

Wendy Linsley

Co-counselling and children

" We can learn from our children"
"Children should be seen and heard"
"Just to hold and listen is enough."

Last night I was reading quietly when I heard a heavy thudding noise in the house. Instinctively, I jumped up to see what it was and then realised that it was my twelve-year old son banging vigorously on his bed. I had heard him noisily ascend the stairs seconds earlier and knew he was angry about something. The banging continued for five minutes - (which is a lot of anger!) I had a strong urge to rush downstairs and interfere, firstly to know what the anger was about, and secondly to encourage him to let it out. He didn't need me to do either, in fact I know from past experience that had I appeared would have started to talk about the incident instead of physically "discharging" his feelings.

I heard him leave his room and go downstairs. When I appeared later he wanted to tell me that his elder brother had taken the best turnip for a Halloween lantern. He was quite happily making his lantern from the turnip that was left. He said he had felt angry with his brother for taking the turnip that he had earmarked for himself earlier in the evening. He said he knew there was nothing he could do to change the situation but he needed to get rid of the anger he felt. He did this and freed his attention so that he could enjoy making his lantern. A similar event in the past would have left him resentful and sulky. Being able to let feelings out, without criticism, is very freeing. To hide his feelings would have meant his resentment would stay with him and he would not have been free to enjoy his evening.

If we learn as children to let our feelings out - but in a way that is culturally acceptable - then we will be able to do so as adults. My children do not let their feelings out where they know they would be criticised for doing so - they "save" them until they come home.

When I first started co-counselling I felt the very beneficial effect of letting my distress out, I realised how much I had repressed in my sons. I now try to give them all my attention when they are distressed - that in itself is all they need. They don't need me to solve their problems or fight their battles or make everything alright for them. They do need me to hold them and have all my attention if they are hurt physically or emotionally are frightened or feeling put down in some way. As with an adult once a child feels supported

(uncriticised) they will discharge. They will hesitate or hold their feelings in if the support isn't total e.g. if you try and watch T.V. at the same time!

Just to hold and listen is enough. It works so well I wondered why I hadn't done it instinctively before I co-counselled. I wouldn't have been able to - even if I had known that it was the most effective caring thing I could do for a child. My own upbringing had taught me to repress my feelings - to allow my child theirs would have been too threatening for me. It is only since I've let myself feel my own fear, pain, anger and tears that I've been able to give my unconditional acceptance to my children and all their feelings.

When they are excited or pleased they need to express their feelings physically. They jump, dance, hug, giggle and make a lot of noise. When angry or frightened they shout and scream; when sad, they cry; when their plans are thwarted they swear vigorously. Cushion-banging, teddy-bear killing, paper-bag ripping, egg-box crushing have all been used to let out feelings that would otherwise have been used against themselves or each other. Yes, the house is sometimes very noisy but there are also many hours when we peacefully co-operate with each other.

I see three very different people growing up with respect for themselves and others. I see them as affectionate self-motivated fun-loving children - and I learn from them daily.

Dick Saxton

What Cocounselling means to me

I think the best way for me to convey what cocounselling means to me is to take a look at the question in two different ways,. What I get from a co-counselling session itself and how I feel I've changed as a result of co-counselling over a number of years.

Firstly what I get from a session itself. What immediately springs to mind is the feeling of space. A place and time where I can settle back and do what I want to do. Work on what I want in the way I choose. Get in touch with what's going on, allow the dust to settle, take time to enjoy completely what's good, get off any feelings that I've bottled up, sort through where I'm going and what I want.