

Engaging Parents...

Are We the Barriers?

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Presenting colleagues:

- ▶ Kristen Shores
- ▶ CSA Coordinator,
Fredericksburg

- ▶ Christopher
Campbell
- ▶ VHBG
- ▶ Director of Advocacy and
Program Advancement

Family!

...Family?



Historical Engagement with Parents

The “child welfare movement”-

- ▶ In the United States in 1853- New York Children’s Aid Society
 - ▶ “Placed Out” children from the city to rural areas, the beginning of foster care
- ▶ Mary Ellen Wilson, child abused by parents, brought awareness to abuse issues
- ▶ First child abuse laws in general, early 1900s
- ▶ Child welfare services established through the SSA, 1935
- ▶ Government-sponsored child protective services, 1962
- ▶ Child welfare services expanded, 1970s



Child welfare social workers serve some of the most vulnerable children, youths, and families. Social workers specialize in building on the strengths of families and helping them to provide a safe and nurturing environment for children and youths.

However, when families are unable to do this, social workers must intervene to protect the children from harm. Child welfare social workers ensure that children and youths who have experienced abuse or neglect are supported through a range of services.

NASW, 2024



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...a lot of subjectivity

What challenges do we face?

Growing numbers of youth identified as needing “protection.”

Fewer resources (staff, programs, funding) available to engage parents directly.

Cultural bias toward parental compliance.

What challenges present in your agency or locality?

What are the typical recourses?

- ▶ Families receiving services
 - ▶ Youth referred for treatment
 - ▶ Parents referred for treatment
 - ▶ Parent Coaches assigned
 - ▶ Parent classes assigned
 - ▶ Youth removed from home
 - ▶ Youth in foster care
 - ▶ Youth in acute settings
 - ▶ Youth in residential settings
- ▶ **Families are disrupted...**

Incidence and outcomes for youth raised away from parents/family

- ▶ 2016 study (Wildeman, Edwards, & Wakefield, 2020)
 - ▶ 1 in 100 US children will experience termination of parental rights by age 18
 - ▶ Highest incidence of this is from birth to two years old
 - ▶ Higher incidence for Native Americans and African Americans (3% and 1.5% resp)

4% of children are separated from parents due to parental incarceration (Sykes, Pettit, 2014)

6% are in foster care prior to age 18 years (Wildeman & Emmanuel, 2014)

Incidence and outcomes for youth raised away from parents/family

Issues with:

- ▶ Safety and Risk Behaviors-criminal activities and substance use, homelessness
- ▶ Mental and Physical Health-depression, anxiety, hopelessness; diabetes, heart disease, asthma, early pregnancy
- ▶ Academic achievement/disruption-test scores, discipline, non-completion
- ▶ Overall well-being- unemployment, poverty, health, family, community

TPR in Va

adapted from the Code of Virginia

In Virginia, DSS can terminate a parent's rights if a court finds that this action is in the best interest of the child, due to:

- ▶ The child being abandoned, with parent identity or whereabouts unknown
- ▶ The child's parent/relatives didn't identify the child within three months of foster care placement
- ▶ The parent has abused or neglected the child, endangering life/health
- ▶ The parent has a substance abuse or addiction problem and hasn't sought treatment
- ▶ The parent is unable to provide for the child's basic needs
- ▶ The parent has a mental illness that prevents them from caring for the child

- ▶ *All require clear and convincing evidence, with this action ending the legal relationship between parent and child.*

What if...?

we decide to engage differently?

we consider, like Kristen did, a creative and child-focused opportunity for reunification?

Restoration of Parental Rights

How does this happen?

- ▶ Child of ____ years of age
- ▶ Previously adjudicated to be an abused or neglected child, CHINS/CHINS, or delinquent **True or False?**
- ▶ Parent rights terminated _____ prior
- ▶ Child has not achieved a _____
- ▶ _____ and _____ consent to restoration

Restoration of Parental Rights

How does this happen?

- ▶ Child of **14 years of age**
- ▶ Previously adjudicated to be an abused or neglected child, CHINS/CHINS, or delinquent
- ▶ Parent rights terminated **at least two years prior**
- ▶ Child has not achieved a **permanency goal**
- ▶ **Child (14 +) and parent** consent to restoration

If the court finds, with clear and convincing evidence, that the parent is willing and able to receive and care for the child, have a positive and continuous relationship with the child, provide a permanent and suitable home, and protect the child from abuse and neglect—DSS may create a placement plan

What if...?

we decide to engage differently?

*we introduce and use new methods of
educating and supporting parents?*

Considering Engaging Parents

▶ Power With versus Power Over

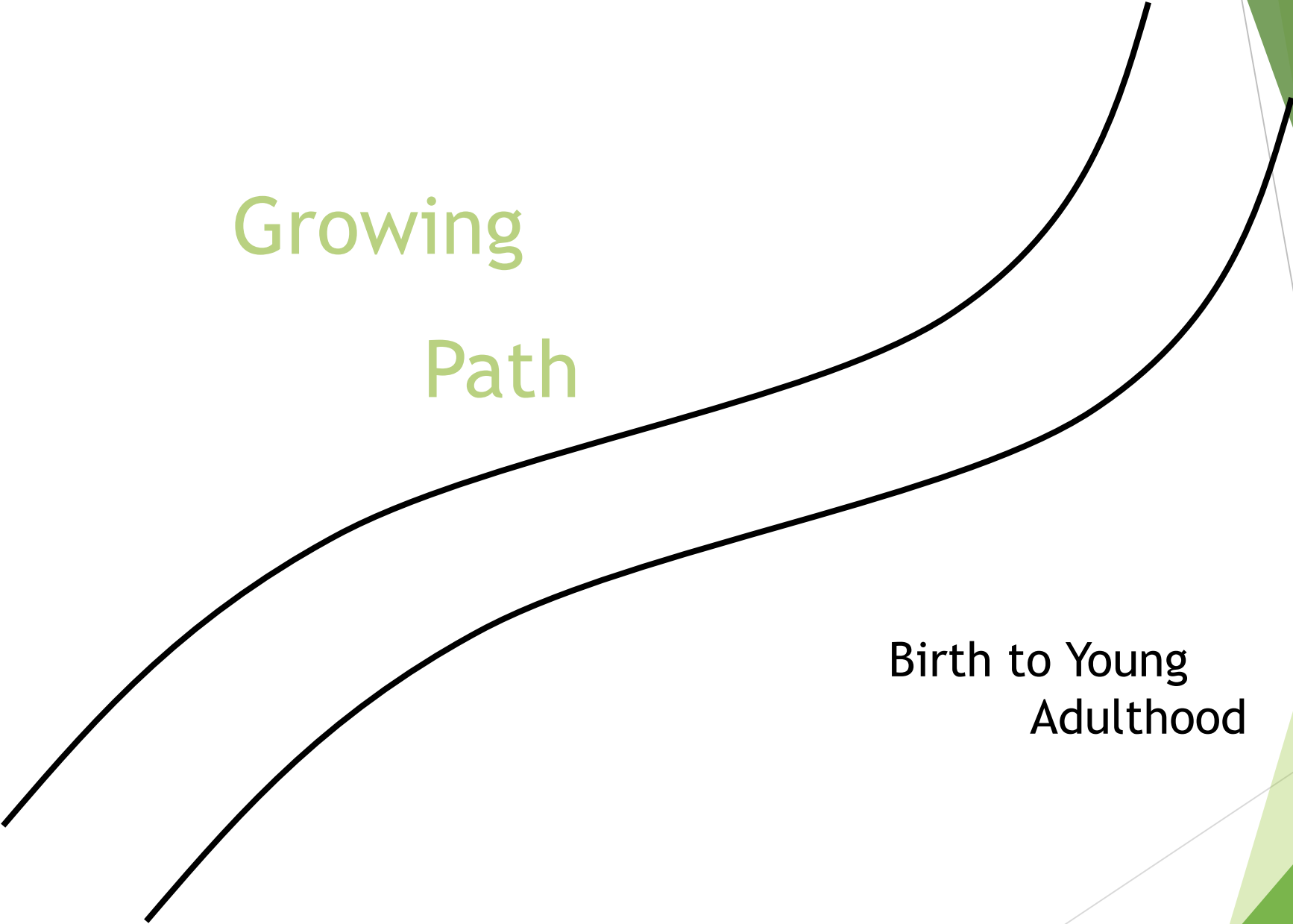
- ▶ *Power with and power over: Social workers' reflections on their use of power when talking with parents about child welfare concerns (Saar-Heiman, 2023)*
- ▶ Power Over= “Research into the experiences of parents involved in child protection interventions has revealed that interactions with social workers are often experienced as intimidating, confusing, shaming, and humiliating”(Ghaffar et al. 2012)
- ▶ Power With=“In the context of power, interpersonal empathy is necessary but not always sufficient...empathy, which takes into consideration those lived differences across cultures of oppression and marginalization are crucial in opening up genuine dialogues that reduce ‘power over strategies...’.

New ways with old theories...

Erikson's Stages of Development

- ▶ Trust vs. Mistrust
- ▶ Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt
- ▶ Initiative vs. Guilt
- ▶ Industry vs. Inferiority
- ▶ Identity vs. Role Confusion

Growing Path



Birth to Young
Adulthood



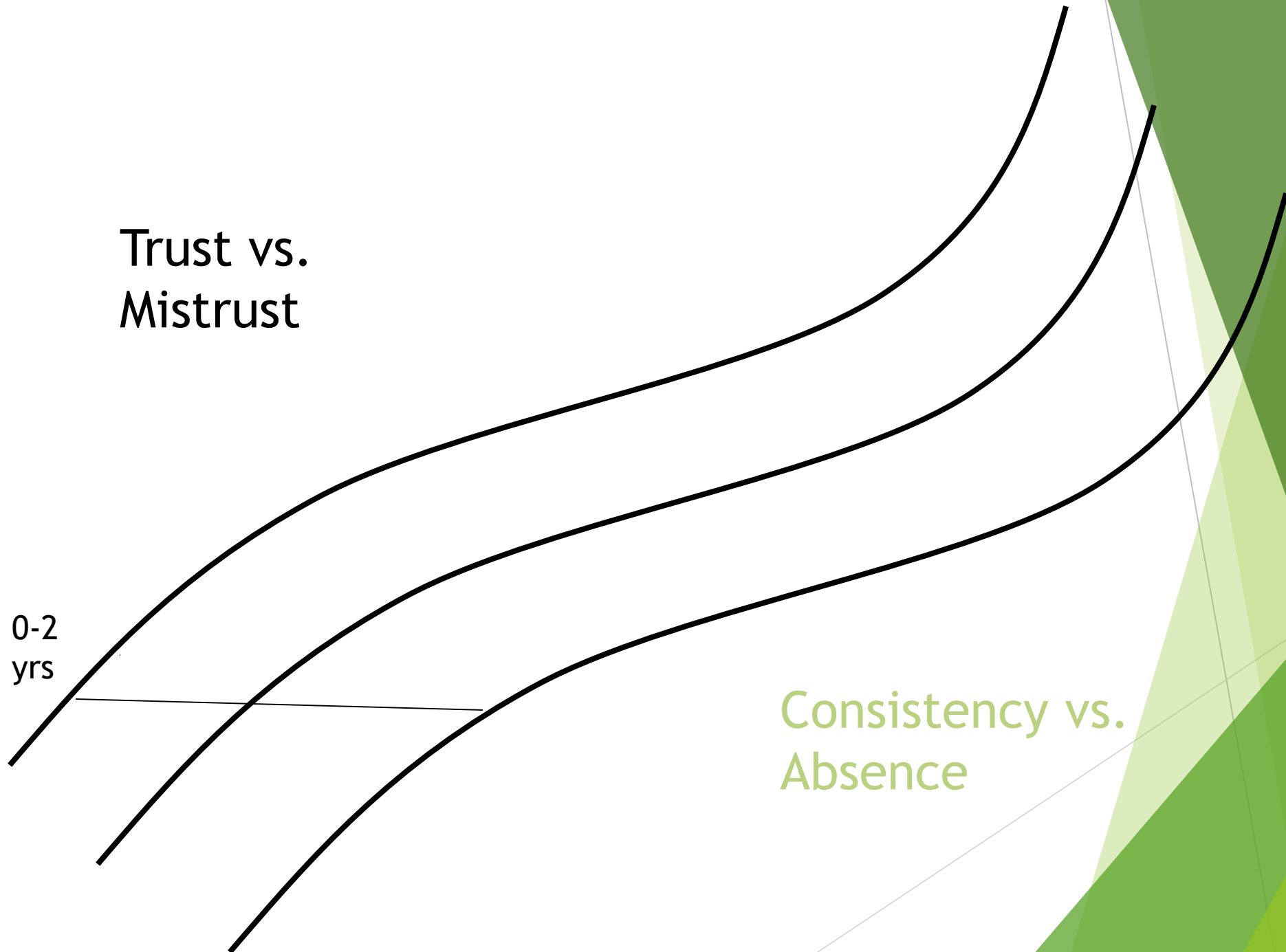


Growing Path -
Youth

Growing Path-
Parents

Trust vs. Mistrust

0-2
yrs



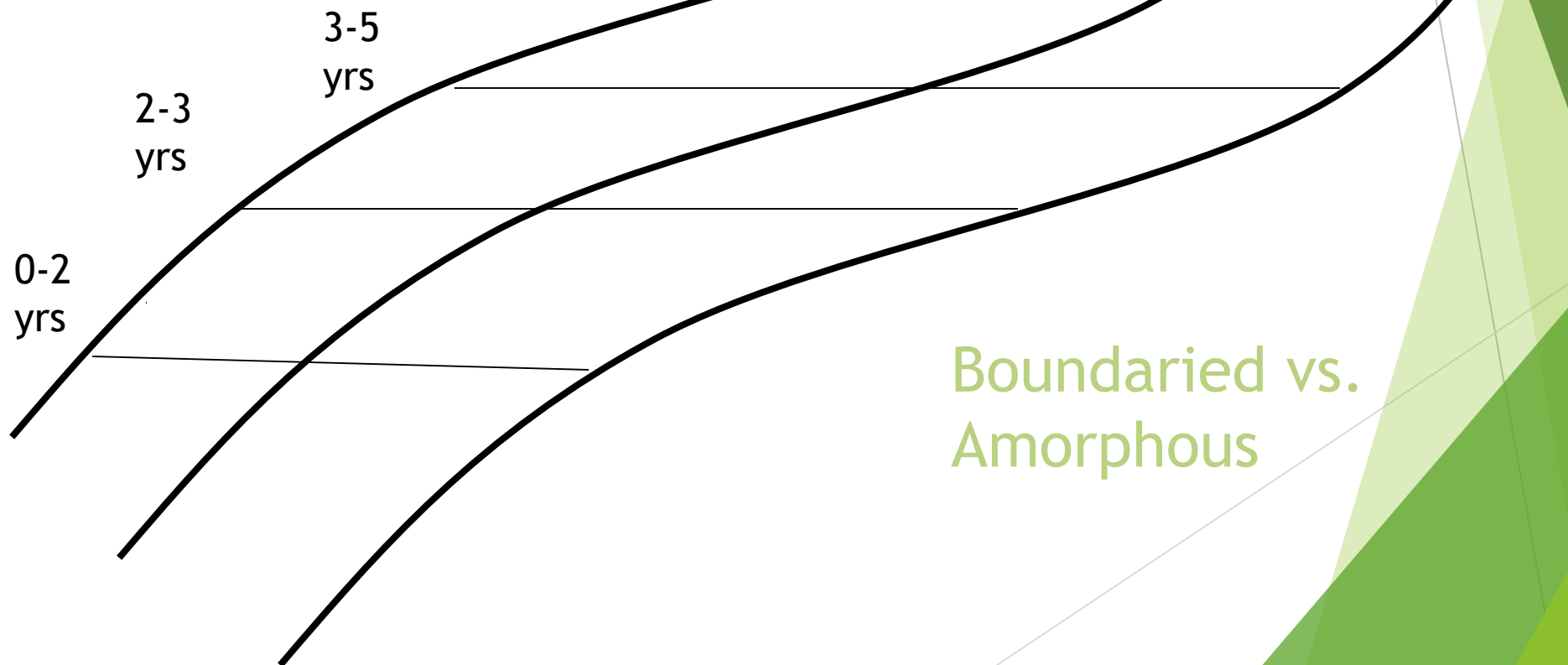
Consistency vs.
Absence

Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt



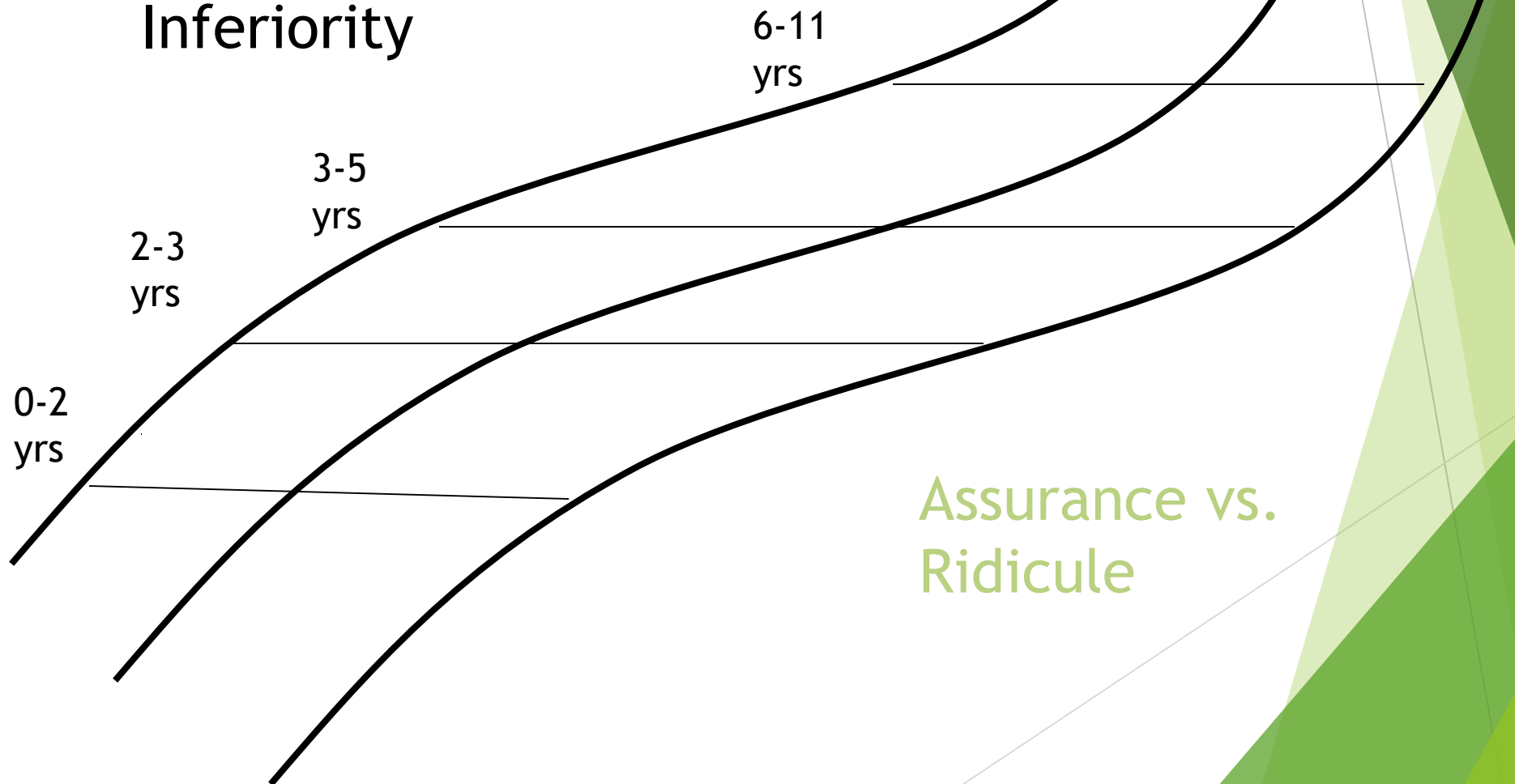
Perserverance vs.
Quitting

Initiative vs. Guilt



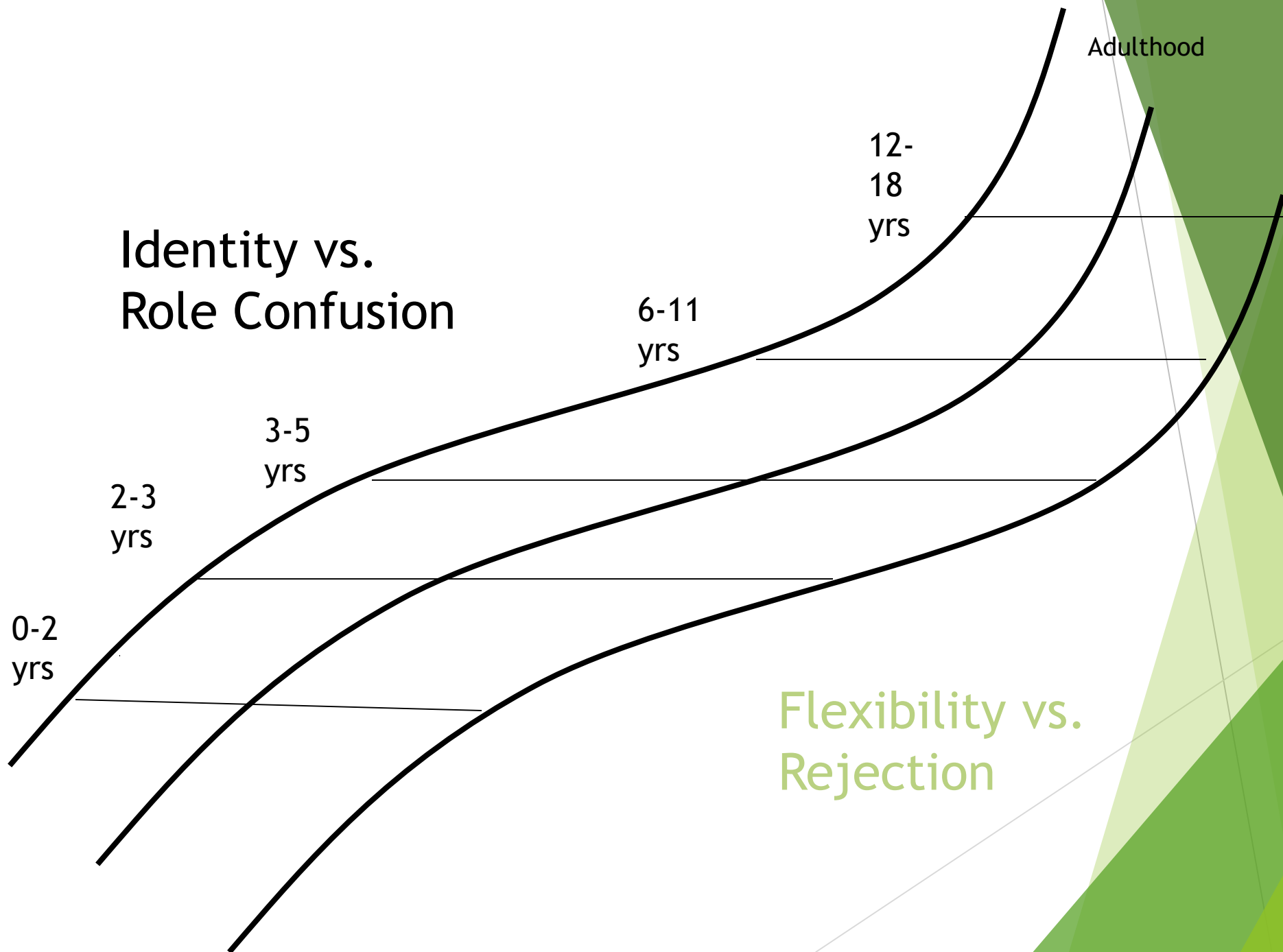
Boundaried vs.
Amorphous

Industry vs. Inferiority



Assurance vs.
Ridicule

Identity vs. Role Confusion



Flexibility vs.
Rejection

So...why is all this review so important?

Are we in the way—sometimes—with what we say is our **main objective?**



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Bone deep longing...

“Within each person lies a bone-deep longing for freedom, safety, hope, self-respect, and the chance to make an important contribution to family, community, and the world. To live fully, we each need ways to express this powerful, natural longing. Without healthy outlets, the desire for freedom turns into lawlessness, and the need for safety and self-respect degenerates into violence. Without avenues to make an important contribution, hopelessness translates into dependency, depression, violence, substance abuse and other forms of self-abuse. No government program or religious group can help people become self-reliant, contributing members of their communities unless it is built on an understanding of this powerful force inside each human heart.

Claire Forest, 2003

How are we being trained? ...and how should we train?

- ▶ MSW students- theories, interventions
- ▶ Interns- exposure
- ▶ New professionals in our field
- ▶ Ongoing In- Service Training and Professional Development

- ▶ **How are we introducing and sustaining our cultural beliefs about families to and with our colleagues?**



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How are we being trained? ...and how should we train?

Are we willing to shift the culture through our training and mentorship our next generations of child welfare workers?

Family Development Credential

Family Engagement Inventory

Working Alliance Inventory

Collaborative Problem Solving

Are our systems willing to do so?

Can we be the change leaders to address and introduce the benefits of this change?



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Strengthening Families Approach

- ▶ Self Assessment of Practice: outlines practices by exemplary programs to support families, organized around

FIVE PROTECTIVE FACTORS

Parental Resilience

Social Connections

Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development

Concrete Support in Times of Need

Social and Emotional Competence of Children

How does your agency/locality rate?

Takeaways...



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- ▶ What does all this mean to me in my role?
- ▶ Am I willing to wonder about my role as a possible barrier in the system?
- ▶ Will I put some new ways of thinking in to my work orbit?
 - ▶ How?
 - ▶ Who are my partners in this effort?

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Engaging Parents...

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Not any more!

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