

CONNECTING

Healthy Information from the Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center  January / February 2002

Beyond Time Out

Proactive strategies are actions adults take to decrease the likelihood that maladaptive or aberrant behaviors on the part of their children will occur. They are based on the premise that children are not miniature adults; they have limited experience and are not always capable of understanding situations as adults do. They are also much less able to accurately and effectively communicate their limited understanding and experience. When adults who live and work with children employ proactive behavior management strategies, they attempt to create environments that meet the specific needs of their children as well as shape the behavior of their children to meet the requirements of the various environments in which they live. For example, a proactive parent of a curious two-year-old puts safety locks on all cupboards that have dangerous materials in them, thereby creating an environment that fits the needs of that two-year-old. Gradually, as the child matures and understanding of “no” increases, the locks are removed. Of course, a parent could be in a more “reactive” mode and not put the locks on the cupboard doors. This would result in a lot of frustration for that parent as the child does the natural curiosity thing, and the parent is in the not-so-enviable position of having to block that natural tendency to explore. This in turn creates frustration in the child, which, for a two-year-old, typically means “temper tantrum.” Obviously, an escalating process ensues.

This is not to say that there is no need for reactive strategies, rather to underscore the difference between proactive strategies and reactive strategies in terms of goals. That is, what is it one is trying to accomplish when one utilizes various strategies with children? Proactive strategies are designed to fit the environment to the needs of the child and to teach new behavior. The goal of a reactive strategy is to de-escalate an inflammatory situation, not to “teach a lesson.” Think about it - when you are upset about something, do you need time and space or is it helpful for you to have someone peppering you with questions about your motivation to engage in certain behaviors or lecturing you about the “evils” of engaging in certain behaviors? Imagine what this would feel like if you were five years old...or ten...or fifteen...

Proactive management strategies involve structuring the environment to meet the needs of the child. Environments that are structured to fit the needs of children are generally predictable and orderly. Kids feel safest when they know what is happening when and when things, as well as people, are where they are supposed to be. Thus, I feel happiest and most secure when my nighttime routine is predictable. I can still describe the routine at my house when I was six: bath, jammies, story, bed. It was also a surety that on Saturday mornings the whole family would be engaged in household chores. No one balked at working because that was the scheduled activity...it was just what everyone was expected to do.

Proactive management strategies also involve teaching, i.e., expanding the child’s response (social, emotional, behavioral, spiritual) repertoire. The most powerful behavior change technique we know of is positive reinforcement. Positive reinforcement is not bribery. Rather, it is an event/object presented contingent upon a behavior or response that increases the likelihood that the response will occur again in the future. Verbal praise, pats on the back, as well as tangible tokens, are frequently positive reinforcers. Unfortunately, we often resort to use of punitive techniques or threats of punishment to manage behavior. For example, instead of saying, “First pick up the toys; then we’ll play hide-and-seek,” a parent resorts to “If you don’t pick up your toys, you cannot play outside.”

Parents often employ a behavioral technique called “shaping.” Positive reinforcers are presented contingent upon “successive approximations” to the desired behavior. For example, when a child is just learning to use utensils, we do not expect perfection - we expect food spillage! We are willing to accept successive approximations toward that goal of “no spilling.” Our “criterion” for delivery of positive reinforcement changes as the child’s repertoire changes. We utilize this principle when we teach our children many things. However, we do not say to the child, “If you spill, you will get a spanking.” Indeed, we typically watch the eating process carefully and praise the child each time a bite makes it to the mouth

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without spillage. We use this type of process when we teach complex chains of responses from things such as riding a bicycle to saying "sorry" after name calling to doing something nice for someone "just because."

The problem with use of punitive techniques is that they typically engender a myriad of emotional side effects (which will affect a myriad of relationships), and they do not teach anything other than "that response does not work." They do not teach a child what to do in any given situation, only what not to do.

One of the most important, yet overlooked, coping behaviors that needs to be taught is that of emotional control. We do not wish to tell our children "don't get angry;" that is not natural. Everyone gets angry...and sad and scared. What is it that we want our children to do with these feelings? Do we punish them for their expression of emotion or do we "shape" their coping with the emotion?

When a child seems "out of control," adults tend to rush in to gain control of the child. In a reactive strategy mode, the adult rushes in to gain control of the situation to allow the child time and space to de-escalate. There are two things that happen for the child: emotional needs are validated rather than punished and a message is given which says, "I trust you to handle this okay." A strategy frequently used by parents provides an illustrative example - "time out." Typically, time out is used as a punitive technique. The message to the child is "You are out of control. That is bad. You are bad. Go to your room." However, if our goal is to teach a coping response, we will utilize more of a "chill out" strategy. The message becomes "This situation is not okay. I understand you feel angry about it. Let's take some time and space to calm down." Further, if our goal is teaching or shaping this emotional coping strategy, then we will provide positive reinforcement contingent upon the child's implementation of the response. Thus, a "reward" is presented for going away and cooling off.

At C.O.O.L. we often invite parents to take some time to think about the proactive/reactive framework in the analysis of specific challenges presented by their children. It is a way of thinking about behavior that focuses on what we believe to be the inherent goodness of children, the natural and unthwartable growth toward the light.

Grace Percival, M.A.
Licensed Pediatric Psychologist

Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center Annual Meeting

On February 19, 2002, we will be observing the 30th anniversary of the Center's service to the community. The program will include Bill Connet, singer/songwriter/lecturer, who will be speaking on the topic of "Living Your Values." If you are interested in attending, please call the Center at (515) 274-4006.

2002 Clergy Day

Redeeming Memories: Witnessing to Trauma

Presenter: The Rev. Flora A. Keshgegian, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Systematic Theology
at the Episcopal Theological Seminary of the
Southwest, Austin, Texas

Date: February 8, 2002

Location: West Des Moines United Methodist Church

Registration Deadline:
February 6, 2002

This presentation will explore the relationship between trauma theory and theology. The process of working through traumatic memories will be developed as a multiple practice of remembering suffering, claiming resistance and resilience, and connecting with a fuller life narrative.

Brochures will be mailed early in January. For more information or to request a brochure, call (515) 274-4006.

New Staff at C.O.O.L.



Dr. Kelli Hill Hunt

We are pleased to announce the addition of a child clinical psychologist to the Center's child/adolescent department, C.O.O.L. (Children Overcoming the Obstacles of Life). Kelli Hill Hunt, Ph.D., will be working with toddlers through adolescents, as well as with parents and families. Dr. Hill Hunt has a special interest in psychological assessment, depression, anxiety, and behavior problems.

Dr. Hill Hunt comes to the Center from Des Moines Child & Adolescent Guidance Center, where she was a psychologist. She earned her Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology with a specialty in Child & Family from Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan. Dr. Hill Hunt is licensed as a psychologist in Iowa.

MANifest Workshops

MANifest workshops focus on topics that are significant in men's lives and are rarely talked about. The richness of the workshop comes from the shared experience of participants themselves. Call (515) 274-4006 to request a MANifest brochure or visit the MANifest website at manifest.themenscenter.com.

Dates: January 26, 2002 (Men and Sex)
March 16, 2002 (Male/Female Communication)
Time: 9:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.
Location: To be announced.
Cost: \$50, includes lunch
Facilitators: Lowell Houts, D.Min., and Mike Sears, Ed.D.
Registration Deadline:
Call Lowell Houts or Mike Sears at (515) 274-4006 to pre-register at least two days prior to the workshop. Registration is limited to 20 participants to allow for adequate discussion/interaction; register early.

Men and Sex Workshop

Henry David Thoreau once said, "I lose my respect for the man who will make a course jest about sex, but when asked to speak seriously on the subject remains silent." Often when we do choose to speak seriously, it is because a sexual problem has developed in our relationship, and we want to fix it. Even then, our fix may be believed to be more medical than emotional. Men find it very difficult to know where to begin in having a serious discussion of sex and may feel awkward or embarrassed in even admitting an interest in such a discussion. After all, we are supposed to be the ones to know, to lead, to be the orchestrator in our sexual lives. "Men and Sex" will provide an opportunity for men to speak earnestly and explore the sexual/emotional connection with full permission to be curious while growing in their understanding of themselves as sexual human beings.

Male/Female Communication Workshop

Communication is the key to successful relationships. Men and women often perceive the world quite differently, and their styles of processing and communicating information reflect these differences. The goal of the workshop is to raise awareness of male/female communication styles and equip participants to understand and respond more clearly to the significant women in their lives.

Fourth Annual Women Helping Women Luncheon

Date: Wednesday, March 6, 2002
Topic: [Creativity: Playful Spirit](#)
Guest of Honor: Sarah Grant Hutchison, Sticks, Inc.
Speaker: Rebecca Kemble, Licensed Mental Health Counselor; Registered Art Therapist
Location: Younkers Tea Room, Downtown Des Moines

Are we, as human beings, inherently creative? Do you have a creative outlet in your life? This year's speaker, Rebecca Kemble, will focus on the ways we can use creativity to cope and thrive. Sarah Grant Hutchison, guest of honor, will share the story of her creative journey.

Invitations will be sent early in February. Luncheon attendees must pre-register by March 1, 2002. For more information or to request an invitation, call the Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center at (515) 274-4006.

Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center Foundation

The Center's Foundation was created to ensure the financial security of the Center for years to come. In the future, earnings from the Foundation will help people with limited financial resources have access to healing at the Center. We encourage you to consider a planned gift to the Foundation. Some of the ways gifts can be made include:

1. A will directing a portion of your estate to the Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center Foundation.
2. An insurance policy naming the Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center Foundation as your beneficiary.
3. A retirement plan or IRA naming the Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center as the beneficiary.
4. A trust arrangement naming the Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center Foundation as the beneficiary.
5. A gift of property, with retained life interest, to the Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center Foundation.

Please let the Center know if you have already included our Foundation in your estate plan.

Group Counseling for Sexual Abuse Survivors

Debbie Reed, Ed.D., L.M.H.C., and Susan Kearney, L.M.S.W., of the Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center will co-lead a group counseling experience for women who are survivors of childhood/adolescent sexual abuse. The primary purpose of the group is to provide a safe and therapeutic environment in which women are helped to move past the role of "victim" toward a sense of personal empowerment. Other goals of the group are to increase ability to trust oneself and others and to provide an opportunity to begin working through and resolving feelings associated with the trauma and make changes.

The group will meet on Saturdays from 10:00-11:30 a.m. over a 16-week period, beginning in February, with meetings in West Des Moines. The cost per session is \$20 (\$320 total). Each prospective group member will be interviewed by one of the facilitators prior to acceptance into the group. Women enrolling in the group must be currently involved in on-going individual counseling and obtain the permission of their therapist. For enrollment and/or further information, please call (515) 274-4006.

A Closer Look at Evil

A 10-Week Course Offered by the Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center

Dates: March 1, 2002 – May 3, 2002
 Time: Fridays, 8:15-9:45 a.m.
 Location: Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center Conference Room
 Cost: \$200, plus selected books if desired
 Registration Deadline: February 25, 2002
 Instructor: J. Jeffrey Means, Ph.D., Director of Clinical Services and Professional Education

The purpose of this seminar will be to conceptualize "evil" in a fashion that is helpful for clinical practice and pastoral care. The seminar will address individual, social, cultural, and spiritual forces that lead to fragmentation, violence, and abuse and will present resources for healing and transformation. Evil will be viewed as a process that fragments and destroys the selves and souls of persons, rather than a label to place on particular persons or event. Clinical case material will be used, along with a variety of audio-visual materials. This course is approved for 15 hours of continuing education credit. Call J. Jeffrey Means, Ph.D., at (515) 274-4006 for more information.

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is a publication of the Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center, an independent, interfaith, not-for-profit organization. For nearly 30 years, the Center has been providing counseling and educational services to individuals, couples, and families for the purpose of enhancing emotional, spiritual, and relationship health. The Center has satellite offices in West Des Moines, Altoona, and Ankeny.

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