

Robinsons on Parallel Discipline in Families and Schools

At the International Institute on Adlerian Psychology, we learned new angles about discipline from Dr. Betty Lou Bettner, who recently had her book called The Crucial C's translated into Romanian. Everyone at the institute was excited about how useful it would be to practitioners and parents of the wonderful country where we were located.

The CRUCIAL C's are Dr. Bettner's clever categories of what we need to be **mentally healthy human beings**:

We need to CONNECT and feel a sense of belonging.

We need to feel CAPABLE to handle what comes our way in life (what Alfred Adler called moving from a felt **minus** to a perceived **plus**.)

We need to know that we COUNT in this life as a person worthy of dignity and respect.

We need COURAGE to do what needs to be done in this life, especially when times get tough.

When we deal with people and particularly children, we would be wise to keep these CRUCIAL C'S in mind when we care about the emotional needs of children. Misbehavior is a way that children cope when something is missing. Misbehavior becomes a "solution" that the child has figured out.

For a misbehaving child we need to look for a way to understand, motivate, and encourage. Betty Lou says for us as parents and teachers to stop treating the "symptom" (misbehavior) and work on

curing the “disease” (low self esteem, discouragement, inability to get along with others.)

Discipline is defined “to learn and to gain knowledge.” However, recently it has taken on flavors of punishment, obedience, handling roughly, injuring, and hurt. We have to think what our goal is for the children with whom we have responsibility. We want them to be friendly, cooperative, happy, successful, caring, respectful and honest children.

However when punishment is used, children become resentful, hurt, angry. Obedience produced by punishment comes at a terrible price. They learn that adults make something bad happen until they give in. They learn to behave in ways so as to not get caught, or they live in fear. Punishment teaches that aggression is acceptable, and it’s OK to hurt people you love. It detracts from the social interest that is necessary for mental health. It takes courage to refuse to punish.

A story was told of a young student who was aggressive with his classmates, suffered from hygiene issues, did poorly in school and was socially isolated. His school counselor asked him if he wanted to be in charge of her hermit crab that she had in her counseling room. He agreed. It was important to be responsible to feed the little fellow and keep his cage clean. Over time,

1. GIVING HIM A JOB for which he was RESPONSIBLE and
2. GIVING HIM CHOICES in how he would do the job built his SELF ESTEEM and changed the misbehaviors.

Betty Lou Bettner then shared a summary of one of my favorite child rearing books, a best seller, Children: the Challenge, written by Rudolph Dreikurs in 1964:

- Show respect for the child.
- Teach Respect for order.
- Encourage respect for rights (others and your own).
- Eliminate criticism; minimize mistakes.
- Maintain routine.
- Take time for training.
- Avoid Undue Attention.
- Sidestep the struggle for power.
- Use care in pleasing; have the courage to say “no.”
- Refrain from overprotection.
- Stimulate independence.
- Don't feel sorry.
- Make requests instead of giving orders.
- Listen; watch.
- Have fun together.
- Talk with them, not to them.
- Hold family meetings to model democracy.
- Don't fight; don't give in.

Many useful nuggets of information were provided, and we listeners wanted more information. Thankfully, we had learned the names of two books we could use for further study; The Crucial C's by Betty Lou Bettner and Children: the Challenge by Rudolph Dreikurs.