



# Psyche Matters

The Newsletter of the Sullivan Center for Children

## Parenting and Behavior Management

by David Wolter, M.A.

One of the most challenging endeavors in life for which there is little training and support is parenting. There are more requirements for driving a car, owning a handgun, working at the drive-up window at McDonald's and owning a credit card than there are for parenting. Parenting leaves the most lasting and powerful imprint on a person's life and in society and yet it is often overlooked and minimized. This issue of *Psyche Matters* attempts to address the ins-and-outs of parenting while offering practical help to parents in areas that surface most as challenging and difficult.

One of the frequent reasons for therapy we hear at the Sullivan Center is that the relationship between parents and their children, or between children and their teachers, is eroding. What can be done to help my child behave better? What do I do about discipline and punishment as a parent? What do I do NOW? These questions are built upon several assumptions or beliefs: (1) First, that the parent is in a position of authority and responsibility over their child, (2) Second, that the parent cares about the child more than their own reputation or interests, and (3) Finally, that

something proactive can be chosen as an appropriate response to guide behavior. A behavioral plan is a proactive tool that a parent can use with their child to help guide their lives into a better direction for the child's sake.

Below is a sample of a behavioral plan that focuses on natural consequences to help guide children's behaviors. You begin by identifying 3 key

Behavioral Plan			
Behavior	Description	Consequence	Steps Involved
Behavior			

behaviors that you want to reduce and 3 key behaviors that you want to see increased. Keep it simple and revise the plan as needed. Then in the second column you further describe the behavior. For example, if you want to see respectful communication increased, you might want to describe what that looks like: "uses age-appropriate language to express desires"; "speaks in tone of voice that expresses respect"; "requests without

demands"; etc. In the third column you would then work at appropriate consequences that would be as specific and realistic to the behavior as possible. If at all possible, identify natural consequences such as "student misses bus and therefore walks to school." This is a great place to have your child work with you as you brainstorm possibilities, and enables them to get invested in the plan.

Make a list of seven consequences and then work together to whittle that down to the best choice that you can both agree on. In the final column, try to identify the steps you might need to make to help your child eliminate or increase that particular behavior. If you want to see more respectful communication, one of the steps might be that you model respectful communication to others in the family including them. Another step involved may be teaching three elements inherent in respectful communication: tone of voice, appropriate words and time to consider and respond to the communication.

One of the great benefits of working on a chart like this with your child is that they can agree with you, you can post the chart and then the chart can serve as the agreed-upon authority in times of discipline. This helps

Volume 2, Issue 1

February 13, 2009

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you enforce without having to be all worked up first.

Two books that I have found to be extremely easy to read and doubly helpful in this respect are How to Talk So Kids Will Listen and Listen So Kids Will Talk (by Faber and Mazlish), and How to Really Love Your Child (by Ross Campbell). Two final words about disciplining children: Don't punish your child with disrespect; and avoid punishing your child when you are angry.

# Communication = Connection

by Treon Hinman, Psy.D.

Communication is a simple process, right? Since the age of 2 or so most of us have been talking every day of our lives. Countless spelling tests, book reports, essays and classroom presentations have helped us build our vocabulary, grammar, and general speech and writing skills. We have cell phones, voice mail, e-mail, social networking sites and good old fashioned face-to-face conversation. So how is it that we often run into problems when communicating with each other?

In truth, communication is a pretty messy process. You start with a thought and/or a feeling, and then try to translate it into words to share with another person. Then, in order for your communication to be effective, your audience - your child or the other parent - must listen to that message and try to decipher your true meaning. To complicate matters further, that other person is busy having their own thoughts and feelings, which may distract from your message or even change how they take your words. Is it any wonder that people are sometimes hesitant to express themselves?

Encouraging better communication begins with establishing connection and acceptance. Here are a few tips to help you develop that:

**Set and maintain a neutral, if not positive atmosphere.** The experts who write books and articles on communication estimate that words account for only about 10-25% of our messages. So, how does one account for that other 75-90%? Non-verbal communication - body language, tone of voice, and facial expression - have a huge impact on how messages are received. These

aspects of communication help set the mood and tone of our messages. Negatives such as frustration, hostility and sarcasm can poison even the sweetest sentiment when they leech into one's communication patterns. Be mindful of your emotional state and attitude before entering into discussions. Are you tired? Having a bad day? Angry about

work? Worried about money? Even when we think we're concealing our emotions, they often have ways of making themselves known - leading to misunderstandings and hurt feelings. If necessary, take a moment to relax a little and clear your head so that you can fully participate in the conversation.

**Make time for casual talk every day.** Parenting often involves giving directions, investigating when things go wrong, and dispensing consequences. These are necessary activities, but they can leave a very negative residue on relationships if they tend to dominate interactions. Remember how intimidating it is to hear someone say "We need to talk." Get into the habit of regular chats so that establishing a link becomes second nature. Make communication positive. Talk about fun things, shared interests, fond memories, exciting plans, hopes for the future, and silly thoughts. Those casual conversations are good practice so that when you do have to talk about something serious, both you and your audience have an established history of talking things out smoothly. When connecting becomes habitual, it's less threatening.

**Listen actively.** Give that person time and opportunity to express their own thoughts, feelings and opinions. Show your interest by making good eye contact, keeping a neutral to positive facial expression, and nodding or making encouraging comments (e.g. "Yes", "I hear you", "Interesting", etc). People tend to listen better when they feel they've been heard, so give them their turn first to boost their receptivity to your message.

**Ask open-ended questions & share when appropriate.** Questions are useful tools to get people talking, but too many make a conversation feel more like an interrogation. Rather than run through a laundry list of all the things you want to know, ask general questions that require more than a yes-or-no answer. For example, instead of asking "Did you take out the trash?", try asking "What chores do you have left?" Open-ended questions pull for thought and explanation, which in turn encourages

mindfulness and accountability. If you're still getting stonewalled, try setting a good example by sharing something from your day. Appropriate self-disclosure levels the playing field and deepens emotional connections.

**Maintain an open mind & be willing to talk things out.** One of the potential consequences of talking and asking questions is that sometimes you get answers that you'd rather not hear; the alternative is remaining in the dark. Keep in mind that it takes love and trust to share one's innermost thoughts and feelings with another person. Your attention and interest communicates your respect and commitment to the issues at hand, as well as validating the trust that person shows you by sharing. Some parents worry that listening to a child talk about some objectionable behavior is the equivalent of condoning that behavior. Remaining open to discussion is very different from accepting or agreeing with another point of view. Besides, no one wants to talk when there's no hope that they'll be heard, so be willing to listen.



## Special Announcements:

**CALENDAR:** The Sullivan Center will be closed for President's Day (Mon.2/16) and for Memorial Day (Mon.5/25) unless you make prior arrangements with your therapist. Groups will be cancelled on the Saturdays before Easter (4/11) and Memorial Day (5/23) as well. Please check with your therapist to verify appointments for those days and to let your therapist know of upcoming vacation dates.

**GROUPS:** We currently offer 7 different groups:  
*Tuesday nights - high schoolers*  
*Wednesday nights - 5th gr. boys social skills*  
*Thursday nights - parents group*  
*Friday afternoons - young adults*  
*Saturday mornings 9am - 12-14 yr. olds*  
*Saturday mornings 10am - 8-12 yr. olds*  
*Saturday mornings 11am - 4-8 yr. olds*

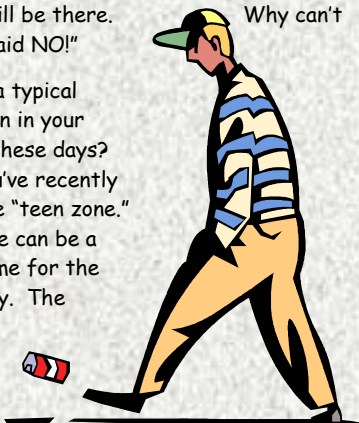
# Understanding the Teen Zone

by Lisa Ganiron, Psy.D.

"Can I go...?" "No!" "Why?" "Because I said so." "You never let me do anything." "That's silly. You just went to your uncle's birthday party last week." "He's 112 years old. I want to hang out with my friends at the mall. Everyone will be there. Why can't I go?" "I said NO!"

Sound like a typical conversation in your household these days? Perhaps you've recently entered the "teen zone."

Adolescence can be a difficult time for the whole family. The budding teenager is flooded with



hormones and they struggle to understand what's happening within their own bodies. Suddenly, who you are, what you wear, and who you hang out with are the most important things in the world. You start to question practically everything that you've learned up to now. Your personal identity is morphing. You're separating yourself from your family, especially your parents. Time to be your own person, not just a miniature mom or dad. "I'm ME!" you shout.

Scary? Now imagine this transition from a parent's point of view. They've just spent the last 13+ years providing for your every need. They cared for you when you were too young to care for yourself. They helped you with homework, taught you how to ride a bicycle, wiped away your tears, and protected you from the monsters under the bed. They

yelled until they were hoarse at your sporting events, kept you from making too many silly mistakes and made sure that you were fed and felt loved. And now you want to leave them? Be your own person? Make your own decisions? You'd rather hang out with Slider, Boo, and Mickey, instead of ole mom and dad? Ouch!

While parenting can sometimes feel like a thankless job, it is often most evident during your child's journey through adolescence. Suddenly, they no longer need you. They know everything and can do it themselves. And that attitude? Ugh! It's tough to think that the once innocent, toothless, giggling baby has now become the moody, cell-phone-attached-to-their-ear, baggy-pants-wearing teenager of today. But that's just part of normal development and it's still your job to make sure they see adulthood.

As with any relationship, open communication and clear boundaries are the key. This is the perfect time for teens to learn more about responsibility and privileges.

Trust that you've raised your child to know right from wrong, but continue to provide a basic structure. Teens need more independence, but with that privilege comes more responsibility. If you have concerns about the



many influences that impact today's teens, such as online chatting, texting, drugs, and sexuality, have that talk with your teen before it becomes a necessity. Be clear and realistic about your expectations and the consequences if they don't follow through. Don't be afraid to ask questions about your teen's friends and activities, but also give them some privacy and freedom to explore their own interests. Allow them to become who they were meant to be as individuals and rejoice in the knowledge that you played a big part in forming that solid foundation on which they continue to build. Adolescence doesn't have to be a negative experience for the family. Remaining open, understanding, respectful, and loving can get the family through the teen zone.

## Meet the Staff: Treon Hinmon, Psy.D.

by Kelli Barton, M.A.

Treon earned a Bachelor of Arts degree at Old Dominion University in Virginia. While he was initially interested in forensics and worked with juvenile delinquents, he began to wonder what adults do to help kids grow and become healthy people. This led to a shift in his primary of focus to parenting.

Treon recognizes the constant changes in children's needs as they grow and the parents' need to adapt to and address these

changes. He believes that families have innate strengths and a drive toward stability. He focuses on primary prevention and assists people in bringing out their natural assets so that they can use their abilities in a positive and adaptive approach. Other staff comment that Treon is thoughtful, analytical, organized, articulate and honest. "Treon is confident in his abilities and provides a unique but effective perspective to working with families and addressing their needs."

Dr. Hinmon came to the Sullivan Center during his internship. He has since earned a Doctorate degree in Clinical Psychology and has remained here for the past seven years. Treon is a senior staff and fulfills many professional roles at the Sullivan Center as a supervisor, a therapist, and a parenting coach. He is also involved in a prevention outreach program for Jr. High School students. We value his expertise here at the Sullivan Center for Children.

## IEP Training at EPU:

<http://www.exceptionalparents.org/>

Saturday, 2/18/09, 9am-12pm  
at EPU, 4440 N. First Street, Fresno

Monday, 2/23/09, 6-9pm  
at Professional Development Building, Rm.2,  
1680 David E. Cook Way, Clovis

Register with Anita at  
(559) 229-2000 ext. 242



## The Sullivan Center for Children

3443 West Shaw Avenue  
Fresno, CA 93711

Phone: 559-271-1186

Fax: 559-271-8041



**"Understanding  
the World  
Through a  
Child's Eyes."**

### **Newsletter Staff: Who to Contact**

Editor in Chief: Mark Barnes, Ph.D.

markbarnes@sc4c.com

Editor: David Wolter, M.A., MFT Intern

dwolter@sc4c.com

## Kid's Korner

*by David Wolter, M.A.*

This time in Kid's Korner, we feature a poem by one of our own clients. Perhaps you have a poem or a drawing that you'd like to feature in *Psyche Matters*. If so, pass it on to your therapist and they'll give it to the editors.



Pictures of dinosaurs and children surround the room  
It is a place for peace, a place for silent suffering  
Many pass through here, each one getting the help they need  
The building is strong and sturdy, like all the staff they call it home  
Everyone is allowed here, a safe place from a dangerous world  
They fix what is wrong, like any other doctor  
The diseases they treat are just like everyone else's  
No one hides here, they are accepted  
Those who suffer know this place well, halls echo with crisis  
This building will stand for year, decades, centuries  
People will need its help for years, decades, centuries

*by K R D*

## From the Director: Balancing Responsibility and Acceptance for the Person Your Child Becomes

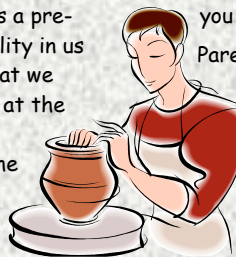
*by Kathy Sullivan, Ph.D., ABPP*

Being a parent is perhaps the most daunting and important role one can undertake. It seems to involve, after all, having the responsibility of a human life in your hands. The fantasies parents have that surround the birth of a child are typically full of the deepest felt hopes, wishes, and plans for that child to have the best life a parent can imagine. Most parents dream and hope that their child's life will be free from illness, struggle, and physical and emotional pain. They imagine who and what their child will become, and at least in Western culture most healthy parents set about doing everything possible to "make it so." The exact nature of most parents' hopes and dreams about the type of person their child will become are quite interpersonally determined - usually by one's own psychological and personal successes and failures, and values. It is almost impossible not to project onto one's child the hopes that they will be successful in ways we value and will avoid the pitfalls of that which we dislike, devalue or cannot understand.

There is no doubt that it is part of your responsibility as a parent to try to teach your child how to be in the world, to pass down to them what you have learned and to do your best to teach them the tools they will need to be

successful in society. What is easy to ignore intellectually however, is that parental guidance and direction does NOT determine the totality of who your child is or will become - it is a very important part of who they will become but not the totality. Each child comes to this life with part of his or own individuality hard wired and predetermined. There exists a pre-determined genetic individuality in us all that is then shaped by what we experience in life. Just look at the difference between you and your siblings, or reflect on the differences you've noticed from birth between your own children. We know that temperament styles are easily identified at birth and persist into adulthood. The varieties of differences are endless and range from cognitive strengths and weaknesses, to the range of emotional and personality differences. And then of course there are children born with deficits and disabilities - a parent's heartbreak - or so we all initially assume. It is exactly these differences though, that make us, and them, human.

And, amidst all the pressures you feel to make your child into the typical child - it is the differences between you and your child, and the differences between your child and other children, that I encourage you to stop for a minute - contemplate - accept - and perhaps even enjoy. Because, being able to nurture, accept, and simultaneously mentor the child you have - even if they are quite different from you and from others - is priceless.



Parents spend so much time trying to shape their children into what they and others expect them to be, and often feel so inadequate when unable to do so. I encourage all parents to take the time to focus as well on who your child is, and while carrying on with your duty to teach, take a new look at your job within this context. Your child will never have the idealistic wonderful life you secretly hope for; they will struggle, they will experience physical and emotional pain, for they are human. Your child will never just be the person you want them to be, they will differ from you in many ways some of which you will like and some of which you will dislike. They will be themselves, and with your guidance, be unique, and be the person they are destined to be.