



Helping Children Get Their Needs Met

Goal: To understand the purpose and intent of children's behavior.

Children's Needs

Needs are the basic elements of human life that are common to all people. Needs dictate behavior. We behave in order to get our needs met. The two are inseparable. If we are tired, we sleep; thirsty, we drink; lonely, we seek companionship; bored, we seek stimulation. *The basic needs that children have to live are no different than the basic needs of adults.* Young or old, capable or incapable, man or woman, boy or girl, all people have the same basic needs. What differs is the degree to which a person is needy and how dependent we are on others to get our needs met.



Dependency on Others

Many parents are on a developmental speedway trying to ensure children are self-sufficient as soon as possible. Toilet training, sleeping alone and through the night, getting dressed, and doing their homework in their room are just some of the ways parents mistakenly believe they encourage a sense of independency in children.

Life is a set of stages going from dependency to independency. Natural development has to take its natural course. Speeding it up only causes the child to speed through childhood with a life-long need to go back. On the other hand, delaying natural growth only frustrates kids and keeps them dependent when they can be doing things on their own. The trick is to know

what children need, and how parents can facilitate normal growth. In Nurturing Parenting Lesson 10, the focus is on developmental stages of growth children go through. Our emphasis here will be on understanding children's basic needs, and how parents can help children get their needs met.

Children's Development

Needs: The forces that dictate and influence our behavior.

Behavior: Observable responses to specific situations.

Parents: Caregivers responsible for the health and welfare of their children.

Parenting: The art and science of raising children to their maximum potential.

Got the picture? Parents are the ones primarily responsible for the health and welfare of their children, and parenting is a process by which they can accomplish this goal. The key is understanding children's needs, and what parents can do to facilitate their growth. Let's examine children's needs:

1. Physical. Basic to all life on the planet, but of particular interest to children. Some basic physical needs of school-age children include:

- Eating proper foods, drinking proper liquids.
- Sleeping eight to ten hours daily (depending on age and make-up of the child.)



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- Exercising to develop a healthy attitude of staying fit and in shape.
- Being touched in warm, positive ways.

2. Emotional. From ages five to 12 years, school-age children undergo tremendous development. Basic emotional needs of school-age children include:

- Consistency
- Trust
- Independence
- Love
- Autonomy
- Security
- Fun
- Success
- Stability

3. Social. The need for friendship and companionship is of major importance during this period.

Friends evolve from playing trucks and dolls, to going to school dances, babysitting, and playing team sports. Friends provide:

- Companionship
- Peer acceptance
- Social involvement
- Validation

4. Intellectual. The need for new ideas, knowledge, skills, and competencies characterizes this period of growth. School goes from kindergarten to elementary school to middle school. Rapid intellectual growth makes learning an exciting adventure. Intellectual growth is facilitated by:



- Reading stories
- School
- Interest in special areas
- Experiments
- Exploring
- Telling stories
- Homework
- Field trips
- Hands-on activities
- Discussions

5. Spiritual. To belong, to have membership, and to believe in ideals all characterize a person's spiritual needs. Meaningful friends and belongings offer personal support and validation. Some ways spirituality can be accomplished is by membership in:

- Family
- School
- Nature
- Synagogue
- Clubs
- Peer Group
- Community groups
- Church
- Sports
- Mosque

6. Creativity. A basic need is to express one's inner self; to be noticed; and to be unique. Some ways in which creative needs are expressed are in:

- Art
- Music
- Hair cuts
- Sports
- Dance
- Gardening
- Make-up
- Interests
- Dress and style

Empathy and Needs

Empathy is the ability of parents to be aware of the needs of children, and to construct an environment where children can get their needs met in a safe, fun, and nurturing way. When needs get met, children feel more fulfilled as people, and are generally easier to parent.

Needs also represent the milestones of development. As children grow older, the means by which children get their needs met changes. Reading stories to children develops their own independent reading.

Knowing the developmental needs of children, and having appropriate expectations are characteristics of empathic parenting.

Needy and Spoiled Children

All young children are needy. *The goal of nurturing parenting is to promote growth and autonomy by helping children get their needs met.* Children who don't live in homes where basic needs are met face serious consequences to their development.

Needy children generally feel insecure and unsure of their own abilities to get some of their needs met. Hence, they cling to their parents or other adults, believing that only by staying close can they be assured their needs will get met.



1. Excessive neediness in children develops in one of two ways: Needy children generally have had everything done for them by their parents, and hence have not been encouraged to do things for themselves. In a sense, they have been treated as infants or "infantalized," that is, not allowed to grow in independence and autonomy.

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2. Needy children can also be a product of a home where needs don't get met as a result of too many children in the family, children spaced too closely in age, single parenting, special needs that require added attention, non-empathic parents, or parents who are as needy as their young children.

On the other hand, spoiled children generally don't trust that their needs will be met, develop an infantile personality, whine, hoard their belongings, have difficulty in sharing, and generally make life miserable for everyone around. **Generally, children displaying such "spoiled behaviors" don't have positive feelings of self-worth; hence have difficulty understanding how their behavior makes life for others miserable.**

For both the needy and the spoiled child, a systematic plan to develop their positive self-worth through success in being able to do things for themselves, and in learning how to make meaningful contributions will go a long way in helping them develop more age-appropriate behavior.

Notes and Comments:



Family Home Practice Assignment

1. During the course of a week, discuss with children the areas of needs presented. What did you learn?

2. Use the categories of needs to help children understand their behavior and the behavior of others. Statements like, "Why do you suppose your baby brother is acting this way? What need do you think he's trying to get met?"

3. Use "needs" to describe your own behavior or behavior desires:

- a. "Mommy needs some time alone now."
- b. "Daddy needs to concentrate on this project."

4. Take time to nurture yourself. What did you do?

5. Honor and respect your children's needs. Be helpful in assisting them to get their needs met appropriately.



Developing Personal Power in Children

Goal: To develop a strong sense of personal power in children.

What is Personal Power?

Personal power is the use of our inner energy to influence the quality of life for ourselves and for others. *Personal power is not physical strength, but rather emotional strength. Personal power is the drive to accomplish things, the will to live, the energy and commitment to create, to change, to build and to make the world a more caring place.* Personal power is the life force within everyone. If you live, you have personal power. As a parent, the goal is to direct the personal power of children for constructive and healthy uses.



How Do We Acquire Personal Power?

To a certain degree, personal power is both innate and learned. Innate means we were born with personal power.

When a baby cries, he is using his personal power to let his parents know he is hungry, tired, wet or scared. Since he can't talk yet, it is the only way he can let his parents know he needs something.

As the child grows older, he learns new ways to express his needs, wants, and desires. Exploring the environment, or getting something to drink on his own are some other examples of the ways a young child will use his personal power.

Another example of using personal power is getting the needs met to love and be loved. A young infant needs to feel secure and assured that mom and dad will love her and take care of her until she can begin to take care of herself.

Positive Use of Personal Power

The way children use their personal power has a lot to do with the way they feel and think about themselves. *A self-concept is the way we think of ourselves, and a self-esteem is the way we feel about ourselves.*

People who have an overall positive self-regard, that is, a positive self-concept and a high self-esteem, behave in ways that treat themselves and others with respect.

When parents create a home with boundaries that allows healthy choices, safety and trust, children learn how to use their personal power in positive ways.



Negative Use of Personal Power

Not all people, however, use their personal power in a positive way. Some use their personal power in negative ways. Hurting others, alcohol abuse, fighting, and constant oppositional behavior are some examples of the negative use of personal power.

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People who commit such acts generally do not feel very good about themselves as boys or girls, men or women. Consequently, they don't feel good about others either. They use their personal power in ways that keep themselves and others feeling lousy.

**Powerlessness**

Still, others feel they don't have any personal power, that no matter what they do things will never get better, so why bother!

We call this feeling "learned powerlessness."

Children and adults who are victims of child abuse and spouse abuse are good examples of people who have learned to be powerless.

Over a period of time the messages they received and the violence they experienced tell them that they are inadequate and unable to do things for themselves.

As a result of learned powerlessness, some people remain in violent situations and relationships because they feel trapped and powerless to get out, or get out only to get involved in a similar situation.

Personal Power and Parenting

Personal power is a concept of extreme importance when we turn our focus to parenting. Parents use their personal power in an attempt to teach their children and adolescents right from wrong by using various types of behavior control and encouragement measures.

In this sense, control is the use of personal power to manage, guide and encourage the behavior of children.

On the other hand, children and adolescents use their personal power to explore, experiment, and learn new ways to be autonomous and independent.



At times, the personal power of the parents who want to control their children and adolescents, and the personal power of children and adolescents who strive for autonomy and independence, clash. When this happens conflict usually occurs.

Control

Control is the use of personal power to manage, dictate and steer behavior and needs for self-gain.

Controlling another person's behavior is necessary when that person is unable to meet their own basic needs independently. Infants, elderly, disabled, mentally ill and bedridden patients all require help in meeting their basic needs. In these instances, controlling a major part of a person's life is positive and appropriate.

Controlling a child's behavior when the child has the capability of managing their own behavior, or meeting their own needs is an inappropriate use of control. Not allowing children to take responsibility for their own behavior is using control in a negative way. Using control in a negative way often encourages resentment. These feelings of resentment will only lead to rebellion, inadequate feelings of self, or extreme forms of dependence, all of which will present problems for everyone involved.

Power Struggles

1. Power struggles are natural. It may not seem like it but they are. Power struggles are a way of children gaining some autonomy in their life. They're trying to be their own person. Problems occur when parents or children are using their personal power in negative, destructive or hurtful ways.

2. Oppression is the seed of power struggles. History tells us over and over again you cannot oppress people. Build walls around them, they'll knock them down. Enslave them, they'll run away or fight back. Try to take their opinions away, they'll think them secretly. Try to take their desires away, they'll dream them. Whether parents like it or not, children have personal power and the goal is to teach them to use it wisely and not to keep trying to oppress it.

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3. Power struggles come in various frequencies (seldom to often) and degrees (differences of opinion to oppositional behavior). The most serious kind are the ones where parents and children are arguing all the time about everything. Oppositional behavior is the worst kind of power struggle. It shows no empathy, no cooperation, and no perception that the other person's opinions have value. **The most common type of power struggles are the "differences of opinions" that can be resolved through negotiation, compromise and problem solving.** Curfew, dress, diet; these are all easily negotiated power struggles. The beauty of these is in the lessons children receive in finding ways to resolve problems and differences of opinions.

The techniques and strategies presented in this Handbook are designed to reduce and prevent power struggles through mutual respect, empowerment and empathy.

**Obedience vs. Cooperation**

There are those who suggest that children be taught absolute obedience to authority figures, especially their parents, and "do what they are told to do, when they're told to do it." "Strict obedience to authority figures is the mandate and nothing else will do," so say the hard liners.

- "It's my way or the highway!"
- "As long as you live under my roof, you'll do as you're told."
- "When I want your opinion, I'll ask for it."

Obedience without thought is trouble waiting to happen. Disobedience, the practice of not doing what you're told to do, has its desirable place in life. Some examples include:

- Children being challenged by their peer group to do drugs.
- Not accepting a ride from strangers.
- Staying out of a car with a drunk driver.

- Refusing to play with matches, or to take things that don't belong to you even though a child's peer group insists.

At moments like these we want our children to be disobedient. However, we don't want disobedience as the norm for interacting with parents. The answer is not obedience, which is the response of the powerless, but rather cooperation, which is the response of the empowered. Cooperation is a learned behavior. It is the ability of a child to use their personal power in a positive, constructive way to please their primary source of love, namely their parents. The advantages of teaching children cooperation rather than obedience are several:

- Cooperation takes thought and is the result of a choice. Obedience has no thought. It just is.
- Children who are uncooperative are making choices that can be managed through negotiation, compromise, and problem-solving. Children who are disobedient are feeling angry and often remain rigid and unyielding in their views and attitudes.
- Cooperation is a moral action that has value; obedience is a blind response to a command.
- Children who cooperate use their personal power in a positive way. Children who are obedient have no personal power.
- Obedience training is for pets and circus animals. Teaching cooperation is for children.

Empowerment and Children

Empowerment is a feeling of capability. To be empowered means to use your personal power in positive, healthy ways. Adults, however, often view empowered children with a cautious eye.



- Toddlers who are excited about life and want to explore the environment are labeled as "terrible." The "terrible two's" are adults' way of saying empowered children are a lot of work to manage. However, adults who explore and discover are called scientists.

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- Children who express their opinion about issues in life are labeled as “opinionated” or “having a smart mouth.” Adults who express their opinion are often referred to as “informed” or “having a moral conviction.”
- Strong-willed toddlers are scorned by adults who try to break their will by demanding obedience to authority. However, adults with a strong will are thought of as leaders. Adults who act obedient are dismissed as having a weak character, gutless or followers.

Empowered Children and Mental Health

Children who are taught to use their personal power in positive ways are in a much better position to succeed and to conquer the challenges of life than children who are powerless.



- Children need to be empowered to withstand the peer pressures of drugs and sex. Saying “no” to unhealthy aspects of life takes personal power. The weak or powerless are easy prey.
- While any child can be victimized by others, children with a strong sense of personal power challenge, ask questions, examine the entire situation, make a personal assessment, and then decide.
- It takes a strong sense of personal power to cooperate, follow family rules, have a moral conviction, respect others, and succeed in life.
- It takes a strong sense of personal power to make healthy choices, control impulses, and seek help when needed.

Building Personal Power in Children

To help build a sense of personal power in your children, begin by:

- 1. Treating your children with respect and dignity.** Just because they are smaller, younger, or less capable, doesn't mean they should be treated with less respect.

2. Praise your children for being and doing.

Positive regard is one of the nicest gifts children can receive from their parents. Let your children know they are appreciated for who they are, as well as what they do.

- 3. Give children opportunities for success.** When children accomplish tasks and are praised for their efforts, their sense of positive personal power is reinforced. Help them succeed.

- 4. Be nurturing and consistent in helping children learn appropriate behaviors.** No one ever feels positive about themselves after they have been hit or ridiculed. Physical and emotional abuse help build a sense of negative personal power. Remember we are how we behave.

- 5. Respect your child's body.** They own their body just like you own yours. Unwanted touch and embarrassing comments of a child's body are not ways of showing respect. *Children will respect the bodies of others if they experience respect from their parents.*

- 6. Finally, talk with and listen to your children.** Discuss how they feel, give them a chance to make decisions in family activities, and encourage them to be responsible for their behaviors.

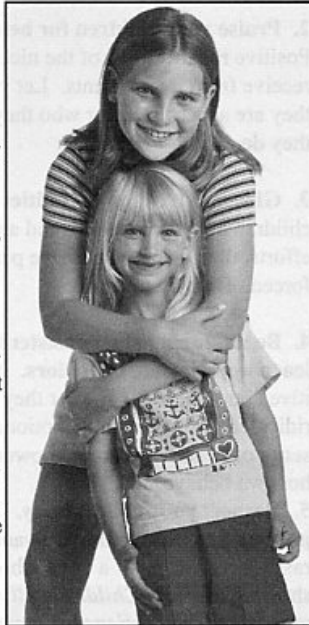
A Final Thought

Many parents and parent educators will insist that kids with a sense of power will only misuse it, cause a lot of problems, or somehow use their power to undermine the power of their parents. I want you to know that without a strong sense of positive personal power, children will lead a life of frustration and failure, have perceptions of inadequacy, and will feel lacking. Can a child really say “no” to drugs and sex and all the things bad (yet accessible), but not be able to say “no” to their mother or father? Strong will is not a curse, it's a gift. Life at home growing up is the in-service workshop for adulthood.



Developing Personal Power in Children (cont'd)

Simply, children with a positive sense of personal power turn out to be leaders, are not easily swayed to act out of their moral beliefs, and believe that respecting and caring for themselves and others are important values to have. As you develop your sense of positive personal power, it will be easier to see the value in having your children develop their power. Personal power is our life force and energy. Teach children to use it for the betterment of humankind.



Notes and Comments:

Family Home Practice Assignment

1. Discuss with your partner or a friend issues of personal power. How is personal power displayed in your family? Does one person in your family use their personal power to control others?
2. Practice building personal power in your children. Use the strategies in this chapter as guidelines.
3. Don't forget to praise your children and to review your family rules. Any changes you notice in your family? Describe:
4. Become aware of how you use your personal power. Is it positive or negative? Describe how and when you use your personal power in both ways.