

The Judge's Role in d s s c o u r t

UNC School of Government

August 8, 2025



Hello, my name is j., and I'm a hope dealer



FINDING YOUR WHY



IT'S ABOUT YOU
(IT'S ALSO NOT ABOUT YOU)

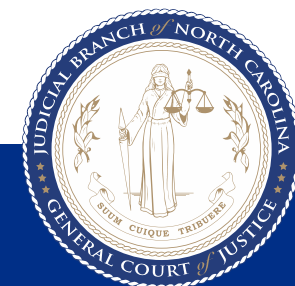


The Why is Because of the Who

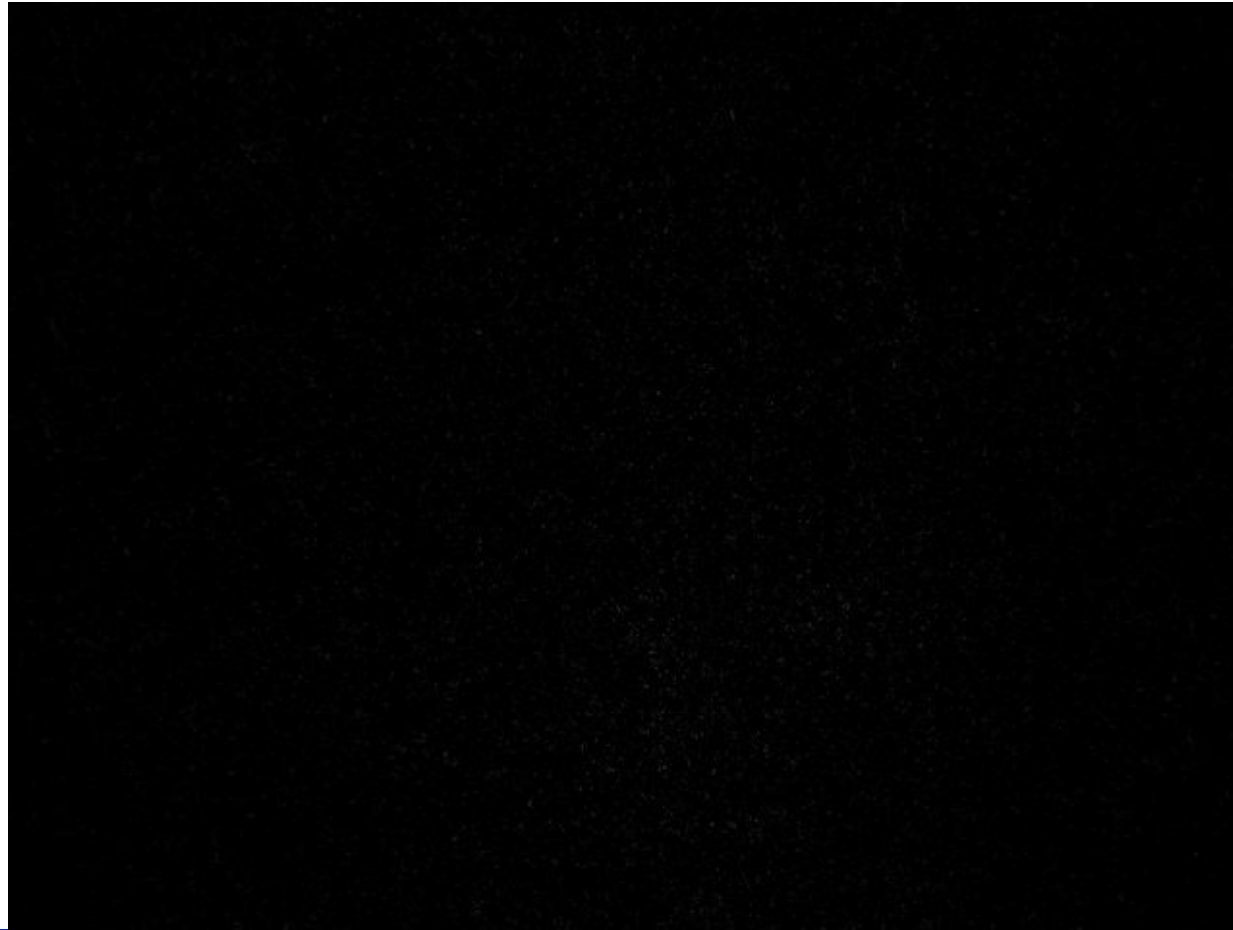


Dependency Heroin Disability
Mental Health Health
Unemployment Divorce Trauma
Abuse
Fentanyl Housing Domestic Violence
Neglect
Poverty Hunger
Parenting

What
comes in
our
doors?



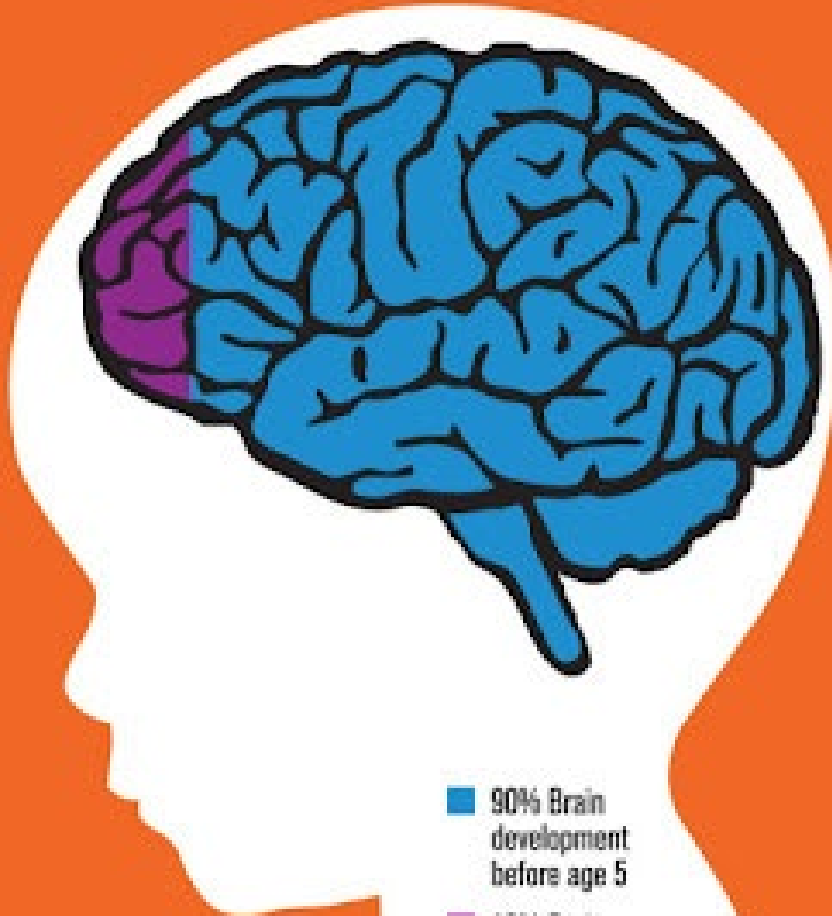
Absence of hope



90%

**of a child's brain
development
happens
before age 5**

Source: Harvard Center for the Developing Child



- 90% Brain development before age 5
- 10% Brain development after age 5



IN NORTH CAROLINA OVER 60% OF YOUTH ARE EXPOSED TO ABUSE, NEGLECT OR OTHER TRAUMATIC EVENTS BEFORE AGE 17

-DUKE CENTER FOR CHILD AND FAMILY HEALTH



I've Changed



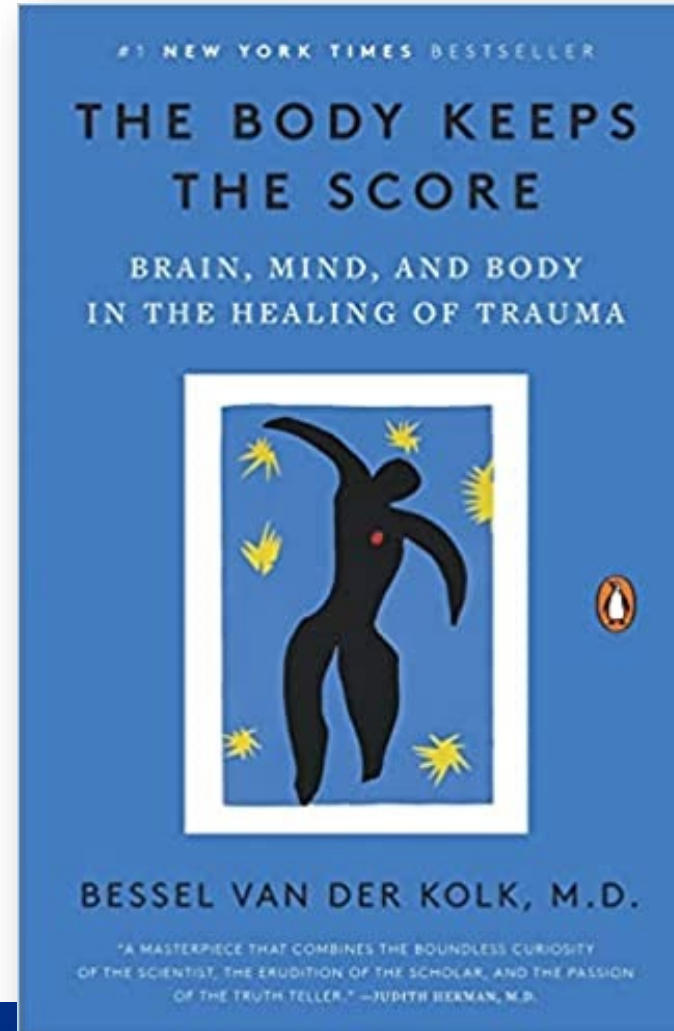
Fixing the Bridge



Getting at the Root of the Problem

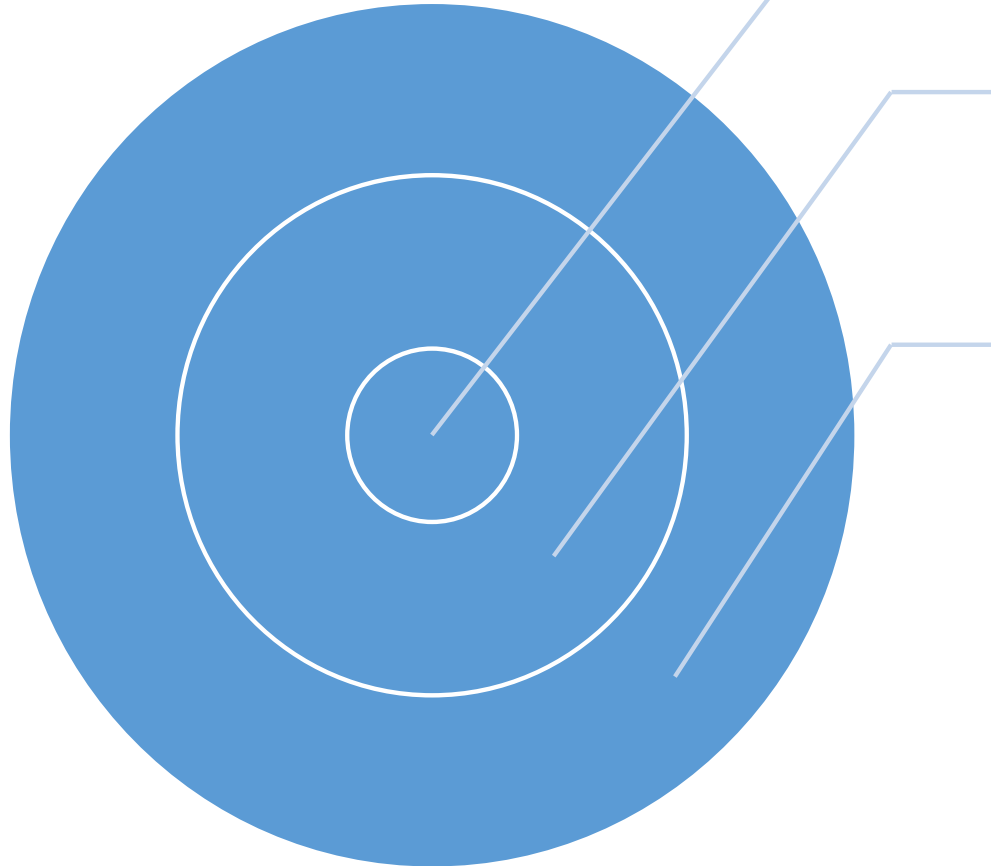
“Eradicating child abuse in America would reduce the overall rate of ... alcoholism by two-thirds, and suicide, IV drug use, and domestic violence by three-quarters. It would also...vastly decrease the need for incarceration.”

The Body Keeps the Score, pg. 150



The golden circle of a/n/d court





WHY

HOW

WHAT



The what
Emmet t f o l l o w s i n s t r u c t i o n s
(a n d s o d o w e)



Our “Instructions”

- Statutes/Case law
- Procedures (timing too)
- Rules
- Policies
- Candyland
- Let’s review
- **Everyone** gets it, right? (and everything is awesome)



The How

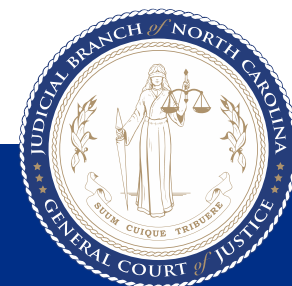
The Master Builder

Dispositional alternatives



Disposition → Discretion (Still some rules)

- Best interests
- Placement
- Visitation
- Services
- Life plans/case plans
- Different than “instructions”
- What happened with the Master Builder? (cookie cutter)



The why
Purpose Driven
(this is about you)
the center of the golden circle



The Why

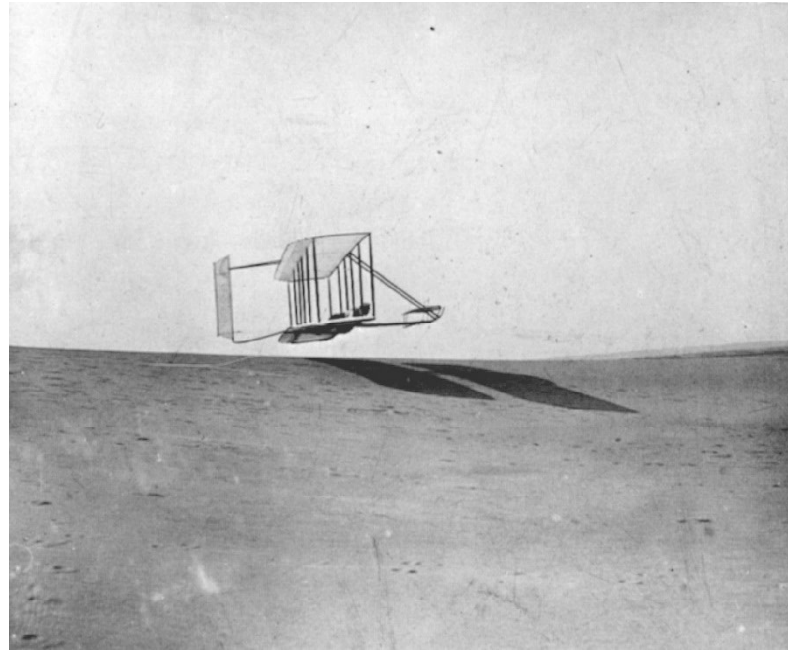
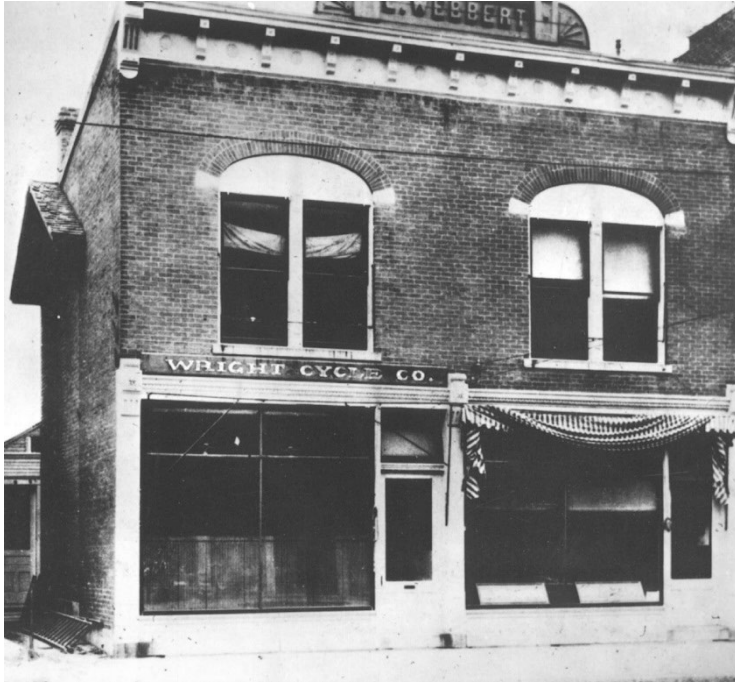
Apple



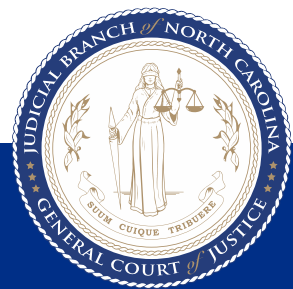
The Why



The Why



The Why



How About you?

LEADER

Shaped by your Why!



Leadership is Key

*When parenting fails, when informal community responses are inadequate, our juvenile and family courts provide the state's official intervention in the most serious cases involving children and families. We are the legal equivalent to an emergency room in the medical profession. We intervene in crises and figure out the best response on a **case-by-case, individualized basis**. In addition, we have to get off the bench and work in the community. WE have to ask these agencies and the community to work together to support our efforts so that the orders we make on the bench can be fulfilled. We have to be the champions of collaboration.*

Judge Steve Teske, quoting Judge Leonard Edwards of Santa Clara, California, 2004 Rehnquist Award for Judicial Excellence, NCSC



We're changing lives.

We're shaping lives.

We're saving lives.



Overly dramatic?



- Could be called “last chance court!” (maybe 1st chance)
- Last chance to meet unmet needs
- Last chance to diagnose and treat mental health issues
- Last chance to address behavioral issues
- Last chance to address family issues
- Why last chance?



Juvenile Court is the Crossroads



And we're the traffic cop! (or Neo!)



So, How do we do this as a leader?



- Learn to read!
- Be committed (lead with your Why!)
- Listen, listen, listen
- Become trauma informed
- Understand brain science of trauma and brain development
- Pay attention to detail: ask the context questions



So, How Do We Do This?

- Change the way you talk. These are real people. Trauma has occurred.
- Active listening/motivational interviewing.
 - Tone, volume, words used
 - Talk to or with, not down to
 - Engage
 - Show you care
 - Talk about the future
 - Motivate!



So, How do we do this?



- Use your power
 - Order evaluations
 - Understand your resources
 - Use your resources
 - Hold professionals accountable
 - This will be frustrating, especially with mental health



So, How do we do this?



- Pay attention to education
 - Attendance
 - Grades
 - IEP/504
 - Suspensions/expulsions
 - Behavior at school
 - Bench card



So, How Do We Do This?

- Pay attention to mental health
 - Assessments/evaluations
 - Treatment
 - Family involvement
- Be Creative
 - Visitation and other areas



So, How do we do this?



- Understand substance misuse (take the course asap!)
- Resources are scarce
- Involve the family
- Be the leader



So, How do we do this?



- Every family is different
- Different than yours: careful with your personal experiences
- Avoid POAS (new to DSM 5)
- Engage and empower parents
- Be optimistic: hope dealer!



So, How Do We Do This?

- Pay attention to Katie!
- Give children their voice.
- Child participation is critical.
- They've lived the hell:
shielding them from hearing
about it is meaningless.
- Value your time with them!



Back to Leadership

ALWAYS LEAD WITH YOUR WHY!



LET'S CHECK IN: WHAT'S YOUR WHY?

Lead with what you wrote Monday

Where are you today?

Let's share



Closing





Thank You

J.H. Corpening, II

Chief District Court Judge, 6th District

Julius.h.corpening@nccourts.org

