

- WESTERN CANADA MENTAL HEALTH SUMMIT -

# IMPROVING SKILLS & COMPETENCIES FOR MENTAL HEALTH & EDUCATION PROFESSIONALS

WEDNESDAY, MAY 24, 2023 – FRIDAY, MAY 26, 2023

Best Western Premier Calgary Plaza Hotel & Conference Centre  
1316 33 St NE, T2A 6B6, Calgary, AB

JEFF RIGGENBACH, PH.D.

## WORKSHOP #4

Disarming High-Conflict Students in the Classroom: Dealing with  
the 8 Most Difficult Students in Educational Settings

Day One | 8:30am - 11:45pm



JEFF RIGGENBACH  
PH.D.

Jeff Rigenbach, Ph.D. is a best-selling and award winning author who has earned a reputation as an international expert in CBT and personality disorders. Over the past 20 years he has developed and overseen CBT-based treatment programs for Mood disorders, anxiety disorders, addictive behaviour disorders and Personality Disorders at two different psychiatric hospitals and clinics serving over 3,000 clients at multiple levels of care. Dr. Rigenbach trained at the Beck Institute of Cognitive Therapy and Research in Philadelphia, is a Diplomate of the Academy of Cognitive Therapy and a certified cognitive therapist.



208-197 Forester Street  
North Vancouver, BC, Canada  
V7H 0A6

T 604 924 0296 F 604 924 0239  
TF 1 800 456 5424  
E registration@jackhirose.com

**DISARMING DIFFICULT STUDENTS IN THE CLASSROOM:**

DEALING WITH YOUR 8 MOST CHALLENGING STUDENTS BEFORE YOU BURNOUT!



JEFF RICGENBACH, PhD  
[DIFFICULTPEOPLE@JEFFRICGENBACH.COM](mailto:DIFFICULTPEOPLE@JEFFRICGENBACH.COM)

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**DISARMING DIFFICULT STUDENTS IN THE CLASSROOM:**

TEACHERS HAVE THE MOST DIFFICULT JOB IN THE WORLD!

- More responsibility on teachers
- Less responsibility on parents
- Changed thinking/expectations in society
- Changed thinking/mentality of students

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**DISARMING DIFFICULT STUDENTS IN THE CLASSROOM:****STATISTICS**

- In the US 14% of new teachers resign by end of first year – 33% leave within 3 years, 50% by 5th
- New study revealed sick leave has doubled in Toronto area teachers over last 3 years
- 7,000 students dropout daily in the US
- 41% Canadian students said considering dropping out

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**DISARMING DIFFICULT STUDENTS IN THE CLASSROOM:****TEACHER BURNOUT**

- Students identified not fitting in or relating with peers and teachers and not getting enough support among top reasons for dropout

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**DISARMING DIFFICULT STUDENTS IN THE CLASSROOM:**

**Conflict is Inevitable;  
Combat is Optional!**

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**DISARMING DIFFICULT STUDENTS IN THE CLASSROOM:**

**IS THERE A SUCH THING AS A NORMAL PERSONALITY?**

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**DISARMING DIFFICULT STUDENTS IN THE CLASSROOM:**

WHAT MAKES SOMEONE DIFFICULT?

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**DISARMING DIFFICULT STUDENTS IN THE CLASSROOM:**

“THE EMOTIONS OF NORMAL PEOPLE”

WILLIAM MARSTON, 1928

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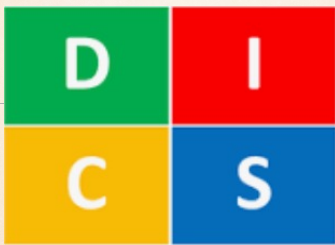
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**DISARMING DIFFICULT STUDENTS IN THE CLASSROOM:**



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**DISARMING DIFFICULT STUDENTS IN THE CLASSROOM:**

D

Motto:  
Do it Now!

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- Dominant
- Direct
- Doer
- Decisive
- Demanding

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**DISARMING DIFFICULT STUDENTS IN THE CLASSROOM:**

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Motivated by: Being challenged, having choices

Environmental Needs: Autonomy, Authority, Advancement

Responds to a teacher who: Rewards Accomplishment,  
Stays out of your business

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**DISARMING DIFFICULT STUDENTS IN THE CLASSROOM:**

Outgoing

	D	I	
Task	C	S	People

Reserved

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**DISARMING DIFFICULT STUDENTS IN THE CLASSROOM:**



Do it Fun!

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- Inspiring
- Influential
- Interactive
- Impressionable
- Interested in People

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**DISARMING DIFFICULT STUDENTS IN THE CLASSROOM:**



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Motivated by: **Recognition, Approval**

Environmental Needs: **Opportunities to Interact**

Responds to a teacher who: **Is friend, not dictator.**

*Creates atmosphere of excitement in the classroom!*

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**DISARMING DIFFICULT STUDENTS IN THE CLASSROOM:**

Outgoing

			
Task			People

Reserved

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**DISARMING DIFFICULT STUDENTS IN THE CLASSROOM:**

S

Do it  
Together

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- Social
- Supportive
- Steady
- Sweet
- Shy

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**DISARMING DIFFICULT STUDENTS IN THE CLASSROOM:**

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Motivated by: Security, Appreciation

Environmental Needs: Identification with group

Responds to a teacher who: Is Nurturing

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**DISARMING DIFFICULT STUDENTS IN THE CLASSROOM:**

**Outgoing**

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**Task**

D	I
C	S

**People**

**Reserved**

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**DISARMING DIFFICULT STUDENTS IN THE CLASSROOM:**



Do it Right!

- Cautious
- Careful
- Contemplative
- Calculating
- Competent

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**DISARMING DIFFICULT STUDENTS IN THE CLASSROOM:**



Motivated by: **Quality**

Environmental Needs: **Structure**

Responds to teachers who: **Detail-oriented,**  
**Provides sufficient time**

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**DISARMING DIFFICULT STUDENTS IN THE CLASSROOM:**

**WHAT MAKES SOMEONE DIFFICULT?**

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**DISARMING DIFFICULT STUDENTS IN THE CLASSROOM:****WHAT MAKES SOMEONE DIFFICULT?**

1. Easily triggered
2. Extreme thinking
3. Intense feelings
4. Inflexible behavior
5. Lack of awareness

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**DISARMING DIFFICULT STUDENTS IN THE CLASSROOM:****WHAT MAKES SOMEONE DIFFICULT?**

1. Awareness - The problem can't be US!
2. They can't just be different than us
- 3 We can't just not like them... But...

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**DISARMING DIFFICULT STUDENTS IN THE CLASSROOM:****THE BULLY****THE DRAMA MAMMA****THE CON ARTIST****THE VICTIM****THE OVERANALYZER****THE LAND MINE****THE SKEPTIC****THE YES MAN**


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**DISARMING DIFFICULT STUDENTS IN THE CLASSROOM:****BASIC PHILOSOPHIES**

1. Validate
2. Attack the Problem, not the Person (student)
3. Connecting is Key!

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**DISARMING DIFFICULT STUDENTS IN THE CLASSROOM:**

✦ We receive 35,000 Messages every day - how do we do our best to ensure our messages hit the mark???



Communication = Message Sent + Message Received

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**DISARMING DIFFICULT STUDENTS IN THE CLASSROOM:**

**BELIEFS DRIVE BEHAVIOR!**

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**DISARMING DIFFICULT STUDENTS IN THE CLASSROOM:**

**“A mental filter that guides the processing of information” - Landau and Goldfried, 1980**



1. How we get our buttons pushed?
2. How we say something without even realizing it

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**DISARMING DIFFICULT STUDENTS IN THE CLASSROOM:**

**Beliefs affect the “Sending” AND the “Receiving”**

Communication = Message Sent + Message Received




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**DISARMING DIFFICULT STUDENTS IN THE CLASSROOM:**

**5 “Magic” Questions**

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# DISARMING DIFFICULT STUDENTS IN THE CLASSROOM:

## THE BULLY




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## THE BULLY

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Profile

- ❖ Beliefs: "I am Special"
- ❖ Mindset: "Win, and look good doing it!"
- ❖ Triggers: Criticism, challenges to autonomy, Image
- ❖ DISC parallel: One out of control version of the **D**
- ❖ Clinical parallel: Individuals with Narcissistic Traits

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## THE BULLY

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Profile

### Continuum

Mild                      Moderate                      Extreme

I ————— I ————— I

Direct, to the point,  
Lacks Empathy for peers

Demanding,  
Bossy w/students

Teasing takes on cruel  
nature, Verbally abusive,  
physically aggressive

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## Characteristics of **THE BULLY**

- ❖ Low empathy
- ❖ Controlling
- ❖ Entitlement based behaviors

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## **THE BULLY**



### Red Flags and Bullying in ed settings

- ❖ Bragging
- ❖ Unwillingness to share or take part in game initiated by another student
- ❖ Telling teachers/students rather than asking
- ❖ Difficulty working in groups, taking other student input
- ❖ Inability to receive constructive feedback

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## Connecting with **THE BULLY**

**Communication = Message Sent+ Received**



- ❖ Compliment them on Successes
- ❖ Let them know they are a part of something special

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Disarming

**THE BULLY**

## ❖ Disarmers

- That's impressive
- That's a good idea
- I hadn't thought of that
- Who wouldn't be?

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Tips for  
Dealing with**THE BULLY**

1. Feed their need to succeed
2. Let them work as autonomously as possible
3. Avoid power struggles
4. Separate when necessary
5. Create a Bully-free zone

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"Bamming"

**THE BULLY**

Speaking his language

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## My BAM! **THE BULLY** Speaking his/her language

Situation:

**B** Mike, we couldn't have won last yr championship w/o you

**A** And I want you to lead our team to another one this year

**M** Every time you treat Jase like he's less than the rest of you just b/c he is new, you hurt our chances of winning. Please be a leader and don't say that again."

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## My BAM! **THE BULLY** Speaking his/her language

Situation:

**B**

**A**

**M**

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**DISARMING DIFFICULT STUDENTS IN THE CLASSROOM:**

## THE CON ARTIST




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## THE CON ARTIST

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Profile

- ❖ Beliefs: Get what I want at any cost
- ❖ Mindset: Serve my own interests only
- ❖ Where we see them: Prison, gangs, professional athletes, politics, CEOs
- ❖ Triggers: Rules, Denial of instant gratification
- ❖ DISC Parallel - One out of control version of the **D**
- ❖ Clinical Parallel - Individuals with antisocial or Psychopathic traits

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## THE CON ARTIST

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Profile

### Continuum

Mild                      Moderate                      Extreme

I ————— I ————— I

Occasional lying,  
Viewed as "rebellious"

Frequent disregard for  
Classroom rules

Yells at or hurts others  
to get what they want

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## Characteristics of THE CON ARTIST

- ❖ Violators
- ❖ Can be Impulsive or Pre-meditated
- ❖ Low Anxiety
- ❖ Lack of Remorse

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## THE CON ARTIST

### Examining Motives in Rule-Breaking

- ❖ Were they aware of the rule or policy?
- ❖ Did they have genuine need?
- ❖ One time event vs a pattern of behavior
- ❖ Evidence of changed behavior

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## THE CON ARTIST



### Red Flags of Con artists in ed settings

- ❖ History of rule-breaking/willful disobedience
- ❖ Roughhousing/Bullying on Playground
- ❖ Describes cruelty to animals
- ❖ Fascinated with fire-setting
- ❖ Lacks nervousness or anxiety
- ❖ Unremorseful or unconcerned when disciplined

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## Connecting with THE CON ARTIST

### Communication - Message Sent+ Received



- ❖ Shoot straight
- ❖ Columbo
- ❖ Ask about their sham jobs
- ❖ Validate the grain of truth

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## Disarming **THE CON ARTIST**

### ❖ Disarmers

- That's smooth
- Crafty
- Sounds like you pulled a fast one

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## Tips for Dealing with **THE CON ARTIST**

1. Reward goals accomplished within rules/norms
2. Collaborate to Minimize Deception
3. Fact Check and confront directly
4. Leverage Consequences - No Wiggle room
5. Separate if necessary

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## "Bamming" **THE CON ARTIST** Speaking his language

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## My BAM! THE CON ARTIST

### Speaking his/her language

Situation:

**B** Curtis, I know you want a piece of candy

**A** I know snickers are your favorite - I want you to get one too

**M** I saw you steal Bailey's and I need you to put it back. I'll be giving more chances this afternoon and hopefully you can get one then.

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## THE DRAMA MAMMA




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## THE DRAMA MAMMA

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Profile

- ❖ Beliefs: "I am noteworthy"
- ❖ Mindset: Life is a Party!"
- ❖ Triggers: Being Ignored
- ❖ DISC Parallel - One out of control version of the **I**
- ❖ Clinical Parallel - Individuals with *bistrionic* traits

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## Characteristics of THE DRAMA MAMMA

- ❖ Talkative, engaging, fun
- ❖ Class Clown
- ❖ Cracking jokes, telling stories
- ❖ SOS

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## THE DRAMA MAMMA



### Red Flags in school settings

- ❖ Exaggerates
- ❖ One upping others
- ❖ Distracting Other Students
- ❖ Trouble working alone
- ❖ Hard to have a serious conversation without deflecting
- ❖ Frequently in nurses clinic
- ❖ More concerned with school scores than actual learning
- ❖ May not take school work seriously

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## THE DRAMA MAMMA



### Continuum

Mild

Moderate

Extreme

I ————— I ————— I

Likes to be center of Peer group, but rarely interferes with teaching or learning

"Class Clown" behaviors distract other students and interfere with teaching

Is unable to ever take class serious, attention-seeking or flirtatious behaviour is inappropriate

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## Connecting with **THE DRAMA MAMMA**

**Communication = Message Sent+ Received**



- ❖ Compliment!
- ❖ BE FUN!

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## Disarming **THE DRAMA MAMMA**

### ❖ Disarmers

- Cute
- Fun
- That's Crazy!
- I see you

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## Tips for Dealing with **THE DRAMA MAMMA**

1. Create a positive, upbeat classroom environment
2. Provide opportunities to socialize
3. Feed their need to be the center of attention
4. Depackage
5. Delegate the Details

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## My BAM! **THE DRAMA MAMMA** Speaking his/her language

Situation:

- B** Treasure, you crack the whole class up, you can be hilarious
- A** Making people laugh is a gift
- M** I need you not to do it at chloe's expense - hurt her feelings and upset others

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## THE VICTIM

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Profile

- ❖ Beliefs: "I am helpless"
- ❖ Mindset: "Bad things will always happen to me"
- ❖ Triggers: High expectations
- ❖ DISC Parallel - One out of control version of the **I**
- ❖ Clinical Parallel - students with BPD, Narcissistic, Histrionic traits

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## Characteristics of **THE VICTIM**

- ❖ Feels sorry for themselves
- ❖ Wants you to feel sorry for them
- ❖ CAN expect special treatment because of it
- ❖ Complains, insists on innocence, rejects problem-solving

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## **THE VICTIM**

### Red Flags in school settings



- ❖ Frequent Complaining, whining, pouting
- ❖ Blaming teachers and other students
- ❖ Regular tattling
- ❖ Drawing attention to self with band-aid, cast, etc

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## **THE VICTIM**

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Profile

### Continuum

Mild

Moderate

Extreme

I ————— I ————— I

Tendency to blame others.  
Mild complaining

Pouty in class or on  
playground, lacking  
engagement, becomes irritated  
with attempted problem solving

Demanding help or special  
privileges; Extreme  
measures taken to ensure  
others see unfairness

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## Connecting with **THE VICTIM**

**Communication = Message Sent+ Received**



- ❖ Be sympathetic
- ❖ Deal with classroom injustice

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## Disarming **THE VICTIM**

### ❖ Disarmers

- I'm Sorry
- That's terrible/awful... and...
- Be that as it may

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## Tips for working with **THE VICTIM**

1. Validate and Empathize
2. Grey Rock Method
3. Gently point out how they may be turning peers off
4. Shift out of Reverse
5. Catch them doing something right

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## THE VICTIM Mentality:

### A Deeper Look

2 Types

- ❖ Helpless
- ❖ Helpless/Entitled

Prosecutor      Judge



Victim

I

I

I

Passive

Assertive

Aggressive

**Passive-Aggressive**

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## My BAM! THE VICTIM

### Speaking his/her language

Situation:

**B** Collin, I'm sorry teachers were mean to you at your last school

I know you never want to feel that way again - I want you to have a good experience and feel more empowered at Jefferson, and I promise do everything I can to ensure that you are treated fairly here

**A**

**M** But refusing to participate in music class and giving Mr. Pauls a hard time was not the best way to accomplish that.

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## THE LAND MINE




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## THE LAND MINE

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Profile

- ❖ Beliefs: "I hate you don't leave me"
- ❖ Mindset: "People are God. People Suck"
- ❖ Triggers: Perceived put downs or "slights"
- ❖ DISC Parallel - One out of control version of the **S**
- ❖ Clinical Parallel - Individuals with *borderline* traits

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## Characteristics of THE LAND MINE

- ❖ Overly "sensitive"
- ❖ Extreme thinking shifts
- ❖ Rapid and intense mood swings
- ❖ Impulsive behaviour

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## THE LAND MINE

Red Flags in school settings



- ❖ Rapid and Extreme Mood Swings (ie fine one moment and the next in tears or panic or rage)
- ❖ Do you go from being their "favorite teacher ever" to a target of blame?
- ❖ Do other students go from being their "bestie" to being so mad they don't talk for periods of time?
- ❖ Rallying the troops

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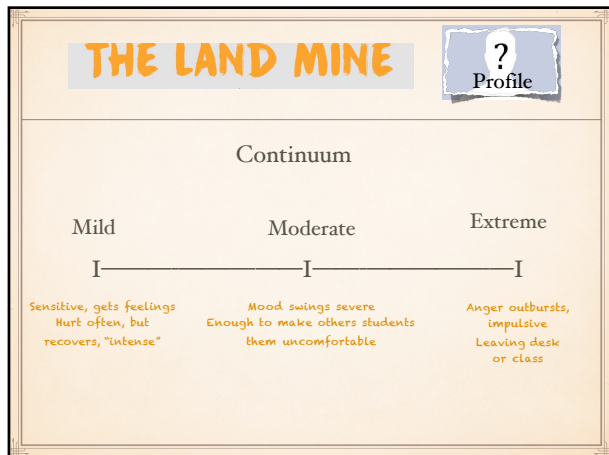
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## Connecting with THE LAND MINE

**Communication = Message Sent+ Received**



- ❖ Take an interest in them
- ❖ Be Nurturing
- ❖ Be Consistent

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## Disarming THE LAND MINE

- ❖ **Disarmers**
  - I can't imagine
  - I could never understand... and
  - I'm with you

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## Tips for Dealing with **THE LAND MINE**

1. Be Consistent
2. Stay calm!
3. Clarify Meaning
4. Opportunities to cool off
5. Set and reinforce consequences - frame in relational terms

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## My BAM! **THE LAND MINE** Speaking his/her language

Situation:

- B** Layton, I'm sorry John hurt your feelings. I know you have been rejected a lot in your life and I hate that for you
- A** It is really important to me that you to feel accepted here
- M** But next time I need you to come up with a better way to let someone know they upset you - can I help you come up with some different ways that will work better for you and the class?

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## My BAM! **THE LAND MINE** Speaking his/her language

Situation:

- B**
- A**
- M**

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**THE YES MAN**

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Profile

- ❖ Beliefs: "I Need Other People to be OK with me"
- ❖ Mindset: I Must Put Others Needs Before My Own
- ❖ Triggers: Working Alone, Conflict, Hostility
- ❖ DISC Parallel - One out of control version of the **S**
- ❖ Clinical Parallel - Individuals with *dependent* traits

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**Characteristics of THE YES MAN**

- ❖ Extremely talkative
- ❖ Social
- ❖ Susceptible to peer pressure
- ❖ Difficulty taking initiative, making decisions

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### Red Flags in school settings



## THE YES MAN

- ❖ Overly talkative
- ❖ Difficulty taking initiative
- ❖ Difficulty problem-solving
- ❖ Tendency to “follow the crowd,” even if it means making choices they would not on their own
- ❖ Will blame self even in situations where majority of blame goes elsewhere

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## THE YES MAN



### Continuum

Mild                      Moderate                      Extreme

I ————— I ————— I

Easily influenced  
by problem  
students, but  
performs  
adequately  
academically

Asks for help  
frequently, but can  
problem solve with  
prompting

Meltdowns over what they  
“can’t do. Begs, pleads for  
help and had difficulty  
trying on their own

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### Connecting with THE YES MAN

**Communication = Message Sent+ Received**



- ❖ Be Nurturing
- ❖ Validate Feelings
- ❖ Offer Support

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## Disarming THE YES MAN

### ❖ Disarmers

- Appreciated
- Thank You
- I'm with you

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## Tips for Dealing with THE YES MAN

1. Compliment Often
2. Push them to Problem - Solve
3. Let them Work in Groups When Possible
4. Provide Accountability
5. Explain Consequences in Relational Terms

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## My BAM! THE YES MAN Speaking his/her language

Situation:

**B** Ruthie I know it is really important for you to fit in

**A** You are a neat girl and I want you to have a lot of friends

**M** It was disappointing to me that you let Ella Cate convince you to be a part of this - I know you didn't want to hurt anyone - How can I help you make a better choice next time?

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**THE OVERANALYZER**

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 Profile

- ❖ Beliefs: “I Must be Perfect, You Must be Perfect”
- ❖ Mindset: “Do it right, or don’t do it at All”
- ❖ Triggers: Being Rushed, Poor Quality
- ❖ DISC Parallel - One out of control version of the **C**
- ❖ Clinical Parallel - Individuals with *OCPD* traits

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**Characteristics of THE OVERANALYZER**

- ❖ Perfectionistic thinking
- ❖ Overly focused on minute detail
- ❖ Inability to delegate
- ❖ Difficulty meeting deadlines

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## THE OVERANALYZER

### Red Flags in school settings

- ❖ Verbalizes being bothered by slight imperfections in classroom
- ❖ Other pre-occupation with Detail
- ❖ Overly critical of self or other students
- ❖ Turning homework in late /difficulty meeting deadlines

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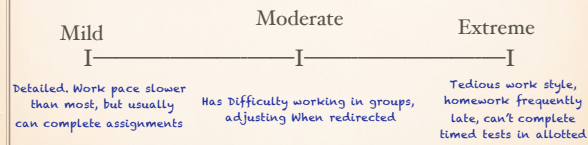
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## THE OVERANALYZER

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Profile

### Continuum




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## Connecting with THE OVERANALYZER

### Communication = Message Sent+ Received



- ❖ Structure classroom
- ❖ Give adequate time/don't rush

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## Disarming

## THE OVERANALYZER

## ❖ Disarmers

- Right
- Noted

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## Tips for Dealing with

## THE OVERANALYZER

1. Feed their need for Structure
2. Be Patient
3. Anticipate Questions
4. Help them Eat an Elephant
5. Eat Sloppy Joes!

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## My BAM!

## THE OVERANALYZER

## Speaking his/her language

**B** Stew, I wish other students did even close to the same quality work that you do - I appreciate you wanting to be sure everything is right

**A** We need people in this world who keep trying and don't give up easily

**M** But I know Ms. Paysour has been working with you on "passing" on questions you don't know and just getting as many done as you can - I am going to help with carline and you won't be able to stay here any longer - Tomorrow you can try again.

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**THE SKEPTIC**

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Profile

- ❖ Beliefs: People are Out to Get You
- ❖ Mindset: Trust Nobody, or You Will Get Hurt
- ❖ Triggers: Situations They Perceive Potential Threat
- ❖ DISC Parallel - One out of control version of the **C**
- ❖ Clinical Parallel - Individuals with *paranoid* traits

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**Characteristics of THE SKEPTIC**

- ❖ Untrusting
- ❖ Guarded
- ❖ Suspicious
- ❖ Can be aggressive

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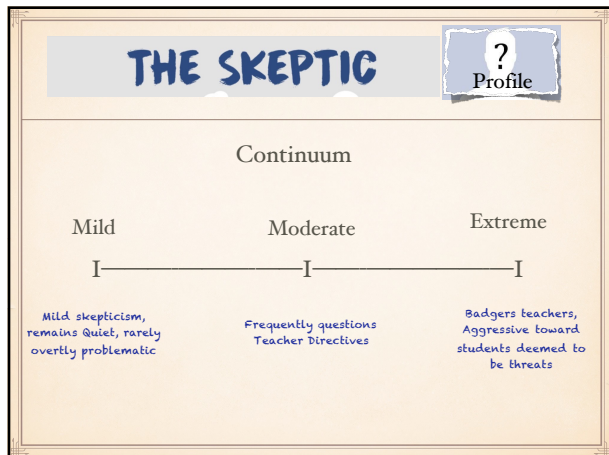
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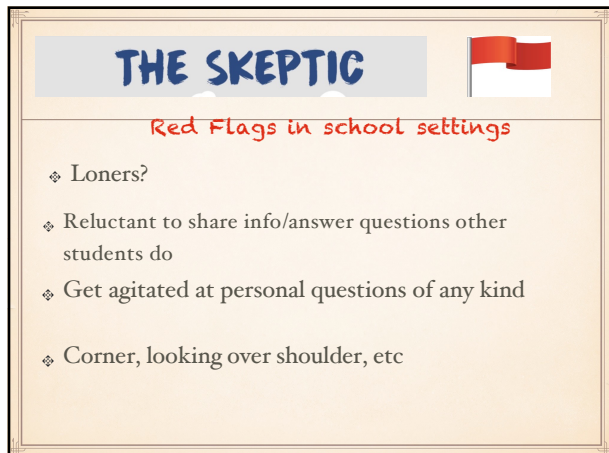
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## Disarming THE SKEPTIC

### ❖ Disarmers

- I don't blame you
- I got your back

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## Tips for dealing with THE SKEPTIC

1. Anticipate Questions
2. Validate Concerns
3. Seat Accordingly
4. Be as transparent as you can
5. Frame Consequences in Terms of How it Could Hurt Them

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## My BAM! THE SKEPTIC Speaking his/her language

**B** Debbie, I know that you have had some bad experiences with male teachers in the past... and I fit into both of those categories - so I don't blame you for not not trusting me right off the bat - I wouldn't trust me either if I were you!

**A** I do want you to succeed in this class

**M** And I wanted to remind you 50% of your grade here is class participation, so I hope you will work at pushing yourself to share a little more - If there is anything I can do to help just let me or coach Brush know

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Contact us at [difficultpeople@jeffriggenbach.com](mailto:difficultpeople@jeffriggenbach.com) to discuss training options!

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