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OUT OF THE TWILIGHT ZONE- DISCIPLINE FROM THE INSIDE OUT

Chapter 1

DISCIPLINE FROM THE INSIDE OUT

Billy?... (looks out and spots Billy in the back of the room) -- present.

Susie?... (there she is... little wallflower) -- present.

Glenn?... (uh... cute as usual) -- present.

Kathleen?... (there she is... for now!) -- present.

Mark?... (where is he? In the back? No, that's Brian. Hmmm? Is he here today? Hmmm? No, not over there... no, not over there...)

*Mark? Has anyone seemed Mark today? Hmmm? I guess... I guess he's not here today. Not present. (Mark's not here! **Mark is not here! Mark is not here! MARK IS NOT HERE !!! YES!**)*

*No Mark tantrums! No Mark fights! No Mark arguments! **IT'S TIME FOR A CELEBRATION! IT'S GOING TO BE A GREAT DAY TODAY!** No Mark interruptions to distract the other kids. No Mark whining to take me from the others. Going to be able to get work done today. **It's going to be a GREAT day! MARK IS NOT HERE TODAY!!***

Not your darling! No... It can't be your darling whose absence causes celebration among his/her teacher. Well, sometimes it is your darling! Or, maybe your darling is the invisible child who never causes any trouble but is also virtually unknown to the teacher and the other children because he/she is so quiet. Or, is yours the fidgety one? The "yes...but" kid. You know the one who, "yes is bright, but is so active!" Or, "yes is very sweet, but can't keep his/her hands or feet still." Or, yes, is well liked, but always has to be first. How do your darlings become the children of kindergarten, elementary school, middle and high school? How do they become the good, great, and... uh... other kids? How do they become the good, great, and other academic and social successes or failures of school and other future communities? Harsh as it may sound, when I tell the little vignette above to teachers from preschool age to elementary to high school, I get uproarious laughter, knowing nods, and teachers pointing fingers at each other. There are children that become so frustrating to teachers that they virtually celebrate when such children DO NOT come to class. Does this happen due to the dynamics of the classroom, the playground, or the home, the family, and the neighborhood, or the media? The anger is the classic therapist answer... it depends! There are many aspects and circumstances that contribute to a child's success or failure. The home, the family, the neighborhood, the class, the playground, and even the media are the communities every child grows up and develops in. Each and every one of these communities influences the child's development and predicts his/her future success or failure in other communities. A young child's future communities include middle and high school, college, various formal and informal teams, performing groups, clubs, partnerships (platonic and romantic, unofficial and legally sanctioned), the workplace, places of spiritual fellowship, family configurations of many kinds, and more. Success or failure of a child as he/she grows up can be measured not in academic or financial success, or in trophies of achievement, or in accumulation of



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material things, but in his/her ability to function well in a community. The purpose of discipline then is to prepare and promote success community membership.

HOW COME... WHAT FOR?

Discipline serves to direct a child towards appropriate behavior. However, the appropriate behavior that is taught in his/her first community, the family in its home may or may not match what is considered appropriate behavior in his/her future and other communities. This is often quickly discovered with early visits to grandma's and grandpa's where expectations may differ significantly. Or, at the grocery store versus in ones own home. And, sometimes the behavior expectations in ones own home change with additions or subtractions to the family community. When guests are present, suddenly the dress code changes. Running around in just a diaper or your underwear, acceptable and normal at all other times becomes unacceptable. Or, when dad's gone, the sleep arrangements or the dinner or snack menu changes drastically! The first training ground of socialization, that is, for the child to behave appropriately in his/her society at large is in the miniature society of the family. When the socialization expectations of the family are a relative match for the expectations of the later and larger societies, then the child may be prepared for (or at least, not surprised by) them. In addition, certain societies or communities (including families) are more or less functional... are more or less healthy. A child who comes prepared with healthy behavior expectations of a functional healthy family may be surprised by a dysfunctional or unhealthy society or community (new family, classroom, workplace, or even larger institution) will still be more readily able to survive and possibly (hopefully) strive to foster functionality and health in it. A child who comes with dysfunctional or unhealthy behavioral expectations may be "successful" in a larger matching community but with a continuing of the psychological and emotional destruction he/she has suffered in his/her family. Or, in a differing yet still dysfunctional and unhealthy community, he/she will lack a healthy psychological emotional foundation... a healthy model to deal with it for him/herself and others. Sometimes a family may adapt "successfully" to its challenging child, that is, form a workable family community for him/her. However, he/she may be able to be successful only in the family community, and be left unprepared for the greater community. A family may make accommodations in the home that allow for the child's challenging behavior that few if any others in any other community (grandparents, neighborhoods, playgrounds, school, etc.) would be willing to make.

MARK- FALLING INTO COMMUNITIES

Mark was a very challenging child at 3 years old. He was very active, very loud, and very impulsive. He was a sweetheart, but... (another "yes, but..." kid) his energy and lack of awareness of others in his world caused him to antagonize just everyone outside of his parents. His parents loved him and his 4-year-old brother dearly, of course. And, they understood his energy and largely accepted it. They made accommodations to help him: he got more time than his brother to get his clothes on, plenty of warning when there was going to be a transition, few if any trips shopping with only one parent (always two parents- one to shop and one to watch him, or leaving him at home in the first place), curtailed social activities that would be too difficult for impulsive Mark to handle), and so forth. Their major accommodation was change their life and community to fit his abilities. Respecting a child's personality and individuality is a highly honorable principle. However, in the extreme it misses out on the need for socialization. In other words, since most people don't become hermits, individuals function for the most part in communities of one kind or another. Balancing the individual needs and personality with community needs and standards is the key challenge. In a sense, they did a "reverse socialization"- rather than socializing



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Mark to their community and needs as they had done with his older brother, they socialized (adapted and changed themselves) to his personality, despite his personality bringing negativity, ostracizing, and punishment from society. There are times when society would be well served to be more accepting and less arbitrarily demanding of conformity, and respect a person's individuality. However, respecting individuality must not mean allowing people to express their individuality in ways that are intrusive or destructive of others safety, sanity, security, and serenity. As soon as Mark stepped out of his family and into another community, his behavior started drawing often very severely adverse consequences upon him. In his neighborhood, as much as they liked his brother, the other children found him to be annoying and rude. If he wanted to get something, somehow he would bump into, step on, and knock over several kids to get it. If there was a new toy in the neighborhood, when Mark got through with it, it was often broken or damaged. He soon became unwelcome in his neighbors' houses, as the parents got tired of him jumping on furniture, breaking vases, and upsetting their children. Nobody liked him. Most of the kids HATED him. His preschool teachers didn't like him either. He made their lives crazy! Although, they were professional and refrained from labeling him a "bad boy", their body language, facial expressions, and their tone of voice were clear communications of their dislike for him. As much as adults try to make a distinction between the behavior and the child him/herself, when the behavior is consistently troublesome and the adults' frustration becomes extreme, then the child becomes the negative behavior and the negative behavior becomes the child. And of course, his self-esteem plummeted. He had high self-esteem from his family... his parents loved him! His grandparents loved him! But no one else loved enough to tolerate his behavior. He was a "bad boy" to just about everyone else.

Devastated by the rejection that he suffered daily in his neighborhood, Mark tried desperately to be accepted. By the time he was 5, he was willing to do just about anything to get accepted by the neighborhood kids. Unfortunately, the neighborhood included some less than kind kids... predatory kids. Mark became so needy for acceptance that these kids could talk him into doing just about anything not matter how harmful or dangerous. One time they convinced him to take off all of his clothes and lie naked on the sidewalk as a human ramp for them to ride their bicycles over! Luckily, his grandmother happened to drive up just in time to stop it, as four kids from age 7 to 10 were about to coming tearing down the sidewalk on their bicycles to run him over. Life became even more difficult for him when he entered Kindergarten. He had the misfortune of entering a class with a teacher who should have retired but hadn't. She should have retired because she was "real tired" of working with challenging children! In her community, the classroom, Mark's behavior was quickly determined to be outrageous and intolerable. She quickly decided that Mark was a problem child, along with another 5 of the 11 boys in the class (more than half the boys were problem children?!). As the manager of the community, her negativity about Mark made his daily misery so overwhelming that he became a Kindergarten dropout before the Christmas break. He had fallen into two communities, his neighborhood and his Kindergarten class that his first community had failed to prepare for... and he suffered for it.

FROM THE INSIDE OUT

Discipline comes from the inside out in many ways. It comes from the inside the emotional and psychological history of the adults. Then it moves out into the world of the child as development challenges them. When a person is mature, discipline that has become part of his/her internalized moral and behavioral codes moves from inside out to his/her relationships and life. Discipline also develops its basic rules and guidelines inside the family and then is followed and expressed out in



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larger communities of school and work. As a former preschool teacher, director, and owner, as a former elementary and secondary school teacher, and as a consultant to educational and youth service programs, as well as a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist, I have experienced many children who have significant difficulties dealing with mainstream group expectations (in the preschool, elementary, middle, and secondary classrooms and playgrounds). Often times, their difficulties come from the mismatch between family, that is, parent to child socialization and the larger group. Functionally, parents with a smaller ratio of adults to children (two parents to the one first-born, or adopted child in a coupled partnership) can get away with a style of discipline that involves intensive supervision and little or no self-management on the part of the children. In other words, children may not be taught or be expected to internalize behavioral boundaries. Adults stay vigilant and even hyper-vigilant and/or restrictive to prevent their children from crossing any boundaries. They will hold the cup of milk for their children, never leave them alone with a pet, bathe the child even past when they are developmentally ready to do it themselves, intervene with other children for their children when there is a conflict, choose and buy their children's clothes even when they wish to begin making such decisions themselves, tell them which classes to take or not take... which sports or activities to do or not do, and make sure their teen and young adult children make the RIGHT... that is correct... that is PERFECT choices in life!

DISCIPLINE COMES FROM DISCIPLE

Such an approach to discipline moves away from the concept of "discipline" relating to being a "disciple," that is, learning and conforming to a healthy and positive way of life taught or promoted by a more experienced and wiser individual or group. Of course, some of us as adults may not be all that wise despite our experience! The wise person learns from others' mistakes, the average person learns from his/her own mistakes, and the fool never learns despite his/her many mistakes. The most difficult thing for a parent or adult is to watch children make mistakes... usually the same mistakes the adult make him/herself when younger. Often, parents try to force their children to make the "right" choices. However, that often backfires creating highly defiant and acting out children. Or, depressed and anxious children unable to make their own choices when it becomes time to do so. The Chinese calligraphy for "learning" is made up of the words "study" and "practice." Without practice, study does not create learning; one never gets the experience that promotes and solidifies the learning. Without study, practice does not create learning; one never examines the experiences for positive or negative consequences and determination of good principles. Practice does not make perfect. However, practice is necessary for learning. And, practice includes and accepts mistakes as part of children's learning process of how to have a healthy and successful life and relationships. To coordinate this principle with the principle of discipline coming from the inside out, this means that parents need to allow the family to be the practice place for behavior, dealing with personality and conflicts, stress and disappointments- the practice place for socialization. This means teaching problem-solving skills, presenting clear models of expected and appropriate behavior both in the family and in larger communities, and appropriate consequences for both positive and negative behaviors.



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Chapter 2

SOCIALIZATION FAILURES- THE YUCKY KIDS

Here comes the Billy, the super hero! Fly through the air... Smash! Blast! Boom! Throw the bad guy down! Kick him! (Chucky screams in pain) "Oh...you ok, Chucky? I'm sorry."

Run to the table... bump the others kids at the table... shake the table and make the blocks fall... ("Billy! Stop!") "Huh?... " loudly, "Hey, I can I play?"

Push through the kids and get to the drinking fountain... take a long drink...("Billy, hurry up!") "ah" take another long drink... "aah" smack your lips... take another long long drink. "Billy, hurry up. We want to drink too!" take another long slow drink... "aah" done... no, one more sip...ok, "Hey, can I play?"

Here comes the rocket ship! Captain Billy soaring through the universe... Smash! Blast! Boom! Gotta ram the bad alien's spaceship! Kablam! (Chucky screams in pain) "Oh...you ok, Chucky? I'm sorry."

"It's mine! Give it to me! (grab and push) I got it! Na na na na na! (run away with the toy).

"Happy Birthday to Davie...Happy Birthday to DAVIE DOO DOO HEAD! HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO DAVIE DOO DOO HEAD!...ha ha ha... Davie DOO DOO HEAD! Davie, do you want to play monsters?"

Here comes Spiderman Billy! Zoom through the air... Smash! Blast! Boom! Throw a punch at the bad guy! Get him! (Chucky screams in pain) "Oh...you ok, Chucky? I'm really sorry."

(later at home...) "Mommy, nobody likes me (sniff... sniff). They call me 'yucky Billy!'"

The Billy of the above was not a mean or intentionally hurtful child by any means. He was a very kind and delightful child full of vitality. He was not angry or anxious. However, he was at great risk to suffer the consequences of his behavior regardless. In his home, his energy and exuberance was accepted as "that's our Billy!" His parents and his older siblings made accommodations for him. Unfortunately, the communities that our children will live and function in both as youngsters and as adults are not as accepting or as forgiving as the first family community. Sometimes, neither children nor adults realize this causing great harm to the children's relationships, academic and vocational options, and overall life happiness throughout time.

NO ONE LOVES YOU THAT MUCH TO...

As a therapist, I once was working with (in contrast to sweet little Billy) a particularly obnoxious teenager named Calvin. He was consistently rude to adults and perceived alternately as funny and crude by his peers. His parent although loving were at a loss of what to do. His negative attitude was particularly foul this session. It must have been a rough day... a rough week... a rough month... a rough life so far for him. Without a doubt, he had many reasons to have a bad attitude: social, economic, family challenges and traumas abounded. However, the most empathetic and socially conscious person can tolerate only so much of hostile and nasty messages and action



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directed at him/her without beginning to reciprocate the anger and dislike. I had a fair understanding and even empathy for his situation and the circumstances and history of his life that brought him to this attitude. However, nasty is nasty and rude is rude... and super-nasty and super-rude is super-nasty and super-rude, and then there was Calvin! Maybe Mother Teresa or Gandhi or some other saintly person could still smile and turn the other cheek. Unfortunately, I ran out of cheeks! Fortunately, I was self-aware of my rising anger and resentment at his continued disrespect and hostility, and how he had antagonized many other adult professionals in and around school. I was able to present back appropriately and therapeutically, rather than just reciprocate with disrespect, hostility, and rejection. However, I chose to respond in a fashion that would both fit into his "street" style and communication and hopefully, provoke some self-awareness.

After he had retorted to a simple question with his usual litany of profanity and disrespect, I told him, "You know nobody in the real world is going to put up with your disrespect and abuse. No one in the real world loves you that much to put up your disrespect. You think your teachers love or like you enough to put up with this? The only reason they put up with your abuse at all is that they are professionals and it's their job to try to help you... in other words, because they get paid to do this! You think they would put up with your disrespect over and over because they like you? You think I love or like you enough to put up with your abuse? I get paid too! And you know what? They don't pay me enough! In the real world with real people... not paid professionals when you are still a child, but in the real world, real people don't... nobody loves you enough to keep putting up with your disrespect and abuse- they'll fire you, divorce you, ostracize you... maybe beat the heck out of you! No one loves you that much to put up with your disrespect and abuse... except maybe your parents... and they're getting tired of you too!" I was purposefully provocative because he had been so stuck in his negativity and even feeling entitled to be hateful and hurtful. He had not been confronted successfully, nor had the reality of the consequences of his behavior clearly and blunted reflected back to him. He was surprised with vehemence of my response. It did get his attention. Unfortunately, the best that I was able to do with this intervention, was to get him to pause a second to consider (primarily, because it was so blunt) the relevance of my feedback regarding his future relationships. I could see clearly that if he maintained his social deviance, he would undoubtedly suffer for it. Hopefully, he would see it too... eventually.

SOCIALLY CARING BUT SOCIALLY INEPT

Many (hopefully, most) children are not so severe in their social response to others and to their own issues; they do not overtly and defiantly deviate from social norms. However, a child does not have to be a social deviant to be punished by his/her peers and society. Someone who is not hostile or disrespectful... who is not filled with anger and hatred, may still be ostracized by his/her peers because he/she is not in tune to the rhythms of the group, or conversant in the social language of peers, or is hyper-focused to his/her own needs at the cost of peer awareness, or has some other blockage or interference in receiving or sending social communication. Children and adults, who may be good-hearted and with positive intentions, if they are poorly socialized to community expectations become the socially inept. The socially inept are also punished by society. Each community has its own sets of expectations, rules, and consequences. These are often not expressly articulated as clear "to-do's" and "don't do's." Many of these expectations and rules are implicitly taught and monitored. Often, one only figures out them out over time as one clue after another has been communicated about the propriety or impropriety of the behavior. No one says overtly that something will not be okay, but once the transgression has been committed, then the



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disapproval is conveyed or the punishment is administered. In other words, you don't know until after the fact that a line has been crossed... sometimes, you didn't even know there was a line!

LEARNING THE ELEVATOR RULES

For example, there are the "elevator rules." When asked for the "elevator rules", most people give you a bemused look. When encouraged, they tentatively start to propose some rules with a growing realization that they DO know the "elevator rules." Stand facing towards the door. Avoid eye contact, especially after the door closes. Don't talk to the other people in the elevator. If you must talk to someone, whisper. Put your hands either by your sides or in front of you- NEVER behind your back (you might TOUCH someone!). And, watch the lights indicating the floors as if they are interesting! How did all of us learn the elevator rules? Don't you remember that wonderful day, when your Mom or Dad or both, told you, "Son (or Daughter), you're grown up now. You're ready to learn the elevator rules!" You don't remember? Well, that is because we all learned implicitly with the looks and hushes from parents what was ok and not ok when we went into that magical little moving room when we were little, curious, and spontaneous. As innocuous as knowing the elevator rules may seem, when someone does violate the rules, he/she is perceived with anything from bemusement to disdain to anger (especially, if he/she is an adult). There are many other social rules. What is an appropriate time to call someone later in the evening? Up until 9 pm? ... until 10 pm? ... until 11 pm? What about a thank you note for a present? Is a verbal heartfelt thanks enough? How many times do you offer? How many times do you decline an offer before accepting?

I WANTED THAT LAST PIECE

One time many years ago, some friends had come over for dinner: Don and his girlfriend. We had bought a delicious strawberry cream pie for dessert. After serving everyone a piece of pie, there was only one piece left. In due time, everyone had finished with their piece of pie. I asked our female friend, our kids, and my wife if they wanted the last piece. All of them were honestly quite full and satisfied and declined. I asked Don if he wanted the last piece. He said no. So... so, I took and ate the last piece! Don who is Japanese-American later that night on their way home, told his girlfriend that he had wanted that last piece of pie! He said he thought that I was going to offer it to him again and insist on him taking it. Then he would demur a couple of times more, but when I would still insist, then he was going to accept it and eat it. "I wanted that last piece!" His girlfriend with great delight, told him that with Ronald, he had only one chance to get the pie! Later on, when they told us the story, we all had a good laugh. My wife who is also Japanese-American understood immediately what had happened. She too had been taught that one was always supposed to decline an offer four times before accepting it. It was the proper, polite, and gracious way to accept any generosity. On my part, I was supposed to insist, insist, insist, and then insist one more time to show my generosity and graciousness as a host. Unfortunately with my different upbringing, my "host" rules were to genuinely offer him the last piece and take his response as his honest desire! Yep, that second piece of pie sure was good too! Fortunately, we were all close friends and also all one to three generations removed from the original immigration in our families (less "Old Country" and more Americanized), and Don did not reject our (that is, my) friendship due to this cross-cultural miscommunication. On the other hand, this type of miscommunication (social or cultural ineptness)- no matter how innocent can be interpreted as rudeness or disrespect. On a larger scale, in other countries this has given rise to the term "Ugly American"- that is, an American who is insensitive and disrespectful of the people and culture of the country he/she is visiting. Without intending to, such a person commits social gaffs that



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alienate the people of the country. In your neighborhood or own home, this can cause major disconnection between parents and teenagers as misinterpretations of motivation and intent are seen as disrespectful from either or both sides. On the playground or in the classroom, very nice children who are unaware of the expectations of the teachers or of their peers can be labeled “yucky,” mean, bad, or worse be ostracized.

Discipline is a primary way to help socialize children to the expectations of the greater society and to specific communities. The model they are presented in their own families as to what is appropriate is critical to socialization. When they deviate from that model, then often discipline is appropriate in teaching healthy socialization. There are differences between discipline and management. In addition, a child’s perspective is vital to finding motivation for socialization/discipline.



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Chapter 3

NOW AND NOT-NOW

If you eat all that candy, you'll get sick later. NOT-NOW

This candy is yummy. Eat another piece. NOW!

Remember you ate too much candy at Sally's birthday party, and you got sick. NOT-NOW

I love chocolate! NOW!

You better go to bed early, or else you'll be tired for school tomorrow. NOT-NOW

The movie is almost over. Just another 30 minutes. NOW!

Your teacher said you were cranky last time you didn't get enough sleep. NOT-NOW

This is the best part coming up. NOW!

I really need to watch out that I don't charge up too much on my credit card again. NOT-NOW

That outfit is beautiful. It looks great on me! And, it's on sale. NOW!

I got that bill coming in... and the car payment on the 15th... and Joe's birthday... NOT-NOW

It's been a bummer of a day. I could use a pick-me-up. And, it's on sale. NOW!

Before = NOT-NOW;

Later = NOT-NOW;

NOT-NOW is NOT RELEVANT;

What is relevant? NOW, and only NOW!

The developmental sense of time for a young child is based on NOW and NOT-NOW. The only thing that is relevant for a young child is what serves or disserves him/her in his/her immediate situation and immediate presence. Does it taste good NOW? Does he/she want it NOW? Will it give him/her pleasure NOW? Will it satisfy a desire, need, craving, or wish NOW? If the answer is yes, then the behavior or response will be assertive because only NOW matters. What happened before (the stomach aches, the empty purse, the achy body, the temper tantrums...) which could be lessons about cause and effect, which if integrated in a continuum of understanding about the functioning of the world (of money, of your body, of relationships, and so forth) does not matter because before is NOT-NOW, NOT-NOW is not relevant, and only NOW matters! What may probably or even definitely happen later... the consequences of the present choices (often negative consequences such as pain, debt, frustration, or diminished relationships), which if understood also in terms of cause and effect would help children (and others!) predict and prepare for later circumstances and demands of survival and performance, also does not matter because later is also NOT-NOW, NOT-NOW is not relevant, and only NOW matters. While this is developmentally



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acceptable and understandable with younger children, older children, teenagers, and many adults continue to function as if anything that is NOT-NOW is not relevant, and incur major financial debt, weight gain, health problems, lost academic, vocational, and career opportunities, and compromised if not destroyed relationships. How much do you as the parent or teacher- the adult model the wisdom of experience (NOT-NOW before) and the discipline of delayed gratification (NOT-NOW later)? The wise person learns from the mistakes/experiences of others, the average person learns from his/her own mistakes/experiences, and the fool does not learn despite his/her own mistakes/experiences. Wisdom is often gained from foolishness. As the models and guides for children, we often try to gift to our children the “wisdom” (gained from being stupid as we developed and grew as quite the average people in our NOW’s, and then are surprised that our children often prove to be very human (and average just like us) in their indulgence in NOW.

REMEMBERING – PREDICTING – AND NOW, TOO!

What does that mean for discipline and teaching for children and their behavior? That adults are to give up the “before” and the “later” lessons, the lessons about cause and effect, and the responsibility of ones previous choices affecting ones life currently and of current choices having consequences not only in the immediate but also for the future? Absolutely not! Good parenting and positive discipline includes reminding children of prior choices and lessons learned (this applies to larger communities than the family and classroom- “those who fail to study history are doomed to repeat it”), and helping them realize the consequences of choices extend into the future in predictable and often manageable ways. Decisions and choices are package deals- package deals that often include both positive and negative results. The decision to eat the chocolate cake is a package deal. Included in the package is not only the immediate sensual pleasure of the decadent cake, but also the additional calories, the pimples, the added inches, and especially the future guilt! Unlike the smorgasbord buffet, you may not choose to have what you like and leave behind what you don’t. A prior decision delivers the additional aspects of the package whether you want to take delivery or not. A current choice delivers a time capsule that may explode upon you later.

As adults teach about choices and consequence, discipline become effective when they do not only count on prior lessons and later consequences to motivate good choices. NOT-NOW remains not relevant unless it becomes relevant NOW. Remind children of before and warn them about later, but also set motivation and consequences NOW for both proper and inappropriate choices. For example, “Honey, calm down. Last time you got into trouble fighting with your sister. You won’t like being on restriction again.” If the child responds appropriately, then reminding them of before and later is sufficient. It is noteworthy that there is an implicit imperative in the above message. It says, “you better not...” rather than explicitly saying, “you may not...” or “Stop it!” The implicit imperative is a social communication mechanism to avoid sounding too controlling or demanding, however it is still an imperative command. In other words, this is what you are required to do. Some adults have learned this graceful manner to maintain social harmony while asserting control or command (as may be required of their role as supervisors, bosses, teachers, etc.). However, with a child (or defiant teenagers or contrary adults), this communication style can backfire on parents. The child, not hearing a overt command to stop the behavior... to not eat the additional cookie can chose to interpret the statements as permission to continue; the absence of a clear negative is an implied positive! Making a very clear (perhaps very assertive) command, “Thou shall stop!” “Thou shall not eat the fifth cookie!” removes any ambiguity of your expectations. With the clear command, there is only one current implied consequence that applies NOW- your



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OUT OF THE TWILIGHT ZONE- DISCIPLINE FROM THE INSIDE OUT

displeasure, disapproval, or disappointment. For some children and people, this is adequate motivation for them to make a better choice; it is a sufficiently impactful consequence to experience NOW to change behavior NOW. On the other hand, that may not be enough.

OR ELSE!

NOW it would be time for the big guns!! NOW would be time for the “... or else!” “Stop it, NOW! You got in trouble before and that wasn’t any fun. You’re going to be very unhappy later if you continue. Stop it or you will be on timeout NOW!” “No more cookies. You got sick before and you’ll get sick again pigging out on cookies. Stop bothering me about it or else you won’t get ___ later.” Although, you are teaching the cause and effect dynamics of before and later, you also present an immediate highly tangible consequence to direct the child towards the appropriate choice or behavior... NOW! Once that is clear (and hopefully effective), then the child can be gently reminded of how NOT-NOW (before) became NOW at a later time and negative consequences suffered. “Gently” is the operative attitude so that such reminders don’t become shaming “I told you so!” “You know, the toy you really wanted last week used up all the money so you don’t have enough to go to the show today. That’s too bad.” In addition, when NOT-NOW (later) becomes NOW, when there has been good choices made, you can enthusiastically remind the child that he/she does not have to suffer the negative consequences that would have arrived with the previous poor choice avoided. “You almost spent all your money last week on that toy and then you wouldn’t have enough money to go to the show today. Good thing you decided to save your money!”

There will other times and situations where it is not a matter of doing or not doing something, or of a good versus a bad choice (appropriate versus inappropriate) but rather of one choice that is more beneficial long term versus another choice that may be immediately satisfying but problematic later. Then it may become a judgment call whether or not you should allow your child to make the “negative” or poor choice. In my articles (also on this web site) on Building Self-Esteem, in V.2.5 Consequences in Power and Control- “That’s Not Fair,” I discuss a situation where I allowed my daughter to make a poor choice and allowed a negative consequence to arise. In that situation, rather than letting the negative consequence happen, we chose to use it as a learning opportunity for her to teach her about choices. We gave her another option (but did NOT rescue her or say “never mind” to the consequences) that gave her the opportunity to learn her lesson without suffering the consequence. She took the opportunity and did learn an important lesson about choices and consequences that she has lived and followed through on ever since. In other cases, however, it may be prudent or even necessary given the situation or your child’s personality to let the negative consequence happen.

LIKABILITY, VALIDATION, ACCEPTANCE, & CONNECTION

The boundaries, presented with consequences and choices seem to imply that a child’s major motivation in his/her behavior is whether or not he/she gets punished. There will be some children that this becomes very relevant. Certainly, there are some “spirited” or “willful” children that seem only to respond to negative consequences. On the other hand, even these so-called difficult children in their NOW worlds are looking for positive things from the people in their worlds. Or, to put it another way, once there is a security of stable boundaries and consequences... of predictability in their caregivers’ relationships with them, children look to be liked, validated, accepted, and connected NOW. Being liked by family, peers, and caregivers happens in the moment and accumulates over many moments from the NOT-NOW of before, through NOW the



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OUT OF THE TWILIGHT ZONE- DISCIPLINE FROM THE INSIDE OUT

present, and to the NOT-NOW of later. “Honey, remember how mad Suzy was at you when you hit her? I don’t like you when you’re mean to her. We’ll both be mad at you if you keep hitting.” Validation, acceptance, and connection also can be expressed for positive behavior over time. “You were such a nice kid when you helped her. We can count on you to be a great kid that helps. You’re our super helper.” However, if the liability, validation, acceptance, and connection are about how the child used to be or do, or what he/she would gain later IF he/she does this or that, then the reference again becomes at the NOT-NOW time- the not relevant time. Liking, validating, accepting, and connection needs to be offered NOW for the NOW oriented child to be effective.

UNCONDITIONAL LOVE & CONDITIONAL ACCEPTANCE

Some people may criticize this as offering conditional approval or acceptance of the child based on his/her behavior when they feel that a child should get unconditional love. Every child should get unconditional love. However, the world is high conditional in how it perceives children and people. If my neighbor is rude to me, I have no unconditional love for him or her. If a store clerk is dismissive of me, then I don’t like the clerk... or the store! The real world does not have unconditional love for your child. If your child is obnoxious and disruptive to a person in a public place, that person does not accept your child. If your child tears the library book, the librarian does not approve of your child’s behavior or your child. The real world has normally (aside from a few wonderful teachers and other saints) only conditional like (not love!) for your child, or for that matter, for you or anyone else. As a parent or primary caregiver, your unconditional love should not be distorted to become unconditional acceptance of any behavior whatsoever. Love your child unconditionally AND conditionally like, validate, and accept his/her behavior based on the appropriateness of his/her choices. NOT-NOW later will punish your child if he/she makes poor choices. It is the loving parent who has the patience and the investment to take the time and energy to teach those NOT-NOW principles and lessons. Others will not. They will take the simple solution in most cases, and reject your child.

When is it a good time to hold your child responsible for his/her choices? When should he/she receive the consequences of his/her choices? From the real estate world, when is it a good time to buy? NOW! Always NOW! If it becomes too much trouble NOW for you to battle your child... if you don’t want the discomfort of asserting boundaries NOW... if you rather “enjoy” your child NOW... if you prefer your head buried in the sand NOW, then when NOT-NOW later arrives and becomes NOW, remember... I told you so!



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OUT OF THE TWILIGHT ZONE- DISCIPLINE FROM THE INSIDE OUT

Chapter 4

I'M BORED... TO DREAMS AND VISIONS

I'm bored. Hmmm? I wonder what would happen if I pull on that thread?

I wonder what would happen if I put the bead in my nose?

I wonder what would happen if I stuck the fork in the electric outlet?

I wonder what would happen if I bounced higher?

I wonder what would happen if I said, "I hate you?!"

I wonder what would happen if I ignored mom?

I'm bored. Hmmm? I wonder what would happen if I did the dare?

I wonder what would happen if I took a hit?

I wonder what would happen if I let him... ya know, if I let him...

Children may complain occasionally that they are bored, but actually they don't know how to be bored. As they start to get bored, they do something to stimulate or entertain themselves. Perhaps to attract attention, whether positive or negative. They wonder... or they dream. What they do can be fairly benign- a bored child plays with the loose thread on her tights. She pulls and pokes it and eventually it becomes a big hole... another ruined set of tights. Another bored child may create a minor household medical crisis- this is interesting... it's small... my nostril is small too... they're about the same size... I wonder if it'll fit? "Mom! Dad! Help! Something's stuck in my nose!" Just why do kids stick things into their nose, anyway? Because it's there! Popcorn, erasers, beans, rocks, beads... My craziest experience with kids and sticking things in their nose? One time one of the teachers was playing with candle wax with the children. Candle wax when it is still warm and hasn't hardened is very supple and totally stirs the sensory curiosity of children. For some reason as the teacher was giving children turns with it, the little demon inside Mikey suddenly prompted him, "Mikey! Quick, Mikey snatch that wax and stick it up your nose!" And, that's just what Mikey did! And then, the wax did what wax does- it cooled and hardened! It made for an interesting visit at the doctor's office. That was the only way anyone could get it out.

WHAT FOR?

Other times, the self-stimulation or attempts to entertain oneself can lead to more serious problems. Relationships can be harmed, negative physical consequences, and emotional and psychological damage can be incurred. Taking a dare to deal with boredom can be dangerous, since most dares are to do something risky... and stupid! "I dare you to jump off the roof... I dare you drink a beer... I dare you to cut across the railroad tracks in front of the train... I dare you to skip class..." Or, when there is not anything that is meaningful in ones life, then trying to find meaning (not be bored) through morally questionable activities becomes more probable. What leads otherwise



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mature young people to make questionable decisions about alcohol, drugs, sexual behavior, and risk taking?

A few years ago, I was working simultaneously with two 17-year-old teenage boys. One young man was a straight A student (actually 4.0+ grade point average with advance placement classes) who had always excelled in school. He had his choice of college; colleges were competing to recruit him. The other young man had struggled in school since late elementary school with learning disabilities. He was in the continuation alternative high school for dropouts and marginal behavior kids. College was a joke... getting a high school diploma was questionable. As different as these two young men seemed to be, they both faced the same dilemma in their lives- neither one had a sense of purpose. "What for?" was the question both of them asked. School was very difficult for the young man with dyslexia. "You need to go to school," was the command to him, and his response was "What for?" Going to school meant feeling stupid and miserable. Or, was very boring. "You need to get an education." "What for?" The only thing that made him feel good was hanging out with his friends, including drinking beer and smoking pot. His parents said, "You need to stop drinking and partying." "What for?" "You'll mess up your life. You have to look ahead." "What for?" What was happening right now was what was important to him. Later, was not now, which was not relevant. Beneath his bravado, however, was the fear and understanding that the future was tenuous and foreboding, and as a result, he was depressed. His depression was present and stressful. Alcohol, drugs, and partying helped him self-medicate his ever-present depression. His depression was present and real, but a future was hypothetical and ambiguous. Stop partying? "What for?" There wasn't an answer in the present to that "What for?" So, alcohol, drugs, and partying continued to make sense in the absence of a future vision to strive for.

The academic performer heard comments too and answered each the same way. "You need to keep up those high grades." "What for?" "So, you can get into a good college." "What for?" "So, you can get a good job." "What for?" "So, you can have a nice house and lifestyle." "What for?" As successful as he had always been in school, as talented as he was academically, as many options as he had before him, he didn't have a dream to strive for. He didn't have a vision of what he might do or be. And as a result, he faced a classic existential question as to whether he had a purpose in his life. He was worse than bored. Erik Erikson, psychologist and theorist said that in the last of his Eight Ages of Man, that each person would face a crisis between integrity and despair. At the last stage of life, a person would look back at his/her entire life and ask the question, "Did I live a life of meaning? Did my existence make any difference in the world? Did I live a life of integrity? Or, did my existence make no difference?" If a person feels that he/she did have an effect on the world... on others, then he/she has a sense of integrity. If he/she led a wasteful and meaningless life, then he/she will feel despair. Erikson's Ages also cycle several times in each individual's life. This young man, despite his academic success, did not have a sense of purpose as he dropped into depression. In fact, he began questioning his continued academic efforts. For both of these young men, I recommended that they begin a search for a dream or vision- to find a purpose in their lives. The adult discipline response in this situation was not to punish but to help find motivation.

WITHOUT A DREAM, VISION OR PURPOSE, EVERYTHING IS TOO HARD

When you have a dream or vision that you are striving for, then there is a purpose to your life. What is hard, becomes a challenge. Barriers that block you, become obstacles to be circumvented.



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OUT OF THE TWILIGHT ZONE- DISCIPLINE FROM THE INSIDE OUT

Being tired becomes rewarding. When you don't have a reason... a compelling motivation, then just about everything becomes too hard and too much trouble. When I started my career change from education to counseling, I didn't know how hard it was going to be. I had come to realize that the curriculum of individual, family, and human growth was what I was truly interested in, rather than the curriculum of reading, math, and other early childhood development. I began my career transition with a plan to complete a master's program in psychology in two years, and then complete my training and hours of experience to take my licensing exam in an additional two years- a total of four years. Then reality set in! Self-employed as the owner of a preschool and daycare program w/ dozens of kids and a small staff (eventually closing it and directing another person's program), married with two young children, and involved in a practicum in addition to the master's coursework, it took me twice as long to finish the master's than I had hoped. By the time I passed my license exams it was a total of seven years. Many a time, I felt overwhelmed with my multiple responsibilities and workload. It was hard! Really hard. However, my dream was to become a therapist. Without that, it would have been too hard. To be honest, if I had known how much work it was going to take, I wonder if I would have even tried. When the workload was too much and the stress level was at its highest, it was the passion for the dream that kept me focused... that kept me at it. Without a dream, vision, or purpose, everything is too hard.

EVEN THE WILDEST DREAMS

When children are young, they can have fairly grandiose and fantastic dreams. Encourage their dreams. When the children are very young, you should support just about any dreams they have. Dreams are about passion and energy. The drive for even the wildest dreams can lead a child forward. Many people strive for dreams that they do not achieve. However, as they strive toward their unfulfilled and perhaps unfulfillable dreams, they move forward in life, experience things, achieve progress, obtain credentials, and otherwise expose themselves to or prepare themselves for a new dream or purpose. Being an educator was my first professional dream; owning and running my own program was my vision; and when I decided later to become a therapist, the experiences (including academic credentials) placed me significantly toward that new goal. In fact, without having experienced the process and achievements of that original dream, I would not have realized my new and more fulfilling dream was that of being a therapist. I have a friend from high school who had dreamed as a child of being a professional athlete. He was passionately involved with sports even after it became clear that he couldn't keep up athletically on the school yard, much less at higher competitive levels. He stayed the sports knowledge "geek" throughout high school and into college. To make a long story short, he gave up one dream but that dream led him to find fulfillment in a related profession. He eventually traveled the world as a coach to world-class and Olympic champion athletes. Support very young children's wild dreams because they will provide the passion for them to risk, to try things, to stretch themselves, and to discover new visions. In addition, as you help children explore new things, they do not become bored. Remember when they get bored, that is when they do things to entertain themselves!

Expose children to what is possible through meeting people, activities, travel, books, and other media. Unless they can see someone... especially someone like them, who has done or been something or somewhere, it is difficult for them to see what is possible. If a girl sees a woman who has flown into space, if a poor child meets someone from lower class origins who is a business success, if a student with dyslexia meets an adult dyslexic who has achieved, if a child of color sees successful adults of color, and so forth, they learn it is possible for them to achieve their dreams as well. And who is most like your children? As the adult role models in their lives, you



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OUT OF THE TWILIGHT ZONE- DISCIPLINE FROM THE INSIDE OUT

offer what is possible in the most compelling manner. Former All-Star pitcher Dave Stewart of the Oakland A's was once asked by a sports reporter who his role models were. Clearly, the reporter expected Dave Stewart to mention some sports role models, or perhaps some peers or mentors that he had. Dave Stewart's response was, "My parents. Who else should be my role models!?"

FEEDBACK SHAPES DREAMS

As children get older, they experience more and more in the real world. They get feedback about their competencies and skills (and challenges) in the real world. This feedback eventually begins to shape the dreams. Dreams that are reinforced with successful experiences in the world (classroom, playground, stage, neighborhood...) become more directed. Dreams that are not confirmed by life experiences may lose their luster. They can become boring. A child who dreams of being a professional singer is confirmed by positive experiences in the choir; a child who dreams of being an Olympic track star is confirmed by winning the races on the playground; a child who dreams of being a doctor is confirmed by academic successes; a child who dreams of being a teacher is confirmed by his/her relationships with peers and models. On the other hand, a slow runner's dream of athletic success is diminished, a poor reader's dream of writing the great American novel is lost, a budding actor who cannot remember his/her lines loses focus, and so forth. Adults need to support their children dreaming, but they also need to be realistic when they watch for their children's motivations, skills, and aptitudes so these attributes also can be supported.

A major problem is when parents project their dreams onto their children, noticing, emphasizing, and supporting the attributes in their children that would help with such dreams. Such parents support the skills (such as math) whether or not the child is interested, motivated, or fulfilled by them (not interested in being a scientist, for example). A family I worked with had such a problem. The parents were adamant that their son achieve their goal for him to go to college and become a professional, despite years of indifferent academic performances late into high school. School was boring. Feedback from school was that he was a dumb kid. Feedback from his parents was that he was a bad kid. On the other hand, fortunately, he did find something that he loved that wasn't self-destructive. He was passionate about automobile stereo and security system electronics. And he was good at it. He loved reading about the latest advancements in auto electronics, and had real skills in designing and installing them. He got a job at an auto electronics store where he did very well and was appreciated. The feedback he got here was positive. His dream was to own his own business that installed the best premium sound systems for luxury cars. Because his parents remained focused on their dreams for him, they ignored or put down his skills and successes. They put down his dream even though it was a realistic, tangible, and motivating dream for him because it wasn't their dream. Until the parents could accept his dream (accept who he was, which included accepting what he wasn't), the family remained in pain, and the son felt disrespected.

When children get bored (momentarily), they will do something to entertain themselves. Sometimes, that something may be beneficial. They may find their passion (for the moment, and even perhaps for life). Directing their "boredom" with clear healthy alternatives and options helps a great deal. The boredom actually can be motivating for the search for dreams that will promote growth. When they are older, whether or not they have dreams plays a large part in how they handle the boredom and life choices. They will restrain themselves from poor choices if they have



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OUT OF THE TWILIGHT ZONE- DISCIPLINE FROM THE INSIDE OUT

a greater vision they are striving towards. Moving a child from being dependent on adults' discipline to self-discipline is easier when a child finds a purpose in life.



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Chapter 5

ANGER DISTRACTING IN COMMUNICATION & DISCIPLINE

What? You did what!?

Dad is mad.

!@#\$\$%^&*

Dad is really mad. Dad is really really mad.

How many times do I need to tell you!?

Dad is scary.

What IS WRONG with you?

Dad is really scary. Dad is really really scary.

!@#\$\$%^&*

I'm scared. I'm really scared. I'm really really scared.

Say "I'm sorry" Say "I'm really sorry, I'm really really sorry."

I DON'T UNDERSTAND HOW.....

Say something... say anything. Anything so he won't be mad at me.

Say "I won't do it anymore." Say it again... and again.

Say anything that would get him away from me...

I... am... really... disappointed...

Boy, he was really mad... really really mad!

Okay ... I hope you understand.

Whew! He's calming down. I'm glad that's over!

Don't you ever do that again!

Hmmm? What did he say? Can I do it anyway? Or what?

When we speak to children, oftentimes what we intend to say comes out poorly or inappropriately. In other words, our intentions get confused and children have confusion and difficulty figuring out how to deal with us. Sometimes, this is because we are frustrated and confused ourselves. Often the confusion needs to anger. Getting clear about what is important to ourselves, what is important for us to communicate to children – to clearly and concretely understand the values that we hold is very important. When we are not clear, yet we still communicate to children and as a consequence, confuse them and ourselves. Clear and effective communication starts with clarity within you. And, clarity within oneself starts with clarity about your family experiences. Just why do you end up saying exactly what your parents said to you... end up saying exactly what you swore you'd never say to your own children!?

OUT OF THE MURK

A couple that I worked with had trouble finding clarity in their family. This was expressed in their communication and dynamics with each other and in their parenting styles. It took significant work to understand the models of communication and parenting that they each came from before they could be effective in parenting their children. The father came from a family where communication was always very loud and very angry. A parent communicating with any intensity meant that you were in trouble and that you would be soon emotionally abused or humiliated. This made it difficult for him to hear any loud or upset communication whether or not it was addressed at him. That it was loud automatically implied that it was going to be dangerous. As a result, with his wife and with his children, he censored himself when he was



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angry. In addition, he also would be upset at his wife if she raised her voice. In addition, he stifled the children's honest emotional expression if it came from anger or frustration. Despite his sanctions against being angry, the realities of being in a family and being in a relationship made it so he was angry at times (like it's even remotely possible to be in intimate relationships without sometimes getting frustrated and angry at the others in the relationship!). He would then feel ashamed -- fearing that he had or would express himself in the negative ways that the parents had done when he was a child. Inevitably, the pent-up and unexpressed anger would seep out or even explode at some later time causing even greater damage and problems in the family. He remembered that anger as his childhood family anger and it had terrified him. And, he was terrified that he was repeating it... or, that his wife was repeating it. To him, anger equaled abuse, which equaled pain, and therefore anger equals pain.

In her family, very little was said out loud. There was a false harmony- a pseudo-peace in the family as most communication was done nonverbally. They maintained a myth that there were no "fights" in this family. However, a dirty look, rolling eyes, a smirk, a sigh of disgust, a shift in body posture, a slight change in tone, something that was not said, or a simple action... all these were common and powerful communications of approval and disapproval that sanctioned everyone in the family. Everyone in the family eventually learned the meaning of the implicit messages of these nonverbal communications. In fact, there was an underlying binding rule that you did not to ever express anything out loud if it was potentially upsetting. As is often the case, while everyone in the family is painfully in tune to the family communication style and rules, people from outside the family often do not clearly interpret these secret messages, approvals, and/or disapprovals. Someone who grows up in such a family often expects another person (especially a romantic partner) to intuit the meaning of the nonverbal communication, and is then often deeply disappointed (devastated) that they do not do it correctly. The rule or assumption is (as it was understood in the family of origin) that "if you really care... if you really love me, then you would know/intuit what I mean... what I need, and automatically respond appropriately. And, if you don't respond appropriately, then you don't care... then you don't love me... you dirty dog!" Over and over in the relationship, the wife would be deeply hurt as her husband "failed" to interpret her subtle nonverbal communications and respond appropriately. Even then as she was hurt, she did not overtly communicate her distress or what had caused it. It was not part of the family style. Instead, she sent even more nonverbal communications for him about her distress, which since he was not from her family and thus unfamiliar with the communication style, he would miss again... thus injuring her again.

When the two of them brought the family communication styles and rules into their new family, they did so without being fully aware of their styles and rules and also, without negotiating a new overt style and set of rules for the family. Their children were then burdened with interpreting two distinct communication styles. This, of course confused them a great deal when they were young. However, most children when they are older have figured out the discrepancy between their parents' competing communication styles, and can describe them fairly clearly. When I asked their children in family therapy, the parents were very surprised at how accurately their children had figured them out. While the children recognized the differences, they also found them burdensome and they definitely didn't like them. Each parent was living out his or her family of origin communication style (and dysfunction) without awareness, while their children could only react to them. When each parent was able to understand how his/her communication style had developed from their family experiences, only then were they able to examine whether



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OUT OF THE TWILIGHT ZONE- DISCIPLINE FROM THE INSIDE OUT

or not either style was appropriate, or effective, or worth perpetuating. Only then, could they overtly negotiate a new and effective communication and parenting style that would be effective in their new family.

"USUALLY..." VERSUS UNDER STRESS

Many people are unaware of how they function under stress. They see themselves, and hold themselves to be kind and reasonable people. They can live up to these values without difficulty when things are going well. Unfortunately, health and success in the world, in life, and in relationships is not based on how well you handle yourself when everything is going well. The true test is how well you handle stress. Can you still be a person you need to be... the person your children need you to be even under stress... even under tremendous stress? I'm reminded of a conversation I had with a group of directors of childcare programs (I was a director at that time as well). One of the directors was talking about an unexpected scary situation at her school -- they had received a report that someone was loose in the neighborhood with a gun. Their playground was adjacent to the street, separated only by a cyclone fence. There were three dozen children and four teachers in the yard at the time. Three of the teachers quickly began gathering the children and sending them inside. The fourth teacher panicked and ran inside without helping with the children. Of course, all of us were appalled that she had abandoned the children. To her defense, the director said "She was usually a very good teacher." I am certain that she was usually a very good teacher -- that she was generally very reliable... when there was no stress and no crisis. Unfortunately, it is at the point of crisis... it is when there is the greatest danger, that she is needed the most. Under stress, she failed in her most fundamental role of protecting the children. Most adults can be good parents... **are** good parents when they are not under stress. However, bills are real, time is short, work can be demanding, relationships are difficult... and you get to pay taxes too! Unfortunately, being a parent is largely about being under stress! (What!? Not just fun and games!?). How do you respond under stress?

Some people feel that the best way to deal with stress is to remove or to avoid stress. That is impractical and impossible! It is possible to reduce stress; however stress is a part of life... it certainly is a part of parenting! Sometimes people deny stress and in doing so, load up on it only to explode later on... at family or somewhere else. By being aware of how you function under stress of, you can begin to improve on how you deal with stress. Again, this often takes you back to your family of origin. It is in the family of origin that you begin to learn how to deal with stress, specifically how to deal with the stress of a being in that family... or neighborhood... or classroom or school. Often, the survival mechanisms of childhood are carried forward into adulthood without any evolution or examination, whether or not they are necessary or appropriate vs. unnecessary and damaging to current survival. The father described above, carried forth his denial and avoidance of expressing anger -- a basic survival mechanism from his family into his new relationship and new family even though it was unnecessary and actually dangerous and damaging to everyone. When he became aware that his own feelings of anger and his own experiences of other people's anger triggered him in this manner, he could begin to plan alternatives and attempt to adjust how to respond to stress and triggers.

THE MURK MONSTER EMERGES AND ANGER OVERWHELMS!

Sometimes the communication that comes out of a parent is primarily that he or she is angry. And that it is the child's fault. And that the child must do something so that the parent is no longer angry. The anger that occurs comes out of the frustration normally within the parents. It



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may come from having held the anger or having held the frustration over a long period of time. Anger can become counterproductive to the effectiveness of the discipline (or can be supportive-- more later on this). This is a functional perspective-- not a moral perspective about anger. What does anger contribute to the effectiveness of discipline? Discipline is about teaching a child the important lessons of life. Lessons need to be learned about what is appropriate behavior and inappropriate behavior, how to understand and interpret people, how one's actions have consequences upon other people and upon one's own future, and so forth. While the anger in a parent when a child has messed up may be normal and appropriate, when it is too intense it will defeat the learning -- the acquisition of discipline that is intended. When the anger is too intense it becomes terrifying to a child. If nothing else, when the anger is too intense, it draws virtually the entire attention of the child to the anger -- and away from the lessons that are intended to be taught.

Whatever the lessons that was intended to be taught to... whatever you want the child to learn... the opportunity to teach... all are loss as the child's focus is drawn to the anger and to avoiding the anger. The discussion of whether or not is appropriate to express anger at your child (I believe it is appropriate, if you are aware, sensitive and responsive to how it is affecting them. Being angry is human... as if anyone can actually not express anger when angry!) is useful as it focuses on the potential abuse or harm it can cause to children. However, anger can also cause harm to the effectiveness of discipline. Instead of learning a discipline lesson, the child learns to never get or allow his or her parents to get mad. Or, the child learns that is his or her fault that the adult is angry. Or, that the child must subjugate his or her own needs to keep the parent happy or pleased, or risk the rage of his or her parents. Or, that the child learns that he or she is helpless in his or her terror facing the rage of his or her parent. Or, the child learns that his or her parent hates him/her. Expressing one's needs would be experienced as being defiant and very dangerous provoking of the parent.

“ACCENTING” THE DISCIPLINE

On the other hand, anger can be an appropriate accent -- emphasis added to the point, to the lesson being taught so that the child can recognize the importance of the lesson, and hopefully take it more to heart. As some parents do this anger “accented” emphasis intuitively, some of them will condemn themselves and are terrified that they are damaging their children. Ironically, these are often the sweetness and kindest, most nurturing and sensitive parents. To them (and to you), I remind them to take a close look at their children and ask themselves, "Do your children looked like traumatized children?" "Are they scared of you? Or, are they uncomfortable when you are angry? Does it take a long time for them to recover? Or a short time? Do they learn a lesson -- get the discipline?" If the answers indicate a stable, secure, and positive relationship, how you are handling it is probably fine. There has been more than a few times when I had doubted myself or been upset with myself for losing my temper with my children. Each time, I would despair that I might have scared or damaged my children. Inevitably, they rebound from the incident immediately and without trauma. I was the one with trauma worrying about them! To them, it was just Dad being mad! ...about this particular thing ...and for this short period. And, the rest of the time, everything is loving and caring. And, behavior changes for the positive. If, on the other hand, you are ineffective... if they are not learning the lesson... if they don't get the discipline AND you have a secure nurturing relationship, then it might be necessary to "accent", that is, emphasize the urgency of your communication with a little bit more overt and obvious anger!