

# March notes from the Healthy Family Healthy Child Project

By Mark Kimball, Project Manager

My last few articles have discussed making your job as a parent a little easier by exposing readers to a model of child rearing that, in my opinion, is as close to having an "Owner's Manual for Raising Children" as one might get.

As stated in previous articles, this model was developed by Dr. Rudolph Dreikurs in the late 1950s. This month I will discuss a question we have all asked ourselves, "Why did they do that?" This question has puzzled all parents over the centuries.

Sometimes it feels as though our children are just trying to get on our last nerve or they woke up this morning intent on making our day bad. Our children do have goals behind their misbehavior, but it's not necessarily related to simply being bad or making our day bad.

Sometimes children "misbehave" because they are tired, hungry, sick, angry, lonely, sad or stressed. These same things can even make me "misbehave."

Dreikurs has divided children's goals for misbehavior into four categories: attention, power, revenge and display of inadequacy. Children's behavior is driven by their beliefs about what it takes to belong and at times these beliefs may drive a child to what we call "misbehavior."

Children may believe that the only way to belong at a certain time is to be the center of attention or have the power. At other times, they may feel they do not belong and then seek to hurt others. Or some children find it impossible to belong, feeling incompetent, and they give up.

You may ask then, how do you know which goal is behind their "misbehavior." As a parent of two daughters and two sons, the answer to this question has been the biggest help to my parenting.

Are you ready? The answer begins with you as the parent - "How do I feel?" Being aware of our own feelings produced by our child's behavior is the first clue into what's behind their behavior - what belief they have about what it means to belong at that particular moment.

There are four primary feelings to be aware of in yourself as parents to help clue you into a child's goal - annoyance, anger, hurt and helplessness.

If you're feeling annoyed at your child's behavior, your child probably is seeking attention - they will seek negative attention if they can't get your attention in positive ways.

If you're feeling angry, your child probably is seeking power as they are feeling powerless.

If you're feeling hurt by your child's behavior, your child probably is seeking revenge - to get even or to hurt before they get hurt.

If you're feeling like giving up, like the situation is helpless - your child probably is displaying the belief that they can't do it.

The easiest response for me as a parent is to respond out of my emotions at the time. Often this reinforces the negative behavior displayed by my children.

They get my attention, even if it's negative attention. They learn to use power in ways that say "I have power when I'm bigger and I control others." They learn that it's OK to hurt others and be disrespectful

to them, and they learn that it's OK to give up if things get too difficult.

The more difficult yet more rewarding response - for my children - is to respond in a way that thinks about my children and their goals (they're not necessarily aware they have these goals).

If my goals for my children are that they grow to be happy, healthy, cooperative, compassionate and responsible, then my responses to them, especially when their behavior is "misbehavior," should respect them and their needs - not wants - in such a way that they learn how to function appropriately and positively.

To respond differently than what my frustrated emotions might dictate, I need to stop and think, "How am I feeling?" When I understand better what my emotions are and am clued into their goal, I can change my response in order to nurture them with respect to what need is driving their behavior.

When my child is seeking attention (cue - I'm feeling annoyed) at an inappropriate time or in an inappropriate way, I can choose to reward positive behavior rather than negative attempts for attention.

This may mean I need to ignore negative behavior and then reinforce positive behavior with words of encouragement and/or with time spent with the child.

When my daughter, after being put to bed, continues to call for me or her mother, knocking on the wall or making other noises, we can ignore her behavior (as this is not the behavior we want), but then when we pass the bedroom later, we can make an encouraging statement like, "Thank you for staying in your room."

When my child is seeking power (cue - I'm feeling angry), I can choose to not get hooked into a power struggle and also can choose not to take power away from them - there is nothing wrong with children having power.

Instead of making sure they know I am the one with power and punishing or struggling with them until I "win," I can choose to withdraw from the struggle, give them choices - this helps them maintain a sense of power, or I can address problems through consequences and agreements.

When my young daughter gets on the table and I ask her to get down and she does not listen (it's the not listening that angers me), I can simply take the power away from her by grabbing her, yelling at her and demanding she behave like I've asked - or I can give her a choice to get down on the big chair or the high chair.

This gives her choice and invites her to cooperate (allowing her to maintain her sense of power). When this scenario took place in my home, my 2-year-old chose the big chair and came down off of the table of her own accord.

When my teenager pushes for power, I could choose to enter into the struggle and continue until she breaks under threats and punishments, and I win - or I can respect her desire for power and help her toward the positive use of power by addressing the issue through agreements and consequences related to the issue at hand.

Again, this allows her to maintain a sense of power instead of it always being taken away. It's also important to

remember that some things are not worth battling over.

Another quick word about choices. We're not talking about ultimatums, "You either do what's asked or you go to your room." That's not a choice. Know the behavior you want and give positive choices that direct the child to the desired behavior - "Do you want to wear the red pajamas or the blue pajamas?"

When my child says or does something that hurts me (the sign my child's goal is revenge), perhaps I also feel a bit angry and want to retaliate or get even. I could choose to do so - or I could choose to respect that my child has been hurt by something and needs to be listened to.

Instead of yelling and screaming or punishing so they "understand that they don't talk to me like that," I can choose to give them some of my time to listen to what is frustrating them. It's time to take time with them and do some active listening, helping them discover new ways that are more appropriate to resolve their hurt and frustration instead of lashing out at others.

When my child is displaying inadequacy (cue - I'm feeling helpless too), I could give up with them - or I could respect that they need more than me demanding they "get it done, sometimes we have to do things even if we don't like it."

I can choose to give them some hurdle help to get them over the mental/emotional roadblock they've encountered. I can point to past success and help break the task down into small steps to help them get back on track.

When my daughter is ready to give up on learning to ride a bike, I could give up with her, saying "You're right, this is too hard." Or, I could help her see the pieces of riding that she's already accomplished - "You were already balanced and you were pedaling great. Let's start again and just go to the garage instead of all the way down the street."

Building her confidence by reminding her of her accomplishments to this point and breaking the task down to reachable goals will go much further toward her

enjoyment of reaching the goal of riding a bike than belittling her for not being able to learn it like I think she should or just giving up. Belittling or giving up would allow her to think the best solution when things get tough is to give up.

Children's "misbehavior" is behavior with a goal behind it and a skewed belief system about what it takes to belong - and every child has a need to belong.

Let's help our children learn how to belong in appropriate ways by responding to their frustrated behavior with respect to their needs instead of with emotional responses that belittle, control and take away their ability to learn and grow to happy, healthy, compassionate, cooperative, responsible people.

I will close this month's article with the following axioms:

- If a child lives with criticism, he learns to condemn.
- If a child lives with hostility, he learns to fight.
- If a child lives with ridicule, he learns to be shy.
- If a child lives with fear, he learns to be apprehensive.
- If a child lives with shame, he learns to feel guilty.
- If a child lives with tolerance, he learns to be patient.
- If a child lives with encouragement, he learns to be confident.
- If a child lives with acceptance, he learns to love.
- If a child lives with approval, he learns to like himself.
- If a child lives with recognition, he learns it is good to have a goal.
- If a child lives with honesty, he learns what truth is.
- If a child lives with fairness, he learns justice.
- If a child lives with security, he learns to have faith in himself and those about him.
- If a child lives with friendliness, he learns the world is a nice place in which to live, love and be loved.

## Enrollment, Education Committee Vacancies

There currently is one vacancy on the Enrollment Committee and one vacancy on the Education Committee. Any Tribal member interested in serving on a committee for the remainder of the two-year term must fill out the following form and return it to the address below prior to April 7, 2011.

Please mail or fax your application to Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians, Attn: Executive Secretary to Tribal Council, P.O. Box 549, Siletz, OR 97380-0549; fax: 541-444-8325.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Roll No: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: Day ( ) \_\_\_\_\_ Evening ( ) \_\_\_\_\_

Choose the first or second choice of committees you are requesting by numbering your preference 1 or 2 in the space provided. If you only want to be considered for one committee, please indicate this by inserting the number 1.

\_\_\_\_ Education Committee      \_\_\_\_ Enrollment Committee

Tribal Council will review applications and approve appointments at its regular meeting in April. If you have any questions, please call Tami Miner, Tribal Council's executive secretary, at 800-922-1399, ext. 1203, or 541-444-8203.