

Effective Parenting: Technique within System

NAGC Big Event, 28th October 2012

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Outline of the Workshop

- Inner Wisdom and Personal Responsibility
- Attachment Theory
- Strategies:



- Listening to/for what kids are feeling – not content or ‘active listening’
- Decision-making
- Helping out at home
- Responsibility for our feelings – talking to children
- NO punishment or concept of naughtiness
- Boundaries, and how to be healthily flexible



Content Warning

- This presentation is NOT designed to make you comfortable. Our comfort zones can be straight-jackets anyway.
- My responsibility here is to inform you to the best of my knowledge and ability.
- If the information herein stirs up any proverbial muck, that's great. Leverage off of that for improvement.



INNER WISDOM

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"We don't receive wisdom; we must discover it for ourselves after a journey that no one can take for us or spare us."

Marcel Proust

"Wisdom is what's left after we've run out of personal opinions."

Cullen Hightower

"Thought creates the world and then says 'I didn't do it.'"

Dr David Bohm



What Makes You Distressed or Happy?




Ground Assumptions

- Our happiness comes not from circumstance, but from the meanings we create out of our experience of circumstance.
- Feelings are the felt side of our thinking, however unconscious that thinking may be.
- We are therefore 100% responsible for 100% of our feelings 100% of the time. NO EXCEPTIONS, even when it really looks like there should be.



What is your job as a parent?



To guide your children into being happy, contributing, responsible, self-fulfilled, moral, functioning, independent adults to the utmost of their abilities.

What is your child(ren)'s job?

- To continually become themselves... which means...
- To be happy, contributing, responsible, self-fulfilled, moral, functioning, independent adults to the utmost of their abilities –
 - Sound thinking (e.g. critical thinking skills, reasoning ability, awareness of and ability to defend against manipulation)
 - Emotional intelligence (e.g. reflexivity, perspective, inner wisdom)



What is NOT your job as a parent?




It is NOT your job to make your child(ren) happy.

You can point them in the direction of their happiness but cannot create it for them.



What is NOT your child(ren)'s job?



It is NOT your child(ren)'s job to make you happy (i.e. with their achievements or compliance).

This is different from children being held **ACCOUNTABLE** for their actions.



Setting Negative Examples

- If you index your happiness in how well you do at work, you teach your children to index happiness to their grades.



– ‘Grades are a pathway to a ‘good job’ too’ – if you believe that pathway, you pass that on

- If you want your children to be resilient but you scream righteously and unapologetically at the guy who cut you off in traffic – hypocritical and ineffective.
- If you want your children to have unconditional self-worth but think badly of yourself – guess what?



Leading by POSITIVE Example

- You need to let go of your insecurities and be clear about the source of your wellbeing. Simple but not easy.
- **Point them to their happiness and self-worth by living yours daily**
- **Point them to their responsibility for their happiness by demonstrating yours daily.** (They need to see you make mistakes and deal with it)
- FYI: These relationships with self are in PROCEDURAL (rather than episodic) memory and only gained with countless thousands of repetitions.



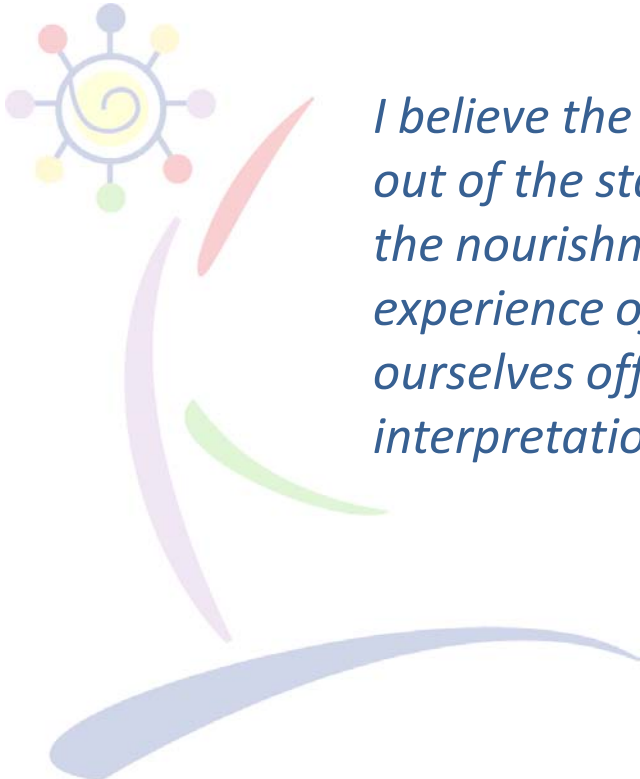
Where Does Self-Worth Come From?

- Happiness research is clear: a strong (but not veering to arrogant or overly entitled) sense of self-worth is critical for happiness
- Self-worth does not come from achievements, belongings or even relational belonging (being in loving relationships); nor from physical health. All these things can be taken from you.
- *Your truest self-worth comes from an **UNCONDITIONAL** knowing of yourself as **BEING a GOOD person**. This knowing makes you failure-proof and shame-proof (not guilt-proof!).*



ATTACHMENT THEORY

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I believe the ways we take care of ourselves so poorly arise out of the starvation we experience from being cut off from the nourishment of commonplace experience, including the experience of intimacy. We are responsible for cutting ourselves off from experience by substituting our interpretations of reality for reality.

- Dr Brad Blanton



Attachment

- ‘Attachment’ is a formal term developed by John Bowlby and Margaret Ainsworth, furthered by other scientists to mean:
 - A non-optional, biological drive to create and maintain proximity to a care-giver, especially in times of distress
 - ATTACHMENT IS **NOT** LOVE, although it can be, and, attachment can be incredibly intense. Intensity is not necessarily love either.
 - Attachment styles are also in procedural memory



Attachment Styles/Strategies

- What love is – a VERB, not an attitude:

- ✓ Safe touch

- ✓ Respect

- ✓ Care

- ✓ Warm feeling and expression thereof

- ✓ Attentiveness/listening/cu-riosity

- ✓ Keeping the Other in mind

- ✓ Thinking about the needs of the Other

- ✓ Reliability

- ✓ Nurturing

- ✓ Support

- ✓ Holding space

- ✓ Unconditionality



(comes later in a conscious way for kids, already embedded in strategies for eliciting secure attachment behaviour from caregivers)

Secure Attachment = Love

- When there is Secure Attachment, then there is a good enough sense of self and fostering of sufficient resilience in the child. You also teach them how to be loving by your example.
- We are hardwired for secure attachment –
 - We KNOW what love and not-love is instinctively
 - Growth hormone production stimulated in infants with touching the bottoms of baby's feet
 - Brain development of infants most expansive, healthy and rapid with secure attachment (Sue Gerhardt)



When there is not enough love

Insecure Attachments

Insecure Avoidant

Insecure Preoccupied

Clingy

Caregiving

Disorganised Attachment

Avoidant

Preoccupied

Flipping between one and the other, and/or having predominantly one flavour or the other but mixed. Unstable.

It

Gets

Worse



Insecure Attachments

- Insecure – Avoidant
 - Pretending feelings that are on the vulnerable side don't matter; putting emotional needs aside but retaining a high sense of entitlement. Often tends to anger or can just be shut down, unavailable, unreachable, etc.
- Insecure – Clingy
 - Intense desire to be close to the Other, difficult to soothe, high drama
- Insecure – Caregiving
 - Taking care of others at one's own expense.

***ALL insecure strategies are innocent, pained attempts to manage a tragic LACK
ALL insecure strategies are co-dependent (assumption that well-being comes from
outside)***

Leading by POSITIVE Example

- Your children learn attachment patterns through countless repetition, i.e. what you habitually do, not what you manage to pull out on occasion.
- To be the best parent you can be, you are beholden to clean up your own attachment challenges. (We all have them.)



STRATEGIES

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“Because of their size, parents may be difficult to discipline properly.”

P. J. O'Rourke



Caveats

- Strategies are a means to an end, and that end must be in the genuine best interests of the child
 - What is best for your child may be uncomfortable or inconvenient for you.
- Strategies only work if they are presented in the context of your empathy, reliability, care and wisdom.
- Do discipline coldly and with intent to control - and you will generate hatred from your child towards you.
- Do it with warmth and acceptance - and create intimacy, security and cooperation, even with initial resistance.



Listening

- How you listen structures your (and their!) response
- Listening to/for what kids are feeling – not ‘active listening’ or just for content
 - Listening for feeling, and/or guessing and checking, is empathic and respectful.
- Costly to not listen
 - Having preconceived idea of what is best for your child
 - Looking for your child to pause so you can leap in with (even genuinely!) clever solutions
 - Not listening can build up years of frustration and guilty resentment; these feelings may explode in teen years.
- Listening exercise?



Responsibility and Authority

- Responsibility without authority is incredibly disempowering (Moss-Kantor)
- Responsibilities and rule-setting must be age appropriate
 - For example, it isn't up to a 6 year old to determine how many sweets to eat daily, but it can be her/his choice on which sweets, or things like clothes, movies, or playmates
 - With coaching, children can make bigger decisions, e.g. What time to go to bed, when homework should be done and where, how they contribute to the running of the house
 - The depth and breadth of potential involvement increases with maturity (and vice versa!)
- Greater independence comes with greater (authoritative) responsibilities



Inclusion in Decision Making

- Involve children in making rules (e.g. even bedtime!)
 - Concept of natural consequences – if the bedtime is too late, child wakes up tired. Hence, it is the child's body saying go to bed earlier: ownership leads to self-care, which is much healthier than compliance
- Involve children in deciding consequences for rule breaches when there are no natural consequences
- Rules apply to big people and little people alike



Accountability

- Honesty comes first to enable healthy accountability
- Avoiding accountability diminishes respect.
 - “Tell them the truth... If the child finds out the parents have been lying... they would be angry and treat you with less respect” *Aliyah Kaitlyn Orr, 8 ½*
- Admitting mistakes doesn't diminish authority
 - But can increase intimacy, (self-) respect and authority
- Just saying ‘Sorry!’ is not enough - Teshuvah
 - Admit it
 - Say sorry
 - Think about it
 - Make changes / make up for it
- Accountability leads to reliability



Helping Out At Home

- It's not helping YOU, it's contributing
 - By asking them to contribute you teach them community participation rather than the benefits of keeping you 'sweet'
- Make it age-appropriate, keep adding on, e.g:
 - Laundry in hamper properly at age 2, wiping up spills
 - Making bed from age 4
 - Tidying room at age 6



NO Punishment or Naughtiness

- “Good Girl/Boy” and “Naughty Boy/Girl” – 2 sides of same coin
 - A child’s global goodness is then reliant upon being judged so; badness likewise. Being good or bad is indexed to parental approval, and social approval is a second best for unconditional acceptance. The child’s centre of gravity is outside of him/her – seeking approval is a losing, addictive prospect
- Children's misbehaviour may be a way of communicating something important to us, without words.
- Punishment is counterproductive



Responsibility For Our Feelings

- Your children don't make you angry, you make yourself angry with the meaning you are making from the content of your thinking
- Your children don't make you peaceful either – you make yourself peaceful with the meaning you make of what you are thinking about
- **Holding your children accountable for your feelings fosters unhealthy co-dependency**
- Hold yourself accountable and you teach that responsibility to them
- Your children are responsible for all their feelings – tantrums are hence unacceptable after 2 (ish).



Boundaries: Rigidity and Flexibility

- “Don't give them whatever they want, or they will get too used to having everything they want and have terrible tantrums and you'll have to pay extra for the babysitter.” *Aliyah Kaitlyn Orr, 8 ½*
- When parents set different boundaries and are hashing them out frequently, this is inconsistent boundary setting with all its addictive and volcanic consequences:
 - Inconsistent holding of boundaries creates addictive pushing against boundaries.
 - Video games programmers use random rewards to deliberately foster gaming addiction
 - Rats pressing levers
 - Having a privilege and then having it taken away is anathema to our human psychology and triggers forceful rebellion (Cialdini – USSR)
- Boundaries/rules must be known in advance where possible and explained where feasible.
- Exceptions need to be explained; the exception criteria become a set of rules themselves, and thus remain predictable



It's an Art

- Art of listening, allowing, responding, engaging
- Boundary holding and bending and reformulating
 - Although not formulaic and constantly changing, still needs to be predictable. This requires even more skill.
- Remember your parenting is systemic, not a collection of techniques
 - Your authority comes BOTH from your systemic coherence and warmth
- Be conscious and deliberate in your leadership
 - You lead by example whether or not you like that example or are even aware of it



Parenting Resources

- How To Talk So Kids Will Listen And Listen So Kids Will Talk – *Faber & Mazlish*
- Parenting from the Heart – *J Pransky*
- Non-Violent Communication: A Language Of Life – *M Rosenberg*
- Influence: The Psychology Of Human Persuasion – *R Cialdini*
- NLP for Parents (google search, a few good ones out there)
- Five Love Languages – *C Gary* (www.5lovelanguages.com)
- Raising Resilient Children: Fostering Strength, Hope, And Optimism In Your Child – *Brooks & Goldstein* (*They have an edition for children on the autistic spectrum*)
- Somebody Should Have Told us – *J Pransky*
- You Can Be Happy No Matter What – *R Carlson*
- Conscious Loving: The Journey To Co-commitment *Hendricks & Hendricks*
- Radial Honesty – *B Blanton*
- To arrange a consultation, or a speaking or teaching engagement:
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