

**What's Next?  
Series**

**The Child  
Who is  
Resistant**

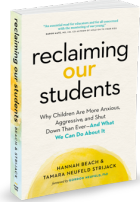
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November 16<sup>th</sup>, 2022




**Book chapter and webinar on  
Resistance and Opposition**

11  
The Child  
Who Is Resistant




**the CounterWill instinct**

... is a pushing back against the will of others  
or a defensive reaction to perceived control and coercion

**INSTINCT**

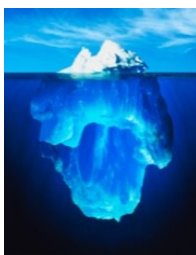

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FSKIOvLTAsA&t=1s>



**Start with the  
WHY**

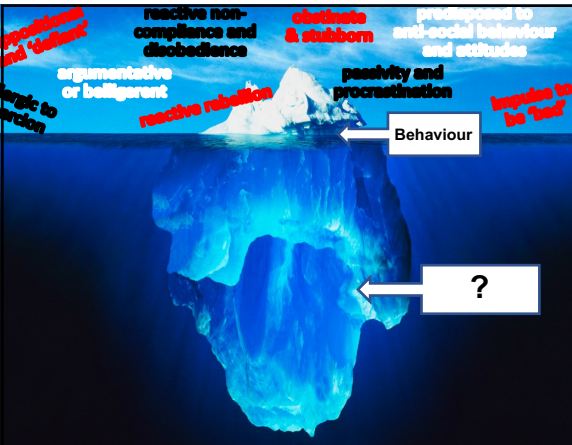
Simon Sinek - Golden Circle

**WHY: the purpose**  
what is your cause?  
what do you see?

**KEY INSIGHT #1**

Children's behavior isn't always what it seems, we need to dig deeper and look at what's happening beneath.



**Behaviour**

**?**

reactive non-compliance and disobedience  
argumentative or belligerent  
passivity and procrastination  
stubborn & stubborn  
prone to anti-social behaviour and attitudes  
reactive rebellion  
prone to be 'lost'

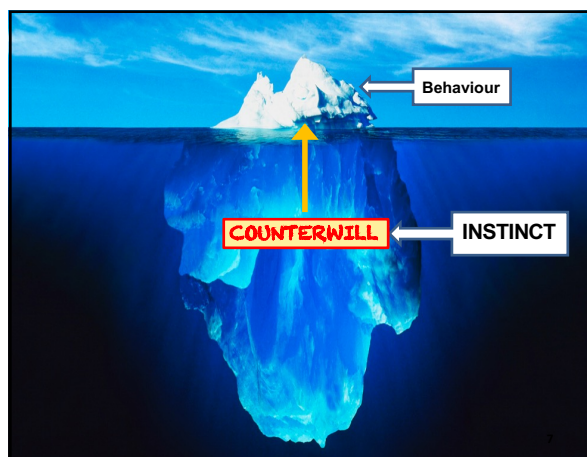
**SHIFTING OUR LENS**  
To gain perspective and insight



What we **SEE**  
influences what we do

When we understand what is behind the behaviour we then:

- choose interventions that will make a difference
- avoid interventions that risk making things worse



### Opposition and Resistance (Counterwill Instinct)

... is a pushing back against  
the will of others

or a defensive reaction to  
perceived control and  
coercion



**CounterWill** refers to the instinct to resist or oppose  
the will of others when the attachment instincts are not engaged.

#### Other's WILL

values & goals  
designs & purposes  
intentions & initiative  
preferences & priorities  
judgements & opinions  
expectations & hope  
plans & decisions  
wants & wishes

**COUNTERWILL**

**CounterWill** serves attachment by  
protecting against 'outside' control and influence

**CounterWill** is NOT a learned response, but an  
**EMOTIONAL REACTION** that plays a critical role  
in **PRESERVING** the self and becoming a  
separate person.

The belief that resistance and opposition must be  
unlearned (a) doesn't recognize or **value the  
developmental benefits of having one's own  
mind** and (b) fails to appreciate that we need to  
**GROW a child out of resistance**, not punish or  
teach a child to behave otherwise.

from *Rest Play Grow* by Deborah MacNamara

### Counterwill Instincts

#### Why are children moved by their counterwill instincts?

- There is a **natural** and **intended** purpose to the counterwill instincts. We are all born with this instinct.
- It is quite **healthy** for a child to show counterwill tendencies.
- When children stay **stuck** in counterwill, they may be **having difficulties with**:
  - Experiencing vulnerable feelings
  - Trusting the adult (may not feel cared for or may be feeling exploited)

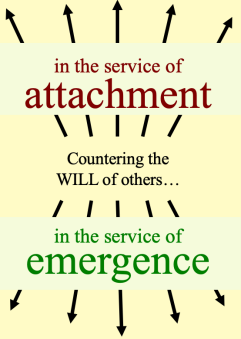


#### KEY INSIGHT #2

Children's behavior is based on  
development and emotional maturity.  
We cannot push and pull to get what's  
expected.

What is the purpose of counterwill?

- It serves **attachment** by protecting against outside influence and direction.
- It serves **development** by preparing the way for separate functioning.
- It is quite **healthy** for a child to show counterwill tendencies.




in the service of  
**attachment**

Countering the  
WILL of others...

in the service of  
**emergence**

**Resisting because of a LACK OF CONNECTION**



**COUNTERWILL** serves attachment by **protecting against outside influence & direction** from those NOT within the parent-sanctioned village of Attachment.

"Children were designed to be impossible to manage unless sufficiently attached to those in charge"


It is the default dynamic in a child that serves to **PROTECT** them.

Hence the importance of good parent-teacher-school relationships.  
And the problem with Substitute teachers

**ATTACHMENT & CounterWill**

**Why does a child oppose an adult to whom he/she is attached?**

- When the directive is given the child is attached to someone or something else
- Counterwill has been "held at bay" earlier and re-emerges when in a safe place



**CounterWill** happens when the **pressure or coercion** felt is greater than the child's **pursuit of attachment**.

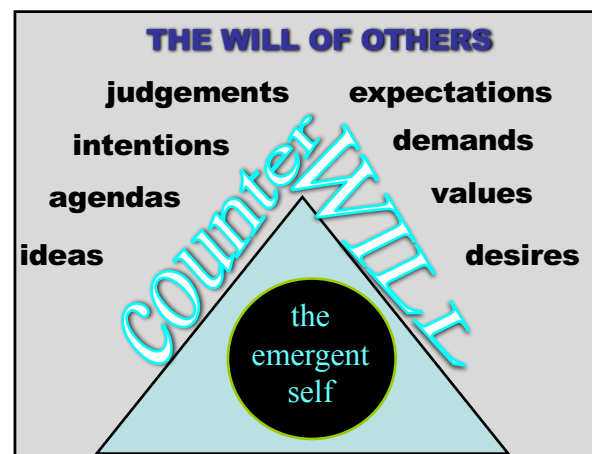
<b>commands</b>	>	<b>impulse to comply</b>
<b>obligations</b>	>	<b>urge to make it work</b>
<b>expectations</b>	>	<b>desire to please</b>
<b>demands</b>	>	<b>inclination to defer</b>
<b>pressure</b>	>	<b>desire to measure up</b>
<b>forcefulness</b>	>	<b>desire to be good</b>

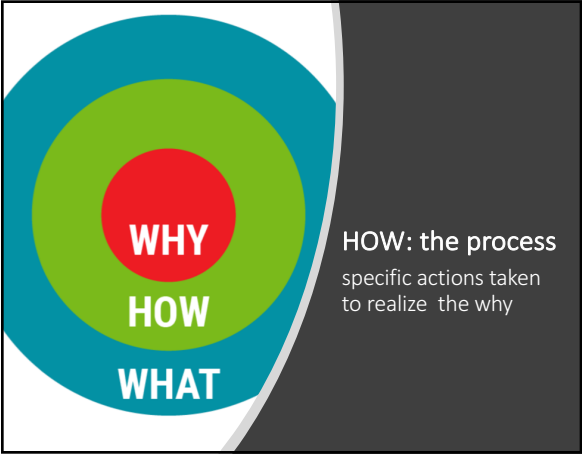
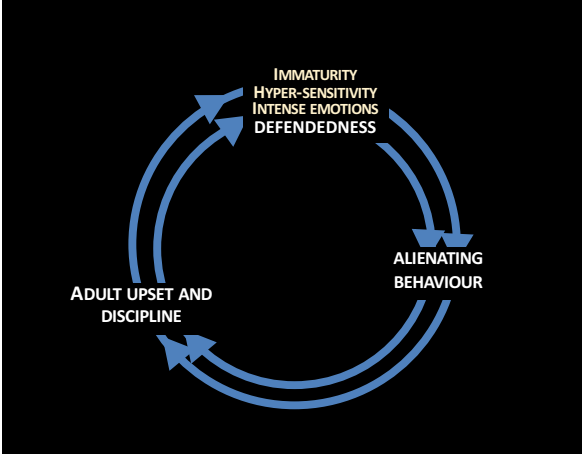
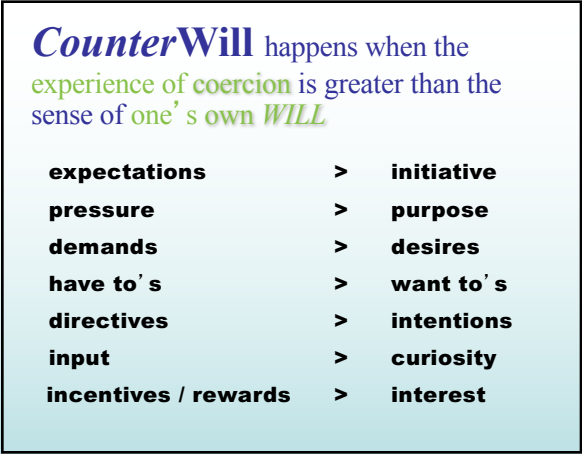
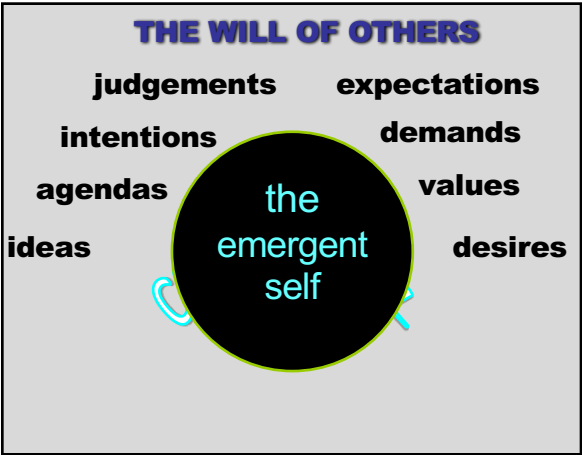
**CounterWill and DEVELOPMENT**



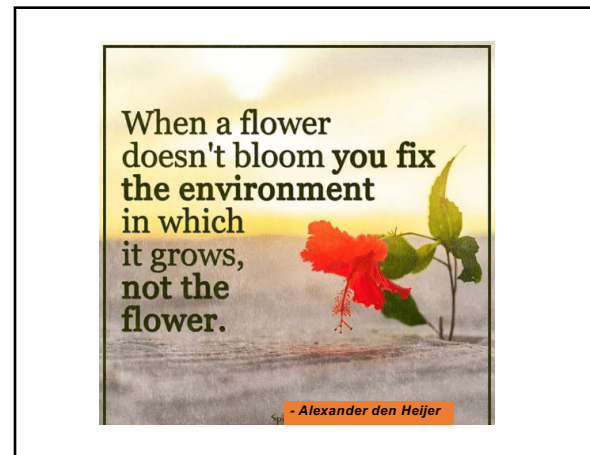
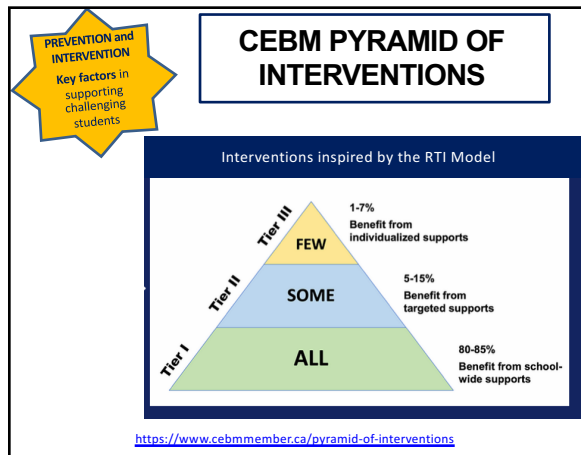
**COUNTERWILL** serves **DEVELOPMENT** by preparing the way for **SEPARATE FUNCTIONING**

The first step in finding one's own WILL is to resist and counter the WILL of others.









## BEST PRACTICES

Gaining insight to inform practice

**From:** What's wrong with you? This behaviour has to stop.

**To:** She's experiencing too much **coercion**

*How can I help reduce the pressure?*

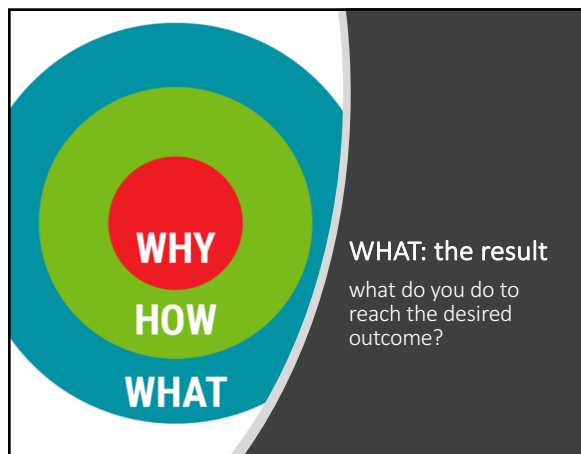
## BEHAVIOUR CHANGES WHEN...

**Maturation**  
Behaviour changes as the brain matures

**Emotions**  
Behaviour changes when emotions are felt

**Vulnerability**  
Behaviour changes when vulnerability is protected

**Attachment**  
Behaviour changes when students are attached to adults



Challenge: Resistance & Opposition Making Sense of What is Unfolding and Mapping Interventions to Support a Student			
What are the behaviors that you see?	Suggested Interventions:	Understanding "WHY" this might be coming from:	Practices to try and WHY
<b>Tier 1: In the Classroom:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Withdrawn, turned out</li> <li>Ignoring, not participating</li> <li>Initiated when being told what to do, reactive to smaller requests</li> <li>Stays "you're not the boss of me" important with peers &amp; adults</li> <li>Intimidates and intimidates others</li> <li>Work refusal</li> <li>Runs against daily routine and expectations</li> <li>Struggles with transitions, changes and novelty</li> <li>Aligned in tone and demeanor</li> <li>Physical outbursts with objects, towards peers and/or adults</li> <li>Stays out of the room</li> <li>Can be extremely difficult to manage by substitute teachers</li> <li>Does not willingly respond to authority</li> </ul>	<b>Tier 1: In the Classroom:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establish clear, structured routines - follow these implicitly</li> <li>Plan interventions, announce in advance - give students time to digest information and respond</li> <li>Work at building a significant attachment with this student</li> <li>Increase opportunities to make 1:1 connections</li> <li>Have additional work supplies readily available - provide with generosity when they are missing items</li> <li>Offer alternate seating options and alternate workstations to provide opportunity for choice</li> <li>Thank student for following requests - notice, name and recognize efforts - focus on small steps</li> <li>Make suggestions for different ways of completing required tasks</li> <li>Organize a Personal Box with the student - include items they enjoy touching, looking at and doing when they need a break</li> <li>Include a free-form activity, change from previously to maintain engagement. Encourage having photos from home</li> <li>Establish a Private Area and/or Quiet Activity Area within the classroom</li> <li>Subtle help in areas you know they have good skills</li> <li>Consider alternate arrangements when substitute teacher is present</li> </ul>	<b>Understanding "WHY" this might be coming from:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of secure attachments with adults</li> <li>Feeling cornered vs. being asked to do things, being process and being against this</li> <li>Facing the result of numerous things that their life are not working</li> <li>Facing too much separation from caregivers</li> <li>Attachment disorganized with life and school experience - too much is happening or being asked of them</li> <li>Adverse family conditions</li> <li>Learning difficulties</li> <li>Disruptive conditions</li> <li>Hyperactivity, hyperemotional</li> <li>Sensory issues, ASD</li> </ul>	<b>Practices to try and WHY</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>When resistance is felt from the student, avoid pushing into it. Rather, reduce pressure, offer choices, step back and give time for student to respond</li> <li>Time Out - increase separation alarm and isolation, which can lead to disengagement. I don't care or provide isolation, which can lead to disengagement</li> <li>Consequences - in times of high emotions consequences directly increase isolation for a child who already struggles managing their emotions</li> <li>Incentive charts, rewards and behavior contracts</li> <li>Child experiences the adult's agenda consistently</li> <li>May increase disengagement</li> <li>Can provide substance and cues</li> <li>Make the relationship contingent on performance</li> </ul>
<b>Tier 1: In the School/On the Playground:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Walks the halls in frustrated stance and demeanor - refusing to go where the adult has requested</li> <li>Negative comments readily directed to others</li> <li>Involves personal space and conversations</li> <li>Often refuses to go outside for recess and/or lunchtime</li> <li>Refuses to play or play too roughly</li> <li>Physical outbursts with objects towards and/or towards adults</li> <li>Participation in "interest clubs" with adult supervision</li> <li>Participation in the schedule to "break &amp; connect" clusters of students who struggle together</li> <li>If the student struggles with large groups - sheltered recess and/or sheltered lunch in a predetermined location with the objective of practicing skills in small group and then transitioning back to the larger group context</li> </ul>	<b>Tier 1: In the School/On the Playground:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Set up and use Physical Movement Stations - Inside and Outside</li> <li>Visits to Foster Classroom - provide a break from the classroom</li> <li>It is essential that this be set-up as an intervention prior to use, that the student and parents are informed of this intervention strategy</li> <li>Provide a student with power to visit the Tutorship Room, to be referred to play or play too roughly</li> <li>Map-out games that can be played outside, provide materials and alternatives to choose - clearly state safety measures</li> <li>Participation in "interest clubs" with adult supervision</li> <li>Observe the schedule to "break &amp; connect" clusters of students who struggle together</li> <li>If the student struggles with large groups - sheltered recess and/or sheltered lunch in a predetermined location with the objective of practicing skills in small group and then transitioning back to the larger group context</li> </ul>	<b>Tier 2 &amp; 3: Interventions with Support Staff and/or Professionals:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Schedule intervention time based on the needs of the student - daily, bi-weekly, weekly</li> <li>Check-in/Out of Day Recap</li> <li>Safe place to express big emotions</li> <li>Emotional expression activities</li> <li>Introduce sensory materials</li> <li>Written "personal center" for students, feel comfortable with the adults</li> <li>Create a personalized tool kit to support student in changing their emotions</li> <li>Share information with other members of the school team, including discipline team</li> </ul>	<b>Suggestions to help big emotions come out:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pre-set schedule for:</li> <li>Physical movement breaks during the school day</li> <li>Break from the classroom - intervention with support staff</li> <li>Targeted emotional release activities</li> <li>Personalized Project to be a service for</li> <li>Additional outdoor time</li> <li>Additional physical education classes</li> <li>Assign a job within the school with a significant adult to the student</li> <li>Assign a "supporting project" that can be a "break" for the student to be involved with</li> </ul>

<https://www.cebmmember.ca/resistance-and-opposition>

### TIER 1 – UNIVERSAL Practices in the Classroom

- Classroom interventions to benefit the whole group, evidence-based practices
- Daily practices lead by the Teacher with the help of other adults in the room
- In-class universal practices, focused on PREVENTION:
  - ✓ Minimizing exposure to additional pressure/coercion by relying on structures and routines to convey directives and to avoid surprises
  - ✓ Engaging student's attachment and receptivity before moving on to a task
  - ✓ Offering an array of support measures to answer to a variety of student needs and challenges

### Examples of Counterwill at Tier 1

At Tier 1, students may exhibit some covert signs of counterwill instinct by:

#### In the classroom:

- Taking their time/ slowing down after having been told to take out their material or to begin a new task
- Procrastinating in completing a task

#### During transitions/ in the schoolyard:

- Passively ignoring the adult directives to stand in line
- Hanging out longer in the schoolyard after having been told it's time to return to class

### REDUCE COERCION

- use **structures** and **routines** to orchestrate behavior
- the routine guides the behavior
- teach routines in a fun way
- make routines engaging:  
*"quiet as a mouse", "super-hero role"*



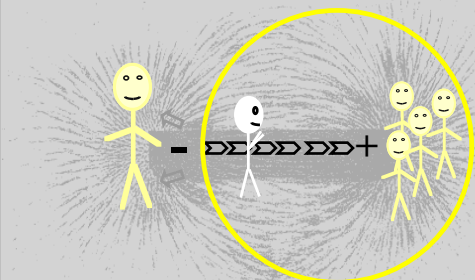
### ENGAGE THE ATTACHMENT INSTINCTS

1. Ensure to **collect** students at the beginning of each day and at least a few times throughout the day (following a transition), where there is no apparent reason to engage them other than to affirm the relationship
2. Make certain to **engage** students prior to giving a directive or starting a task
3. Use the engaging power of **play** if necessary to jump-start the relationship dance (especially if there is reticence to attach)

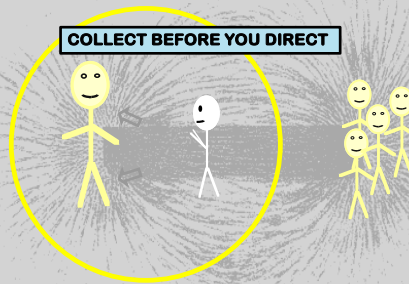


### When returning from lunch or recess

PURSUED ← PROXIMITY ⇒ RESISTED



COLLECT BEFORE YOU DIRECT





What practices do you use to **ENGAGE** the student's **attachment** and **RECEPTIVITY**?

## USE PLAY AND PLAYFULNESS



- **Singing and actions** – to take the mind off of the “have to”
- **Playing** usually evokes smiles – increasing attachment
- **Play with “no”** – a “no” dance – saying “no” or “I don’t want to” as loud as you can – as silly as you can

## TIER 2 – TARGETED Practices in the Classroom and School

- Interventions for challenging students who struggle in the classroom (situational, for a short period of time)
- Practices lead by the Teacher with the help of Support Staff and other adults in the room.
- In-class and out-of-class targeted interventions based on student needs, remedial/supporting measures
- Student continues to benefit from T1 interventions in addition to supplemental T2 measures

## Examples of Counterwill at Tier 2

At Tier 2, some students in the group may exhibit more overt signs of the counterwill instinct by:

In the classroom:

- Refusing to do work
- Openly not participating in group work

During transitions/ in the schoolyard:

- Resisting to transition to Specialists
- Opposing others' rules during recess games



## “HAVE-TO” INVENTORY

How many “Have-tos” are involved into the **classroom/school** experience?

What “Have-tos” are added involved a **learning** situation?

What other “Have-tos” are present, or have been present, in this **student's life**?

## Handling *CounterWill*

**Understand what makes a student feel VULNERABLE, evoking counterwill**

- New learning
- Not knowing what is expected
- Looking inadequate, especially in front of peers
- Confirming inadequacy
- Facing loss of attachment

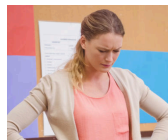


## REDUCE COERCION

- **Address student privately** (if possible) to avoid escalating the power struggle – this also protects the child's dignity and preserves the adult's position vis-à-vis the other students
- **back off** until you get a better attachment hold
- **LEAD** the child out of the impasse (power struggle)
- draw attention **AWAY** from the coercive elements of the situation



## REDUCE COERCION



- refrain from using a **commanding or prescriptive** manner
- make agendas **less explicit**
- refrain from focusing on the **SHOULDs**, the **MUSTs** & the **HAVE TOs**
- use as little force and leverage as possible

## ENGAGE THE ATTACHMENT INSTINCTS

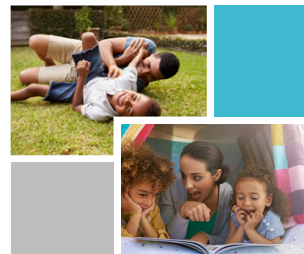
- Talk about **how hard it is** to always "have to do" things
- **Normalize** that there are times when we all want to refuse to do what we "must"
- Allow the child **time and space** to handle their Counterwill instinct



## COME ALONGSIDE

### Use Play and Playfulness

- Being playful helps to diffuse tense situations.
- Being playful helps to get our directives across without pressure and coercion.
- Through fantasy, stories and make-believe, play can provide cues and guidance towards expected behaviours.



## ENHANCE EMERGENCE

- provide for some sense of **choice**
- put the focus on the child's **will**
- make room for the child's **initiative** and **involvement**
- solicit **good intentions** where possible
- place **in charge** where appropriate and possible



What practices do you use to **MAKE ROOM** for the student's **own WILL** (their initiative and involvement)?

### TIER 3 – INDIVIDUALIZED Practices with the help of Support Staff and/or Professionals

- Interventions for highly challenging students who are unable to function well within the classroom and/or the school
- Collaboration between the school team, with the support of the board consultants/professionals
- In-class and out-of-class individualized interventions based on close observations and reflection - Referral for further investigation on the root of the problem
- Adaptation-Accommodations – Student specific needs, remediation (pull-out 1 on 1)
- Student continues to benefit from T1 interventions in addition to supplemental T2 and T3 measures

### Examples of Counterwill at Tier 3

At Tier 3, few students in the group exhibit frequent and disturbing behaviours resulting from the counterwill instinct. At this level, the student may exhibit a range of different behaviours, which originate from a multitude of sources.

#### In the classroom:

- Railing against the daily routine and adult expectations
- Interrupting and speaking over others
- Doesn't willingly respond to adult authority. Says things like: "you're not the boss of me!"

#### During transitions/ in the schoolyard:

- Imposing themselves onto others and invading their personal space
- Disrupting other's games when not invited to join

Children stuck in counterwill are challenging



much less receptive to being lead in general

highly resistant to direction and guidance

often are less endearing, tending to alienate the adults responsible for them

appear independent and much less needy and so not as likely to evoke care-taking responses in the adults responsible for them

very difficult to bring to state of REST and SATIATION

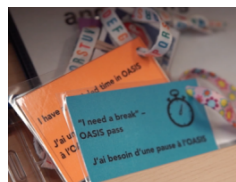
consequences and sanctions are highly PROVOCATIVE

### Daily multiple student "Check-Ins" with a significant adult



### Instead of a time-out, use TIME AWAY

- If necessary, use TIME AWAY (rely on your school team for support and respite).
- Send the student to someone or to a pre-determined location.
- Use a dignified way to have the student leave. E.g. Send the student on an 'errand'
- Let the student know explicitly that the relationship is still intact (i.e. Bridging).
- It is always up to the adult to restore and maintain the relationship with a student.

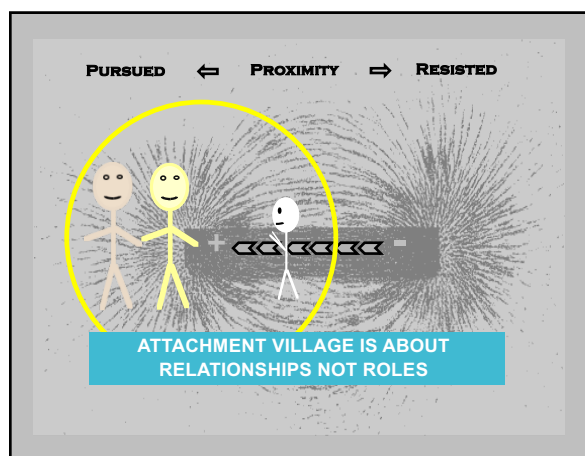
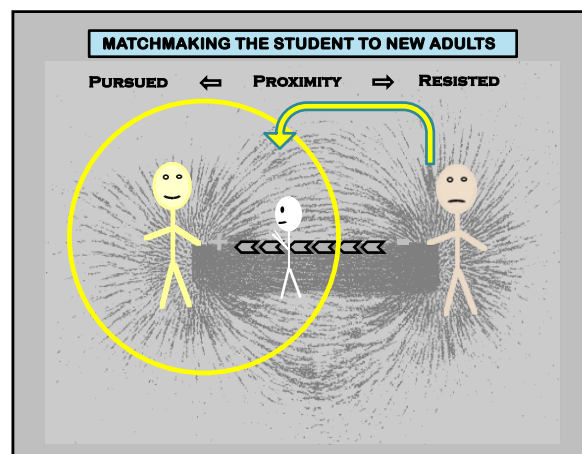
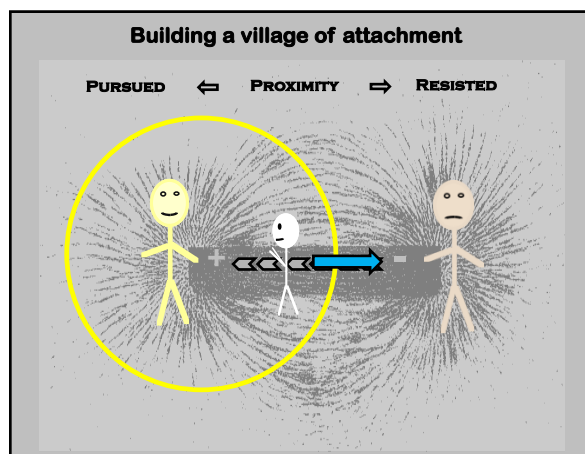


### Nurturing Support Centre Tier 3 Intervention

Personalized & adapted schedule

Individualized support





### Don't let counterwill Break the CONNECTION

- don't take counterwill personally
- anticipate and expect counterwill
- reflect the resistance as natural & normal
- don't use separation as a consequence
- don't make behaviour the bottom line
- repair damage done by counterwill fallout

### When faced with a challenge of the 'wills'

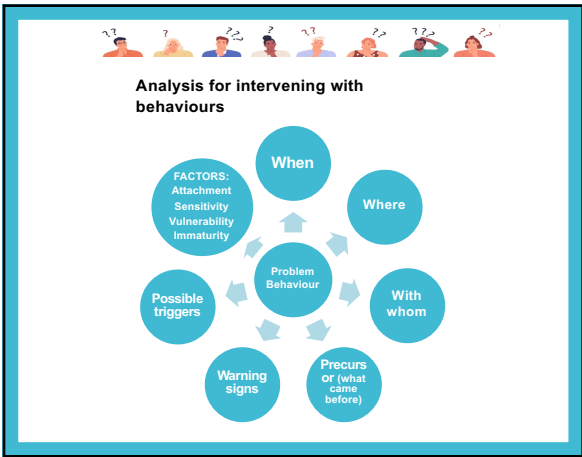
- Be careful about finding yourself into a **power struggle**.
- Don't let yourself be **alienated** by their behaviour and don't take the behavior personally. **Detach your anger from your discipline.**
- Separate the response from the incident and choose a **more suitable time** (\*except in case of emergency or security)
- **Change the circumstances** affecting the child rather than trying to control their behavior.
- **Bridge and repair** any fallout from counterwill confrontations.



### Guidelines to consider

- 1** Give the impression that you can and will take care of the child by projecting calmness and confidence (If necessary, fake it until you can make it!)
- 2** Rely on structures, routines and rituals to help (\*this limits reliance on child direction/control)
- 3** Be careful about revealing your own sense of helplessness "I don't know what to do with you anymore!"
- 4** Be careful about revealing your own needs, felt inadequacies or fears

YOUR WORDS MATTER	
Instead of that, try saying this	
No you won't	Yes, I understand this is important to you, how about (...)
Not right now	Yes, that's a great idea, let me see when (...)
You should / must / have to	Let's / We can / How about
Be quiet	I see you are eager to share / this is really important to you.
Stop it / Calm down	I see you need to let it out. How about (...)
Don't be so defiant	It sounds like you need to follow your instincts and listen to what your body is telling you.
That's enough	How about we take a pause.
You better do as I say, right now	I've decided this is not a good time to address this issue
If you don't listen to me, I will (...)	I see this is tricky for you, we are going to solve this later. How about we go for a walk / a drink of water.
Leave my classroom	How about we go to a quieter place to figure this out.



**Our ROLE as the adult**

- teacher
- Educator
- Parent
- COACH
- Technician
- Principal
- counsellor

**Adjusting our VIEW**

- Taking things **LESS PERSONALLY**
- Recognizing that instinct is involved
- Aiming to "do no harm"

**Adjusting our STANCE**

- Normalizing by conveying that some pushback is part of the process
- Placing child **in charge** when possible
- Being **patient**

**Making ROOM for**

- For child to display own "will"
- To be indulged in the play mode

**Catherine Korah and Martine Demers**  
Centre of Excellence for Behaviour Management

[www.cebm.ca](http://www.cebm.ca)

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**THE CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE FOR BEHAVIOUR MANAGEMENT (CEBM)**

As a support to the 10 English School Boards of Quebec, the CEBM aims to help boards and their staff to find effective and developmentally friendly interventions for working with students who experience significant behavioural challenges in the school setting.

**Also visit the CEBM Resource Center**  
<https://www.cebm.ca/resources-and-opposition>

**Editorials on Counterwill**

May 9, 2016 • 6 min  
**Why Kids Resist and What We Can Do About It**  
by Deborah MacNamara  
May 9, 2016

May 1, 2017 • 5 min  
**The Surprising Secret Behind Kid's Resistance and Opposition**  
by Deborah MacNamara  
May 1, 2017

Feb 1, 2017 • 6 min  
**Playing Matchmaker: Cultivating Relationships with Teachers and Adults Who Care for Our Kids**  
by Deborah MacNamara  
Feb 1, 2017

Dec 1, 2016 • 5 min  
**The Five Things Master Teachers Know and Do**  
by Deborah MacNamara  
Dec 1, 2016

<https://macnamara.ca/portfolio/why-kids-resist-and-what-we-can-do-about-it/>  
<https://macnamara.ca/portfolio/the-surprising-secret-behind-kids-resistance-and-opposition/>  
<https://macnamara.ca/portfolio/playing-matchmaker-cultivating-relationships-with-teachers-and-adults-who-care-for-our-kids/>  
<https://macnamara.ca/portfolio/the-five-things-master-teachers-know/>

**Upcoming Events**

<https://www.cebm.ca/news-events>

process changes transformation identity puberty maturity adolescent body

Wed, Dec 07 | Online Professional Development  
**Demystifying The Adolescent Journey**  
Join us ONLINE Wednesday, December 7th, 2022 - 4:00-5:00 pm. Presenter: Catherine Korah. Event is FREE. The session will be recorded and available on the CEBM website.

[To Register](#)

Thu, Jan 19 | Online Professional Development  
**What's Next? series: The Child Who Is Anxious**  
Join us ONLINE Thursday, January 19th, 2023 - 4:00-5:00 pm. Presenter: Catherine Korah. Event is FREE. The session will be recorded and available on the CEBM website.

[To Register](#)