Encouraging Lifestyle Change in the Discouraged Adolescent
by Understanding Their Private Logic
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Abstract

Discouraged adolescents are a population that is little understood. Many discouraged adolescents become homeless, join gangs, and ultimately end up in correctional facilities. This thesis explores how trained therapists can encourage lifestyle change through understanding adolescents’ private logic. When utilizing basic problem solving skills, training the adolescent how to implement positive change in their world has transformational value that benefits all in our society.
Encouraging Lifestyle Change in the Discouraged Adolescent

Introduction

Adlerian Theory has been greatly used in motivating teenagers and youngsters. This theory states that as one feels encouraged, he/she will begin to feel capable of striving toward positive life goals. Upon feeling appreciated he/she will have the tendency to interact more with people and become more cooperative. On the other hand, one who feels discouraged may act negatively by either getting into unhealthy competition with others by withdrawing and eventually not striving toward healthy goals. Hence, Adlerian Theory suggests that finding ways of expressing encouragement, respect, and social interest to people will greatly help anybody feel fulfilled and optimistic. (http://www.AlfredAdler.edu/visitors/overview/adlerian.htm, 2006).

This is the very reason why Adlerian Theory is found to be very effective when handling the “misbehaving and/or discouraged child” (http://www.AlfredAdler.edu/visitors/overview/adlerian.htm, 2006). This paper is aimed at analyzing Adlerian-based ideology and how effective it will be in encouraging lifestyle change among discouraged adolescents by understanding their private logic. Specifically, this paper will:

1. Identify concepts related to Adlerian Theory
2. Classify discouraged adolescents
3. Identify various approaches to Adlerian Theory that can be effective when working with discouraged adolescents.

The Adlerian Theory

Adlerian psychology was introduced by Alfred Adler who had been studying psychological approaches in handling various personalities and human attributes. According to
Adler, Adlerian theory is a combination of a value-based, fully-integrated theory of personality, a model for psychopathology, a philosophy of living, a strategy for preventive education and a technique of psychotherapy (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki-Classical_Adlerian_psychology, 2006).

In his time, Adler described human nature and how it evolves. He visualized human nature by forming concepts and images that had never been expressed by either his contemporaries or predecessors. When he introduced his theory, his contemporaries described the theory as “the forerunner of many approaches to education, counseling, and therapy” (Sweeney, 1998). To this day, Adlerian Theory captures and illuminates human behavior and potential (Watts, 2000).

Alfred Adler introduced *individual psychology* by committing fellow Adlerian psychotherapists to understanding each individual solely on the basis of their perspective on past, present, and future life events. Understanding these main ideals can reveal the individual’s unique personality along with their *private logic*. *Private logic* is like an individual’s thumbprint; it’s a one of a kind blueprint of their personality.

Understanding someone’s unique personality with Adlerian based concepts starts off by discovering the “primary and secondary feelings of inferiority”. It must be noted that infants and most children experience the primary feelings of inferiority, weakness and dependency. These feelings oftentimes evolve in a healthy manner when combined with appropriate parental incentives during child development.

However, there are also instances when a child feels overly inferior, especially if he/she is handicapped or a product of inappropriate parenting (such as child abuse, family neglect or even over-pampering) and/or cultural or economic difficulty (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki-Classical_Adlerian_psychology, 2006).
Secondary inferiority feelings are normally experienced by adults who have the tendency to feel insufficient, which can be the result of trying too hard to achieve unrealistic goals; hence, the feeling of imperfection. Secondary feelings of inferiority can also be the product of long time feelings of primary inferiority. This, in the end, may become the extended feeling that leads to “pessimistic resignation and assumed inability to overcome difficulties” (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Classical_Aderian_psychology, 2006).

The second trait is reflected in the person’s way of striving for significance. Taking into consideration that human beings’ movement goes naturally from birth to death, in between birth and death, man usually strives for expansion, growth, completion and security. However, not only positive outcomes result from the striving. At some point, in anybody’s life, some may aim to be superior by looking for ways to overpower other people (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Classical_Adlerian_psychology, 2006).

People have the tendency to feel highly important in our society if they are in control of other people or events. Many people can show this tendency. It can work out for the positive and sometimes can have negative repercussions in life. It depends on who and what one tries to control. If one has balance and social interest, they can be the controller of their own destiny in a positive way. If one tries to control everyone else and everything around them, this could result in some negative consequences into his life.

The third trait relates to compensation. Compensation is believed to be the result of one’s tendency to make up for their under development in physical or mental functioning.

Indulging in self only and disregarding other people can lead to negative life patterns. Again, if one has balance, setting your mind to overcome deficiencies can result in many positive life rewards (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Classical_Adlerian_psychology, 2006).
A feeling of belonging or community involvement is the next human trait. This trait is a product of one’s social interest and social sense. This trait implies that recognition and acceptance is combined with an interconnectedness to people (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Classical_Adlerian_psychology, 2006). Sense of community can be in the form of belonging, acceptance, reliance on others and interdependent relationships with people. Through these tendencies, growth and personality development can be enhanced.

The next trait is one’s perception concerning style of life. Everybody strives for a unique style as to how they view self and how they believe they fit into society. The styles of life reflect the overall organization of the personality, including the meaning of one’s perceptions of life and themselves, the goals they have towards the future and the very means of achieving such goals.

The Adlerian-based ideology addresses the fictional final goal which is the result of man’s normal tendency to assume a central personality reflecting growth and movement. The intensity of an inferiority complex undermines one’s goal which is closely related to one’s behavioral patterns (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Classical_Adlerian_psychology, 2006).

Unity of the personality is the overall result of cognitive, affective and behavioral components moving in one psychological direction, without any significant contradictions or conflicts (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Classical_Adlerian_psychology, 2006).

This is the ultimate desire of man as implied in Adlerian theory. The overall make up of the personality, traits and behavior of man, when united, will ultimately result in cognitive, affective and behavioral advancements.

The next trait is the ability to respond positively in the battle of private logic versus, that which common sense dictates. Private logic is the kind of reasoning through with which an
individual invents himself. They do this to arouse and justify independence and a self-serving way of life common sense on the other hand, is a representation of the society’s cumulative and consensual reasoning; recognizing the knowledge of mutual benefit (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Classical_Adlerian_psychology, 2006).

Private logic therefore is a diversion from the norm. Private logic implies that not everything in the norm is the right or most proper thing to do. Private logic, regardless of what other people might think, matters a great deal to the individual.

Exploring Discouraged Adolescents with Adlerian theory

Adler has stated that an individual is a whole entity, yet a composite being. Adler also said that human beings are not a collection of parts combined together by things like “ego, “superego”, or id”. Each and every human being should then be seen and perceived as a unique entity constructed by what they think and feel as a unified whole (Osborn, 2001).

A discouraged adolescent may become discouraged or troubled with low self-esteem and psychological traumas and troubles. The adolescent may not feel worthy of others’ company, and may not think that they are worth the trust of others.

As a result, they tend to do negative things just to stir the attention of others because they may feel neglected or disregarded. Generally, a discouraged adolescent feels that they have no one and they have no personality worth noting. If an adolescent is encouraged to use their own private logic, then their whole personality can be significant. The discouraged adolescent can be motivated to realize that they are an important part of the society and they have positive, innate attributes and qualities that can be useful in society.

Adler has also said in his theory that human beings’ perception is one of the driving forces of behavior (Hoffman, 1994). Adler’s emphasis on perception is not limited to the sense
Human being’s perception is an expanded concept that encompasses the various approaches to interpretation (Dinkmeyer & Dinkmeyer, 1989). Private logic plays an important role in highlighting one’s self perception.

Thus, discouraged adolescents can focus on highlighting how they see themselves. One of the things that can help the discouraged adolescent do this is knowing what they are capable of doing and what they are not able to do. By knowing one’s skills and knowledge in comparison to potential skills and knowledge, there is room left for growth, development and, thus, a step towards lifestyle change. Motivating the troubled adolescent can be done easily if one knows how to encourage the adolescent; even to the point of changing or revolutionizing the way they live their lives.

Another way of understanding the discouraged adolescent is by delving into their past. Analyzing why they have become discouraged, seeing closely what forced them to look negatively on things, and measuring the contributions by the discouraged adolescent’s family, friends and other people with whom they have interacted before are integral parts of connecting the past with the present condition of the adolescent (Hoffman, 1994).

It must be noted that more often than not, that the history of the adolescent in interacting with their own family, friends and relatives affects how they respond now. They may have become overly discouraged or troubled because he/she came from a broken family. He/she may have become self-conscious or overly insecure because they have been the subject of too much bullying while at school. They may have become psychologically discouraged because they came from a troubled family where have been subjected to abuse, unfair treatment or other family dysfunction. All these are possibilities may contribute to the way the adolescent sees themselves today. Thus, when trying to help the discouraged adolescent, one of the best possible
approaches to follow is to analyze the past by talking to the adolescent and then trying to motivate the adolescent by changing their own perception of themselves and by encouraging them to change the path they are taking; leading them to a better and brighter path.

Forward thinking and movement is also an approach related to Adlerian theory. Adler always displayed an orientation toward the future. For him, the adolescent could be greatly empowered and encouraged by the future, not the past.

Adler further noted that human behavior is always characterized by its ability to be pulled forward by constructed goals and not by the idea of being pushed from behind by predetermined explanations or instinctual drives (Dinkmeyer et al., 1987). Thus, the Adlerian based ideology is focused on seeing behavior in terms of its goals (Dinkmeyer & Dinkmeyer, 1989). That is why creating a picture of the future would mean pulling and combining one’s goals, dreams, aspirations and intentions together. All these are comprised and fashioned in one’s perceptions, as evident in the lifestyle, fictions or non-rational and unconscious beliefs regarding life in general (Sweeney, 1998).

Thus, when trying to motivate the discouraged adolescent and make them use their private logic, expectations about their future should be highlighted. This can take the form of helping them list their short and long term goals in life. The short term goals are the things that will have short term impact on their overall life. Long term goals, on the other hand, are the things that will have a profound effect on their life as a whole. By listing such goals, the adolescent can then list the things that they need to do to achieve such goals. In the same manner, they should be asked to list the things that may get in the way of achieving listed goals.

Doing this will help the discouraged adolescent realize that there are things they must be working on to achieve their goals, and that there are things that he/she needs to be eliminate,
This method is closely related to lifestyle changing. The adolescent will be encouraged to change their present way of life by focusing on the short term goals that lead to bigger future goals.

Adler believed that enhancing the adolescent’s fictional goal will help to clarify how one's future life can be completed (Prochaska & Norcross, 1999). He further pointed out that striving for significance in society will mean adhering to and following the societal expectations which are related to the strengthening of social interest or an improvement in one's social context (Sweeney, 1998).

**The Six Basic Problem Solving Skills**

Having a discouraged or troubled adolescent is a problem for parents, siblings, teachers and ultimately society. Many of these adolescents become more productive in their lives and society when healthy minded people present a balanced life perspective to them. Discouraged adolescents, whether they admit this or not, are facing psychological problems which they could not solve when growing up in their biological, adopted, or foster families. Hence, the discouraged adolescent should be provided with the basic knowledge as to how their problems and challenges can be dealt with.

This is where Thomas Gordon’s six basic problem solving skills come into play. These skills include (http://www.gordon.army.mil/aftb/probsolv.htm, 2006):

*Recognizing and defining the problem.* This of course entails knowing what the real problem is. The adolescent mind is very vulnerable. It can easily be affected by what is going on in society, inside the home or inside one’s own mind. Moreover, there could be a number of interconnected problems going through the adolescent’s mind that they cannot pinpoint, much less find a solution for.
By analyzing the adolescent’s thoughts clearly and listing issues on paper, one can get to the real root of the problem. Asking questions about their childhood and early memories can also help this process move along.

Gathering facts and making assumptions. After knowing the main problems, and their causes and effects, talking about how these early memories make the adolescent feel will provide information about how the adolescent responds to current problems in their life. In addition, talking about the facts may help them understand what causes them to be affected psychologically and physiologically, time and time again. Making assumptions or a hypothesis about how the problem can be solved is important in this phase. An educated guess will help determine the way the problem should be dealt with. Making an educated guess can be the result of past experiences. Hence, this is a strong reference point for the therapist and adolescent to discuss changing their first response by thinking about the situation first, then feeling and, finally, acting in a different manner. Much of the time people act before they think because they respond only to what they feel first. This is a great tool to teach all adolescents.

Developing possible solutions. After knowing about some of the problematic situations in the adolescent’s life, it is possible to discuss how the problems should be solved. Listing solutions and their pros and cons is one of the most proven ways of dealing with this.

Of course, there a number of ways that a problem can be solved, but there is only one best approach for a specific problem. This is why every individual must develop a unique case plan with their therapist that works best for the individual adolescent.

Analyzing and comparing the possible solutions. In line with the fourth step, analyzing
and comparing all the possible solutions is also very important. This is where one weighs each of the suggested solutions and finds out how each solution will benefit the person who has the problem.

*Select the best solution.* Of course, the solution with the highest number of possible adverse reactions or negative impacts on the person and the society should be eliminated. In the same manner, the suggested possible solutions must be ranked accordingly and the best possible way of dealing with the problem can be chosen.

*Implement the solution.* The last and final step to solving the problem is implementing a solution. Eventually, the chosen solution to the problem will provide results. Such results can be discussed while probing how this made the adolescent feel, versus how the person expected to feel. Discouraged adolescents can learn so much from these six steps to solving problems.

Incorporating some basic Adlerian ideals with Gordon’s six basic problem solving steps is very natural.

*A Training Cycle*

Most behavioral analysts are aware that introducing people with troubled behaviors into training will help them to find tools that can change their lifestyles; leaving them more balanced and more productive individuals.

Training is defined as the kind of learning which that is provided to any individual. This style can improve their present performance in their day to day living (Clark, 1995). To establish good training, a complete training cycle should be followed. A training cycle is composed of planning, execution and follow-up/revision, or the post evaluation phase. Tom Goad, training specialist, describes these phases as an inter-related system or continuous cycle, (Goad, 1982).

In the analysis phase, there are two primary purposes – to make sure that the training is
needed and to ascertain that the training would be based on credible and reliable training materials. In this phase, the trainer should identify what the issue or problem is for which training might be a solution (this is often called "needs assessment"). The trainer should inquire about the tasks and skills needed to accomplish a function or job, and identify who the possible learners are (Goad, 1982). During the designing phase, the psychological trainer/designer determines the strategy to be used in accomplishing the training. Furthermore, the trainer, in this stage, gathers data upon which to base the learning objectives or the driving force behind the design.

The trainer should also decide upon what training approach they follow, by looking at the learning objectives, training methods, tools and timing appropriate to the skills to being learned and the learners participating. This is also a phase during which the need for pre-testing might be appropriate (Goad, 1982). Meanwhile, in the development phase, the psychological trainer develops training methods which may include experiences, tools and methods of delivery. In this phase, much attention is paid to the look and feel of the final training event, including supportive materials, packets, overheads and technological requirements. The final flow, or blocked out design results from work done in this phase (Goad, 1982).

The next phase is the implementation phase. This will be the time when the trainer conducts the actual training. In addition, the trainer monitors the progress and response of learners, and evaluates the effectiveness of the design and its delivery as the training unfolds; making adjustments during the session, as needed. Notes taken during this phase will be valuable in the evaluation phase (Goad, 1982).

Last, but definitely not least, is the evaluation phase. The training program is evaluated and feedback is gathered for updating or revising the training design. What is so surprising is that
this phase is typically the most neglected phase of the training cycle.

However, if attended to correctly, this phase can create better training programs for future use, and can serve to guide revision of the program and methods used with participants. This information can give the trainer important feedback on their performance.

This phase leads directly back to the Analysis phase, during which data gathered in evaluation are used to determine further training needs (Goad, 1982).

The discouraged adolescent will greatly benefit from a series of trainings or seminars which encourage them to modify their lifestyle. It must be noted that the lifestyle of the discouraged adolescent is one of the reasons why they have become discouraged or troubled. Thus, it is to be expected that such a lifestyle should either be totally eliminated or be enhanced and modified to fit with the expected outcomes of their personality development.

Adlerian therapists can easily use Goad’s phases while incorporating therapeutic and coaching strategies when conducting transformational therapy. Transformational therapy happens when adolescents transform their lives and become balanced, productive and happy members of society. I believe that influencing discouraged youths in a positive manner ultimately taps into the very basic essence of man connecting to others in the community. Adolescents who commit themselves to suggested lifestyle training can continue to strive to reach their full potential in life.
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