



Issue 88

## BrainWise is the Foundation for My Work

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"Few professionals do what I do," said Gary Brayton, PhD, a Clinical Social Worker in Alberta, Canada. Dr. Brayton specializes in treating children and youth who have engaged in sexually intrusive behaviors. He has been teaching BrainWise since he was introduced to the program at a conference 12 years ago. "It is the foundation for my work and aligns with everything I do," he said. He estimates he has treated over 2,000 clients and maintains a recidivism rate of 3%.

A literature review of longitudinal data for youth sexual offenders reveals that 5% or less re-offend. Research also found that juvenile sexual offending does not predict adult sexual offending, and youth rarely assault young children. It also is noted that stigma follows youth offenders and deters many therapists from working with them. Therapists like Dr. Brayton are to be commended for their commitment to helping these young people change their behaviors and lead productive, crime-free lives. His goal is to make communities and families safe.



**Dr. Gary Brayton, PhD, MSW, RSW,BSW**

Dr Brayton uses BrainWise not only to help the children and youth he counsels but also their parents, foster parents, and others who interact with them. He

said that most young offenders want to change their behaviors, but they lack decision-making skills. He appreciates that BrainWise not only teaches decision making, but also ties the lessons in with brain research. He has found BrainWise enhances their therapy and gives family members tools to reinforce positive behaviors.

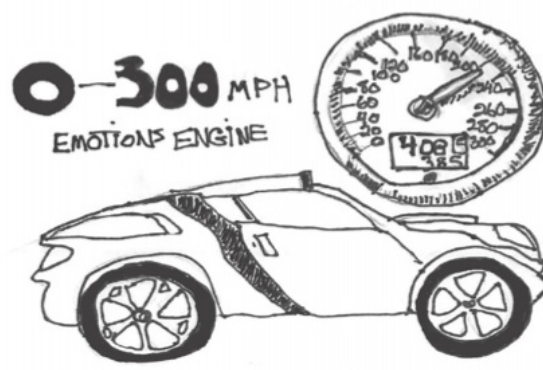
**The 10 Wise Ways Are Easy to Integrate.** Dr Brayton described how easy it is to integrate 10 Wise Ways into everything he teaches, including psycho-sexual education, relapse prevention planning, family issues, trauma issues, developing empathy, and apology work. He gave the following examples:

- **Wizard Brain over Lizard Brain.** He says his clients grasp this key concept and identify him in group settings as “the Wizard Brain guy.” He stated the lesson helps them understand why they are responsible for their behaviors.
- **Red Flags** help the youth recognize their triggers. The BrainWise model “fits perfectly” because it teaches about the internal and external warnings that precede sexual behaviors. “It helps my patients understand that when they get this thought, it is not OK. This helps them stop and think before they react,” he said.
- **The Constellation of Support** is critical to reduce recidivism. He said it was easy to explain BrainWise to parents, and a double benefit was “not only are the youth learning BrainWise, so are their parents.” This [BrainWise newsletter](#) offers tips on ways other people in the youth’s Constellation of Support can become “double lines” and reinforce their positive behaviors.

“We cannot treat these youth alone,” he said, and added, “The traditional therapist/client confidentiality is lifted with sexual offenders,” helping him work with families and support agencies. “My clients know that I share what they tell me with others. My obligation is to the safety of the community as well as the family.”

He shares BrainWise in his consultations with the patient’s medical team, tells them what he is doing, and asks for their support and understanding. “I do this every chance I have so they can talk with others about BrainWise,” he said.

- **The Emotions Elevator** metaphor describes how emotions can change, and Dr. Brayton was impressed when one of his clients, a car enthusiast, proposed using another metaphor -- “the emotions engine.” He drew a picture and connected stepping on the gas pedal to rev up the engine with the rise of emotions.



## The Emotions Engine

- **Ask Questions** is an important Wise Way to help the youth understand, recognize, and discuss their behaviors. Dr. Brayton uses videos to help the youth look at problems that happen to others. “I stop the video, and ask, “How does that apply to you?” “What Wise Ways would you use to react in a better way?” It works because it helps them gain an understanding of their behavior, and the consequences. “It teaches them to evaluate their behaviors themselves,” he said.
- **Communicate Effectively** helps youth and parents listen to each other. He found that teaching “I” statements helps them immediately recognize the difference between laying blame and sharing information. “I use role plays to help the youth and parents see the difference between “I” messages and “you” messages,” he said.

**Flexibility and Teachable Moments.** “The BrainWise model gives me the flexibility to use the Wise Ways whenever they are needed,” he said. Teachable moments often arise during sessions, and he is quick to introduce a Wise Way he may not yet have taught. Examples include Consequences Affecting Others (Wise Way #8) and taking others’ Point of View (Wise Way #10.) These important concepts can be introduced, revisited, and reinforced as needed.

Many of his clients are low on the autism spectrum and he said, “BrainWise concepts are easy to explain and adapt to their problem situations. Other providers he has trained agree that the 10 Wise Ways not only are easy to teach their students or clients, but also to family members, teachers, and caregivers. All find that BrainWise explains complex concepts so they can be understood. “It is skill-based and can be adapted to fit a wide range of needs. BrainWise has everything I need to teach,” he said.

**Trust Turns Resistance to Cooperation.** It may take time to win the trust of some parents, especially those who are court-ordered, because they have had previous negative experiences working with courts and family services. He said parents who resist help often feel powerless and mistrust him because they have been told what to do. “This changes when I tell them that I want to give them tools they can use for themselves and their child,” he said. He finds that it takes longer to work with resistive parents, but as they learn BrainWise, the skills help them reconnect with their kids in a healthier way.

**BrainWise in Canada.** Dr. Brayton is a certified BrainWise instructor and has trained other health professionals and educators in Alberta. He consults

with schools and mental health agencies and shows them how BrainWise is a foundation course for a wide range of children and youth with mental health issues.

His advocacy for BrainWise led to its addition as a program used by Wood's Homes in Calgary and programs at Hull Services, an agency that has been serving the mental health needs of children and youth for sixty years. He has trained health and social service providers in urban and rural school districts and on First Nation reserves, as well as the staff at Sifton Child Family Services, a residential program for youth in Lethbridge.

Dr. Brayton also mentors young professionals, some who have been [featured in past newsletters](#). They include Jocelyn Vincelli, who founded the [BrainWise Professional Group](#) that shares teaching tips and success stories, and her colleague Melissa Roals.

Colton Hok, another protégé, teaches BrainWise to Alberta School District's Learning Support Teachers, School Counselors, Child and Youth Care Workers, and Family Support Workers. [Colton became a BrainWise champion](#) after seeing results with difficult students.

**Praise for BrainWise.** Dr. Brayton reflected on his years teaching BrainWise and said it changed how he teaches. "Before, I would tell clients, 'You've got to do this.' Now I teach them about the brain and how their emotions impact their behavior." Now he knows his patients have the tools they need to control their behaviors.

He knows his clients are better because of learning the program. He said, "Systems theory says 'a change in one element of the system can cause a chain reaction of changes in other elements of the system. BrainWise helps create a domino effect. It is why I am such a strong proponent of the program.'" The safety of the community is his priority and he works to ensure this goal is met.

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BrainWise instructors teach the 10 Wise Ways to give their students, patients, and clients tools to help them stop and think. Like Dr. Brayton, they may work with challenging populations, and recognize how teaching critical thinking skills can help change negative behaviors. Other instructors work with parents whose children have been relinquished because of abuse and neglect ([BW and families in crisis](#)) or with classes of developmentally challenged youth ([Brain Zones for Special needs](#)). Their experiences highlight the good they are doing for others.

In Colorado, Aurora Central High School counselor Pat Austin, M.S., taught BrainWise to developmentally challenged teenagers for more than fifteen years. Pat was a beloved colleague who recently passed away following a stroke. She shared the story of teaching BrainWise to David, a special needs teen who developed schizophrenia. David had been in her BrainWise class for years and she thought he had not retained anything. This changed when he had a psychotic episode at school and saw flying clocks coming to steal his brain.

He started hitting his hand to his forehead, telling her, "I need to find the green! The clocks are coming to steal my brain!"

It took her a minute to realize what he meant. David had colored his Wizard Brain green and was hitting his head because he wanted to use it to get rid of the clocks. She got David to his doctor and his awareness that his Wizard Brain could help him was extraordinary. We will miss our dear friend and her signature goodbye to “Be safe.”

A heartfelt thank you to everyone.



Take care,

**Dr. Pat**

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## On a Lighter Note

During a tribute concert to 9/11 First Responders, Bette Midler sang “The Wind Beneath My Wings.” Her moving rendition recognizes the importance and purpose of the work of those who help others.



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