Strategies for Eliminating Points and Levels: Lessons Learned

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Developed with Barbara Wilson LCSW
This is not a debate on scientific evidence.

This is our experience with eliminating points and levels as part of the Promising Path to Success Initiative.
“And so it is with human relationships: we can both create and destroy, nurture and terrorize, traumatize and heal each other”

(Bruce Perry)
Behavior Management to Healing Centered Environment
Healing Centered Environments

* Behavioral Management … Trauma Informed Care
* Advice Giving … Compassionate Attunement
* Negative Consequences …. Identifying strengths
* Problem Solving … Involving Youth and Family voice in decision making

*Goal: Creating a Trauma Competent Healing Environment
We don’t restrain. Ok, how do you get kids to do what you want? 

Coercion

The Behavior Room

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Points Needed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 1</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 2</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 3</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 4</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 5</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 6</td>
<td>250</td>
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<tr>
<td>Level 7</td>
<td>325</td>
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<tr>
<td>Level 8</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 9</td>
<td>475</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 10</td>
<td>550</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
"Kids with trauma history don't need more punishment. And, quite frankly, they don't need more stickers."

- Dr. Ross Greene -
Moving from Points and Levels to Healing Environments

**Points and Levels**
- Behavior Management Framework
- Behavior needs to be corrected
- Control
- Discipline
- Points and Levels
- Verbal Interventions

**Healing Environment**
- Neurobiological Framework
- What is the Function of Behavior
- Connection
- Relationship
- Regulation, Co-regulation
- Somatosensory Interventions - NonVerbal Interventions, Body Based Movement Based, and Sensory Based Interventions
### Points and Levels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Points Cards &amp; Level Charts</th>
<th>Attention Seeking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Consequences, Punishment, Isolation</td>
<td>Mastery, Competence, and Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extrinsic Motivation</td>
<td>At Promise Youth</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Healing Environment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regulation Plans</th>
<th>Attachment Seeking</th>
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<tr>
<td>Intrinsic Motivation</td>
<td>At Promise Youth</td>
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</table>
Why Systems of Equality (levels, points, etc.) fail our youth

Equality

Equity
Why Points and Levels Don’t Work

* No empirical evidence supporting efficacy of points and levels for youth with behavioral health needs

* No evidence of sustainable outcomes outside of restrictive setting

* Organized around needs of staff reinforcing control and maintaining order

Massachusetts Department of Health, Creating Positive Culture of Care Resource Guide
Moving Away From Points and Levels
Why Points and Levels Don’t Work

* Punishing youth for behaviors that brought into a treatment setting
* Timeliness of award/not award
* Withholding is inconsistent, arbitrarily assigned and usually results in conflict between staff and youth
* “Punitive in nature” (tone, posture, prosody, inflection)

Massachusetts Department of Health, Creating Positive Culture of Care Resource Guide
Moving Away From Points and Levels
“Our levels don’t work anymore. We want the kids to go out on Friday night”.

“ These levels are getting in the way”

“ The consequences don’t make sense, and everybody thinks they can give out the consequences”

“They’re off level more than they’re on”

“Our system is too complicated”

“We don’t all follow the same rules for dropping levels”
What to Expect Along the Way

- This is the way we always did things
- The kids will have no consequences. They will get away with whatever the want to do
- Peer Reactions
- Use of Safety Protocols
- Staff frustrations and core beliefs

- Staff may quit
- Caregivers may want consequences
- If you remove things to quickly and do not replace the motivation system or behavior management system with something else there will be chaos.
Where to Begin and How

* Organizational commitment (Restraint and Seclusion reduction, eliminate Coercive Practices)
* Ongoing Process of Culture Change
* Trauma Informed Approaches to Care
* Youth Guided
* Family Driven
* Individualized Care Plans designed to succeed
* Bringing staff on as a Performance Improvement Team
Everyone will utilize a trauma-informed lens when interacting with youth.

Staff need a basic understanding of complex/developmental trauma.

Staff need training the triune brain and ask why is the child doing this, what problem are they solving, how is this adaptive for the child?

Staff will ask youth to develop Regulation Plans/How to Deal Plans and focus on using those strategies daily to avoid crisis.

Secondary Traumatic Stress, Vicarious Trauma, Compassion Fatigue and burnout will be addressed in supervision and staff self-care and their own regulation strategies.
Healing Environments

* Using the relationship to build hope
* Interacting in an attuned manner
* Using modern brain science to direct the milieu and individual interactions
* Using and understanding the adaptive role of behavior to create change
* Designing unit structure and programming to promote healing relationships
* Individually responding to problem behaviors based on this understanding
* Applying principles of restorative justice to treatment settings
Points and level systems can teach basic skills, provide external motivation, and yield immediate compliance, but they “react to behavior rather than respond to needs” (Brendtro, 2004), and don’t yield long term enduring outcomes. Emphasis becomes placed on negative consequences for challenging behaviors rather than the shaping of pro-social behaviors through the use of carefully managed reinforcement schedules.
Good Intent
The kids who need the most love will ask for it in the most unloving of ways.
REFrame THE BEHAVIOUR
“KIDS DO WELL IF THEY CAN”
~ Ross Greene

WON’T ➔ CAN’T YET

- Judgmental
- Willful
- Defiant

- Curious
- Too many stressors
- Skills deficits

He’s lazy.
She just wants attention.
...rude!

- Rewards & punishments
- Frustration
- Guilt/shame

- Adult’s mindset
- View of child
- Thoughts
- Response
- Child’s experience

Find & remove barriers
Supported
Strengthened

“SEE A CHILD DIFFERENTLY, YOU SEE A DIFFERENT CHILD”
~ Dr. Stuart Shanker

When kids exhibit challenging behaviour we can be “STRESS DETECTIVES”... finding and removing barriers.

- Find stressors ➔ reduce them
- Find unmet needs ➔ meet them
- Find skills deficits ➔ teach them

@kwien562
He isn't giving me a hard time. He's having a hard time.

Breathe & repeat. Be the light.
Sample Regulation Plan
How to Deal Plan

Things that upset me!
Things changing at the last minute
When you tell me NO
Asking me to talk about my trauma
People not keeping their promises
Moving from one place to another

How people can tell I’m upset:
I yell and curse
I get quiet sometimes
My face gets red
I don’t want to look at you
I go to my room and slam the door
Sample Regulation Plan
How to Deal Plan

When I’m having a hard time controlling my anger please don’t do this:
Follow me around and lecture me
Come into my room right away before I can get it together
Threaten me with loss of privileges or rec.

Please do this:
Ask me what I need
Offer to go for a walk without talking
Offer me something to drink
Leave me alone
Things that help me to calm down when I’m upset:
- Listening to music
- Going for a walk
- Calling my mom
- Calling my friend
- Writing in my journal
- Coloring

When I am feeling low or not motivated I can do these things to increase my energy.
- Open the shades and turn on the lights
- Have a snack or some juice
- Exercise
- Take a nap
Dysregulation is contagious
Creating Your Playbook

Leadership

* Commitment with training, feedback loops, and timeline
* 6 Core Strategies as the framework
* Cultural Sustainability
* Home is a right, not a privilege and is never used as a consequence
Creating Your Playbook

- Youth Advisory Boards as a partner for rule and handbook review
- Increased allied therapies (art, music, yoga, drama, pet)
- Individualized Regulation Plans (alerting and calming)
Creating Your Playbook

- Supervisors and Administrators vary shifts and on-call to support and model culture change

- Rigorous debriefing as a teaching tool for repair and restoration
Lessons learned and expected outcomes

* Take your time
* Know your champions
* Hear your staff’s voices and concerns
* Be prepared for setbacks .. “this will never work”... “these kids have no consequences”.. “we have no power”
* Stay the course for healing, not managing... supporting, not policing
* Engage families along the way to dispel and correct the belief that behaviors need punishment