



Welcome to the Conscious Parenting Course

Introduction

Parenting is absolutely one of the most difficult though, rewarding tasks we human beings may ever encounter. It is a task in which we receive little prior experience, being asked to learn our lessons through on-the-job training. Without much foundation in parenting, we are required to utilize and rely on the experiences of our own childhood. This means that many of those unresolved unconscious commitments and conflicts we had as children in our families of origin surface. When this happens they often leave us confused, frustrated, angry, and sometimes even feeling hopeless as we attempt to deal with our own children.

It is my belief that we in this nation face a parenting crossroads of unprecedented proportion. We are a growing society of anxious baby-boomers many of whom have become helpless spectators, observing the dissolution of their families and traditions. The rise of single parent and step-parent families has been astonishing, and children are left fearful, insecure, and disaffected as they fall victim to adult stressors, insecurities and discouragement.

It is important that adults who seek to become more aware and conscious parents take 100% of the responsibility and initiative to meet the challenges of parenting in these difficult times of anger, discord, and division in this nation and

in the world. It is to these parents that I say that our children deserve encouraging dreams and more hope of finding a better future in which they are able to fully love themselves as they love others, be tolerant and respectful of individual rights and differences, respect our environment, and work toward developing lasting values and relationships and a life style that thrives for common interest beyond ourselves.

As a school/licensed psychologist, I am privileged to present this course to parents who are committed to giving a special gift of love. This is not a material gift, but rather an invitation for parents to better understand their children, themselves, and their parenting skills. This is a journey of becoming more conscious and evolved. As parents advance down a more spiritual path, they are asked to embrace genuineness, respect, democratic parenting concepts, positive communication, shared problems-solving with their loved ones, as well as an openness to self-love and loving others. In bringing you this course, I have been fortunate enough to draw upon my many years of education, clinical expertise, and personal experiences that span over 30 years in working with children, teenagers, families, and teachers in public schools, clinics and private practice. At the same time, I have also been able to integrate my own parenting and relationship experiences as a single-parent with my personal and spiritual growth. As you begin the course, keep in mind that I have attempted to be quite comprehensive in my approach by offering chapters dealing with preschoolers, teenagers, school-related problems, difficult to manage children, special situations such as depression, suicide and divorce, as well as personal growth in values and spiritualism.

Please pace yourself, relax, and do not attempt more than one session per week. Read and reread each session and discuss it with your partner or a friend. The concepts and ideas are also wonderful to share with other parents as well. Don't forget the affirmation and the "Things to Do and Think About" section at the end of each session. These are important and will give you a sense of emotional release, a special way to integrate your knowledge and skills, and a deeper awareness. If need be, feel free to spend as much time as you require on each session, but please don't forget to find time for fun, stress reduction, and caring for your own needs. Remember, that you cannot control others, you are not an island unto yourself, but you are capable of making creative choices that reflect your growing sense of self and love. Positive self-talk and encouragement are central to becoming a conscious parent. After you finish the course, be mindful that you have not reached the end but only a new beginning. I also want to give special thanks to various child psychiatrists, psychologists, and authors such as Alfred Adler, Rudolf Dreikurs, Don Dinkmeyer, Sr. and Jr., James S. Dinkmeyer, Gary D. McKay, Joyce L. McKay, and Thomas Gordon who are responsible for many of the concepts presented in this course, and who have influenced my practice and journey. I would like to give a special note to dads who are also an important part of parenting and in some families are single parents. Forgive my usage of the pronoun "she" in my course since it could have been replaced with

"he."

Good luck on your journey!

Joseph Plasner

Session 1Understanding Children and Behavior

Alfred Adler and Rudolf Dreikurs believed that humans are social beings who have a strong need to belong and be accepted. Human behaviors have a purpose as they make choices based on the need to belong and feel significant to others.

Within this context, children develop early faulty beliefs because they misinterpret events based on their position in the family, the family atmosphere, parental values, styles of discipline and communication. Their genetic endowment and temperament also contribute to personality development.

As result, children adopt goals for behaving that are unproductive. These mistaken goals for misbehavior are defined as a need for insatiable attention, cravings for power, thirst for revenge, and assumed inadequacy.

A child who seeks insatiable attention feels disconnected with the family and is susceptible to believing his importance is attached to getting constant approval and attention.

Children who have power as a goal rarely feel adequate or capable, and they are impressed with control and power. Revenge often follows power struggles when children feel hurt and believe that they do not count for very much within the family. When children lack courage and are able to impress parents with their belief that they are not capable, then assumed inadequacy is the goal.

A conscious parent who understands the purpose for undue attention does not give in. She gives attention when it is not expected, and she catches her child being good. In addition, she seeks to plan special events and fun times on a regular basis.

Instead of engaging and confronting a child who has power as his goal, parents can preempt power struggles or avoid them if possible. Remember, nobody ever wins such conflicts. This knowledge leads conscious parents to look for and create situations in which their children are encouraged to feel capable, utilizing their power in constructive ways. Having a plan to develop self-esteem and self-confidence is as important as giving choices and allowing for natural consequences to occur.

Power struggles with children may quickly escalate into a child's quest for revenge. Conscious parents seek to become more aware and gain insight into the dynamics of the revenge motif. Letting go of the hurt and emphasizing

repairing the relationship, rebuilding trust, and showing kindness and love are essential. As a self-aware parent your purpose could be to offer your child a way of contributing so that he begins to feel that he counts as a valuable and loved family member.

As result of continual discouragement and giving up on any chances for success, a child develops a desire to impress parents with a display of inadequacy. Insightful, conscious parents will not buy into their child's feelings of helplessness. They can role model the courage to be imperfect, give examples of famous and successful figures who often failed at first, and they notice a child's strengths and downplay his weaknesses. In addition, they create an opportunity for successful completion of tasks.

Important Affirmation

I have a deep appreciation for understanding myself and my child. I love the part of myself and my child that needs to be loved, accepted and connected within our family.

Things to Do and Think About

1. Notice your reaction to your child's behavior. If you feel annoyed and find it necessary to constantly remind him, then his mistaken goal is probably attention. Ignore demands for undue attention including constant reminding and attend to positive behavior.
2. When you find yourself angry and feel threatened by your children, recognize a power struggle coming on. Give your child choices and create opportunities for positive display of leadership.
3. Next time you feel deeply hurt and want to hurt back, realize that your child feels the same way. Work on trust and relationships building. Show your child love and that he counts.
4. When you as a parent feel hopelessly like giving up, don't. Instead, use encouragement and create opportunities for success. Focus on positives, and the glass being half full not half empty.
5. Think back to your childhood. How were your needs for belonging, acceptance, and love met by your parents? How did you feel about your place within your family of origin?
6. Can you recognize some faulty beliefs that you might have as a parent?

7. What would you say your parenting style is?

Session 2..... Conscious Parenting: An Integrative Approach

Children require the benefits of an integrative and democratic approach to parenting in order to fully love themselves and others, develop positive values, learn productive interpersonal and communication skills, learn adaptive problems solving skills, develop openness to spiritualism, and appreciate an interest in others outside themselves.

Being a good role model is one critical component that is nonnegotiable in becoming a more conscious parent. If we are to raise children who will be able to demonstrate self-control and self-discipline, we must effectively value and role model patience. The same rings true for honesty, loyalty, respect, and cooperation. As conscious parents we are obliged to make a commitment to maintain unquestionable integrity, acting as though we take our own commitments seriously.

Effective parenting also requires skill at negotiating consequences and setting limits, and knowing when to back off and allow a natural consequence to occur. Allowing natural consequences to teach lessons requires that we love our children enough not to rescue them.

Encouragement provides the fuel for transforming children's negative goal-seeking behaviors into more positive approaches toward feeling significant and contributing. Encouragement is the basis for your child's self-esteem, and feelings of self-worth.

Encouragement is being respectful of an internal process and focuses on progress, effort, and improvement, and not meeting external demands. Praise is largely external and can be used to provide social control and may even feel like pressure to a child.

The language of encouragement sounds something like this, "You must be so proud of how far you have come, I bet it took a lot of effort" or "that was a difficult job, but I know you'll do your very best," or "Thank you so much, you really helped me out again, and I really appreciate it."

Communicating effectively may also be viewed as a relationship builder and part of what I consider to be encouragement. Being a good listener requires some practice based on the commitment of mutual respect and patience. Parents can be good role models for allowing children to talk about their feelings in a genuine manner without having to worry about punishment or losing love, and adults can listen without interrupting.

Reflective listening should help clarify feelings and problems and can be very encouraging. For example, if Sally says, "I hate those girls, they never let me

play,” her mother might breathe deeply and stay calm as she answers, “I know you’re feeling very angry, could it be that those girls hurt your feelings because they left you out.” This allows for a respectful and sensitive dialogue to assist Sally’s parent in determining what actually happened and what Sally felt during this discouraging episode.

“I-messages” express feelings so that there is no intent of blame attached either to the meaning of the words used or the tone of voice of the speaker. An “I-message” might go something like, “when you lie to me, I feel that I can’t trust you any more, because telling the truth is important for trusting each other.” By doing this, the parent respectfully sets the foundation for open communication without critiquing.

Guiding our children and assisting them when they own their problems comes naturally; however, we might undertake this responsibility with a degree of caution and only after an invitation has been extended.

When parents allow children to own their problems as long as they are capable, this is respectful and in the service of instilling initiative, independence, self-confidence, and courage. Not surprisingly, some parents who are overly concerned with comfort and control might conspire together with their kids to spare them of any pain or unpleasantness in the name of love by rescuing them.

Important Affirmation

I am committed to becoming a more conscious parent each moment. I strive to become the kind of parent who manifests love, respect, and creative possibilities

Things to Do and Think About

1. Think of an important person in your life who was a role model for you. What impressed you about the person and what did you learn?
2. After reviewing the session, what is your vision of conscious parenting? How important to you is developing self-esteem and values in your children?
3. To what extent did your parents utilize encouragement as you grew up? Were your teachers encouraging or did they only reward you when you met their expectations?
4. Role model and role play some essential values for your child. For example, you might role play making mistakes and how you

encourage yourself using positive self-talk.

5. Practice using I-messages and reflective listening skills. Attempt breathing slowly while your child is talking and try not to think of what to say; instead, paraphrase or clarify the message.
6. How good are you at allowing for natural consequences and not rescuing your child?

Session 3.....Respectful Problem Solving

Conscious parents learn that the reward-punishment model of discipline has its flaws and certainly does not add much to the teaching of social consciousness and the values we really want for our children as they grow into adulthood.

An effective consequence requires creativity and child input. Consequences have more to do with a process orientation rather than putting emphasis on relief of immediate needs. An immediate outcome is not as desirable as the process utilized to teach a valuable lesson.

If the intent is to control, subjugate, or coerce, then even a legitimate consequence will readily take on the emotional tone of punishment. Punishment often leads to anger and resentment and feelings of unfairness. When a child internalizes such strong, negative feelings, effective learning is not possible.

A conscious parent is able to guide her child in order to help him understand the connection between cause and effect, solve problems and utilize good judgment.

Parents are on solid footing when they have taken the time to insure that consequences are reasonable, appropriately related to the antecedent behavior and respectful. (3 R's).

Parents can pay attention to building positive relationships with their children and move toward encouragement. Committed parents are called upon to respect the process approach to exploring alternatives as they pay increasing amounts of attention to the 3 R's mentioned above.

Learning the process of exploring alternatives is essential to conscious, democratic parenting. This calls for sitting down together with your child in the spirit of cooperation and respect and in a nonjudgmental manner. Angry children who have little reason to trust will not allow themselves to be emotionally available if they are not given the opportunity to express their feelings and share in the communication and exploration process.

Brainstorming and exploring options without judging are key elements that democratic, thoughtful parents are able to utilize. Parent and child can openly discuss behavioral alternatives, consequences, and implications toward problem resolution. This can even be written down in a concrete manner for the record so that there will be no misinterpretation later. After the brainstorming process has run its course, a parent and child can select one specific idea on which they both agree although they willingly accept that each has brought forth their individual differences as part of the negotiation process.

The meeting may be ended with renewed understanding, direction for change, and hope. If necessary continued discussions, new negotiations, and new alternatives and consequences can be explored as mistakes are made along the way.

Important Affirmation

I begin to have more confidence in my child's good judgment and problem solving skills. He is learning the relationship between cause and effect and that what he does counts.

Things to Do and Think About

1. Did your parents utilize a punitive, authoritarian form of discipline with you as a child? How do you discipline your children? How do they react toward your punishment?
2. A logical consequence requires creative thinking, input from your child, and it should meet the test for 3 R's. How effective can you be at establishing logical consequences? Think about some of your child's behaviors that are unproductive resulting from discouragement, and/or do not fit your concept of parenting long-term goals.
3. What consequences might you utilize to effectively teach cause-effect. When can you just allow a natural consequence to occur?
4. Practice being patient and not responding quickly to misbehavior. Practice utilizing the process approach to problem solving. Including your child, brainstorm and talk about alternatives and consequences. Can you think about consequences that meet the test of reasonable, related, and respectful?
5. Next time your child misbehaves, ask him to develop consequences. Notice that they are probably close to meeting the 3 R's. Don't do this when he is angry or resentful.

Session 4.....Fostering Self-Esteem and Values

As self-aware and respectful parents, we may accept a commitment to follow a valued-centered approach that validates the purposefulness of behavior and feelings and acknowledges the power of freedom of choice, creative intent, humanism, and the guiding principle that all humans seek to feel accepted and loved.

We can shift emphasis inward and accept responsibility for our own behaviors and ways of communicating, and we can begin to understand our unconscious, irrational and illogical beliefs that are counterproductive. A support group and/or counseling may be helpful for some parents, while others may take the opportunity to renew their faith in religion and in God and/or spiritualism.

Children will begin to develop useful behaviors and positive goals as parents learn to relax, reduce stress, practice encouragement, and serve as appropriate role models for their children. As parents continue exploring and gaining further insight and understanding about themselves and the meaning of their lives, they will feel a deep conviction that we all need one another and we share the capacity to love deeply and demonstrate compassion, forgiveness, and faith in each other.

A spiritual belief system that invites universal love and feelings of connectedness is desirable. The unequivocal acceptance of God is not absolutely necessary to practice democratic methods of parenting; however, one must be open-minded to embracing God's existence and be willing to accept change .

If we are to practice conscious parenting and foster values in our children, we are also obligated to encourage flexibility of thought and acceptance of different points of view without being judgmental.

Loving our children and creating situations so that they will develop self-esteem and self-respect also require that we role model openness, acceptance, tolerance, and empathy.

One of the most important goals of parenting is to create an accepting, safe, and nurturing environment for our children so that they learn to love themselves fully. Such self-love is a crucial ingredient for being open to accepting love and giving love to others with honesty, integrity, and commitment.

The Adlerian family meeting is a healthy model for conscious parents to demonstrate acceptance, essential family values, interpersonal skills, and problem-solving. It is within this forum that family members are able to utilize and build upon the positive skills that they have learned and practice and reinforce the capacity to respect individual needs and differences and cooperate together with a spirit of harmony, trust, and commitment so that all members

appreciate working together on all levels. This means having fun together, planning events jointly, discussing family goals and values, and joint problem solving. As the parents make a commitment to provide for appropriate role modeling of equal rights and fairness, many wonderful opportunities are created so that children feel that they are significant family members and that they count.

Self-esteem grows when family members demonstrate loving accepting attitudes so that their beloved children feel valued and special. Nurturing families also foster support, sharing of responsibilities, open communication, and appreciation for each other's unique abilities and talents.

Important Affirmation

As I provide acceptance and nurturance, I encourage self-love, an environment for loving completely, and the growth of values.

Things to Do and Think About

1. How did your parents show you love when growing up?
2. How much do you really love yourself on a scale from 1-10?
What are some of the behaviors that go along with self-love?
3. How do you demonstrate love for your relationship partner and your children?
4. How accepting and tolerant are you of differences and how open to embracing new ideas and changes?
5. Reflect about your openness toward spirituality and belief in God.
What are some important values that you hold dear?
6. Begin having family meetings and practice democratic and conscious parenting principles. Express your beliefs and feelings openly about God, religion, and the possibility of a commitment toward a spiritual view of loving and connectedness.

Session 5.....A parent's Journey

Insight is not always enough if one is to grow. Working through knowledge obtained by integrating the intellect with our emotional self as well as our spiritual selves is important.

Awareness that we all possess unresolved issues experienced within our families of origin give us the freedom and psychic energy necessary to become more available in the present time.

Remaining in the present is essential for effective communication, interaction, and healthy relatedness. To help with this process, we can practice relaxation or meditation daily. We can take deep breaths in through the nose (diaphragmatic breathing) and out through the mouth (opening the mouth slightly). We can take a yoga course, walk in nature, or just still the mind after breathing a few times. As we do these, we can also say, "the past is the past, this is now and that was then." If you are a visual learner, you might visualize yourself opening the door and throwing out all of your past fears, worries, and frustrations.

As mentioned previously, it is necessary to be aware and open to the possibility that the parenting roles we have assumed might, in fact, be roadblocks to a desirable outcome of raising, happy, well-adjusted children who feel good about themselves. Are you the parent who easily assumes the role of Captain Commander as you give orders? Perhaps you would rather be Madam Judge pronouncing your child guilty. Some parents are Know-it-All's as they lecture and seek to convince their children that they, in fact, have all of the answers

Most adults need more practice in being honest with their own feelings and expressing them genuinely with all family members. Being genuine and honest is respectful to our children and ourselves. Be willing to search inside yourself for important qualities that you expect to see in your children. Take an inventory to determine whether you demonstrate them on a daily basis.

Parents can model effective listening skills, showing appreciation and not blaming by expressing their feelings through I-messages. An "I-message" goes something like this, "When you lie to me, I feel disrespected because honesty is important for respect and trust in each other." Practice "I-messages" daily with all family members, and demonstrate integrity, an essential human quality necessary for deep commitment and loving relationships.

Conscious parents treat their children with the same integrity and respect that they would treat a friend. Many parents are much too emotionally enmeshed with their children. Stepping back and reflecting on those self-defeating unconscious commitments that were made early in life is important. When this becomes too daunting, they realize the necessity for psychotherapy to assist them in this process. Conscious parents understand the importance of self-reflection and the impact this might have on family functioning.

Although fear is the probable culprit, finding the courage to alter what's not working is essential to prepare for the journey of becoming a more conscious, self-actualized, effective parent. Try acting like an interested guidance counselor rather than an overprotective, enmeshed parent. Self-talking and visualizing the following relationship beliefs will be energizing as you walk down the path of conscious, valued-based parenting.

1. The most important job you will ever have is raising your children.
2. If you find yourself attempting to control your child's behavior, rest assured you are out of control.
3. When you disrespect your child, you are disrespecting yourself.
4. When understood, emotional pain can teach us a great deal.
5. Any crisis presents an opportunity to grow and mistakes represent opportunities to solve a problem.
6. We are all the same and connected on deeper levels; so be genuine and communicate in an honest, truthful and loving manner.
7. Commitment to learning from each moment of interaction is a necessary catalyst.
8. All of us require closeness, but also space and incentive to maintain our separateness and individuation.
9. There are two basic emotions in life, fear and love. We must make a choice which path we take. Feel deeply and open your heart. Allow yourself to feel your sadness, fear, and hurt, don't live in denial. Breathe in slowly and then out...live in the present...Embrace you negative emotions and love yourself for them while you accept responsibility for your feelings. Nobody has power over you and no one gives you your feelings.
10. Accept 100% of the responsibility for any interaction without blaming others and work on creatively making necessary changes in small steps.
11. Learn to listen without interrupting or being judgmental.
12. Appreciate your loved ones in as many ways as possible and liberally share positive feelings and affirmations with your children.
13. Have faith that things will work out Okay; that your child will grow into a productive, healthy, loving person.
14. Learn to love yourself fully.

The topic of self-growth and personal development requires exploring the concept of lifestyle. For Alfred Adler, lifestyle was a significant personality construct. Our values, beliefs, and personal priorities in life tend to be consistent with our self-defined lifestyles.

According to Alfred Adler, most lifestyle beliefs may be categorized into the following four personal priorities of life or a combination of them.

- *superiority
- *comfort
 - *control
 - *pleasing

The parent who has superiority as a lifestyle strives to be perfect, may be demanding, overcritical, and exert a good deal of pressure on his child to perform. Such a parent may not be very tolerant of individual differences or weaknesses.

If comfort is a parental lifestyle, then a good deal of energy, beliefs and thoughts are spent on not becoming overly taxed, stressed, or expending much energy. Emotional discomfort is avoided and parents might choose their own need for comfort over meeting the needs of their children. However, some adults have an equal desire for comfort for their children, and do whatever they can to protect them from life's challenges or disappointments. This, of course, prevents them from developing courage, becoming independent, or learning how to solve problems.

Controlling adults demonstrate this goal by being tearful, charming, displaying temper, being dependent, showing resistance or avoiding deep feelings. These parents must be in control all of the time or control others, and ultimately get their own way. These parents often avoid getting too close to others, always finding a need for self-protection as someone else takes care of their needs.

If you find that you are a people pleaser, then your objective is to be liked and accepted, or not rejected. This is a heavy burden since it is impossible to pull off and requires a great deal of psychic energy and ultimately others grow impatient and tired of it. People pleasers usually care a great deal about others and are empathetic, generous, and sensitive individuals. As a pleaser, you are likely to be the type of parent who will utilize negotiating instead of confrontation. While parents who strive for pleasing are usually kind parents, they clearly need to practice setting firm limits.

A fifth priority, social interest, represents healthy striving. It is my belief, that this goal becomes exemplified when we feel that we belong just because we are part of the universe's loving energy or God's divine design, and that we are all alike in our humanness. Social interest may result when an individual's private/unconscious, unproductive, and self-defeating logic has been altered through positive experiences such as programs or experiences leading to enhanced self-esteem/self-love and acceptance. A journey toward spiritualism and/or reawakening religious fervor may also lead toward a path of social interest. For some individuals, psychotherapy or counseling begins to shift lifestyle beliefs into a positive direction. As a shift occurs, we can embrace life fully, love ourselves more, begin to challenge our faulty beliefs, and encourage others to move in the same direction in a spirit of cooperative and harmony.

Important Affirmation

As I become more conscious, I begin to love who I am and who I am becoming

Things to Do and Think About

1. In order to remain in the present, do self-talk, “this is now and that was then.” Practice breathing slowly in through the nose filling the diaphragm with air first (count to five, hold it for that count, and then breathe out slowly (count of five) opening the mouth slightly.
2. Learning to relax is important to reduce stress and give you the energy required to be a conscious parent. Practice visualizing calming, peaceful and soothing scenes; do positive affirmations and self-talk; find a hobby; join a self-help group; learn yoga or Tai Chi.
3. Which of the five the relationship beliefs are most important to you?
4. Challenge your prior beliefs and those unproductive roles and styles of communication you have assumed as a parent. Which life style-belief or combinations of life-style belief best fits you as an adult?
5. How would selecting a life-style of social interest change your life? A conscious parent is willing to accept spiritualism and knowledge that we are all connected by a Divine loving energy. What does being spiritual mean to you?

Session 6.....School Days and Parenting

Every school has an intervention team comprised of the child's teacher, a parent, and a specialist in order to deal with learning and/ or behavioral difficulties as they come up within the classroom. If there is a preexisting disability that has been identified by a doctor or psychologist, a child might be found eligible for accommodations based on "504" federal guidelines to address his disabilities.

Such accommodations do not constitute a special educational program nor do they carry as much clout. Schools often seek to remedy mild learning difficulties or behavioral and organizational problems resulting from ADHD or other clinical disorder via "504" accommodations. However, the "504" process of accommodations sometimes fails due to lack of resources, lack of trust between parent and school, or poor communication. They also fail just because some students have needs that require the kinds of direct services that schools are only willing and/or able to provide under a special educational designation such as "Specific Learning Disability" or "Other Health Impaired." When this happens, the process will continue to evolve resulting in a child study team referral to determine eligibility for special educational and related services under the federal special education law PL 94-142.

As a parent who is thrust into the world of special education, I suggest that you become fully conscious about a system in which many child study team members are overwhelmed and under a good deal of stress, often having to choose between obligations to the system and doing what is right for children. For the most part, CST members are well intentioned, and yet unable to rise above budgetary pressures imposed upon them by their administrators. Within the same context, there is often insufficient opportunity for communication and collaboration among professionals working with our greatest natural resource, our children.

When I envision a child being successful in a school setting, whether in the mainstream or in special education classes, I see a child's needs being met "holistically" with respect to academic, social, and emotional functioning. While every parent certainly has a right to expect that his child's needs be reasonably met, this is often difficult to achieve in a system that is overloaded. It has been my experience that even the best-developed special education programs on paper can be difficult to implement effectively because of internal and systemic difficulties.

In order to effectively delivery appropriate programs that confer educational benefit, special and regular educators, principals, child study team members, and parents alike need to be on the same page, sharing some common beliefs about a child's rights to a free and appropriate education in the least restrictive setting.

Being on the same page is necessary though not sufficient. Administrative support is essential and, in this regard, teachers must be provided with appropriate staff training, workshops regarding specific methodologies that work, and the time to collaborate and plan together.

The problem in meeting a learning disabled student's needs often becomes a problem of how to adequately bring his basic skills up to grade level while at the same time creating an environment that enhances values, social skills, self-confidence, independence, and a healthy sense of self and self-esteem.

The world of special education may be confusing and scary with many ambiguities. Parents are offered a booklet identified as Parent Rights in Special Education (PRISE), which delineates the rules of the game. Foremost, however, parents should understand that their child is guaranteed by federal law under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) to a free and appropriate education within the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). Parents should be on guard and appreciate that many schools attempt to fit children into preexisting programs more often than not. In so doing, they neglect to develop programs that truly meet the needs of youngsters.

What I recommend is that parents become fully aware and conscious of the IEP process and how their child's special education programs are being implemented. In order to accomplish this more effectively, conscious parents should be prepared to gather as much information as necessary prior to and throughout the process of evaluation and classification.

To this end, one particular website that has been helpful to many parents who would like to learn more about the IEP process, special education, and their rights is www.wrightslaw.com. Parents might also utilize information obtained from www.recapt.com if they are interested in obtaining evaluations, educational consultations, and/or information on child advocacy and therapeutic resources.

Important Affirmation

**I am becoming more conscious and aware of my Child's educational needs.
I can accept my responsible and also hold the school accountable**

Things to Do and Think About

1. Be involved in your child's education and attend conferences and school activities for your child. Talk to your child about school and encourage him to participate in school-based programs.
2. If your child is experiencing problems in school, ask to meet with the teacher and the intervention team. If you feel that there is a serious problem, have him evaluated by an educational specialist or psychologist to determine eligibility for "504" accommodations, and/or special programming. Take responsibility, be cooperative with the school, but do not waste time.
3. Did you experience school-related difficulties as a child? Were your parent's supportive and sensitive to your learning or supportive of your activities in school?
4. If your child has a learning disability, gather as much information as possible, be organized, accept responsibility for working with the school, but be sure to hold the school accountable for implementing the IEP, including related services, and measuring goals/objectives. Talk to your child about what he does in school, about his feelings, about friendships, and about his attitude and belief relative to special education.
5. Speak to educational consultants, attorneys, parent advocates when necessary. For a more thorough education on the IEP process and your child's rights, click on the website www.wrightslaw.com. Parents should also feel free to contact me at my office, Dr. Mae J. Balaban and Associates, LLC, Fairfield, New Jersey. We will also be establishing a non-profit organization to assist parents regardless of income, race, gender, or socioeconomic status.

Session 7.....Your Toddler and Preschooler

As new parents, the idea that they will be shaping, nurturing, and guiding their infant child toward developing positive beliefs and values, self-esteem, and a healthy self-concept often leaves them hopeful, but at the same time just a little fearful and stressed.

Many parents, however, rarely take the time to develop a parenting- for-young-children plan. Sure, they want to raise a happy, respectful, and cooperative child who will be able to develop responsibility, but this does not happen by chance.

Permit me a few observations, reminders, and ideas that might serve as stress reduction so that you and your child will be able to realize the wonderful possibilities of relationship building and the joys of experiencing a new loving life together.

Recall that various unproductive parenting styles are associated with family atmospheres of overindulgence, overprotection, pitying, competition, martyrdom, perfectionism, inconsistency, and disparagement.

We also believe that the parenting style that reflects a higher degree of consciousness integrates the values and beliefs of a democratic model with an emphasis on spiritual development and the development of long-term genuine values.

Such a model is based on the concepts of respect, equality, and genuine love as apposed to fear. Within this model, parents learn to give choices, set limits, and believe in guiding rather than coercing. In addition, conscious parents are respectful of developmental issues and stages of development, and are sensitive and empathetic. However, they are by no means pushovers. As these parents make an effort to understand and reflect their children's emotional experiences, they are also effective at role modeling their own feelings, understanding and using encouragement liberally, and differentiating between punishment and consequences.

As mentioned in session 1, understanding a child's misbehavior is important in determining which one of the four mistaken goals has resulted from the child's discouragement from belonging, feeling accepted, or feeling significant within the family unit.

Remember that a child who seeks attention does not feel connected and the solution often requires encouragement regarding how he may contribute in some way. Give attention only for positive behavior or when it is not expected, but not on demand.

Power struggles often ensue when your preschooler does not feel capable. In response, the parent might want to present the preschooler with choices within limits to help with becoming more responsible and utilize power positively. Revenge in a preschooler often signifies that your child does not believe that he counts very much, and so he views things as being unfair. Parents should not be impressed with power or revenge, but might instead view the child as being in need of empowerment by being given the opportunity to cooperate and contribute in positive ways. Building trust and respect are very important when revenge is the intent.

When assumed inadequacy is obvious, your little child really wants to succeed, but has not yet developed the courage. Encouragement is very important when this happens, and giving in to the child's fears must never be a consideration. Instead, make suggestions, brainstorm, and point out all the things that the child can do. Role modeling situations in which the parent demonstrates making mistakes, remaining positive and being persistent is also a good idea.

For toddlers when attention is the issue, parents may verbalize appreciation by liberally taking notice and/or catching the child being good. When power is the behavioral drama, encourage independence and give choices within parameters/limits. For revenge, encouraging equal sharing and fairness often work well. Inadequacy, even for a toddler, should not be accepted; instead encourage effort, and utilize play to demonstrate the courage to be imperfect.

Remember, that the conscious parent of a preschooler can give her some wonderful and special gifts. One such gift is allowing her to see her own loving, positive reflection within her mother's eyes. This along with genuine understanding, appreciation, and the utilization of the language of encouragement are crucial self-esteem builders. Recall that encouragement emphasizes internal mechanisms and is not concerned with end results or product. By embracing this, you will respect yourself and your child.

For infants and toddlers, affection and physical contact, closeness, having fun, and sharing time together are essential in order to meet their needs for security, closeness, and to feel loved. However, being a good encourager, a good listener

and communicator of feelings early on, and encouraging cooperation and respect are key factors in developing a positive self-esteem.

Although toddlers are, basically, driven by their emotions and the need to explore, it is not too soon to begin guiding them with respect to limits as they learn simple lessons about self-control. Preschoolers, however, are ready to learn about cause-effect relationships so that logical and natural consequences may be utilized more effectively and judiciously.

Defining problem ownership is usually the first step in teaching cooperation in a respectful manner to your preschooler. With younger children, it is often better to just keep it simple and state a choice that is easily understood. For example, “If you want to go outside and play, Ruth, you will have to pick up your toys from the living room first.” Setting limits should also be simple and direct. A parent might say something like, “If you leave all your toys lying around, Jane, I will have to put them away somewhere else and you might not be able to find them.”

As already learned, problem solving can also be effectively accomplished through the exercise of exploring alternatives. Referring to session 3 for review of this topic would be helpful.

As we have already noted, another very important Adlerian/Dreikurs concept that goes a long way towards building loving, respectful, and cooperative relationships is the idea of holding family meetings. This is a powerful tool that should not be taken lightly even for a toddler. It is clear that family’s work best when all members have equal opportunity in making decisions. However, parents usually need to be reminded that family meeting are not just gripe sessions; they are also a time to have fun while role modeling some essential parenting values.

Family meetings for preschoolers should be held at least once a week but they should be brief since children at this age have short attention spans and are not able to retain as much information as older children. In order for family meetings to work effectively, parents might make a commitment to accept the process by agreeing to a day and time in advance, and making sure there are no distractions. In fact, parents may even want to hold family meetings with their infants to establish a tradition that will last a long time and go a long way toward beginning a rich and rewarding experience. For young children, some important values that parents might want to role model during family meetings include:

1. Sharing and turn-taking
2. Developing good listening skills
3. Being patient
4. Expressing emotions
5. Making decisions together or by consensus
6. Using encouragement
7. Democratic process and equal opportunity

8. Cooperation and respect
9. Showing appreciation
10. Honoring commitments and being honest
11. Simple problem solving

Important Affirmation

I commit to becoming more aware as I encourage my preschooler and role modeling love, acceptance, and those values I hold important.

Things to Do and Think About

1. How did you feeling becoming a new parent? Were you anxious to become the best parent you could?
1. Recall the unproductive styles of parenting. Did your parents utilize any of these modes as you grew up?
2. Recall the democratic methods espoused by Alfred Adler and Rudolf Dreikurs.
3. What does being a conscious parent of a toddler or preschooler mean to you? What are some values you would like to role model for them?
4. How would you conduct a family meeting with your preschooler? What would hope to accomplish as you guide family meetings? How would you assist your toddler in solving problems?

Session 8.....Teenage Years

If you have a teenager then at this juncture, you might be asking yourself what do I do with my teenager who is just so rebellious, disrespectful, selfish and not concerned with being part of the family. Indeed, teenage years present particular problems for parents and if you haven't yet developed an ulcer, there's light at the end of the tunnel.

The first step toward improving relationships with your teenager is making a commitment to yourself and your teen to change. Accepting that he is no longer

a child is a great second step. Next, it's essential to accept that you can not fix-up your teenager. Instead, within a spirit of love and respect, begin working on your relationship as you also work on yourself.

As you begin to change, practice working on the following skills:

- *Using the skill of encouragement*
- *Developing positive disciplining*
- *Respecting yourself and your teen*
- *Becoming a good listener*
- *Responding to misbehavior in more useful ways*
- *Expressing feelings to your teen*
- *Showing Appreciation*

Giving orders, criticizing, demanding, and punishing often create a family atmosphere of distrust, control, and struggles over power, which quickly damage relationships. Giving in to your teen creates too much freedom, inconsistency, and disrespect. Neither parenting style really encourages responsibility, independence or self-initiative.

Conscious parenting is humanistic and democratic. It recognizes and values mutual respect, individual rights balanced with sense of responsibility, integrity, and honesty. It presents teens with frequent opportunities for decision making, exploring options and alternatives, and making choices within limits.

One of the greatest gifts that you can give yourself is learning the language of encouragement, and one of the greatest gifts you can give your teen is utilizing this language often. At this juncture, it is extremely beneficial to reread previous sessions on encouragement to fully grasp its essence, especially session 2.

Problem ownership is an important concept that was originally introduced by Thomas Gordon. Problems ownership suggests that unless a parent's rights are being infringed upon, a child is in danger of being injured, or a child is incapable intellectually/developmentally of solving a problem, then the problem belongs to your teenager. Conscious parents are able to take a step back, use reflective listening, guide their teen when asked, and refrain from rescuing. They understand that rescuing serves only to perpetuate misbehavior, dependency, and self-centeredness.

When the parent and teen own a problem together and parents believe their rights have been threatened, they can begin by stating respectfully how they feel without blaming by using I-messages. Recall in session 5 that an I-message states how the parent feels (accepting responsibility for the feeling) followed by stating the behavior and then the reason. An I-message is designed to be respectful and to assist with understanding cause-effect relationships; they are also helpful in beginning the process of exploring alternatives with respect to problems solving.

Exploring alternatives with your teenager is a meaningful process- orientated approach. To review this process oriented approach to problem solving in more detail, please refer to session 3, Respectful Problem Solving.

Alfred Adler and Rudolf Dreikurs believed strongly in the significance of family council meetings. The family meeting was discussed in the previous session on parenting your toddler. The family council meeting is essential in order to provide an excellent forum for your teenage. It is within the family council that parents may structure problem solving. They can do so by identifying and understanding the nature of problems, exploring alternatives via brainstorming, evaluating the various proposed solutions along with their respective consequences, selecting a viable solution agreed upon by consensus, and finally developing a summary statement including reading and/or writing the agreement to be followed. Review session 3 in order to brush-up on respectful problem solving.

During teenage years, it becomes necessary for parents to pay attention to some behaviors and impulses that may become more prevalent and/or pronounced during the teen years. Teenagers often make choices to lie, steal money, drink alcohol, take drugs, and to engage in sexual behavior. Such behaviors are not necessarily an indictment that your teen will develop a conduct disorder as an adult though parents do need to pay close attention.

Prior to addressing these misbehaviors and exploring alternatives, it would be a good idea for parents to be self-reflective in order for them to gain insight into the purpose behind their teenager's behavior. For example, teenagers may lie to get attention from significant others or impress peers, to avoid being punished, or to hurt their parents. Parents can utilize reflective listening and I-messages as well to help determine their teen's goals. It may be necessary to discuss and negotiate logical consequences for lying behavior. Including the teen is a necessary component of this process, and parents might elicit appropriate consequences to regain trust from the child. In addition to experiencing consequences to develop greater trust, conscious parents do their very best to assist their teen in demonstrating an appreciation for being truthful and resisting the impulse to steal.

Sexuality, and sexual thoughts and impulses occur normally in our teen's lives. We, as parents, will not be able to impose our will or demands on our teenager to stop having natural urges brought on by the exchange of hormones and societal pressures in many different venues. However, with love and honesty, parents who believe in democratic parenting concepts are able to keep the lines of communication open as they talk to their children about the values that are important to them.

There is little doubt that our children are exposed to and have access to drugs including alcohol very early in our modern society. Many of us stockpile beer, wine, and hard liquor in our cabinets; TV commercials pay a great deal of attention to prescription drugs; illegal drugs such as marijuana, cocaine, and amphetamines are readily available at many parties, and inhalants have become increasingly popular over the past several years. We in the United States are clearly a culture of sound bites, immediate gratification, easing pain and discomfort, increasing excitement, and sweeping problems under the carpet.

Parents can accept the belief that they can assist their children in making sound decisions by encouraging them to make good choices based on the value of responsibility, respect, and self-discipline. Parent can also share their knowledge openly with teens and make suggestions about where they might acquire as much information as possible.

Teens that possess a healthy self-esteem will be able to utilize better judgment and will be more resistant to giving into peer pressure and immediate gratification. A teenage that is confident, feels accepted and loved, and believes that he is capable will be more resilient and better able to solve problems and think about the consequences of his actions. He will also have sufficient self-discipline and be open to learning more about the dangers of drug abuse.

Conscious parents can have faith in their teenager and be aware, alert and informed while they meet their friends and parents. In addition, family rules for participation in parties can be firmly stated, and parents need not create the opportunity for teens to get into trouble. Parenting teenagers consciously also means encouraging self-esteem building activities, listening to your teen's ideas, observing his behaviors, learning the signs of drug use in children and teens, and assuming the responsibility of getting help when necessary.

Conscious parents do their very best to assist their children in demonstrating an appreciation for being truthful and resisting the impulse to steal, take drugs, or engage in dangerous sexual behavior. They also realize that when these become recurrent events without regard for consequences, it signals the existence of a more serious problem that should receive attention from professional counselors or a psychologist.

Concluding our discussion about the teenage years, I must leave you with words of encouragement. Your glass is half full not half empty. You have accomplished a great deal already. With all of your effort and progress, you must be proud of yourself! Improving family functioning during teen years does not happen immediately since new habits take time and may meet with resistance.

Important Affirmation

I acknowledge the importance of independence and responsibility for my teen. I am committed to our growth, and I am encouraged by the process we share together.

Things to Do and Think About

1. What was it like for you as a teenager in your family of origin? Were you a difficult teen that sought independence without accepting responsibility?
2. How hard is it for you to accept a commitment to change? Have you noticed that your teen is no longer a child? How successful have you been in trying to change others?
3. Review session 2 about utilizing the language of encouragement. Practice using the skill of encouragement, becoming more positive, respecting yourself and your teen, becoming a good listener, responding to misbehavior in more useful ways, utilizing democratic principles of parenting, expressing feelings to your teen, and showing appreciation.
4. What problems can you identify that are owned by your teen? What problems do you jointly own and would like to solve by exploring alternatives, discussing consequences? Review session 3 pertaining to respectful problem solving. Select a problem you feel you share with your teen; after utilizing I- messages, brainstorm a solution together. Come to an agreement about a solution after discussing consequences that will assist in the development of a cause and effect relationship. Remember consequences should be reasonable, respectful, and related to the behavior.
5. Review sessions 4 and 7 on family meetings, select a day and time,

turn off the television, and begin your family meetings. Remember to have fun, plan for fun, show appreciation, show respect, develop leadership and fairness, focus on consensus, and be a good role-model for positive values. Brainstorming and problem solving can also receive attention within family meetings.

7. Pay attention to behaviors that may become more prevalent and/or pronounced during the teen years, such as lying, stealing, drinking alcohol, taking drugs, and engaging in sexual behavior. Know where your teen is, and get to know his friends and their parents.
8. Practice self-esteem building by using encouragement, showing appreciation, using respectful listening skills, talking about feelings, and being a positive role model for those values you would like to see in your teen.
9. Do you know the signs of alcohol and drug abuse? Do not ignore them hoping they will go away.
10. When your teen has made a choice to continually disregard consequences, seek professional assistance.

Session 9.....Special Situation Parenting Skills

While the democratic philosophy of parenting works well with all children falling within a variety of diagnostic categories, parents of disaffected, angry, often oppositional and depressed children deserve additional attention. Such youngsters often feel disconnected and that they don't count for very much. Invariably, these children are extremely difficult to manage at home and/or school; they will frequently incite power struggles, and then seek to hurt their parents and siblings either verbally or physically.

There are no magic bullets as one begins to address the issues involved in managing difficult children. However, with a genuine commitment toward change and a lot of hard work, understanding, patience and positive thinking, there is hope. Disaffected, oppositional or depressed children are not readily able to change their attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. They do not possess the skills, the life experiences nor the emotional maturity or resiliency necessary to undertake such an enormous process.

It is not surprising that parents of difficult-to-manage children may themselves become rather disaffected and depressed as they continually get bombarded with one crisis after another. However, the conscious, self-aware parent will come to understand the value of integrating a comprehensive well thought out intervention/treatment plan. Such a plan effectively utilizes support groups, psychotherapy, medication (when necessary), school-based interventions, and parent training/education sessions. It has been my clinical and school experience that a true "prescription of success" requires the collaboration and communication among all professionals who work with troubled children.

If parents are to survive this difficult period, they must be committed to living in the present moment taking one day at a time as they accept the responsibility for changing only one person. You cannot, control nor should you believe that you can directly change your child. Not being overly concerned with the future or looking toward the end result is also essential as is being able to accept a process approach. In other words have goals, work on improving, but don't get hung up with the end result.

Healing is greatly facilitated when your process is supported with more productive beliefs, positive self-statements, altering ways of communicating, understanding and utilizing encouragement, and redefining the notion of discipline.

When interacting with socially immature children, and/or disorganized ADHD youngsters, whether with or without oppositional-defiant characteristics, parents can set the foundation for change simply by moving away from a position of power, viewing themselves less as authority figures and more as guidance

counselors.

Providing encouragement and creatively structuring what a child experiences by manipulating his environment is essential. In addition, creating new learning situations, and fostering opportunities for success is also important to increase positive feedback.

Difficult-to-manage children are quite often immature emotionally and socially. Planning and organization are problematic as is mood regulation and impulse control and reflective thinking does not come easily to these youngsters. Weakness in executive functioning is also associated with diminished capacity to withstand frustration, internal distractibility, and/or concentration difficulty, poor divided attention, and inability to sustain attention or remain persistent. These children may also experience internalized anger, especially if depression is present and they have feelings of helplessness and hopelessness.

It is clear that a combination of cognitive/behavioral therapy strategies and medication may be helpful in addressing the needs of many of these youngsters. To this end, each case must be viewed individually and with a great deal of care by appropriate professionals. It is important to adhere to the belief that all children ought to be given the opportunity to learn the skills necessary in order to succeed. If that requires the development of behavioral/contingency planning with reward systems for young ADHD children, then the conscious parent might seek out professional help in order to institute such a program at home. This type of programming might also be coordinated with the school's effort in this regard. Older children and teenagers may require more sophisticated cognitive strategies in order to develop social skills, on-task behaviors, and organizational skills.

At home, we can begin to help these youngsters establish a healthier understanding between cause and effect by modifying their environment, meeting them at appropriate levels where they can succeed. We can then set up a reward system by which they might gradually succeed on tasks in small increments, step by step, so that they will be able to build upon success rather than fear failure or sink into self doubt. As children get older, this can become more sophisticated so that they might earn points for selecting appropriate social problem solving strategies, conflict resolution skills, developing cooperation, and showing more self-initiative.

Although I do not generally subscribe to punishment due to its aversive effects, the concept of response cost has been utilized effectively with oppositional defiant youngsters. Simply put, response cost requires a child to make amends after he has chosen a particular misbehavior that infringes on the rights of a parent or teacher. Response cost can certainly be reasonable, related and respectful in a given situation. For example, a child may be required to stay after school to clean up the lunchroom after inciting a food fight.

Difficult-to-manage children certainly experience intractable behaviors and inappropriate reactions causing them to suffer a great deal as the cycle of heartache, frustration and discouragement is perpetuated. In response, to what appears to be hopeless resentment and all out fighting, I offer to parents the language of encouragement as an entrée to the cure. Understanding and effectively utilizing the language of encouragement is a necessary instrument of change with oppositional and depressed children and is a significant building block inherent in their management.

While encouragement is a necessary condition, it is not sufficient in combating emotional or behavioral difficulties within our children. Rest assured that influencing behavioral change will require a good deal of patience, self-examination, and persistence, as well as a commitment to change. Changing ways of communicating and interacting, challenging prior existing faulty and unproductive beliefs, and altering the manner in which you view and perceive your child are also necessary to support an encouraging atmosphere.

Believing that your child is capable of learning and becoming healthier is also necessary to precipitate change. Often, it is helpful to communicate unconditional love and your belief that the difficult-to-manage child counts for a great deal in your life even though his behaviors are unacceptable. This allows the parent and the child the freedom and good will to repair relationships while working on problem solving and altering nonproductive communication and interaction.

What is also a key element in building a renewed parent-child relationship is the willingness of the parent to be respectful, reasonable, and have a vision of long-term goals. If immediate answers are sought out in order to gratify an immediate, unconscious need, a punitive atmosphere develops quickly. Punishment usually leads to the abandonment of a process approach that can be conscious, well thought out, and planned.

In addition, when punishment is utilized to affect change, this often leads to power struggles and resentment. Once a difficult child is angry, there is virtually no opportunity left for any meaningful understanding or any way for him to connect a consequence with the antecedent behavior.

In order to avoid the negative aversive effects of punishment, parents will have to work hard at ignoring certain behaviors while they utilize encouragement and showing appreciation liberally. In addition, it is also helpful to utilize a preemptive strategy in order to avoid problem areas or escalation of conflicts. If this is to occur, parents will have to pay attention to and be very conscious of possible situations and behaviors that lead to potential conflicts.

Gaining greater understanding of the differences between punishment and

consequences is important. For a more thorough review, please refer to session 3. Clearly, in order for consequences to be more effective, discussing them with your child in advance is necessary so that there are no misunderstandings of what will happen. It is also beneficial to write scripts and rehearse them in advance so that the parent will be able to accomplish this without sounding punitive or over-reactive. This will necessitate rehearsal of body language, tone of voice, and facial expression. The best though out consequence will be perceived as punishment in the presence of an angry tone or a mean look.

An angry, resentful child can be presented with limits in a concrete almost business-like manner. The oppositional-defiant youngster bent on revenge and destruction needs to clearly understand and accept that his parents will not accept physical violence or the destruction of property. By the same token, under no circumstances should parents resort to physical violence with their children. The consequence for physical violence might be based on the logic that such behavior is a signal that things are out of control and the police will have to be called or the child might require a more restrictive environment away from home.

As mentioned previously, there will be no easy, immediate solutions from rescuing either parents or their children from unhealthy and unconscious ways of relating to each other and solving conflicts. Each child must be led down a path and presented with a process that is inherently respectful and fair. In order to accomplish this, parents are asked to maintain an encouraging attitude as they attempt to assist in the development of problem solving skills and exploring alternatives.

It's also relevant to appreciate that many of us tend to often forget about the power of role modeling or we sometimes model the opposite of what we want for our children.

Recall that role modeling makes a positive statement about ourselves while it presents opportunities for showing our children appropriate behaviors, values and attitudes so that they will be free to learn in a non-threatening manner.

The conscious parent is able to make a deep and lasting commitment toward change as she is inspired by the willingness to fully love herself and others. In so doing, she has selected a path of self-reflection and understanding her difficult-to-manage child. She is motivated to work through the principles espoused by Alfred Adler and Rudolf Dreikurs, and she is capable of feeling deeply, communicating genuinely and respectfully, being a good role model for values, showing appreciation, and continually working on improving problems solving and conflict resolution.

The Conscious parent appreciates progress and growth, and she accepts being

imperfect. She is truly process oriented, maintaining sensitivity and empathy while attempting to encourage her child's internal barometer. The Conscious parent is open to the democratic process and believes in individual differences and fair treatment. As she encourages reasonability and rationality, she is always aware of the relationship among healthy self-love, values, problem solving, and the importance of moving beyond our own selfish interests.

Important Affirmation

As I become more conscious, I am able to separate the doer from the deed, and love my child for who he is and who he is becoming .

Things to Do and Think About

1. Take an inventory of your thoughts and beliefs in response to your child's difficult-to-manage behaviors. How did you feel?
2. What have you done to live in the present moment and reduce your stress? Have you thought about a self-help group, support from religious/spiritual guidance, or assistance from therapy?
3. Parents can maintain a positive attitude that their situation is not helpless, that they can influence outcomes, and that change can take place, but it must first come from within them.
4. Continue to understand your difficult-to-manage child and separate the doer from the deed. Show him love and appreciation for his positive qualities. List all of them. List those things you can ignore.
5. Attempt self-reflection, and envision interacting with your child in a different manner. Can you picture treating each other with respect, communicating calmly, and avoiding power struggles?
6. What are your long-term goals of parenting and what values would you like to see in your child?
7. Practice role-modeling important values that you would like your child to possess. How good are you at demonstrating these values daily? Talk about these values openly without being judgmental.
8. Review early sessions on encouragement, using respectful problem solving and exploring alternatives and consequences. These are very important skills! Practice these daily.

9. If your child is out of control physically, write a contract clearly stating consequences for this type of behavior. Parents have utilized calling the police, hospitalization, and placing a child in a more restrictive setting.

10. As a conscious parent, make a 100% commitment toward change, a willingness to fully love yourself and your child, communicating genuinely and respectfully, being a good role model for values, showing appreciation, and continually working on improving problem-solving.

Session 10.....Grief, Depression, and Parenting

It would be rather neglectful not to include the topic of suicide when addressing parenting. I can attest to the devastation it leaves behind, having witnessed first hand the impact of a teenage suicide in one of my patients. As a conscious parent, becoming more aware of the clinical symptoms associated with depression is absolutely necessary so that there will be no hesitation in the attempt to acquire professional intervention.

Conscious parents maintain a state of vigilance and curiosity about their child's feelings and behaviors. They are capable of using open-ended questions, observing nonverbal cues, and utilizing reflective listening skills. At the same time, they are also alert for situations that might very well precipitate depression such as parental separation, a heated divorce, a death in the family, a recent loss or break-up, or chronic interpersonal relationship conflicts/difficulties.

Be aware that anger/hostility that is internalized causes depression, which can be expressed as irritability in children or acting-out behaviors in teenagers and/or in feelings of hopelessness and helplessness. Such loss of interest/pleasure or depressed mood must occur in nearly all activities and last most of the day, nearly every day for at least two weeks.

Usually if a child experiences a death or loss, there is cause for concern when bereavement lasts longer than several months or there is a morbid preoccupation with worthlessness, suicidal ideation, psychotic symptoms, or psychomotor retardation .

The criteria for a Major Depressive Episode would be met if five or more of the following symptoms have been present during the same 2-week period, representing a change from previous functioning; at least one of the symptoms is either (1) depressed mood or (2) loss of interest or pleasure.

- (1) Depressed mood most of the day, nearly every day (in children it can be an irritable mood).
- (2) Markedly diminished interest or pleasure in almost all activities.
- (3) Significant weight loss or decrease in appetite.
- (4) Insomnia or hypersomnia, nearly every day.
- (5) Psychomotor agitation, nearly every day.
- (6) Fatigue or loss of energy, nearly every day.
- (7) Feelings of worthlessness or excessive or inappropriate guilt, nearly every day.
- (8) Diminished ability to think or concentrate, nearly every day.
- (9) Recurrent thoughts of death, recurrent suicidal ideation or a suicide attempt or specific plan.

I would also suggest that parents become more aware of their children's anxiety traits and states, paying particular attention to the way in which their children react to anxiety and/or stress. Knowing about the intensity of anxiety is important in children and adolescent because chronic states of anxiety can lead to self-injurious behaviors such as cutting, scratching, head-banging, and depression. Such behaviors require immediate therapeutic intervention and possibly medication to relieve symptoms.

As a parent attempts to be conscious, there is no better way to inoculate your child against suicide than by utilizing techniques to enhance self-esteem, and assure that children feel accepted, connected, and that they count. Clearly, planning ahead, showing appreciation and love, encouraging appropriate communication, and opening the door to a spiritual-values-centered life is a way of preempting the occurrence of future problems.

Losing a beloved parent is also a traumatic event for children and families. When children lose a parent, many adults are caught unprepared and confused when they are called upon to parent their child under the difficult circumstances of having lost a spouse. It is important to encourage a child's grief as she enters into the bereavement period that may generally last a few months. Understanding what constitutes normal bereavement is necessary for a parent who seeks to be aware and prevent future problems such as the development of complicated bereavement, magical thinking and/or depression.

Dr. James Fogarty, a licensed clinical psychologist who specializes in children's grief, noted in his book, The Magical Thoughts of Grieving Children, that normal grief emotions are those that assist a child in continuing the process of healthy mourning. When this process has been misunderstood and/or circumvented by a significant adult, a child can easily feel abnormal or responsible somehow for a loved-one's death.

Normal grieving usually involves an initial stage in which a child may not feel any emotions; this serves to protect him from becoming overwhelmed while he is observing and watching, and interpreting significant others' reactions. Bereaved children also tend to demonstrate ADHD symptoms by becoming very active, attention getting, inattentive, and impulsive since they often have difficulty verbally expressing their grief feelings. Children also go through a strong need to re-experience their loved one, attempting to create situations that were familiar to them during the loved ones life. This is an important process for grieving children since it allows them to resist excessive use of denial as a defense. Adults can be encouraging of this instead of pitying or attempting to short-circuit such attempts.

According to Dr. Fogarty, anger, guilt and anguish are also normal emotions attached to a child's grief process. Related to this is passive-aggressive behavior whose purpose may be to feel in control and empowered or to get revenge. Well-meaning parents who attempt to stop children from feeling

anguish or who overreact to a child's anger or purpose of revenge may unintentionally prolong grief or even complicate it.

The conscious parent, who seeks to parent by a democratic process, will be respectful and encouraging of his child's necessity to grieve in a healthy manner by encouraging and role modeling compassion, genuineness, truth, appropriate expression of feelings, reality testing, faith in a higher power or God, and the courage to recover and overcome adversity.

Another type of loss is represented by the loss of security and trust within the arena of family functioning as parents get divorced. The psychological task surrounding divorce and eventual re-marriage are numerous for adults and children alike. In our society, the mother is usually responsible for the custodial care of her children. Under the best of circumstances, as a result of divorce and ongoing strife, children are left feeling insecure, angry, guilty, sad, and untrusting. Children of divorce have experienced directly the fact that promises and fidelity can be shattered, that they may get pulled in different directions for their loyalty, and that abandonment may loom in the background.

As a result, young children may develop very real separation issues, nightmares, physical complaints, and their behavior may likely regress to earlier stages; thumb-sucking, bedwetting and temper tantrum may be revisited. Children slightly older might often feel like crying, be irritable, feel empty on the inside, worry about abandonment, experience concentration difficulty, and blame themselves or the custodial parent for the divorce. Preteens and teenagers may perceive a threat to their social world and may feel very angry at parents whom they blame for being responsible for their feelings of isolation.

Parents who are empathetic and sensitive to their children's plight take the time to acquire as much knowledge and understanding in advance of the separation period as possible so that they are able to develop a conscious strategy. In this way and with good awareness, they are able to take the first step in honestly and genuinely preparing their children together for what lies ahead.

If adults deal with divorce more consciously and respectfully, their children will come to believe that their parents are responsible, will always love them, and are both committed to their well being.

Being rational, clear and empathetic, as conscious parents express their feelings appropriately and encourage children to do the same, is desirable as the separation/divorce process continues. This can be dealt with within the context of a family meeting where the children are given permission to express their opinions, concerns, and feelings openly. Both parents might take special care to repeatedly assure the children that though the divorce will not weaken the parent-child bond, their lives will be changed. It is important that the children realize that change is not easy, but adjustment will come with time.

Important Affirmation

As a conscious, loving parent I am understanding and sensitive to my child's emotional needs. I respect his right to have and express deep feelings and grief.

Things to Think About and Do

1. Has a close family member ever been clinically depressed or attempted suicide? What were your feelings? Has depression ever been a concern of yours?
2. After reviewing the session, what are the signs of clinical depression to watch out for?
3. What can conscious parents do to prevent suicide in their children?
4. Anxiety and feeling empty can lead to self-injurious behaviors. Have you ever known anyone that has a tendency to inflict injury to themselves in this way or demonstrate self-destructive behaviors?
5. Describe the normal grief process? Reflect back to our own grief after you lost a loved one. How did you deal with your grief?
6. What does "loss" mean to you? Has divorce touched you in any way or do you know someone with children who has recently divorced?
7. How do some children react to divorce and why?
8. How would a conscious parent assist her/his children with the divorce process?

Session 11.....Conscious Parenting, Religion, and Spiritualism

The influences of religion and religious freedom are clearly evident in virtually every aspect of American life. Some of us have chosen to express our beliefs through organized religion; others have chosen to take the path of spiritualism on a more personal less structured level. Nonetheless, the concept of worshiping God or a higher power within the universe is a primary source of inspiration, self-actualization, value system, and code of conduct for millions and millions of people throughout the world.

For many of us, our spiritualism and/or religious beliefs become central to the development of our unique family atmosphere, manner of discipline, and child rearing practices. Religion is certainly heaped with wonderful tradition, ceremony, and symbolism as it calls for a commitment toward faith, patience, love, charity, honor, self-discipline, selflessness, and following a righteous way of life.

The conscious parent is able to integrate the importance of the above values without inundating his beloved child with the fear God or the threat of punishment. While such fear might very well have an immediate benefit in conformity and compliance, the confusion, condemnation, and motivation toward dishonesty is a discouraging and self-defeating legacy. Indeed, as levels of consciousness are raised and the spirit of God is fully realized, parents begin to accept that many of their prior beliefs have been less a labor of love and more a way to control.

The Adlerian-Dreikurs perspective on personality development and parenting fits rather well with the teachings of virtually all of those great masters throughout time that have embraced the value of peace, understanding, acceptance, and love. Adhering to the foundations presented in democratic modes of parenting awakens all levels of consciousness within us so that we may act in the present moment, understand the past, and look forward to our children developing self-esteem and lasting values based on the concepts of love, acceptance, equality and humanism. It is with conscious parenting that we are inspired to believe in an existence beyond ourselves, give up our self-indulgence for a greater good and common interest, and recognize that we are all one in-being with the universal loving, benevolent energy of God.

Becoming more enlightened human beings also requires that we pay more attention to assisting our children in respecting and loving our environment, nurturing Mother Earth, protecting our natural resources, and becoming more aware of social injustice and the plight of the poor, the hungry, and the sick throughout the world.

I believe that the potential and capacity to love genuinely and consciously is a gift that has been given to all of us through the grace of God. It has been transmitted to us through those caring, loving, and selfless, adults who have touched our lives and will continue to do so. For many of us and our children, such gifts may develop into a search for greater meaning beyond ourselves and openness to a spiritual way of living.

Although spiritualism or following a religious path is a personal choice that we are free to make at any point in our lives, the ability to love genuinely, however, is absolutely necessary for happiness and a sense of well-being. At the same time, we are able to recognize that it will be difficult to truly appreciate the existence of a higher power or God without remaining open to love as we let go of fear.

While all of us may not be ready to allow spiritualism into our lives or even believe in God, it is important for us to recognize our connectedness, our need for belonging, and our desire to believe in some type of universal loving energy.

In Wayne Dyer's book "There's a spiritual Solution to Every Problem," he so eloquently directs us toward the prayer of Saint Francis of Assisi whose last verse reads, "For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; it is dying to self that we are born to eternal life." This prayer invites us down the corridor of light to share space on our planet, and it is a message of hope. From a psychodynamic perspective, it is, however, virtually impossible to love selflessly as the prayer suggests without first truly loving oneself unconditionally.

Through God's grace and as we experience greater awareness and heightened consciousness, we become able to view ourselves, our children, and the rest of humanity as being made in the image of God. As parents who live a spiritual life, we also seek to instill similar values in our children, presenting them with opportunities to develop courage, feel good about who they are, integrate essential values, and truly love others. This process will serve these enlightened children well when they are asked to share such gifts with their loved ones as they become the foundation for generations of conscious parents to come.

Important affirmation

As I love myself in a healthy way, I feel more connected; I begin to breathe in love, think love, and radiate the spirit of love to others and the universe.

Things to Think About and Do

1. Reflect about the kind of God you believe in. How has that influenced your daily life, your outlook, and the way you interact with loved ones, as well as others?
2. How has your view of God and/or spiritualism changed over the years? What were your parent's belief about God and religion?
3. How does the Adlerian/democratic view of parenting fit with spiritualism and your religious life? How is it different?
4. How aware are you about social issues and taking care of our planet? Do you recycle and conserve energy? Are you concerned about global warming and pollution?
5. How connected do you feel with others? Do you feel that no man is an island?
6. Have you read any recent books about spiritual development, personal growth or recently visited your church, synagogue, or mosque.?
7. As a conscious parent, what gifts would you like to give your child to pass on to other generations?