# Internship Challenges & Supervision

One of the biggest challenges I have experienced in my internship at Mending Arrow Ranch is that I have difficulty connecting with children at times. I have worked with children in many different settings (Summer camps, Vacation Bible School, Pathfinders, etc.), yet I have always struggled with "getting on their level" so-to-speak. When you add kids with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) or other socialization issues, it makes it even harder to connect. I discussed my concerns with my field supervisor, and we explored the issue further. She recommended that I just be myself around the kids and just talk to them about things they are interested in to get the conversation started. She said that even if I do not know what the latest trends are with kids, they will enjoy explaining it to me. She told me the best thing I could do is to relax and just goof off with the kids; just make things fun and light. I found that I was so focused on incorporating therapeutic techniques and help them improve that I was missing the overall process and connection with the kids. Once I focused more on making the sessions "fun" for the kids and not so much on therapeutic techniques, I realized that I did start to connect with the kids on a deeper level. Not only was I able to connect more, but it was easier for me to zero in on problem areas with the kids and provide the therapeutic services I needed. Instead of forcing it, the therapeutic interventions came naturally, and the kids did show some improvement in their mental health.

Although I was able to connect with the kids more, I still had difficulty keeping some of the students focused on the task at hand. It was especially difficult to keep the kids with ASD focused on specific tasks. I discussed my concerns with my mentor, Matt McUmber, who has extensive experience as a mental health clinician working with kids with ASD. He shared with

me that kids with ASD need consistency and clear-cut directions to keep on task, so he recommended that I be clear and direct when working with the kids. He also advised that I become comfortable with meltdowns and just use those moments as teaching points for the kids. This really helped me know what to expect and how to engage with the kids with ASD. I was able to provide solid instructions, and if their attention wandered, I would look them in the eye and give them a clear task to do. If they did have a meltdown, I would help guide them through it and talk about what happened after they were recovered.