Sparks and the Life Story: A Life Narrative Approach to Crisis Planning

Instructor: Jonathan I. Cloud

This two-hour virtual workshop explores ways in which a child’s/youth’s sparks (i.e., innate abilities, talents, interests, or special qualities) are central to their capacity to recover from trauma or crisis. Exciting findings by developmental science are used to show how sparks are the most important aspect of the child’s/youth’s life story, that is, they hold the child’s/youth’s story (or life) together in a such a way that it is experienced as making sense, being worthwhile, and having purpose. The workshop uses interactive exercises during which participants discover ways to use sparks in crisis planning in a manner that can make them part of the life story’s “plot,” that is, activities, tasks, and relationships are arranged in relation to them, referred to as “self-concordant goals” and “self-integrated action.” Participants discover how a life narrative approach integrates crisis into the life story by giving it meaning and making it a source of growth. Ways to empower the child/youth to recover by using her/his sparks to “author” or self-determine her/his story are presented.

Learning Objectives

1. Understand relationship between sparks, life story, and the life narrative approach as they relate to crisis planning with children and youth and their parents/caretakers.
2. Become familiar with aspects of life’s overarching universal storyline (i.e., separating/departing, doubting/questioning, stumbling/falling, recovering/rising, contributing/serving), how it can be used to assist children and youth with voicing and determining their stories (i.e., self-direction).
3. Understand how sparks support the child/youth in “authoring” her/his story by making meaning of crises and forming a positive identity.

Performance Objectives

1. Use knowledge of sparks and several life narrative perspectives as part of crisis prevention, crisis intervention, crisis response, and relapse prevention.
2. Use the five elements of life’s overarching universal storyline to elicit youth and parent voice as part of assessing effects of trauma on functioning, meaning, and identity formation.
3. Develop crisis plans that involve the child/youth in “authoring” her/his story in ways that involve using his/her sparks to contribute or “make one’s mark.”

About Your Instructor:

Jonathan I. Cloud has thirty years of experience in the human services field that encompasses case management, administration, and program development. His career has included special initiatives in youth outreach, family support, community organizing, child protective services, foster care reform, disproportionate minority contact, juvenile justice systems reform, and youth-focused disaster recovery. His areas of demonstrated expertise include strategy development, organizational and systems diagnosis and development, program planning and development, partnership-building, and systems change through targeted project planning and execution. Jonathan began full-time independent consulting in 1992. His initial consulting included serving as the Urban Initiatives Consultant for the U.S. Department of Education’s Southeast Regional Center for Drug-Free Schools and Communities. He also served as a Certified Trainer and
Strategic Consultant for Developmental Research and Programs, Inc., (which was a key organization in bringing about the national shift to science-based prevention utilizing risk and protective factors). Since this initial work, Jonathan has provided technical assistance to communities engaged in the Weed & Seed national crime reduction initiative, assisted with a juvenile court improvement project, conducted an in-depth analysis in a county of factors associated with DMC and developed a training for three counties focused on alternatives to suspensions, expulsions, and arrests for low-risk youth of color. He has provided training and technical assistance to scores of communities on behalf of the Department of Justice’s Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP). For this federal agency, he assisted with the development and delivery of their Comprehensive Strategy for Serious, Violent, Chronic Juvenile Offenders Initiative, and their Targeted Community Action Planning Initiative. Both initiatives were rigorous, science-based planning processes that linked a community’s prevention, intervention, and corrections systems. Other consulting highlights include:

- Project Safe Neighborhoods: Department of Justice national gun violence reduction initiative.
- Outagamie County (Wisconsin) Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking Partnership: technical assistance in developing and implementing a three-year strategic plan.
- National Center for Missing and Exploited Children: numerous trainings on protecting victims of child sex trafficking and on school safety.
- Outagamie County, Wisconsin Division of Youth and Family Services: assistance in improving its efforts to reduce disproportionate minority contact, integration of child welfare and juvenile justice (e.g., “dual-status youth”), and community-wide strategy to address child sex trafficking.
- Georgia Governor’s Office for Children and Families/Georgia Criminal Justice Coordinating Council: consultation, technical support, and training to address domestic minor sex trafficking and adult sex and labor trafficking.
- U. S. Department of Labor/Youth Build USA: technical assistance provider to Youth Build Programs focused on training and support of development for youth out of the education mainstream.

Jonathan has provided trainings on numerous topics and delivered keynote addresses for conferences across the country. He is the author of Parenting the Guardian Class: Validating Spirited Youth, Ending Adolescence, and Renewing America’s Greatness, which argues for empowering youth rather than controlling youth. His higher education includes holding BA degrees in Religion and Psychology and extensive graduate studies in Public Administration and Social Work.