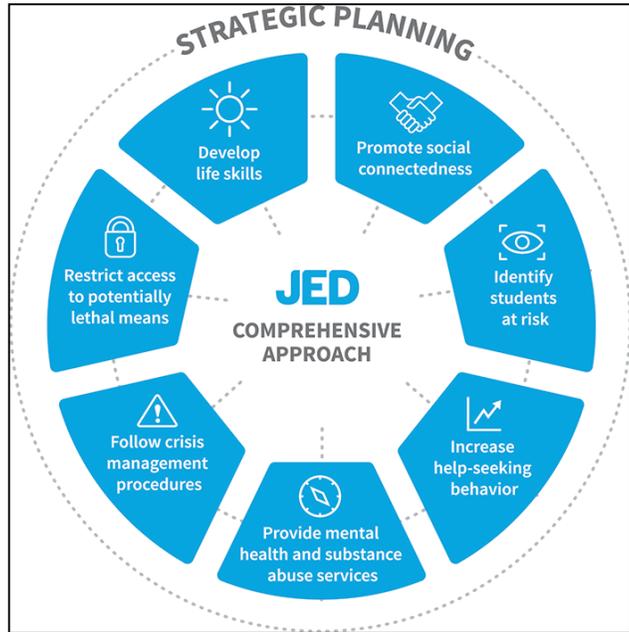
## Reasons Cited for Not Getting Help

- “My problems are not serious enough to warrant assistance.” (66%)
- “I don’t have enough time.” (27 %)
- “I prefer to manage my problems on my own.” (18%)
- “I’d rather seek help from my family or friends.” (16%)
- “There are pragmatic barriers to getting treatment.” (16%)

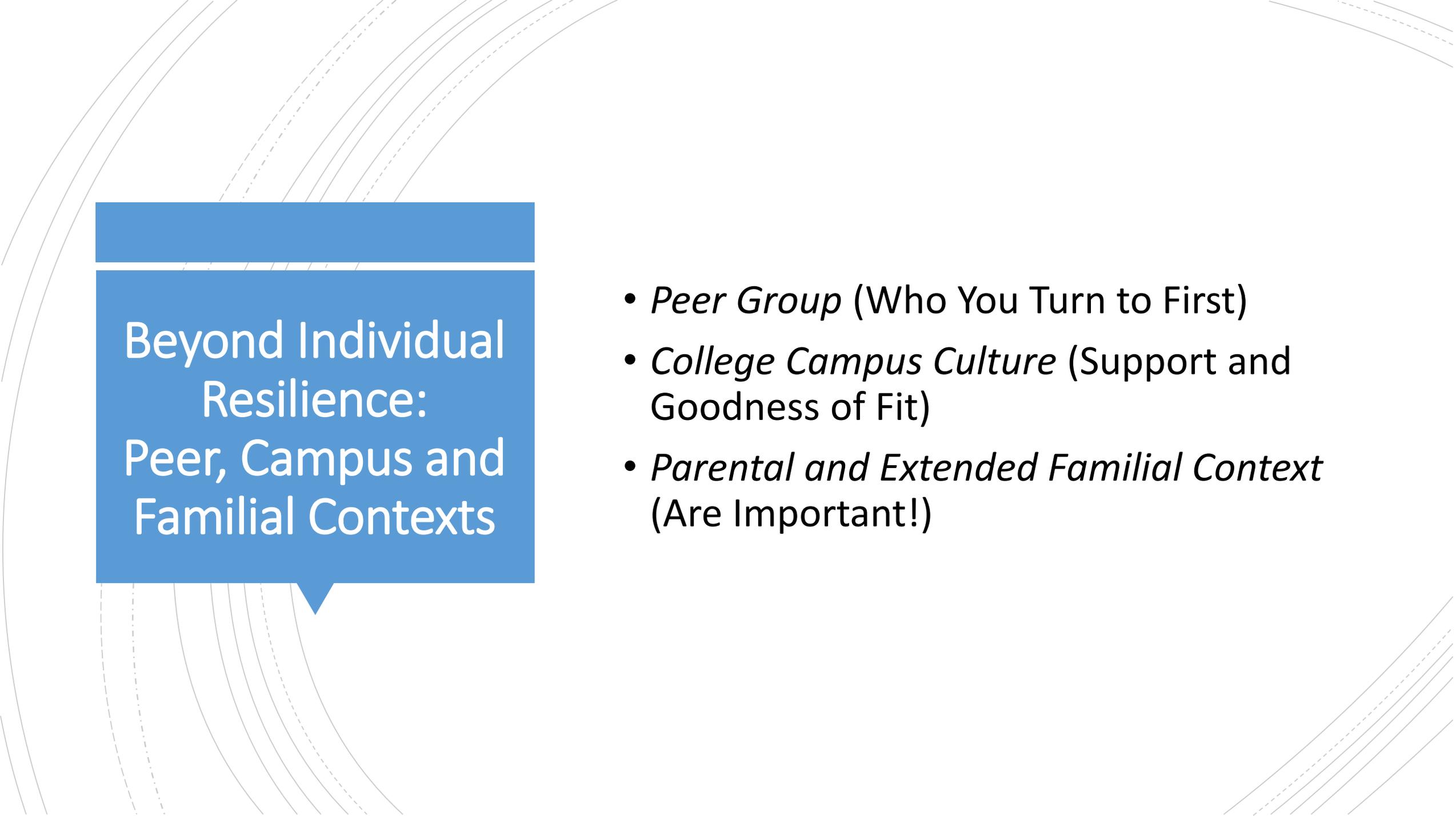
Survey of students at elevated risk for suicide, *Journal of Am College Health*, 2013



<https://www.activeminds.org>



<https://nami.org/collegeguide>

The background features several concentric, curved lines in shades of gray, some solid and some dashed, creating a sense of depth and movement. A blue rectangular box with a white border and a small white triangle at the bottom center is positioned on the left side of the slide.

## Beyond Individual Resilience: Peer, Campus and Familial Contexts

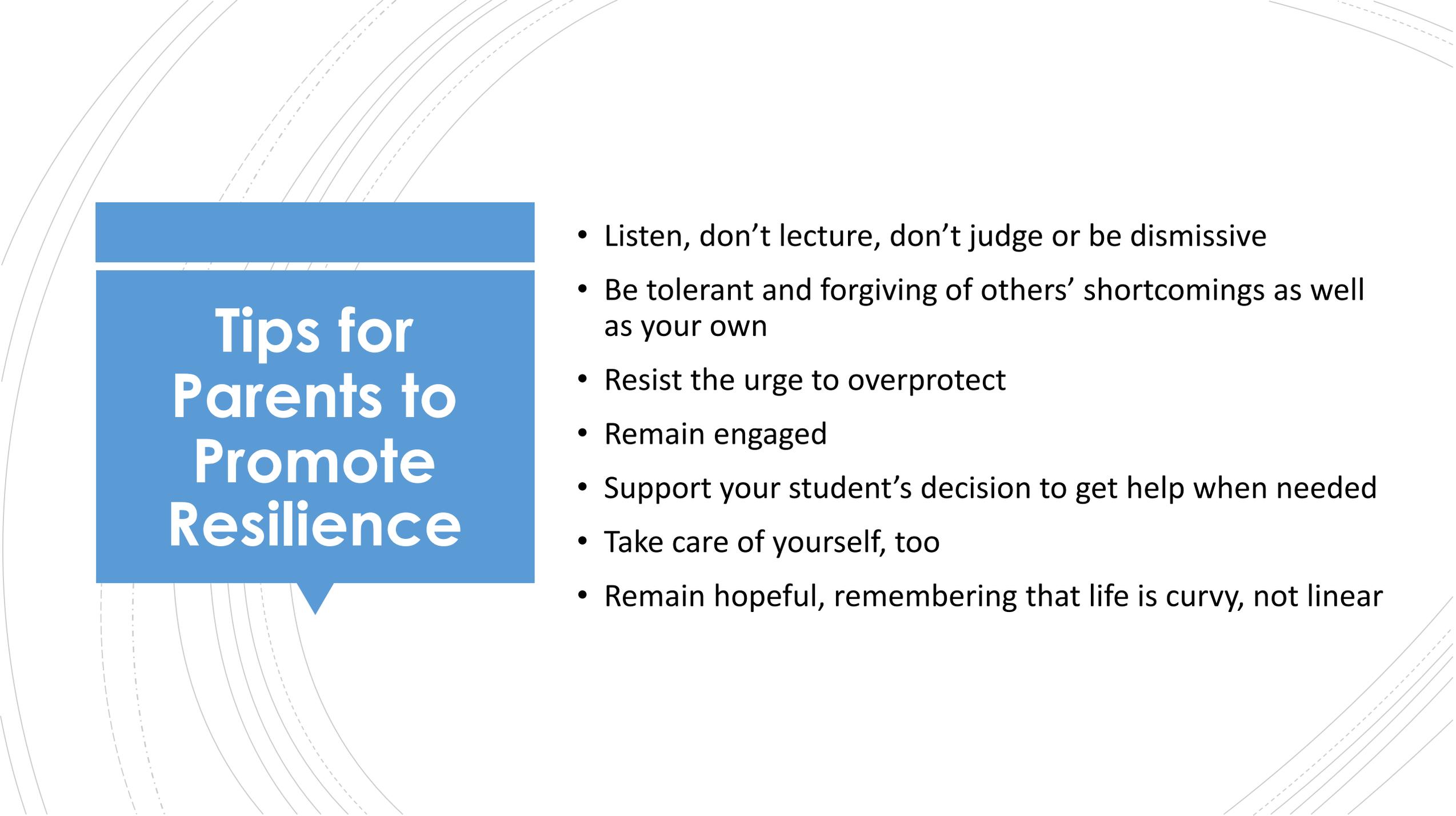
- *Peer Group* (Who You Turn to First)
- *College Campus Culture* (Support and Goodness of Fit)
- *Parental and Extended Familial Context* (Are Important!)

# Families Are Important



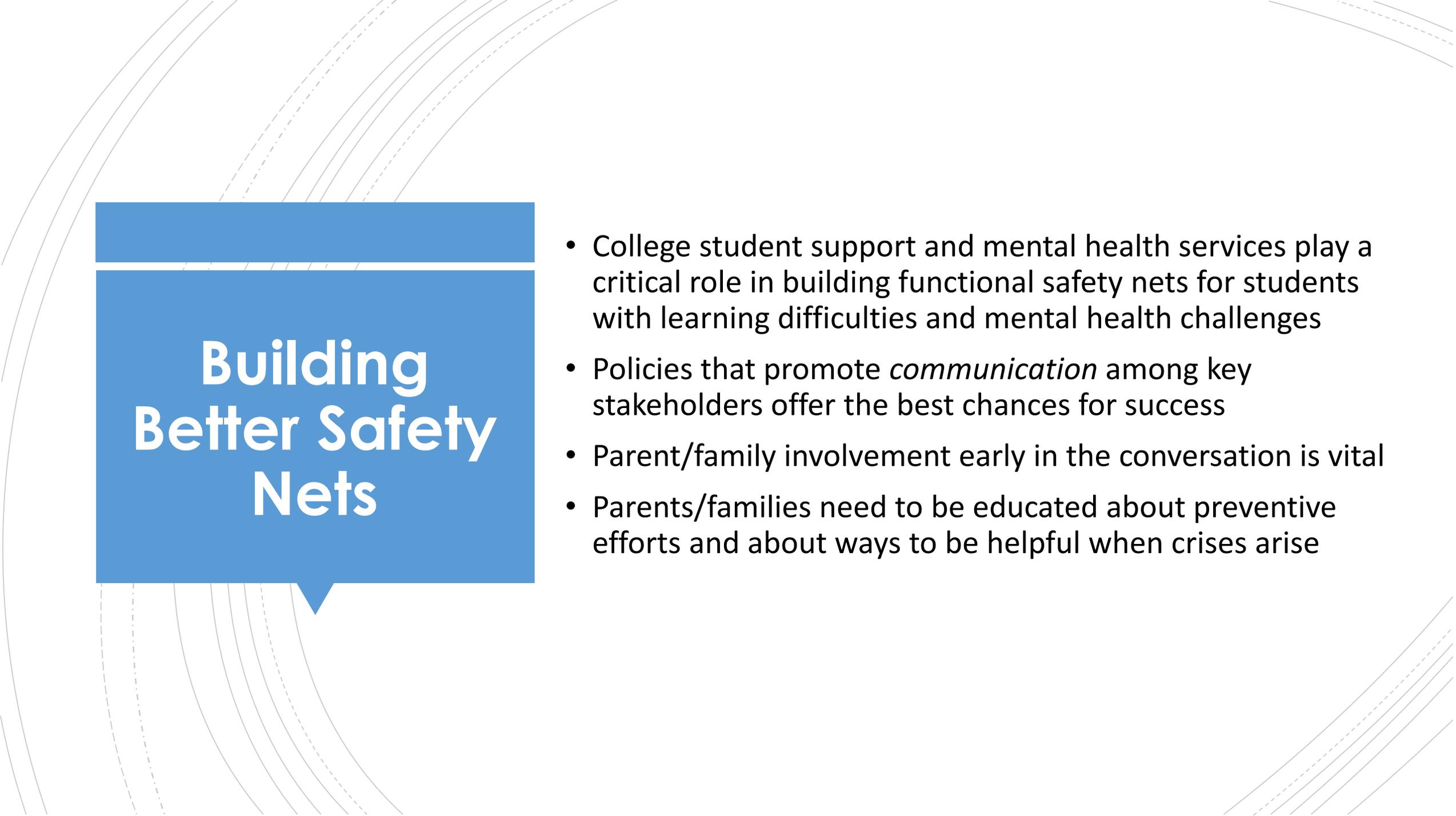
# Families Are Important

- Family connectedness and support are protective against depression and suicidal ideation & behavior among all college-aged youth:
  - General population surveys
  - Youth with history of sexual abuse
  - Sexual and gender minority youth
- Higher family functioning is protective against onset of substance use disorders
- Presence of supportive siblings has a protective impact and may compensate for lack of parental support

The background features several sets of curved lines in the top-left and bottom-right corners. Some lines are solid and light gray, while others are dashed. The overall design is clean and modern.

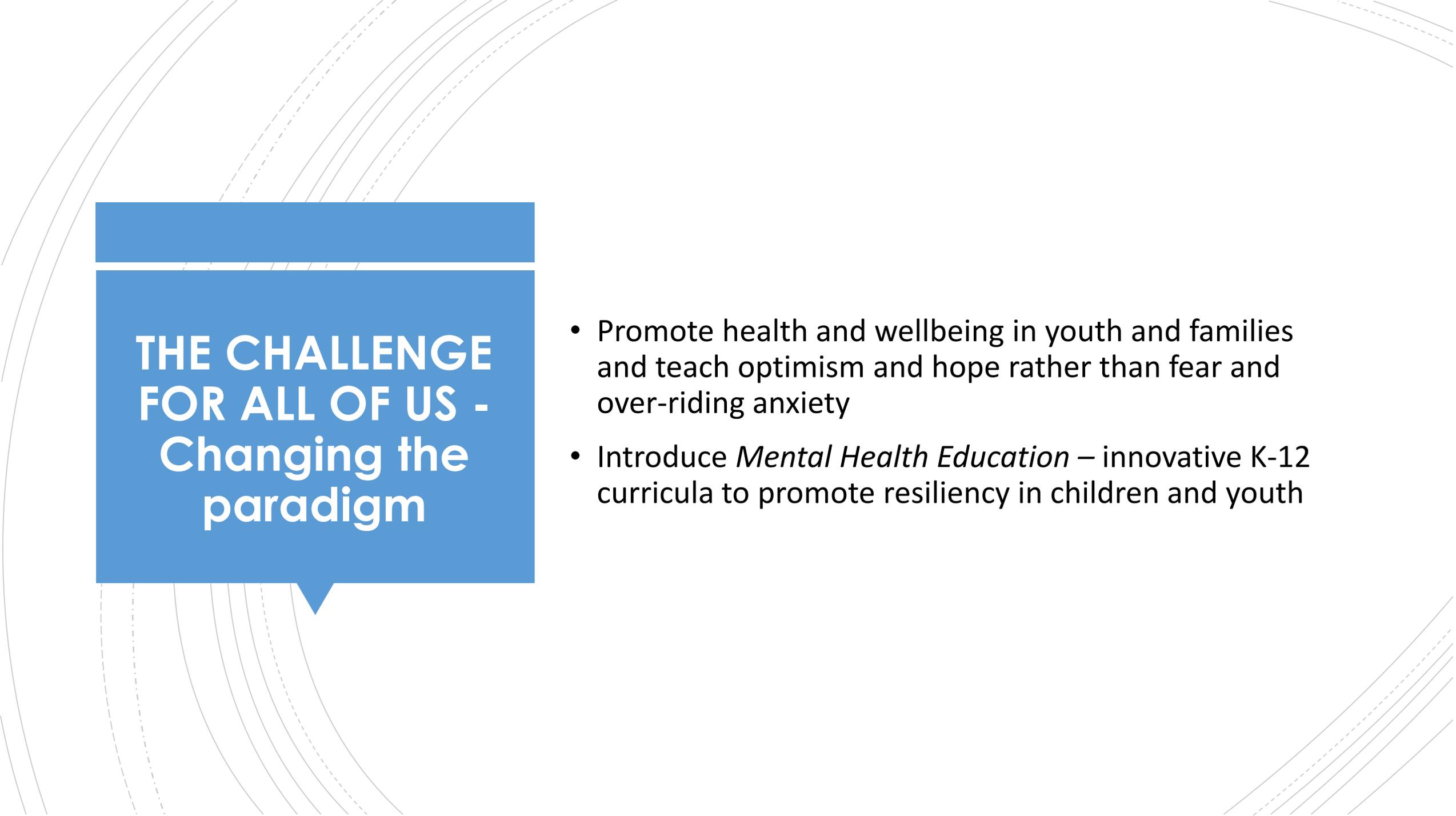
## Tips for Parents to Promote Resilience

- Listen, don't lecture, don't judge or be dismissive
- Be tolerant and forgiving of others' shortcomings as well as your own
- Resist the urge to overprotect
- Remain engaged
- Support your student's decision to get help when needed
- Take care of yourself, too
- Remain hopeful, remembering that life is curvy, not linear

The background features several concentric, curved lines in shades of gray, some solid and some dashed, creating a sense of depth and movement. A blue speech bubble shape is positioned on the left side, containing the main title.

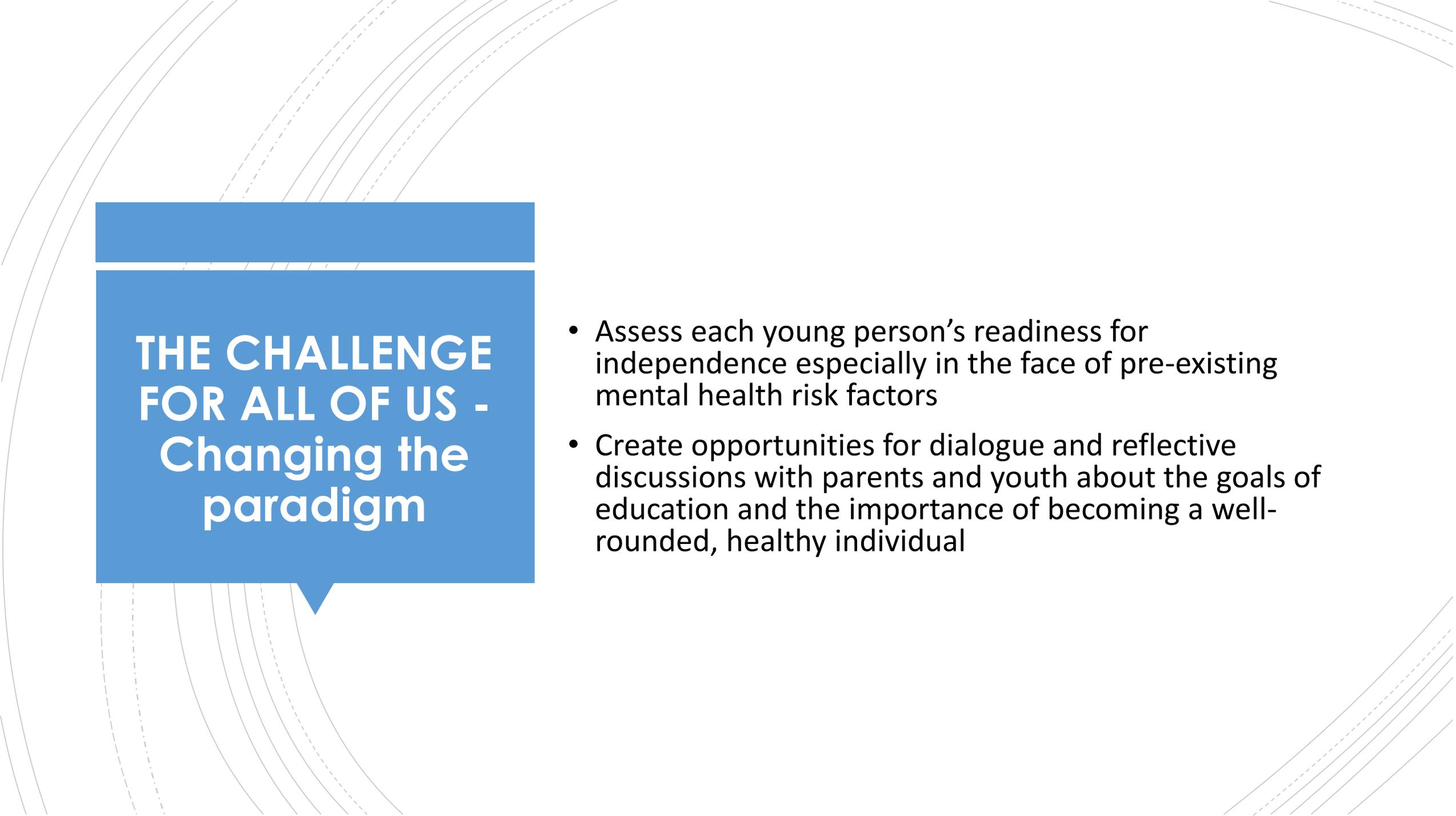
# Building Better Safety Nets

- College student support and mental health services play a critical role in building functional safety nets for students with learning difficulties and mental health challenges
- Policies that promote *communication* among key stakeholders offer the best chances for success
- Parent/family involvement early in the conversation is vital
- Parents/families need to be educated about preventive efforts and about ways to be helpful when crises arise

The background features several sets of concentric, curved lines in shades of gray, some solid and some dashed, creating a sense of movement and depth. A blue speech bubble shape is positioned on the left side, containing the main title text.

## THE CHALLENGE FOR ALL OF US - Changing the paradigm

- Promote health and wellbeing in youth and families and teach optimism and hope rather than fear and over-riding anxiety
- Introduce *Mental Health Education* – innovative K-12 curricula to promote resiliency in children and youth

The background features several sets of concentric, curved lines in shades of gray, some solid and some dashed, creating a sense of motion and depth. A blue rectangular box with a white border and a small white triangle at the bottom center contains the main text.

## THE CHALLENGE FOR ALL OF US - Changing the paradigm

- Assess each young person's readiness for independence especially in the face of pre-existing mental health risk factors
- Create opportunities for dialogue and reflective discussions with parents and youth about the goals of education and the importance of becoming a well-rounded, healthy individual

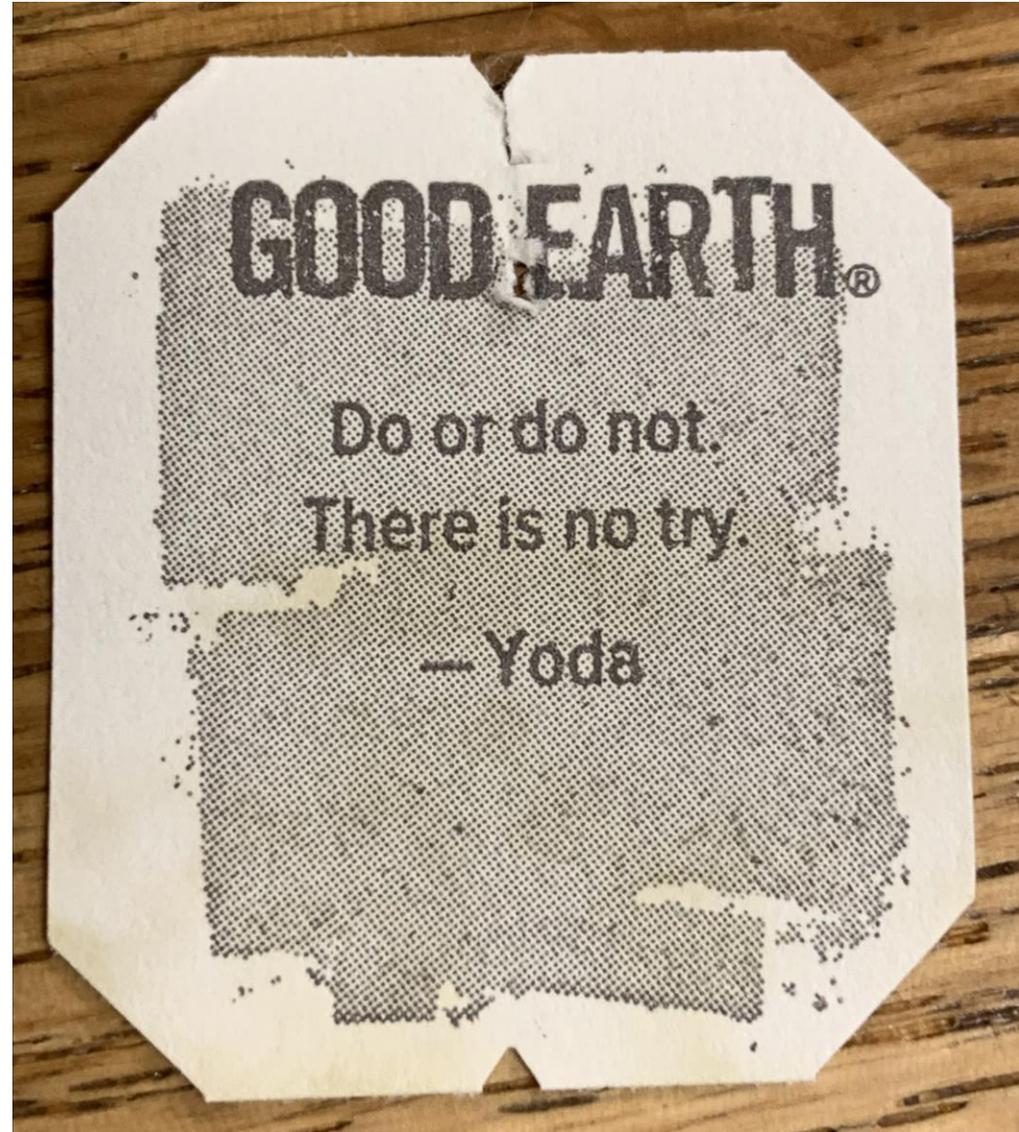
# One Definition of Resilience

“I’m going to graduate on time no matter how long it takes me”

*Anonymous college student*



# Final Word

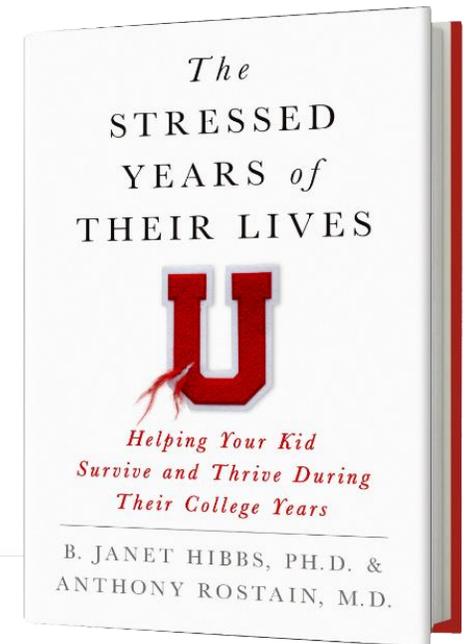


“This book is a hopeful and essential guide that promotes emotional health and mental fitness in young people. The authors address mental illness and offer models for prevention, treatment and recovery. A must-read for parents, educators and clinicians.”

– Patrick J. Kennedy, former congressman, author of the best-selling book, **A Common Struggle**, and sponsor of **Paritytrack.org**

*The Stressed Years*

HOME ABOUT PODCAST MEDIA v CONTACT 🔍



©Vanessa Vick

## About Authors

**Anthony L. Rostain, M.D., M.A.** is a nationally-recognized expert in child and adolescent psychiatry and a professor of psychiatry and pediatrics at the Perelman School of Medicine, University of Pennsylvania, and at the Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia.

**B. Janet Hibbs, LMFT, Ph.D.** is a family psychologist, and AAMFT supervisor, who has held faculty positions for more than 15 years in graduate programs for psychologists and marital and family therapists. She is the author of *Try to See It My Way: Being Fair in Love and Marriage*.

[www.thestressedyears.com](http://www.thestressedyears.com)