

child is labeled as having Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Oppositional Defiant Disorder, Conduct Disorder, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, or simply as being “challenging.”

Even though most books in the field are loaded with recommendations, the underlying message in every single one that we have seen is ultimately discouraging. A picture is invariably painted of a lifelong dilemma and a lifetime trail of accommodations such as medication, long-term treatment and some level of acceptance of undesirable behaviors.

No one seems to present the possibility of essentially changing the old pattern of challenges and failures to a new pattern of successes. No one seems to believe that a “transformation” is a real possibility: that a challenging child can have an essential change of nature and can begin to consistently use his intensity in remarkably positive ways.

The Nurtured Heart Approach, however, has helped thousands of families have an amazingly successful effect on their child in lasting and powerful ways. Best of all, parents who had previously felt as if their relationship with their child was hopelessly stuck in the deepening muck and mire of problems wound up feeling like they had a heroic influence in turning their child around.

Changing the pattern to success is much easier than people think. You simply need to believe it can be done; you need to have a plan, the right techniques and the drive and resolve to follow through. Enjoy the journey.

HOW QUICKLY THINGS CAN CHANGE

Matthew, Brandon and Monique

Matthew, age 7, pushed his sister to the ground after she told him to leave her alone. He had been taunting her. His mother, angry and frustrated, lectured him on right and wrong, sent him to his room and promised that if he did it again he would have no TV for the next two days. Did it work? It would have worked on an average child. It didn't work on Matthew. He was back at it at the first opportunity. His mother feels betrayed and exhausted. She'd run out of tricks. She'd tried everything she had read in books and magazines. She worried about what her son would be like in six months and in six years if his seeming addiction to pushing the limits didn't stop. Mother and child both deeply feel the pain of what had been happening at home and at school. She was a very well-intentioned mom with a bright and well-intentioned child who just couldn't seem to control himself.

Brandon, age 4, will not take “no” for an answer. He tantrums at the least bit of disappointment, whether in the form of a “no” to his demand for more sweets, or a “stop that, please!” to his efforts to explore the family stereo system. Everyone had been saying that he'd outgrow it, but the tantrums were getting worse... and everyone didn't have to live with him! The tantrums were embarrassing in public and scary at home because he had started to break things and to be mean to pets. Nothing his parents tried or read about seemed to work for more than a short while. His parents had even had a few consultations with a psychologist a

year earlier. They were beginning to feel as if people are staring at them—as if they were parents from hell. They were terrified of how Brandon would fit in at school. As things were going, the situation appeared destined for disaster.

Monique, age 13, has habitually under-functioned for as long as her parents remember. She was a smart child who was failing most of her classes and who would rather argue about homework or chores than ever just do them, no matter how simple they were. Her parents had divorced two years previously. They were tense all the time, largely over their distinctly differing opinions on how to deal with Monique. Her dad felt that she got away with murder with her mom, and her mom felt that Monique's father was much too strict. Besides, neither style seemed to work. Monique's defiance had brought her to the edge of growing up too fast. She wanted to pile on the makeup and hang out with older kids with questionable lifestyles. Her mom was positive Monique would find a way to get pregnant before too long. Monique knew exactly how to push her mom's buttons. The arguments, warnings and lectures that followed her defiance had become a way of life.

All three children had several things in common. They had become stuck in patterns of negativity from which they could not extricate themselves, no matter how much individual advice they received. All three children had the impression that they got more interesting reactions and larger responses from the adults in their lives as a result of their negativity than for positive behaviors. And, all three children were very smart young people who were seriously under-functioning, primarily because they expended the greater part of their intensity and intelligence in the unproductive endeavor of trying to get strong reactions to their problem behaviors.

All the parents of these children also had several things in common. They were trying extremely hard to be good parents. In fact, they were trying every trick that they could mobilize. They had sought advice, read books and magazines, watched videos and observed the world around them for solutions. They basically had tried every reasonable traditional

parenting possibility they could get their hands on. Not only that, but they tried things over and over, with as much conviction as they could muster. Despite their excellent intentions, nothing was working.

They might eventually have become looked upon as bad parents, but in actuality, just about everything they tried would have worked just fine with easier children. They had already reached their own conclusions that normal methods did not work with their child. They were also beginning to suspect that something was dreadfully wrong with their child. To say the least, they were not enjoying parenting and they were half-crazed with the thoughts of where this all was leading.

What these parents wound up doing, in each case, turned things completely around in only a month. They applied a wonderful combination of techniques designed specifically for the intense and challenging child. These simple but unusual methods created the changes that quickly and surely drew the child into a completely new focus on being successful.

Here's a glimpse of what these families wound up doing:

In all three families, the parents took a four-part class that explained how intense and difficult children really operate. Each class gave them theories and techniques to carry them along the way toward reversing the pattern of problems and toward shifting the child to a new pattern of successes.

After the first class, the parents were clear that they no longer wanted to accidentally fall into the trap of feeding a pattern of negativity by having a response that was not a true consequence. They were beginning to realize that some of the conventional tactics for parenting a child with problem behaviors—tactics such as reprimands, words of concern, lectures, redirections, threats, discussions, yelling and other ways of making a big deal about negativity—were actually rewards rather than consequences, however unintended that result. They also left the class conscious of different ways they could make a big deal over several different kinds of successes that had been going unnoticed. They were

ready to apply some magic and “trick” their child into a world of successes.

All three parents began by briefly visiting their child several times a day “before” the predictable behavior glitches occurred and applying three techniques. They did a form of recognition in which they verbally described what they saw the child doing. They also gave their child increased acknowledgment for skills, values and attributes that they wanted to see more often, and they consciously gave recognition for qualities like showing a good attitude, using self-control, being respectful, getting along with others, being cooperative and so forth. The parents needed to be very diligent and creative to ensure that this appreciation occurred whenever possible, at the slightest glimpse of the desired trait.

They also left the class ready and willing to give their child compliments throughout the day for instances when rules were not being broken. In this way they were teaching the rules by actually creating positive experiences through pointing out when their child was not fighting, not whining, not arguing or not being disrespectful. They were realizing that, inadvertently, they had always made it more interesting for their child to break rules by reacting more strongly when the rules were broken and, in effect, rewarding disrespect and bad attitude by giving more energy to the problem than the solution.

Now they were having more animated responses when things were going right, and they were using new techniques and creativity to make it happen. *All this added up to five minutes of intervention a day.* A far cry from the hours it typically took to discuss and solve problems.

By the end of the second week, these parents had devised and implemented a way to give their children credit when rules were not being broken, credit for performing chores and responsibilities, as well as credit and recognition for a host of other desirable behaviors. They had linked his with a clever way to exchange these credits for privileges, and they were quickly seeing how the children were buying in, despite their initial reluctance.

Each child was making considerably more effort to follow the rules, to be cooperative and helpful, and to meet his or her responsibilities. Each child seemed pleased to have acquired a newfound ability to get back old privileges and some new ones in a predictable and straightforward way.

By the third week, *the stage was set to have consequences really work.* The children now really knew what the rules were and really knew what happened when the rules weren't broken. They were beginning to trust that they would be noticed for not breaking rules, and this both felt good and benefited their new economy of credits.

Since the parents were no longer inadvertently feeding the negative behavior, they could now deliver a simple but effective consequence each and every time a rule was broken. After initial testing, each child quickly reassessed his or her new circumstances and realized that all the interesting reactions happened when things were going well and when rules were not being broken. And they also realized that all that happened when a rule was broken was a consequence, without the reward of a reaction. The children began to deepen their investment in successes.

By the fourth week, the parents were able to extend these beneficial strategies to school. They were now able to have their child succeed, regardless of whether the teacher was skillful or not, and without having to actually spend time there themselves. This made an enormous difference in their ability to go through the workday without fear of being called or remanded to the principal's office for a conference.

Miracles happen. What's more, miracles such as these are driven by tactics that add up to a fraction of the time it ordinarily takes to handle problems. Such tactics ultimately gave these parents the satisfaction of feeling like they had turned things around and that they were indeed gifted and talented parents.

The parents of these children, like many others who have come across *The Nurtured Heart Approach*, have simply realized that it's all about how and when we choose to give our energy and that the parenting and

education of intense children simply requires a slightly different spin. As for Matthew, Brandon and Monique, they are all doing great, living out new scripts of success. And as for their parents, they are savoring both their own accomplishments and that of each of their children.

A NEW PRIMER

Understanding the Difficult Child

In order to best teach you the techniques, we'd like to introduce you to a few of our basic premises that explain the thinking behind the techniques. It will greatly increase your therapeutic impact and help you understand what you are doing and why you are doing it.

These first chapters will keep you briefly on hold while we explain the pieces of the puzzle that we think are crucial. This chapter is not about techniques, so even if you can't stand the suspense and want to jump ahead, hang in there for the next 35 pages. The techniques will follow.

Keep one more thing in mind as you start reading. When we were bright young therapists fresh out of school, like many other bright young therapists our theories were complex and complicated. Now that we are older and much more direct, our theories are much simpler in nature. Fortunately, "simpler" turns out to be far more powerful. What follows are a few of our core ideas:

Playthings 'R Us

Take a second and think about your child's favorite toys. How many features do they have? Do they have five, 10 or even 100? *Even if they had 1,000 features, they wouldn't come close to approaching the number of amazing features we people have.*

Simply translated: we are *by far* our child's favorite "toy."