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### **What inspired you to write How to Talk to Porcupines?**

I have worked with all kinds of youth and personalities during my career and one thing is clear - every youth is unique and deserves to be treated with kindness. Prickly personalities, when left unaddressed, can disrupt programs, derail activities, and distract from objectives. We, as adults, are quick to ignore or remove the youth from a program when behaviors arise. But this isn't always the best approach. Not addressing or inadequately addressing the issue perpetuates the cycle of trauma when youth are left without the words to process their big emotions.

I also know youth workers *want* to serve their participants (youth) as best possible. Yet, prickly personalities or communication breakdowns can leave the youth worker feeling incapable, defeated, or burnt out. Youth workers don't need to feel burnt out because of communication breakdowns.

I wrote How to Talk to Porcupines to help deliver impactful communication and de-escalation strategies to help youth workers address the needs of prickly youth.

My youth work journey has informed my own communication style and helped me build out my communication tool kit to effectively communicate with porcupines. This book is inspired by lessons learned from all the prickly porcupines I've met over the years.

### **What is a porcupine?**

A prickly porcupine is any person employing warning systems to alert others to back away or change course when threatened or challenged. Although the warning systems take many forms, common examples include engaging in angry or regressive conversation, miscommunicating directly or indirectly, withdrawing from the discussion, or navigating a difficult conversation. These behaviors serve as a means of self-preservation to ward off perceived conflict or help the individual meet an unmet need.

### **How did you come up with the Porcupine metaphor?**

Porcupines and youth share many similarities - so many, it was almost impossible to ignore. Like porcupines, youth desire independence and autonomy to make their own decisions. They are resourceful and employ warning systems to alert others to back away or change course when threatened or challenged. The bristly behaviors communicate a message and it's up to us, as youth workers, parents, or coaches, to hear the message and address the underlying need. The similarities between porcupines and youth are endless, making it easy to carry the metaphor throughout the book.

### **How long did it take you to write the book?**

My answer depends on how you measure "write the book."

I've been delivering the How to Talk to Porcupines workshop since 2018. I had just finished delivering a presentation in 2020 and couldn't stop talking my spouse's ear off about the session. Just before bed, my spouse suggested I write a book about the information presented

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in the book. I raised my quills really high and said it was a silly idea.....but then my brain spent the entire night writing the outline.

Three years later, the book came to be.

### **Tell us about the adorable porcupine icon.**

I love Spikey the Porcupine! Spikey helps bring to life the porcupine metaphor by giving personality to the potential situations we encounter as youth workers, leaders, family members, and humans. I wanted a gender, age, and experience-neutral icon to serve as an inclusive representation of all the potential prickly encounters we have in our lives. Spikey is this icon.

Spikey the Porcupine was created by AKimball Creative and captures the essence of prickly personalities.

### **Where can I buy your book or find your work?**

How to Talk to Porcupines is available wherever books are sold including Amazon, Barnes and Noble, and my favorite - your local bookstore or library. You can also buy my book directly from me at [howtotalktoporcupines.com](http://howtotalktoporcupines.com).

If your local bookstore or library doesn't carry my book, just ask. Most local bookstores are happy to fulfill book requests from their customers.

I also offer workshops, presentations, and book signing events and look forward to partnering with you for your next event. Please email [howtotalktoporcupines@gmail.com](mailto:howtotalktoporcupines@gmail.com) to schedule events, professional development workshops, or conference appearances.

### **What makes your book unique?**

I designed my book to be functional, fun and informative. The size is strategically small enough that you can put it into a bag, backpack, or purse for reference on the go. The margins are wide enough to allow space for notes and the Take Action sections are designed specifically to allow readers space to respond to, digest, and process the information presented in each section.

I wanted to create a book that youth workers at any stage in their career can pick up and use as a reference guide to build their toolkit. This book stands out because it's not a one-and-done field guide. Rather, it's intended to be a book readers can go back to for reference throughout their career as they enhance their own communication toolkit.

### **I want you to speak at my event! Can you do that?**

I am happy to speak at your event, book signing, conference, or other opportunity.

Please email [howtotalktoporcupines@gmail.com](mailto:howtotalktoporcupines@gmail.com) to schedule events, professional development workshops, or conference appearances. You can also review the standard workshops I offer on my website, [howtotalktoporcupines.com](http://howtotalktoporcupines.com).

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### **I love your work, where can I leave a review?**

Thank you! Reviews help me get my book out to other youth workers. You can leave a book review on Amazon, Barnes & Noble, or other book websites.

Reviews also help people learn about my professional development workshops and coaching opportunities. You can leave a review on Google, Yelp, or other social media platforms.

### **How can we stay in touch?**

I love staying in touch with people! I am active on Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn (@HowtoTalktoPorcupines or #howtotalktoporcupines) where you can follow, comment, like, share, watch for event updates, and otherwise engage with other youth workers.

Sign up for our newsletter! The newsletter deploys about once a month with timely updates and you can unsubscribe at any time.

### Human interest questions

#### **Outside of writing and workshops, what gets you up in the morning?**

I am a musician, artist, and extrovert. I love getting outside to move my body in the morning and I am equally comfortable sitting under a tree sketching or drawing for hours on end. I find energy in gathering with people, meeting with friends, and learning from others. So I'd say art and life get me up every morning ready to start the new day.

#### **Do you play music while you write? And if so, what's your go-to playlist?**

I do listen to music while I write! I usually cycle through several playlists and genres depending on my mood or level of concentration needed. If I need extra focus, the Motivational Orchestra or Coffee House playlists on Spotify become my default.

#### **What books do you enjoy reading/what's on your current reading list?**

I really enjoy reading nonfiction books related to communication, youth work, training, education, design, leadership, history, and interpersonal relations. I do indulge in a few fluffier books to occasionally break up the weighty topics. In 2023, I'm working my way through these books:

- [A Field Guide to the Natural World of the Twin Cities](#) (Moriarty)
- [Drum Gahu](#) (Locke)
- [An Indigenous People's History of the United States](#) (Dunbar-Ortiz)
- [Working Identity](#) (Ibarra)
- [Burn After Writing](#) (Jones)
- [The Kleshas: Exploring the Elusiveness of Happiness](#) (Adele)

#### **What writing risks have you taken that have paid off?**

Just starting the process and taking it one day at a time. Writing a book is a financial and professional risk in and of itself. I had to break down the bigger process into multiple smaller steps to be able to plan for each cost, activity, and experience along the way. The biggest risk has been getting started and seeing the process through.