



Youth Voice Band / CARE principles in action....

In educating staff with the CARE model, we discuss placing our expectations of a young person within his or her proximal zone of development. I have heard this sometimes called “meeting a young person where he or she is at”, and I am comfortable with that rewording. In fact, I would further say that meeting a young person where they are should include more than just where they are developmentally. Should we not also try to always be in the moment with them, taking into account not just their developmental level but also their mood, trauma history, physical comfort, our relationship with them, etc.? Is not taking all of this (and more) into account instrumental in how we build a meaningful relationship with these young people (or anyone)?

At one point the star of ‘The Youth Voice Band’ was a young drummer named Mitch (not his real name). He had such a dynamic and charismatic presence that we developed a repertoire for the Band that included a few songs with drum solos. It is a regular practice to follow our shows with a question and answer (Q&A) period and at the first Q&A, Mitch was asked who were his favorite drummers. He named Travis Barker, which was no surprise (a very flashy and technically brilliant drummer with Blink 182, that at the time, was a very popular

band among youth culture). He then named his other favorite drummer, Ringo Starr. I was standing next to him on stage when he said this and my head snapped around so fast I'm lucky I didn't get whiplash! Mitch saw my shocked expression and said, "Didn't you know that? I love The Beatles and I love Ringo's drumming. He's not flashy but nobody else sounds like him and the stuff he does always just fits the song and makes it better". I had talked about The Beatles - I often do - but I didn't know if Mitch had paid much attention to what I said or if he had ever even listened to them. I'm a pretty sentimental guy. Seeing The Beatles on The Ed Sullivan Show when I was 10-years-old started me on my path as a musician. So I'm especially sentimental about them - and everything Mitch said about Ringo is true, in my opinion. When Mitch saw the first tear roll down my cheek he just nodded his head and said, very quietly and just to me, "I love Ringo."

I am proud of what I accomplish with and what I give to these kids. And nothing helps me do the job better than never losing sight of what they give to me. Mitch met me where I was at that particular moment. He hit me where I live. Any of you who've experienced anything similar - in the work with children and young people or in your private life - knows how good that feels. Most of us who work with children and young people probably grew up and/or currently reside in a home where we are loved, supported and connected. And yet when someone, anyone, truly meets us where we are at any given time, gives us the gift of being in the moment with us, and when the vibe is, "I get you and I like what I'm getting" ...it's a remarkable feeling, isn't it? Emond, Steckley, and Roesch-Marsh (2016) in their book "A Guide to Therapeutic Child Care" refer to this as "tuning in".

I will never forget how that moment with Mitch felt for me. I value it not just for how it made me feel, but also for how it informs my practice of trying to always be in the moment with the young people in my care and meet them where they are at any given time. If that little throwaway exchange could loom so large for me - or for you - extrapolate how meaningful and transformative similar exchanges might be for young people lacking and yearning for connection, support and love.