

## Adlerian Ideas: Life Style

(Three of Nine Essays on Adlerian Principles)

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Here are some thoughts about the third of nine principles of Adlerian psychology. The third principle focuses on the developmental of life style, that is, the individual pattern of beliefs and character traits developed by a person to use as a compass to provide personal direction in life. These principles are based on my study of the psychology developed by Alfred Adler. These principles are based on my interpretations of the theory and practice of Adlerian psychology.

The first principle is: People are social beings who want to contribute and belong first in a family, then in an educational setting, and then in the larger community.

The second principle is: People are creative and self-determining decision makers who are responsible for their own thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.

The third principle is: People are subjective in their opinions based on their personal perceptions of self, others, and the world. Adler theorized that infants and children observe the world through their senses, they see, hear, touch, taste, and smell. They make decisions about those various sensory inputs. They observe relationships with the people around them and make decisions about those personal and observed interactions. They observe and are involved in various events and they make decisions about the events. Based on the decisions about self, others, and events, individuals draw conclusions about the meaning of life and the way to move through life.

The conclusions made by children about themselves, others, and events become the integral parts of what Adler refers to as "life style." Life style can be described as the personal beliefs and individual character traits that individual uses to guide them to make decisions about how to think, feel, and act as they move through life. These decisions are typically fairly well developed by the time an individual reaches the age of five or six or seven. The belief system and character traits developed by the young individual is based on personal perceptions and guides the individual's responses to life in the family and then in school and finally in the larger community.

Adlerian psychology is a positive and dynamic psychology that postulates that individuals can change their belief systems and alter the use of their character traits. These changes and adjustments can be made through trial and error, self-reflection, education and re-education, and encouragement by others.

Healthy belief systems are those personal perceptions that guide us to be contributing and cooperative and imperfect individuals as we move through childhood, adolescents, adulthood, and aging.

Character traits, that is those qualities developed through personal perceptions of self, others, and events and the conclusions developed about life can be utilized in one of three ways. Character traits can be under-used or over-used and result in interacting in personal distancing from others in our social life. The third way of applying our character traits is through adapting to situations in accordance with the needs of the situation and the desire to be cooperative and contributing to the good of self and others.