



New Mexico Boys and Girls Ranches

CORRAL

Winter 2022

Modeling What Was Modeled for Us

By Heath Kull

I don't know about you, but I often go about our business without thinking too much about what it means to be a role model. I know that being a "positive male role model" is important and a prevalent term, but I also know that positive female role models are just as valuable and just as needed. What is, by far, the best for kids is a home built by and around a positive male and a positive female modeling healthy relationships and, when necessary, positive conflict and the requisite conflict resolution. But how many of us have a history and a relationship blueprint built on a model that includes strong male and strong female role models who work together to work it out? For the kids at The Ranches, very few if any.

In our society as a whole, I would imagine that "less than we'd like to admit" is most likely the answer to that difficult question. And why is that, exactly?

Relationships are difficult and conflict is challenging. If we get rather honest, we can actually discuss our individual and diverse relationship models. If we continue along that path, we can also talk about each of our views on, and experiences with, conflict resolution. After all, conflict is one of a select few things that can end our relationships and is a near constant that is present in the kids' lives before coming to The Ranches and will be present in their lives after they leave us. Interestingly, if I list the weaknesses of The Ranches, our ability to handle conflict in a healthy way would

be near the top of the list. As fairly normal adults, we don't have any problem being right or being loud or shunning or emotionally overwhelming those who dare to challenge us, but we don't often engage in, value, or do well with conflict resolution. Conflict, yes...but resolution, not so much. One of my goals is to help our staff become more comfortable with and more capable within, conflict and conflict resolution.

We all come from a home with a blueprint for conflict and, for better or worse, strategies and processes to facilitate the peaceful ending of conflict; or, conversely, a method for retribution. Committed family members attempt to resolve family conflicts by actively communicating information about their conflicting motives or ideologies to the rest of the family. As a result, each person forms a blueprint for both engaging and ending conflict. Ending conflict, however, isn't the same thing as conflict resolution.

If we head to the internet for a definition, we get something like this:

Conflict Resolution

"Conflict resolution is conceptualized as the methods of a group (e.g., intentions; reasons for holding certain beliefs) for engaging in collective negotiation. Dimensions of resolution typically parallel the dimensions of conflict in

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The Ranches Alumni

What did you learn from The Ranches that benefits you today?

"First and foremost I learned about Jesus and He changed my life and my future generations. Second, I would say work ethic. Third, conflict resolution."

- Liberty D.

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LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT



Heath Kull

President

Where I Find God

Working at The Ranches can sometimes feel like the furthest place from God. The stories that we hear and subject our hearts and minds to can be overwhelmingly filled with all that isn't good in this world. Fortunately, there are also these beautiful times when God shows himself in the little things and in children who have yet to allow all that they have endured to deform their view of themselves and the world. While the horror of what many of the kids have been through can be sobering and somber for us, it is simply all that they know...Until we get to show them something altogether different.

You see, almost everyone at The Ranches – whether kids in the program or the staff caring for kids – has struggled with being told and often convinced that they are not actually good enough. Good enough for who, you ask? Often the kids and the staff here have been told that they simply aren't good enough for anyone. Not for their parents or their grandparents or their siblings or whomever else was seeking a bit of control in their lives. And that is where our work tends to begin.

With a little structure, some support, and a whole lot of working to live out an example of what the Bible teaches, kids start to see themselves a little differently and begin to have hope again. In short, God shows up. Not in grandiose fashion and not usually on Sunday mornings. He just shows up in the little ways like the forgiveness that slowly changes what a child sees in the mirror; and He shows up in the innocence of children's questions about why; and He shows up in the voice that a child finds in speaking up about all that has happened to them and all that they will not repeat for their own children.

In those moments, all my doubts and my human shortcomings tend to evaporate because I know that God is in the work that we are able to do and that we can pass a little bit of Him on to kids who've had far too little exposure to His blessings.

Thank you for allowing me to continue to do this work and for supporting us in our endeavor. With every gift and interaction with you, God shows up a little bit for me too. I appreciate all that y'all do to make that happen...for me and for the kids.

Sincerely,

Heath Kull - President
heathk@theranches.org

#RaiseThemUp

We asked our Alumni Group what they would tell our donors, here is what one of our former residents had to say.

"Thank you for everything that you have done and continue to do. With out you I dont think the ranches could have made it what was for all of us that went there and continue to go. Even though we did see much of you all. You all were a huge part of our lives."

- Joe S.

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or my

personal Twitter: @HeathKull

#HeathKull

Sunday - (My) Struggle with Faith

"Our fathers were our models for God. If our fathers bailed, what does that tell you about God?"

"Listen to me! You have to consider the possibility that God does not like you...Listen to me! He never wanted you. In all probability, he hates you. This is not the worst thing that can happen."

- Tyler Durden - Fight Club

My father never bailed, but sometimes I struggle with what him staying meant. Growing up at The Ranches, it meant that I had very little in common with the kids in our care.

The reason that this work is so important to me is because we have an opportunity - one we rarely make the most of - to fundamentally redraw a child's view of God.

Now, I have read The Bible and I have searched for ways to apply it to me and I still sometimes come up struggling to believe that I am seen, much less a priority, to God. My own weakness is hard to



THE RANCHES

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the way the conflict is processed. Cognitive resolution is the way disputants understand and view the conflict, with beliefs, perspectives, understandings, and attitudes. Emotional resolution is in the way disputants feel about a conflict, the emotional energy. Behavioral resolution is reflective of how the disputants act, their behavior. Ultimately, a wide range of methods and procedures for addressing conflict exist, including negotiation, mediation, mediation-arbitration, diplomacy, and creative peacebuilding."

If this sounds like a quite different definition than you have seen in practice, I encourage you to take a look at the issue from the standpoint the kids in our care often see it from; "Am I the one who might be the problem?"

Often, kids are seeking emotional resolution while their parent is seeking cognitive resolution. Sometimes, the kids are interested in behavioral resolution, but their family needs emotional resolution. Like I said, relationships are challenging, and conflict is difficult. What we are striving to teach the kids is healthy ways to engage in conflict and in the resolution that ultimately follows. Healthy can be rather uncomfortable for them though.

While healthy is uncomfortable, it is also the path with the best long-term outcomes. We often have to tell the staff and kids alike, "you can do it if you put your mind to it and commit to making a courageous effort." That courageous part is what trips up a lot of people. It is also what prevents most people from being positive role models.

So, why is this such an important topic for kids to understand and learn to address? Because the kids in our care most often come from a home where conflict is somewhat narcissistic and unhealthy and they will need a new model to follow if we are to prevent them from needing to place their kids in our care someday.

Conflict

So, what does narcissistic and unhealthy conflict look like? It looks a lot like fighting without any agreement or understanding of the problem(s) in the relationship. It looks like one party going to whatever lengths are necessary to dominate, control, and overpower the other. While physical abuse gets most of the attention, long term emotional abuse can be just as damaging to kids and to their future relationships. Let's look at some of the emotional grappling techniques at play in many of the kids' original homes.

The Shutdown – Many who are conflict avoidant will handle their discomfort by shutting down, ignoring the other in the conflict and follow up by refusing to re-engage. While this allows for control by the person who engages in the shutdown, it offers absolutely ZERO resolution to the conflict. It also creates a sense of worthlessness in the child on the receiving end. "If you don't even care enough about me to engage in a conversation that is about my discomfort with you, do you even care about me at all?" is often the question that the kids come away with. It is impossible to feel valued and loved...and eventually to even believe that you are lovable at all if a parent or loved one can't engage in any uncomfortable conversations with you. It is a narcissistic and toxic strategy by the parent or loved one, but the impact is felt most by the child who is on the receiving end of the shutdown.

The Overpower – Many parents and loved ones will attempt to overpower anyone who dares to challenge them or mention that they are not 100% perfect. This is usually accomplished with slammed doors, raised voices and an exit to "calm down and process". The slamming and yelling is replaced with withdrawal and abandonment by the one attempting to overpower. This is done in an effort to establish, or often reestablish, control. While the natural evolution of the overpower is physical violence, many never escalate to that level. Kids who grow up with the overpowering parent or caregiver, often don't hate the narcissistic and toxic parent because they are too busy hating themselves for causing the anger in the first place. This has long lasting implications for their relationship map and blueprint. Trust is elusive for kids who grow up with this relationship strategy being forced upon them.

The Subject Changer – Some parents and loved ones just avoid conflict by changing the subject. If you've ever wanted to start a conversation with someone that you love about how you are feeling, but you ended up in a conversation about choosing new colors for their bathroom, you know the power of the Subject Changer. This too, is about control; control of what is talked about in the home. Kids that grow up with a subject changer either learn to believe that they're not important in relationships or go to profound lengths to get back to the subject that is important to them. Most kids don't have the confidence to get angry and get their parent or loved one back to the subjects that matter to them until they are adults. Watch out when they get the confidence to address the parent or caregiver as an equal that they look down upon as there is very little that is off limits, and they will often get to the point that they will no longer be silenced by anyone's discomfort.

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admit here, but it is indeed the truth. This admission means that I occasional fall into the traps of secular thinking, and that often has some lasting effects in my relationships; whether I want to admit it or not.

This struggle with my Heavenly Father is why every shun, every unspoken frustration, every unresolved feeling, every conversation that wasn't, and every missed opportunity to live out, "What Jesus Would Do", has an impact on me. It is also why I know that our work at The Ranches may just have an eternal impact on the kids that we serve.

I sometimes ponder and ask the question: If a child formed their view of God based solely on their interaction with and treatment from us, what would their view of God be? Would they think God is:

Loving
Patient
Steadfast
Kind
Courageous
Fair
Secure

Or would they believe that God is:

Arrogant
Conceited
Punitive
Holds a Grudge
Passive Aggressive
Distant
Values an Awful Story That wasn't His Fault

Dishonest
Weak
Easily Manipulated
Too Busy
Thinks They're Too Much - effort, trouble, time
Unwilling to Listen
Cold
Off Duty for 4 Days at a Time
Plays Favorites

I don't get to decide how others see God. All I can do is challenge the kid's view and offer a Biblically sound example. I recognize how often I fail, but you only have to worry about failure when you're trying to actually accomplish something. No one ever failed at laziness. Contrary to my struggle to sometimes believe that I am a priority to God and that he would never give up on me, we try to always live out our priorities in front of the kids and we work to make giving up on the kids our very last resort.

While we can't always stay committed to children because the kid's behavior is sometimes outside of our capacity to help them, we work to make giving up our last option. It's a bit of a rationalization - yes - but it is one that I can live with. You see, when we are not willing to ever give up, one child becomes more important than the needs, fears and hopes of all the other kids. We are then doing damage to the other kids and reshaping their view of God in a potentially negative direction. As a result, boundaries become necessary. Even still, I am often working to try and make this place the very best at this kind of work and at working with hurting kids. I believe that it is indeed what Jesus would do. I appreciate your willingness to support us in pursuit of these lofty goals.



Thank you seems hardly enough!



Well, another year has come and gone and without any fanfare or need for acknowledgement, multiple groups and individuals have again made Christmas special for our residents and staff. We appreciate them all and want to acknowledge them here. Members of: Faith Baptist Church-Artesia, Monte Vista Christian Church-Albuquerque, the Sojourners-Kit Carson Chapter, Albuquerque Breakfast Lions Club, Albuquerque NE Lions Club, Edgewood Lions Club, Buffett's Candies, the Stoll Family & Friends Group, all the NMBGR Board members, and many other individuals reached out providing wonderful candies, amazing gifts, and many individual kindnesses demonstrating to our residents they are not forgotten. To each of you that participated, we can't thank you enough for sharing part of yourself with the children in our care. Blessings for the New Year!



THEIR JOURNEY





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The Attacker (But You're Worse) – Many of the kids in our care have a parent or loved one that attacks at the first sign of a significant or serious conversation coming their way. The really good ones will get a sense of the tension in the child and start assigning chores. This isn't necessarily due to the chores needing to be done, but it does offer a nice and convenient vehicle for criticism to be dispensed regarding the quality of work on the chores. This can serve to shut down any impending conflict. If the parent or loved one can't get ahead of the conflict, they will often just attack when the kid wants to address an issue. "But what about..." and "But you did..." or "Your behavior was worse..." Kids who are raised in a home with an attacker in charge are either beaten down or join and learn to attack better and faster. Shutting down and internalizing or becoming fiercely angry seem to be the two most likely outcomes for kids with this kind of role model.

The Shunner – Not to be confused with those who shut down. Shunners aren't overwhelmed or "processing" and they are ignoring others and their needs on purpose. While popularized by the Amish, many at The Ranches come from a family that shuns. Interestingly, the shun has its' roots in history for as long as we've had history and the Christian community tends to both celebrate and teach "the shun". While not aligned with The New Testament, it is often a morally superior stance and has morphed and become popularized in recent years as "cancel culture". I am, rather obviously, not a fan, but have been on the receiving end of more than my fair share of shuns. It is a source or some long standing anger within me. Kids who grow up under the threat of shunning are often hypervigilant about making mistakes, or they develop a keen ability to emotionally cut off and not care about anyone that chooses to offer "The Shun" as a conflict strategy.

Back To Good – Some parents and loved ones will jump into the very shallow end of a conflict and then exit without any real attempt at resolution or conversation. They just kind of go about things as if they're normal and wait for the child that they love to get over it and get back to good with them. This prevents the parent from ever having to deal with tension or the idea that they hurt someone and is a favored strategy of highly empathetic parents. This leaves kids wondering when the next time will be but knowing that nothing will ever get resolved or even dealt with. It is hard to develop any sense of morality when you never get any chance to understand the difference between being right and being wrong; especially when all you know is unresolved conflict and the lack of authenticity that goes with ignoring your own feelings in pursuit of getting back to the

mythical "good" with someone who just hurt you emotionally.

Resolution

As role models and employees of The Ranches, we owe the kids a chance to experience something healthier, less toxic, and infinitely less narcissistic. For me it starts with a simple and timeless concept. To quote Sigmund Freud, "Unexpressed emotions will never die. They are buried alive and will come forth later in uglier ways."

We owe them a model that will support healthy relationships. But what does that look like? We teach our staff and encourage them to use the following methods for conflict resolution.

Listen – It costs literally nothing to listen. While small statements of encouragement to further the conversation are great, disagreements with what is being said are best reserved for the end when the frustrated person is de-escalating. If you are unwilling to hear the reason for the frustration, issue, and need for conflict, you are part of the problem and are furthering the pain and dysfunction that the child has experienced in the past by making them experience it in the present.

Clarify – If something isn't clear or doesn't quite make sense, ask nonjudgmental questions in an effort to get clarification. When engaging in conflict with anyone, seeking first to understand and then to be understood is a time tested and valuable model. "I am not sure that I understand" and "Can you give me some history and detail so that I can better understand?" are both nonjudgmental and clarification seeking questions that anyone can use.

Agree on the Problem – Quite frankly, this is where most conflict goes off the rails and heads towards a permanent lack of resolution. (This currently can't successfully be applied to conflict involving politics) If you can't agree on the problem, there can be no resolution. So many adults today are just overgrown children who refuse to agree that someone that they care about can be hurt by their actions. Often because they believe that they have "done so much for that kid" that they can never reach a resolution because they will never, under any circumstances, entertain the idea that they aren't 100%, Star-Spangled awesome. These people need to grow the heck up and, in the process, get over themselves for the sake of someone that they claim to care about. I feel pretty strongly about this one, if you can't tell.

Changes or Lack Thereof – Once a problem or perceived problem has been agreed upon, changes or a return to the same dynamic can be decided upon and, in the healthiest of



situations, agreed upon. The issue that created the conflict will not magically disappear. A change, by one or both parties, must occur to actually resolve the conflict in a way that it does not reoccur.

Resolution – When both parties can agree to a resolution that both are mostly comfortable with, resolution can occur. We do not get to decide what this looks like for someone else and we teach our staff that they need to avoid criticizing how kids go about finding a livable resolution. If they need to discuss that resolution a little more, our staff need to be OK with that and give them a little grace by keeping their criticisms to themselves and allowing kids time to explore their process... even if different from the adult's process. This requires maturity and discomfort on our part. If the kids aren't worth a little discomfort, we need to be honest enough to let them know before they believe that we actually care about them.

A New Normal – If there were no changes, then nothing changes. Staff and kids will just be returning to the old normal...until the unexpressed emotions come back in uglier ways, and we can do it all again or our relationship with a child comes to an end.

If, on the other hand, we can agree to some changes because we value the child and their feelings, we then have to establish a new normal where both parties agree to move

forward without revisiting the conflict unless one person repeats their hurtful behavior. The new normal can be uncomfortable while we adjust, but the pain is often reduced by a reduction in hurtful behavior. This is the point where trust is at it's weakest. "Am I getting the old hurtful behavior or the new considerate behavior?" We have to trust that time will tell us the answer.

Conclusion

In many ways, my writing reflects all of the unexpressed emotions of my younger days growing up at The Ranches. I made a conscious choice to not let all of those unexpressed emotions come forth in uglier ways though I fail regularly. While some still make it back in the aforementioned uglier ways, I try to have them come forth as lessons I've learned in hopes that someone reading what I have written will not allow their children or grandchildren to live with unexpressed emotions that have been buried alive. The absolute best way to do that is to be the person that a child knows that they can talk to about anything, even the uglier things.

Conflict is hard but it is an unavoidable part of life; especially a life spent raising and helping children. It helps to remember that a conflict avoidant nature isn't an excuse to be cowardly in our relationships. Kids need courageous people to model ways to successfully navigate conflict and conflict resolution.

Thank you to all the businesses, organizations and churches that made monetary gifts in excess of \$250 during the period of October 1, 2021 - December 31, 2021. We deeply appreciate your commitment to children and families!

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