Say It Straight™ -
From Breakdowns to Breakthroughs

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ABSTRACT

Say It Straight™ ("SIS") is a research-based action oriented experiential training program with cognitive reinforcement that transforms relationships of submission-dominance to relationships of equal value. It uses Virginia Satir's communication approach, combined with action-oriented behavioral skills practice. SIS has been conducted in diverse settings and cultures, with adults and children. The article describes basic philosophy and components of the program and cites our research to demonstrate its efficacy in various settings, especially in schools and institutions in the United States. In particular it notes statistically significant reductions in alcohol/drug-related school suspensions, juvenile police offences, and self-discharge against medical advice in adult addictions treatment, as well as increases in the use of empowering communication, behavior and quality of life in participants of all ages.

Say It Straight[tm] (SIS) is a research-based, action-oriented, experiential training program that helps people transform relationships of submission-dominance to relationships of equal value. SIS gives people the opportunity to discover and embrace their inherent resources that enable expression of true personal needs without compromising those of others, thereby preserving the integrity of relationships. SIS leads to personal and social responsibility- empowering ways of being in the world.

SIS uses Virginia Satir's approach to communication (Satir, 1972) combined with experiential learning based on cooperative action-oriented behavioral skills practice rather than lectures(Englander-Golden, 1983; Englander-Golden and Satir, 1991; Englander-Golden and Golden, 2011; 2014) . SIS gives people the freedom to explore and contrast empowering and disempowering behaviors and their effects on themselves and others. Empowering behavior means honoring and respecting our selves, others and the issues in the relationship. Disempowering behavior means not honoring and not respecting any part of one or more components of the relationship triad. Satir's great contribution to SIS, and to the authors' personal lives, was in giving people the freedom to discover their inherent resources that lead to empowering behavior (Englander-

Golden, Elconin and Miller, 1985; Englander-Golden, Elconin, Miller and Schwarzkopf, 1986; Englander-Golden, Elconin and Satir, 1986; Englander-Golden et al, 1989; Englander-Golden & Satir, 1991; Daniels, 1996; Englander-Golden and Golden, 1996; Englander-Golden, et al., 1996; Englander-Golden et al., 2002; Wood, 2004; Englander-Golden, 2009 a, b, c; Wood, et al., 2010; Haag, Wood & Holloway. 2011).

SIS developed from one of the author's personal experience with assertiveness training in the seventies as well as experience with Virginia Satir's teachings. At that time, assertiveness training highlighted the use of counter-manipulations in difficult situations. For example, changing the subject, giving excuses, telling someone what they feel rather than expressing one's own feelings, fogging (saying a half-truth). When Dr. Paula Englander-Golden went through assertiveness training, she discovered that communicating in this way diminished her self-esteem. At the same time, she discovered the power of role-playing. She also had been exposed to some of Virginia Satir's work as a graduate psychology student and thought and felt that Satir's approach using "leveling/congruent communication" was more empowering than counter-manipulation.

Both authors met Virginia in 1979 and worked with her directly from then until she passed in 1988. Dr. Paula Englander-Golden began to put together what is now called Say It Straight. In one of the earliest research papers on SIS, 5th – 8th grade students made movies of difficult situations by counter-manipulating and by using "leveling/congruent communication" (Englander-Golden, Elconin and Miller, 1985). The students reported that they felt higher self-esteem, more respect from others and greatest effectiveness when using what we now call Say It Straight communication/behavior training, SIS (Englander-Golden, Elconin and Satir, 1986).

We developed Say It Straight because we believed that giving people the freedom to discover what was deep within them would lead them to discover strength within themselves, learn to love and honor themselves and others and find peaceful solutions. Since then, SIS training has been used successfully in many settings, including schools, juvenile detention and group homes, shelters for homeless people, addictions inpatient and outpatient treatment and after-care, suicide prevention, prisons, and probation facilities. SIS has also been successful in training a variety of populations, including parents, couples, people with eating disorders, student support groups, intergenerational groups, community and church groups and private and public organizational development and long range planning.

The recognition of the universality of relationships of submission-dominance and the disempowering behaviors this produces has led to the use of SIS with diverse populations and cultures. The Say It Straight Foundation has trained people from many parts of the USA, as well as in Canada, Puerto Rico, Mexico, Costa Rica, Hong Kong, Europe, Australia and the Middle East.

SIS is included among the Nationally Recognized Evidence-Based Programs and Practices (NREPP) of the United States Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

Why Say It Straight?

Unequal power relationships are a universal human experience. We are all born little and someone else knows better (Englander-Golden, 1983; Englander-Golden and Golden, 2011; 2014). However, the automatic and long-term assumption of submission-dominance roles, and the fears that arise from this human condition, lead to disempowering behaviors that present challenges to us as individuals, to our relationships, and even to our social structures. For example, fear of being rejected can lead to "people-pleasing" without regard for one's own self-interests. Fear of being "less than" can lead to blaming or bullying. When people discover and embrace their inherent resources (such as courage, wisdom, resilience, friendliness, cooperation, positive support and compassion) they can honor themselves, others and the issues in their relationships.

Studies have shown that utilizing lectures, providing and discussing facts about risky behaviors can boomerang and lead to more favorable attitudes toward risky behaviors such as smoking (Dignan, Block, Steckler & Cosby, 1985). Indeed, lectures create deaf ears (Englander-Golden, 1983; Englander-Golden and Golden, 2011; 2014). The Satir approach honors one of the most highly held human values: freedom (Rokeach, 1973). The freedom experienced by participants in SIS minimizes the chances of rebellious reactions because it gives ownership of the learning to the participants.

In SIS participants choose the challenging situations they want to work on. Some examples brought up by students involve alcohol/drug abuse, cheating, stealing, vandalism, cutting school, sexual behavior, drinking and driving. They ask:

How do I say, "no" to a friend?

How do I say, "I have quit" to a group of friends who are still using?

How do I say to a friend, "I care about you, and I am scared when I see what you are

doing", or

"I don't like what I see you doing?"

How do I tell my parents, "I love you, and I'm scared when I see what you are doing?"

Adults report similar difficulties important to them at home, at work and with friends.

SIS Step By Step

The length of SIS training depends on the size and composition of the group. For example, basic SIS training has been conducted in seven to ten 50-minute sessions with elementary through high school students; in 14-25 sessions over a period of several months with adults in addictions treatment; in a weekend with couples; and as an ongoing program in prison. In all cases the training content is experiential. Cognitive reinforcement is achieved through the use of workbooks/journals for different age groups, that are used to review, contemplate and record one's experiences. SIS also uses posters with pictorial representations of empowering and disempowering behaviors.

## Creating a Setting of Safety and Trust: Creating a Team

To create a setting of safety and trust, the training begins with a process that creates a team. Depending on the size of the group, the team can begin with a number of small groups that merge into one large team.

Guided imagery is used to give people the opportunity to explore rooting diversity in sameness--even with people with whom we disagree or have a fight and to explore rooting uniqueness in sameness and diversity. An example of guided imagery is: "Use your eyes as a camera, take a few snapshots of each other… now close your beautiful eyes and let yourself be aware how you and the others in your group are the same… if you are finding only similarity, go deeper and let yourself discover sameness… and how do you feel as you discover sameness…or, if at this moment you can not discover sameness, how do you feel as you cannot discover sameness at this moment." The guided imagery can go beyond the training group and be extended to the whole world. It can involve nations, religions, and cultures with which our country or some of the participants may be at odds. The guided imagery also includes exploring

diversity and rooting uniqueness in both diversity and sameness. Saint Francis of Assisi recognized the importance of rooting diversity in sameness when he said, *"Can true humility and compassion exist in our words and eyes unless we know we too are capable of any act?* (Ladinsky, 2002, p.37).

This process has been successful across all populations where SIS has been used from 2nd graders through 80 year-olds. In one elementary school, two second grade girls could not see any sameness between them. It took a week for the two girls to see their sameness. One said, "All my life I have been angry," and the other girl said, "All my life I have been mad," and then they hugged. We have had reports that students who have been enemies became friends and we have had reports that SIS demystifies bullying. A counselor doing SIS with a group of gay students told us that a student said, "All my life, I have been irrelevant, now I can be real." In one classroom, some students would not sit next to each other at the beginning of the training, so the trainer said, "Let's do the training standing up." At the end of the first session, they were all sitting in a circle.

The Components of an Interaction
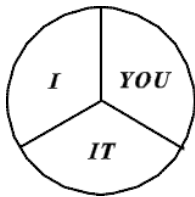
Satir used a simple yet profound view of the components of an interaction: I, You, and It (the issue), as shown in the diagram to the left. We view empowering communication/behavior (saying it straight) as honoring all three components. This diagram also is used to represent disempowering communication/behavior, by crossing out one or more of the components (or parts of a component) to illustrate the dynamics of a relationship involving people-pleasing or placating; bullying, blaming, being passive-aggressive; splitting away from feelings or being super-reasonable; being irrelevant by spacing out, changing the subject or creating a commotion. Posters with pictorial representations of empowering and disempowering behaviors are also used in the training. (Englander-Golden and Satir (1991); Englander-Golden and Golden (2014).

Hidden Treasures

It is a powerful realization for participants to discover that in every disempowering behavior there is already an implicit resource, a hidden treasure that, like a seed, can blossom into its fullness when we honor others, the issues and ourselves.

For example, the disempowering aspect of placating is that we honor the needs of someone else at our own expense. The implicit resource in this behavior is the ability to compromise, to negotiate, and to be helpful. In blaming or bullying there is already a seed of leadership. In being passive-aggressive there is already the seed for standing up for oneself. In being super-reasonable the hidden treasure is our ability to think things through clearly. In being irrelevant there is already the seed of humor, imagination and taking time out to relax.

In all of the disempowering ways of being, when we honor all three components of an interaction (I, YOU, IT) we can be kind without being weak and be powerful without being destructive. We can be leaders for positive change.

Sculpting

Disempowering and empowering communications/behaviors are first explored by using body sculpting, introduced by Virginia Satir. Satir helped people experience their own empowering and disempowering behaviors by having them put their bodies into physical postures that intensify and make overt and concrete one's internal experience. In this way people become aware of their breathing, their body sensations, their feelings and their thoughts in empowering and disempowering ways of being. The body's responses become a comprehensible system of signals, like the dashboard of a car, where lights come on to warn about what needs attention.

In SIS we use sculpting with individuals, couples and large groups to help people experience themselves, their feelings, their body sensations, their breathing and their thoughts. For example, when we introduce the concept of the placating (people-pleasing) behavioral pattern, we ask participants to get down on one knee with one hand on their heart and the other hand in a begging posture or as if warding off a blow. (We have had participants in wheel chairs or who simply could not get down on one knee. They could still follow the guided imagery.) We then ask participants to imagine someone in front of them whom they are placating and to be in touch with their breathing, their body sensations, their feelings and their thoughts as they say "yes" when their deepest yearning is to say "no".

At the end of this sculpture, we ask them to stand up and imagine someone in front of them who is placating them. In this way, they explore not only what happens to them when they placate, but they also explore what happens to them when someone placates them.

Using the same process, participants also explore blaming, being passive-aggressive, being super-reasonable, being irrelevant and saying it straight. Of all the behavior sculptures, only the sculpture of saying it straight has elicited comments from some students and adults, "I have never experienced this before."

While individual sculpting is used to give people the opportunity to experience the different communications/behaviors, sculpting with couples is used to explore the quality and dynamics of relationships. Relationships can be of all kinds, e.g., people who live together, work together, or who are in the same classroom together.

 The multi-generational sculpture is a more complex exercise that gives people the opportunity to discover the rules from past generations that bind them today. An example could be a rule passed down the generations such as, "You must always win," or "You must never put your needs first." The rules later will be transformed into gentler guides (see Transforming Rules That Bind Us).

In SIS we also use a multi-generational sculpture to help people discover the strength in their roots that made it possible for them to be here today. Despite past hardships and even abuse, they become aware that there had to be enough nurture for them to survive and even thrive into the present time. We draw the analogy of the seed of a tree growing in the cleft of a rock. It had to have enough sunshine and rain, even in the most difficult climate, to allow it to grow, burst through the crack in the rock, and be alive today.

This is often one of the most powerful experiences in the training. This sculpture of the strength in their roots moves people from shame and blame to appreciation, pride in their ancestry or their past, and recognition of their own strength, often for the first time.

For instance, in a workshop for teachers, counselors and coaches, one of the counselors volunteered to be the "star" (the primary focus) of this sculpture. The participants all knew each other, as they had grown up together and lived in the same small town. At the end of this sculpture and guided imagery, the "star" was sobbing. She disclosed that there was a secret in her family that had always been a source of shame for her. There were slaves in her heritage. In this sculpture she was experiencing pride in her ancestry for the first time, as she realized the strength, courage, and hope that must have existed in her forbearers to allow her to be alive and present to make her contributions today.

Another example of the power in experiencing the strength in our roots is that of an

elementary school student who had been ashamed of his family, none of who ever came to any school event. Two weeks after he played the "star" of the multi-generational sculpture, his parents and grandparents astonished the school principal by appearing with him at the next family-school activity. His teacher had earlier noticed a change in the student's behavior, and told us that she believed that the student told his family that he was proud of them.

<div align="center">Movies</div>

Making movies is a way for people to explore situations important in their lives in which they have used disempowering behaviors. Participants who will act in a specific movie suggest the content. In this way, the movies give participants ownership of their training. Playing a part in a movie gives participants the opportunity to discover and compare how they feel as a function of their disempowering and empowering behavior. Furthermore, they get feedback from the person with whom they are interacting about the impact of their behavior. They discover that empowering behavior enhances their self-esteem and elicits respect from the other person.

Here is a brief introduction to making a movie. The trainer becomes the movie director, asks for volunteers and asks them to choose acting names for themselves. The director also chooses a name for himself/herself. The actors/actresses play their parts using method acting. That is, they feel their feelings while playing their part, not the feelings that someone else might feel. The simplest movie requires two actors/actresses. Usually, the first movie is about placating that will be transformed into saying it straight. For example, the movie could be about a friend pressuring a friend to engage in a behavior such as drug use or cheating, sneaking out of the house at night, engaging in sex or in the case of adults, being pressured by the community to take the responsibility to raise money for a good cause.

Both actors explore being the one who pressures and the one who responds to the pressure in a disempowering and then in an empowering way. In this way, they both experience the effects of empowering and disempowering behavior by being both senders and receivers of such communication/behavior.

During the movie, the trainer's responsibility as movie director is to help process the feelings of the one being pressured, as well as the one doing the pressuring. For example, the trainer may ask the actors questions such as "How do you feel as you are aware that your deepest wish was to say 'no' and instead you gave excuses and ended up saying 'yes'? You didn't honor

your deepest wish." A question to the pressurer could be, "Did you know that your friend did not want to do this?" The processing continues to clarify and lead actors to reflect on the nature of friendship.

Another function of the director is to assign who will be the pressurer first. The reason for that is that sometimes a student could be a real drug dealer in the school and that student immediately wants to be the pressurer, since he/she knows how to do that job well and wants to show off. It becomes a powerful experience for that student to be pressured first. In this way, he/she experiences what it is like to say "yes" when one's deepest wish is to say "no," compared to saying "no" when "no" is one's deepest wish. To witness the struggle and the transformation that the dealer goes through is also a powerful experience for the observers.

It is worthy to note that when someone is being pressured by a friend to do something that has negative consequences, like cutting school or using drugs, often the person being pressured responds with positive support. For instance, the response can be, "You are my friend and I am scared when I see what you are doing. I'll stick by you. Let's go talk it over with…" If this doesn't happen spontaneously, the director sets up a positive support movie.

It also is the function of the director to assign the deepest wish to the one who will be pressured. The deepest wish is always for empowering behavior, namely, to say it straight. For example, the director can say, "Your deepest wish is to say 'no' to the pressurer, but the only way you know how to take care of yourself is by placating."*

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*You may wonder about the assumption of the deepest wish being for empowering behavior, speaking one's truth. Dr. Paula Englander-Golden's personal experience in WWII created a conflict between the desire to speak the truth and wanting to survive. We believe that relationships of submission-dominance create the same fear and conflict, even though death may not be the result of speaking one's truth. We believe that the universal deepest wish is to speak one's truth that honors one's self, others and the issues. By giving this assignment to an actor in a movie, we empower people to speak their truth that they may have never done before. This allows them to discover what happens to their self-esteem and the effect it has on others as they speak their truth.

At the end of a movie, the actors get feedback from the observers about what they saw, what they heard, whether they recognized such a situation, how they felt as they watched the movie. Lastly, the director invites the actors to take off their nametags and invites actors and observers to take from the movie what is useful and leave behind what is not. Giving everyone permission to only take what is useful is another way to give everyone the freedom to make her or his own choices. For greater detail see our Trainer Manual (Englander-Golden and Golden, 2014).

Participants have played out many challenging situations, such as moments when they very much wanted to say "no" but said "yes" instead; times when they wanted to say "no," said "yes" instead and made plans for revenge; times when they gave lectures and felt frustration and anger with the outcome; and times when they wanted to talk to a loved one whose behavior worried them, but then did not address what was in their hearts when they came face to face. In every case, they change the disempowering behavior into empowering behavior. Movies can become quite complex with several actors participating in one movie.

Transforming Rules That Bind Us

Disempowering communication and behavior is often the result of one or more internal rules that we (sometimes unconsciously) carry from our childhood. The language of rules uses words such as "must", "should", "ought"," always" and "never." Any behavior can result from holding several rules that govern the same situation, and some may even be contradictory. For example, we may have the rule, "I must always be honest" along with the rule, "I must never lose face."

Sometimes the same rule can lead to different behaviors, depending (for instance) on other rules that influence it. The rule, "I must always avoid conflict," can lead one person to placate, another to be passive-aggressive, while someone else might be irrelevant, or even be super-reasonable. For example, if I have a rule, "I must always avoid conflict" as well as a rule that "I must always appease you," I may placate. However, if instead of appeasement, my second rule requires that "I must always use reason to avoid feelings," I may instead become super-reasonable. If my second rule is, "I must always lighten up a difficult situation," I may become irrelevant in my response. If my rule is, I must always appear that I collaborate, but I will get revenge," I will be passive-aggressive, and agree to collaborate, but sabotage you behind your

back.

When taken to the extreme, these internal rules can lead to destructive consequences. For example, the rule, "I must always be right," can lead to willful ignorance, that is, not being open to new information or acceptance of a new idea. The rule, "I must always be more deserving than others," can lead to greed. The rule, "I must always win," can lead to cruelty or dishonesty. "I must never have rules" is a very powerful rule that we have often encountered working with young people. It leads to rebelliousness and is important to transform.

The process of a rule transformation begins with identification of the rule. We examine difficult situations, and consider them as opportunities to connect to our inner resources and develop our skills to honor ourselves, others and life. Then, from "I must always…" or "I must never…" the participant is asked first to change the word "must" into "can." The next step is to change the word "always" or "never" into "sometimes." Finally, the participant is asked to change "sometimes" into at least three possibilities to reach the final statement, "I can …..when…". So for example, the rule, "I must always win," progresses to the next step, "I can always win", which the owner of the rule quickly recognizes as impossible. Next it becomes, "I can sometimes win." Now the transformation reaches the final step, "I can win when…," with three possibilities identified, such as a) "I play better"; b) "I have a great day"; c) I am better prepared". A transformed internal rule can lead to a useful guide for living.

When we do rule transformations with middle school and high school students we ask the whole class to choose a rule. When we are transforming the rule, we record on the board all the student responses. In this way, all students discover that they have rules that bind them and no student is singled out.

The Necklace of Resources

There is always more within us than what may come out in a moment of stress. At times, participants, regardless of age, can find it difficult to transform disempowering communications/behaviors into empowering ones. In such situations, we can help a participant by creating a "necklace of resources." We use guided imagery to help participants become aware that they have infinite resources within themselves. They become aware of those inner resources

with which they need to be connected at that moment to help them in the transformation. Some of the resources that people have come up with are courage, kindness, wisdom; the ability to be a good friend; the ability to honor themselves, others, life, nature; and ability to learn something new. These are truly infinite treasures.

We ask the person we are working with to choose people in the group to be physical representations of their resources. Those who agree to create the "necklace of resources" are asked to come forward and gently put their hands on the shoulders of the person who is doing the transformation. The "resources" rotate so that one by one they are face to face with their owner. A "resource" then says to its owner, "I am your (courage). Do you accept me?" etc.   We have worked with people who created jewelry that they can wear to represent their necklace of resources. In one group of 18 women in outpatient addictions treatment every one of them requested to do their "necklace of resources" in the group. When working in addictions, we have found spirituality to be the resource most often called upon.

<center>The Process of Positive Change In SIS</center>

The process of positive change in the SIS program follows this developmental line:

<center>Experience – Reflect – Share – Get Feedback – Practice – Learn – Assimilate – Implement in Life</center>

- Experience: Learning something experienced from one's own behavior
- Reflect: An attentive consideration (thinking, feeling, body sensations) of one's

    experience with one's behavior
- Share: Share one's experience and reflection with others
- Get Feedback: Receive feedback about the impact of one's behavior on others
- Practice: Practice one's new behavior
- Learn: Understand the effect of one's new behavior on one's self and others
- Assimilate: Let the new behavior become part of one's normal patterns
- Implement: Use one's new understanding and behavior in life
    This developmental process helps people move to empowering ways of being in the

world, as they recognize that they have the ability and resources to honor themselves, others and life.

Research Results

Published research on SIS spans from 1985 to 2011 and includes statistical analyses of behavioral and self-report measures for youth and adults in a variety of settings. The results show that SIS leads to statistically significant and highly significant positive changes in empowering behavior and reductions in disempowering behavior. These changes include reduction in the number of students with alcohol/drug related school suspensions, the number of people leaving addictions treatment against medical advice, the number of students with juvenile police offenses; self-reports of positive changes in behavior, such as significant increases in being able to say it straight in difficult situations by honoring one's self, others and issues; reductions in disempowering behaviors (placating, blaming, bullying, being passive-aggressive, being super-reasonable and being irrelevant); improvement in quality of life in the group or family. The remainder of this paper presents research results of various SIS studies.

Behavioral and Attitudinal Research in Schools

Two types of analyses were used to test the efficacy of the training. A Chi-Square analysis was used on behavioral data to determine the differences between trained and untrained populations. This analysis yielded a probability p and an odds ratio for the changes. A t-test for paired observations was used to test the differences on self-reports before and after training. This analysis yielded a probability p and an effect size d. We have also included percentages in the results because we have been asked to do so by people who are not familiar with statistical analyses, and, yet, wish to have an idea about the changes due to the training

Two early studies measured the effectiveness of SIS training on alcohol/drug-related school suspensions and referrals (behavioral measures), as well as self-reports of social skills to implement constructive decisions in difficult situations with 5th-9th graders in a US southwest city of about 80,000 (Englander-Golden, Elconin, and Miller, 1985; Englander-Golden, Elconin, Miller and Schwarzkopf, 1986).

In the first study, the experimental school was chosen at random from the three middle schools in the town. Out of the 799 6th-8th grade students in the experimental school, 509

students received SIS training. During the school year there were 12 students who received alcohol/drug-related school suspensions or referrals. In the two control schools there were 1539 6th-8th graders who did not receive SIS. There were 55 students who received alcohol/drug-related school suspensions or referrals during the school year. The students in the experimental school were found to be 240% less likely to have alcohol/drug-related school suspensions or referrals compared to the students in the two control schools. This is a highly statistically significant result with Chi Square = 7.38, df = 1, p = 0.007, Odds Ratio = 2.43. The self-report of social skills showed a highly significant movement toward empowering behaviors among trained students with t = 5.63, df = 156, p = 0.0001, d = 0.39 for 6th graders; t = 7.51, df =160, p = 0.0001, d = 0.52 for 7th graders; t = 3.27, df = 40, p = 0.0022, d = 0.62 for 8th graders. Significant changes were not obtained for untrained students.

In the second study, a follow-up of school suspensions during the succeeding academic year, no new "users" were found among the previously trained youngsters. In this study, 1483 6th - 9th grade trained students were 370% less likely to have alcohol/drug-related school suspensions compared to 1295 students who were not trained (Chi Square = 4.98, df = 1, p = 0.026, Odds Ratio = 3.8.

A third study (Englander-Golden, Jackson, Crane, Schwarzkopf and Lyle, 1989) demonstrates the long-range effectiveness of SIS in reducing the number of juvenile police offenders among 9th-12th graders. A six-month pre-training base line period was used to monitor juvenile police offenders among all 9th-12th graders in a city with a population of about 5,000. During the pre-training period there was no statistically significant difference between the students who would be trained and those who would not be trained. After SIS, the untrained 9th-12th graders had committed about 450% more juvenile criminal police offenses than the trained students, and their offenses were more severe as ranked by the Police Department over a 19-month period following SIS. During the first year of the study, 8 of the 357 trained 9th-12-graders were offenders, compared to 25 offenders among the 383 untrained students. This is a statistically highly significant difference with Chi Square = 6.99, df = 1, p = 0.008, Odds Ratio = 2.9.

In the following school year, of the 357 trained 9th-12th graders there were now 278 trained 10th through 12th graders. Of the 383 untrained students from the previous year there were now 299 untrained 10th through 12th graders. There were 17 offenders among the trained students

and 38 among the untrained students. This is a statistically significant difference with Chi Square = 6.52, df = 1, p = 0.011, Odds Ratio = 2.1.

We also compared the juvenile police offenders among the 186 trained 9th graders from the first year of the study with the 211 untrained 9th graders in the second year of the study over comparable time periods. There were 5 offenders among the trained 9th graders and 19 offenders among the untrained 9th graders. There were significantly fewer offenders among the trained 9th graders than among the untrained 9th graders of the second year of the study. Chi Square = 5.88, df = 1, p = 0.015, Odds Ratio = 3.4. After SIS, the untrained 9th graders had about 510% more juvenile police offenses than the trained students.

Large Scale Metropolitan Area Research with 3rd – 12th Graders

In a large research project Englander-Golden, P., Golden, D.E., Brookshire, W., Haag, M.S., Snow, C.P. & Chang, 1996, 96 teachers, counselors, school nurses, school administrators, community volunteers and two project coordinators implemented SIS in schools with 2781 3rd – 12th grade students and 227 parents and other adults living in high-risk environments with attributes such as easy access to drugs, drug abuse, poor school performance and high drop-out rates. The trainers trained students in their classrooms, in student support groups, in a school within a chemical-dependency treatment facility, and in a school within a detention facility.   All grades showed statistically significant increases toward more empowering behavior on the SIS Social Skills Questionnaire (Englander-Golden, Elconin, and Miller, 1985; Englander-Golden, Jackson, Crane, Schwarzkopf and Lyle, 1989) with 4th -12th grades showing highly significant results. Five sexual behavior questions were added to the 9th – 12th grade questionnaire and also showed highly statistically significant increases toward more empowering behavior, even when analysis was done by gender. Statistically significant increases were also found with students in detention and treatment.
                    After SIS, parents and other adults reported highly statistically significant increases in their empowering communications/behaviors and highly significant decreases in disempowering communications/behaviors as measured on the SIS Communication/Behavior questionnaire, and highly significant increases in quality of life in their families and training groups.

A subjective feedback questionnaire gave participants the freedom to say in their own

words what they learned. Their responses were very positive. Some examples of what they learned about SIS among $3^{rd} - 8^{th}$ graders were, "To say what I mean," "The most useful thing there was," "It feels good;" among $9^{th} - 12^{th}$ graders, "It's sometimes hard," "You are respecting yourself and others when you say it straight," "It avoids a lot of tension and let's you know who your real friends are;" among parents/adults, "Being open and honest," "To be honest with others as well as myself," "It helps everyone involved." Students in detention facilities and treatment centers showed similar results to students in regular school settings.

Mothers in Addictions Treatment with Their Children at a Charitable Organization

In another study (Englander-Golden, Gitchel, Henderson, Golden, Hardy, 2002), the effectiveness of SIS as a treatment component was evaluated with 36 mothers in residential chemical dependency treatment with their children. All were indigent, 32 had previous criminal offenses and 14 were on probation or parole at the time of SIS. Self-reported disempowering behaviors showed highly significant decreases after SIS ($p = 0.001$). Empowering behaviors and quality of family and group life showed highly significant increases ($p = 0.001, 0.008, 0.015$ respectively with $d = 0.67, 0.44, 0.43$, respectively). Self-esteem, assessed with one group of eight mothers, showed a highly significant increase after training ($p = 0.009, d = 1.04$). Self-reports regarding training effectiveness were very positive.

Addictions Treatment in a Private Setting

Another study about the use of SIS in addictions treatment, (Wood, 2004; Wood, EnglanderGolden, Golden, and Pillai, 2010) evaluated SIS in a private residential treatment facility(chemical dependency, sexual compulsivity, compulsive gambling, eating disorders and concomitant psychiatric diagnoses) with 26 men and women. Effectiveness of SIS was measured by comparing participants' leaves from the treatment facility against medical advice before SIS and during and after SIS, as well as with questionnaires used in the previous study. An additional questionnaire was used to evaluate anomie (a person's perceived level of alienation from self and from others) before and after SIS (Wood, 2004).

Self-reports of empowering behaviors, quality of family and group life and self-esteem showed highly significant increases following SIS. Self-reports of disempowering behaviors and anomie showed highly significant decreases for disempowering behaviors and a significant

decrease for anomie following SIS. Subjective reports regarding training effectiveness were also very positive. One resident reported, "finding his voice" as a result of SIS, and described how this was important for him in coping with triggers for relapse.

Treatment staff reported that SIS resulted in a prevalent attitude of increased concern among residents for one another's recovery and willingness on the part of residents to go out of their way to assist staff in forestalling residents from leaving against medical advice, as well as to intervene informally on their own with greater frequency. Leaves against medical advice were significantly reduced (odds ratio of 2.1). This is a large effect size, showing that SIS leads to an increase in treatment retention and completion.

Using SIS in a Homeless Shelter

In a recent Study, (Haag, Wood and Holloway, 2011) the effectiveness of SIS in changing the quality of life of residents in a homeless shelter was measured by a questionnaire (Englander-Golden, P., Golden, D.E., Brookshire, W., Haag, M.S., Snow, C.P. & Chang, 1996). The results on the Quality of Life in the Group Questionnaire (showed a highly significant increase after SIS with $t = 3.41$, df = 12 and $p = 0.006$, d not available.

Most recent Study, Still in Progress (2013)

SIS is being conducted in a special high School in an urban American community with wide drug use and gang violence. By student request, an after-school SIS club was formed to give students an ongoing opportunity to explore how to deal with challenging situations in an empowering way. The principal has informed us that SIS has already reduced school absences.

Conclusion

Relationships of equal value are the essence of empowering ways of being in the world. In such relationships, we honor others, the issues, and ourselves as they arise in our interactions. Yet, regardless of culture, we have found that the prevailing social relationships are of submission and dominance, leading to disempowering communication/behavior.

Say It Straight training provides a way to move from what is familiar, yet disempowering, to experiencing our innate resources. When we are aware of these resources, we can see a new picture in an old situation, hear a new sound and find a new meaning in an old

voice, experience the strength in our roots, make new choices and choose to move in a new direction. In this way we move from judgments, shame and blame to feeling competent, empowered, hopeful and able to experience joy and peace.

We believe that the research presented in this article not only represents the effectiveness of this training program, but also shows how new understandings and internal transformations result in relationships of equal value and increased personal and social responsibility. It is our hope that SIS will continue to influence relationships between individuals and between communities of all kinds and sizes in the world and among nations. Our hope is that SIS will continue to be used with yet different populations starting with kindergarten and extending to the United Nations.

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