



Resilience Counseling & Training Center

*Providing counseling, training and
consulting services around the world.*



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Resilience Counseling & Training Center

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Why Does this Child Act Like That?

Ever ask yourself, “Why does he/she do that”? Understanding children’s behavior is an essential skill if one is to be an effective parent, teacher, counselor, or in any line of work related to working with children. Unfortunately, such training is seldom provided to those who need it most. Moreover, what is provided is all too often more myth than fact and likely to be ineffective at best and counterproductive at worst.

So let’s look at what we now know about behavior and how to effectively foster more positive, constructive behavior in youth. We can start by recognizing that human behavior is not “caused” by past events but rather is goal (future) directed. That is, behavior is purposive, but not necessarily ‘on purpose’. Further, our behavior and emotions stem directly from our thoughts, how we perceive ourselves, others, and life events. Thus, a child or adolescent’s (and adult’s!) behavior must be understood on three different levels: the How?, the What for? and, the Why? This is depicted in the illustration below.

This is exactly the principle upon which your childhood Bop Bag toy functioned. While you focused your interventions at the face, level 1, the toy always returned to its original position. The key to the toy was at level 3, the bag of sand at the base. The head always remained congruent with the location of the sand bag base. In much the same way, our behavior always remains congruent with our attitudes and perceptions. Lasting change requires moving the base, i.e., the Why?, as only then will behavior (the head) follow and remain permanently.

Improving child/adolescent behavior requires that we keep our primary focus on providing opportunities for their obtaining a positive self-identity, a sense of connection and value through supportive relationships with the significant adults in their world. Research evidence now clearly shows that developing positive *Rules of Social Interaction* in children leads to more positive, cooperative, responsible, and resilient youth. Corrective interventions (aka: “discipline”) must first and foremost seek to effect positive change at level three rather than on using rewards/punishments to change only behaviors at level one. To focus on behavior change alone is

analogous to only treating the high fever ‘symptom’ of a child’s infection with cold compresses and Tylenol. It is far more effective to treat the underlying infection with antibiotics!.

LEVEL 1:

HOW?
The specific behaviors and emotions observed.

LEVEL 2:

WHAT FOR?
What purpose or function does this behavior serve either consciously or unconsciously?

LEVEL 3:

WHY?
The child’s idiosyncratic rationale or: “*Rules of Social Interaction*”. All behavior is logical if understood from the other’s perspective (even if it is a mistaken view)



To answer the question, “*Why does he/she do that?*”, begin by focusing on HOW the child is behaving; i.e., his/her actions and emotions.. Then, consider WHAT PURPOSE this behavior might serve. Behavior always has a goal or purpose. However, it is not done “on purpose” or consciously but rather, we respond from our “auto pilot” mode.. Finally, reflect upon what might possibly be the underlying logic, i.e., the “WHY” supporting the goal and the behavior used to achieve it. This does not mean looking for what “caused” the behavior. Rather, it means seeking to understand the child’s unique “private logic” as to his/her perceptions of self, others, and the world (aka: the child’s “*Rules of Social Interaction*”). This is what constitutes true empathy, the walking in another’s shoes before judging their behavior. When behavior is effectively understood at all three levels, one is able to better empathize and understand the child’s behavior as well as understand how to best help him/her change and improve.

Examples:

- “*Nobody really likes or cares about me, they all just try to control me and tell me what to do!* (level 3). *Therefore, I’ll show them that they may not like me but they can’t push me around* (level 2). *I’m going to break the rules, not follow directions, do as I please!*” (level 1)..
Or,
- “*No matter how hard I try, I’ll never do as well as my parents/teachers expect* (level 3). *Therefore, I’ll avoid the disappointment, humiliation or pain of failure* (level 2) *and just give-up or act ‘as if’ I don’t care or I’m not capable.*” Level 1).

Think back to the Bop Bag toy analogy above. Level One is analogous to the toy’s face. You focus on the face and intervene forcefully in order to move it; and indeed, it does move. But, the change is only for a moment. Then the toy returns to its’ original position. This is exactly how most child disciplinary methods function and why they consequently fail in the long term! By focusing only on changing the misbehavior act itself through punitive interventions (e.g., reprimands, threats, punishments, and exclusion) or the offering of rewards for compliance, we repeatedly experience the “Bob Bag” effect. Behavior changes are short term at best. In the long term, problematic behaviors return and everything remains very much the same as before, or gets worse.

In the medical field, it is recognized that a patient’s symptoms are not their actual health problem. Rather, symptoms are clues to the real underlying health problem. Physical symptoms serve as the body’s attempt to rectify the problem (e.g. a fever to fight infection, coughing to clear throat congestion, etc.). Adults (teachers, parents, childcare workers, etc.) would be well served by adopting this same medical perspective when addressing child/adolescent behavioral and academic difficulties. Only by addressing the underlying psychosocial “infection” and seeking interventions designed to foster a positive self-identity including a sense of connection, optimism, competence, and personal value can one be truly effective in helping troubled, discouraged youth. Such interventions serve as “antidotes” for the real, level 3 problem and enable children and adolescents to turn themselves around and develop in a more positive/constructive direction.

Below is a brief, descriptive chart that identifies the five most important “Goals of Positive/Constructive Behavior” along with their counterparts, the five most common “Goals of Misbehavior” employed by youth in their attempt to compensate when the positive goals appear unfulfilled or unavailable in their lives.

The Purpose & Logic Underlying Children’s Positive Behavior vs. Misbehavior						
<u>Positive/Constructive Behavior</u>			<u>Problematic Misbehavior</u>			
<u>Goal</u>	<u>&</u>	<u>Child’s Logic</u>	<u>vs.</u>	<u>Child’s Logic</u>	<u>&</u>	<u>Goal</u>
Recognition & Connection		<i>“I feel valued, wanted & important here”.</i>		<i>“I only count when I am being noticed”.</i>		Attention
Autonomy		<i>“I am respected for who I am and my interests. I am responsible for my life”.</i>	<u>vs.</u>	<i>“Others don’t think much of me, just try to dominate and control me.”.</i>		Control
Equality & Respect		<i>“I am of equal value and worth as everyone else.”</i>	<u>vs.</u>	<i>“I only have value when I’m better than others.”</i>		Superiority & Power
Meaningful Contribution		<i>“My talents, ideas and abilities are valued & appreciated here.”</i>	<u>vs.</u>	<i>“I have no real value but will hurt others as I feel hurt.”.</i>		Revenge
Competence or Mastery		<i>“I’m capable, optimistic and know that with effort I’ll eventually succeed.”</i>	<u>vs.</u>	<i>“I’m inept, incapable and Not as good as others”.</i>		Avoidance Failure & Emotional Pain

Interested in further information or training in the positive, resilience-based approach to child/adolescent behavior in schools or families? Contact our Resilience Counseling & Training Center.

ANNOUNCING
Upcoming Workshops and Conferences

**A Professional Development Seminar for
Counselors, Social Workers, Psychologists**

Resilience-Focused Counseling & Coaching

Sponsored by: UNH Office of Professional Development & Training

Location: UNH Portsmouth/Pease Campus

Date/Time: 3 May 2017 – 9:00am-3:30pm

For mental health professionals seeking to go beyond the DSM/ICD psychopathology based, symptom control paradigm of the DSM & ICD and learn to focus treatment on increasing client resilience and psychosocial wellbeing. The approach integrates Adlerian Psychology with other positive, wellness oriented therapeutic approaches. Applications of the model in both counseling/therapy and coaching contexts will be explored along with specific techniques for assessing central underlying issues, reframing pathology to adaptive compensations and increasing client resilience and well-being.

Instructor: *William G. Nicoll, Ph.D. Consultant/Trainer/Author with the Resilience Counseling & Training Center. A former Dept. Chair & Professor and of Counseling and National Trainer for the American Counseling Association, Bill has conducted professional development workshops for mental health professionals throughout North American and in nations on five continents around the world.*

CEU's available

For further Information and Registration:

<http://learnforlife.unh.edu/search/publicCourseSearchDetails.do?method=load&courseId=640980&selectedProgramAreaid=16119&selectedProgramStreamId=16142>

Resilience-Focused Marriage & Family Therapy

With Drs. Monica & Bill Nicoll

A Professional Development Workshop

Sponsored by:

Dalton Associates

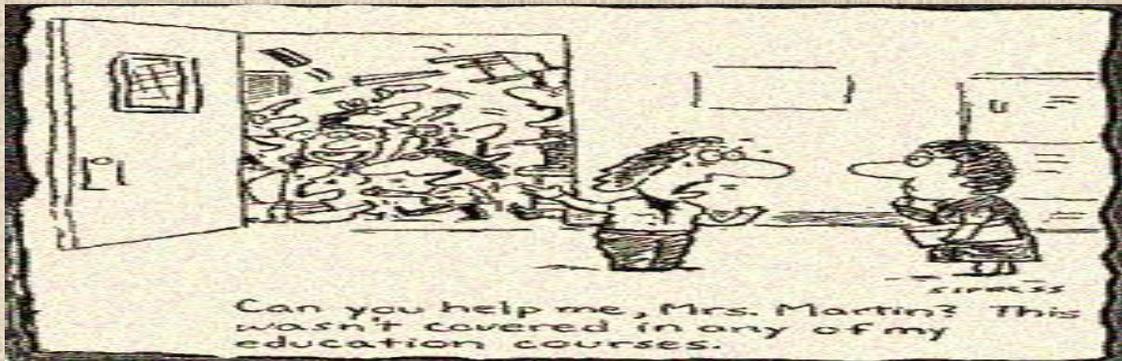
Brampton, Ontario, Canada

April 30, 2017 - 9:00am- 4:30pm

For Registration Information Contact:

Dalton Associates at 855-463-9692

or Email Lindsay@daltonassociates.ca



Resilience-Based Classroom Behavior Management

Dr. William G. Nicoll, will teach an all-day workshop on
Resilience-Based Classroom Behavior Management

Sponsored by: UNH Office of Professional Development & Training

Location: UNH Manchester Campus

Date/Time: 24 May 2017 – 9:00am-3:30pm

For teachers, administrators, school counselors, & school psychologists interested in “going beyond” the old, counter-productive reward/punish methods. Learn instead an evidence-based, positive and empowering approach that reduces disruptive behavior while increasing student achievement & learning motivation.

For further information and registration:

<http://learnforlife.unh.edu/search/publicCourseSearchDetails.do?method=load&courseId=641107&selectedProgramAreaid=16119&selectedProgramStreamId=16139>

International Conference on Social-Emotional Learning

The European Network for Social-Emotional Competence (ENSEC) Conference brings together educators & researchers from around the world on developing of children’s social-emotional competencies.

For Information and details: : www.oru.se/ensec2017



European Network for Social
and Emotional Competence

6th ENSEC Conference

Theme: **DiVerSiTy**

7–9 June 2017 | Stockholm, Sweden



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