

LOGICAL LEVELS – another way of looking

IN her continuing series of articles Helen Oakwater, an adoptive mother for 14 years, looks at how we can better make sense of our children's behaviour.

AS adopters we hear enlightened therapists say "Their behaviour is not the problem – it's the answer to the problem". In previous articles I've discussed how beliefs drive behaviour. Here I'm elaborating that concept, with interlinked models and one particular highly successful and well tested behavioural technique to handle some negative situations.

As enlightened parents we endeavour to explain to teachers that the behaviour our children display results from their past hurts and traumas. Yes they did "overreact" when told to be quiet or when they were gently teased in the playground. Yes, running out of the classroom in tears or hitting little Johnny was not an acceptable response, however they were responding the only way they knew to keep themselves safe. At which point teachers eyes roll to heaven and the label of "batty, over anxious parent" is again pinned on you.

In my 14 years as an adoptive parent I've struggled to understand my children's behaviour and subsequently explain to myself, teachers and other "concerned" adults why my kids behave the way they do. Just this morning, I was with a friend who simply could not understand that after 14 years of very conscious parenting my kids "didn't get it" and their behaviour still, at times, reflected old hurts. "Why can't they see what you've given them" was her phrase that followed me home. This article is aimed at answering that question and proving some practical tools to help.

BRAIN WIRING

I could talk about baby's brains being wired differently because of trauma, neglect, toxins (drugs/alcohol) etc. However you probably know this already. If you don't – investigate. One very good resource is Dr Bruce Perry's website (www.childtraumaacademy.com) which has online tutorials.

More and more evidence is demonstrating that the brain is plastic; it has growth spurts and with

therapeutic parenting, even during adolescence some of the trauma pathways formed in infancy can be stripped out if they are not "fired". (*"Blame my Brain – The Amazing teenage brain revealed"* by Nicola Morgan, Walker Books 2005 and the website for the National Institute of Mental Health (www.nimh.gov) are good sources).

"So what" I hear you ask. "Why is this theoretical stuff relevant for me"? "What difference will it make to how I parent or interact with a fostered or adopted child?"

By understanding how the brain functions we can start to make sense of the "nonsense" in our children's behaviour. It allows us to realise why some strategies that seem counterintuitive are actually the most effective. By delving into new ways of thinking, we can start to understand why "counterintuitive" works and heals.

LOGICAL LEVELS

The first model I encountered when I started my NLP training was that of "Neuro-Logical Levels". It hit me like train. It explained why attachment therapy often worked when conventional therapy failed.

It is a "model"; a visual representation of a concept, which doesn't make it "true", however it is very useful. For me, it explained the sense of, and need for, therapeutic parenting of children traumatised in infancy.

The premise of the Logical Levels model, devised by Robert Dilts, is that there is a hierarchy of levels of learning and change in our lives. Each level in the hierarchy has a different structure and function in our lives.

This model is a powerful way of thinking about change. It is used by business consultants, organisational change experts and in many professional fields. It is helpful as a way of understanding individuals, families, structures, systems and organisations. Its application in personal change work is huge.

It is represented here as a hierarchy, it can also be imagined on paper as a network of concentric circles. For a 3D representation imagine a set of children's stacking cups one on top of the other.

It is often easier to change at the lower levels rather than the higher levels.



Environment is the place we are in and the people we are with – external opportunities or constraints. The **where** and **when**.

Behaviour is our specific, conscious actions i.e. what we do. The **what**.

Capabilities are about the level of skill and knowledge we have. Often behaviour practiced so often that it has become consistent, habitual and automatic. We know "how to" do it. The **how**.

Beliefs and values is the level of what we believe is true and important to us. They generally direct our lives acting as both permissions and prohibitors. They provide reinforcement and answer the question **why**.

Identity determines our sense of self. Answers the question **who**.

Purpose goes beyond self-consciousness, to connection; for some it is the spiritual dimension, for others the bigger picture about mission. It answers the questions **what for** and **for whom**.

Another useful way to consider on what level a person is operating is by noticing where the emphasis is placed when speaking.

I can't do that here = statement about identity

I can't do that here = statement about beliefs

I can't do that here = statement about capabilities

I can't do that here = statement about behaviour

I can't do that here = statement about environment

Logical levels

<i>I</i>	Identity	who
<i>can't</i>	Beliefs and values	why
<i>do</i>	Skills and capabilities	how
<i>that</i>	Behaviour	what
<i>here</i>	Environment	where and when

king at behaviour

As adopters we have to step back and consider whether a child “can’t” or “won’t” do something. It can sometimes feel as if they are being deliberately oppositional. What if at that moment they really can’t! How does that change your thinking? What if there is an unspoken unconscious belief holding them back? Which of the following two pictures illustrates your child’s first few years?

View of self	View of the world
I’m safe	It’s a safe place
I’m loved	People love me
I’m cared for	People care for me
I’m valued	I am important to them
I can trust adults	There is a place for me here
I’m special	The world is okay
I’m okay	

If a child comes second to a drug habit, is “cared for” by adults who still function as seven year olds, is often hungry, thirst, scared or in pain and generally ‘neglected’; they will form beliefs of hopelessness, helplessness and worthlessness.

EMPTY INSIDE?

If you’ve been ignored – how can you exist? How can you have a sense of self? How can you know who you are if you have never been seen? The importance of attachment is now recognised in most quarters, however the deeper implications of non-attachment behaviours from caregivers is, I think, less understood.

“Children who hurt” (to coin Caroline Archer’s phrase) often say they “feel empty inside”. The void they describe could be a lack of self.

Attachment is about the relationship between two human beings. For a baby, the relationship with his mother is crucial. What he sees, hears and feels with her will be replicated into his own inner working model. It is as if she is a mirror for him. What he sees is, in essence, himself.

What if the mirror reflects back nothing or different images each time with no discernable pattern? How could that child form a clear picture of himself? Does that create the “empty inside” feeling?

“I SEE YOU”

In many cultures there are rituals for recognising and acknowledging a child, in the belief that until a child is “seen and blessed” they don’t exist. Their essence is honoured. A Western African greeting is “I see you”, the response “I am here”. The interaction is at an *identity* level. Not behavioural (e.g. “hiya,” “how are you”? what you doing?).

View of self	View of the world
I’m not safe	It’s a terrifying hostile world
I’m not cared for	People hurt you
I’m scared	Dangerous place
I’m unlovable	No one could ever love me
I’m ignored	I’m not important
I’m not valued	The world is dangerous
I’m alone	The world is not okay
I’m bad	

SPONSORSHIP

In this context, “sponsorship” involves promoting the unique identity of an individual. As Robert Dilts says “it involves awakening and safeguarding potential in others”. It is seeing someone at an *identity* level for the unique and beautiful person they are. Good parents sponsor their children positively. Neglectful parents don’t . . . and that has consequences. The table below is reproduced with the permission of Robert Dilts.

What was your sponsorship experience in infancy? And for the child you look after . . . who safeguarded their potential in infancy?

Extract: *From Coach to Awakener*, by Robert Dilts

Positive sponsorship	Non-sponsorship	Negative sponsorship
You are seen <i>relief, relaxed</i>	You are not seen <i>anxious, invisible</i>	You should not be here <i>afraid</i>
You exist <i>centred, at peace</i>	You are not noticed <i>desperate for attention</i>	You are nothing <i>undeserving</i>
You have value <i>satisfied</i>	You are not valued <i>empty</i>	You are a problem <i>blamed and ashamed</i>
You are unique <i>creative</i>	You are nothing special <i>passive</i>	You are worse than others <i>inadequate</i>
Your contribution is important <i>motivated and energetic</i>	You contribute nothing <i>worthless and unwanted</i>	You detract <i>guilty and a burden</i>
You are welcome <i>at home, loyal</i>	You are not part of the group <i>displaced</i>	You are unwelcome <i>desire to leave or escape</i>
You belong <i>committed</i>	You can easily be replaced <i>uneasy</i>	You do not deserve to be here <i>rejected and abandoned</i>

SPONSORSHIP MESSAGES

You exist

I see you

You are valuable

You are important/special/unique

You are welcome

You belong here

You have something to contribute

When these were revealed to me, I wrote them down, put them in my wallet and looked at them regularly. It made me feel better. By knowing them, I could ensure I sponsored myself, my children and others on a regular basis. It enabled me to target positive messages to their inner self, rather than at their behaviour. As we know, our children are so much more than their behaviour! That piece of paper has become very grubby; yet glimpsing it does wonders for me. It might work for you too.

WINDOWS OF THE SOUL

You look someone in the eye to tell them you love them. You connect with them at a very deep and intimate level, soul to soul. The nonverbal messages are those of sponsorship and intense love. Watch good mothers and babies have that same dance of intimacy as lovers. They are connecting at an identity level.

DO EYES MAGNIFY?

We know that eye contact between mothers and infants is generally a good thing and promotes attachment. As adopters and foster carers we are

encouraged to replicate it. I think there should be a caveat. Eye contact when the message is positive – replicating the good mother/baby stuff. However, when the message is negative, eye contact can distort the meaning and be misinterpreted and misconstrued by the recipient – infant, child, teenager or adult. One way of thinking is that eyes can magnify the emotional content of the message. If that's true . . . when do you look where?

ISSUE OR RELATIONSHIP?

When there is eye contact between the speaker and listener, the communication is at a relationship level. When there is a third point looked at by both parties, the communication is about the issue.

When the news is positive then eye contact is recommended because the listener associates the good news with us. Conversely if the news is bad, using a third point is recommended because it preserves the relationship. The relationship is not contaminated by the bad news.

After over 30 years in the classroom, Michael Grinder has developed an extraordinary model for observing and predicting behaviour (amongst much else). I referred to voice and breathing in my previous article (June 2006). His technique for delivering a negative message (How Not To Get Shot) is priceless.

In essence it separates the issues from the relationship. I learned this on a nine month course attended by marketing managers, trainers, doctors, IT consultants, teachers, coaches, acupuncturists . . . the list goes on and on. Each of us used this technique in our home and work environment. Many of us shared it with others. All of us found it effective and invaluable. You can use it anywhere, anytime, with anyone. It's a fabulous habit to develop.

I have been teaching a slightly shorter version to adopters and foster carers for several years. (I have not included the voice element). The feedback is always terrific. I urge you to try this.

HOW NOT TO GET SHOT

In essence you look at the 'problem' not the person.

Go visual (use paper/towel on floor/ report/ flipchart /mess etc). Point and look at the "offending issue"

Get it off to the side. The purpose is to separate the message from ourselves.

Listeners will follow your eyes so keep looking at the "offending issue". Don't be tempted to look at the listener part way through.

Us. A "third person". e.g. the report says . . . "the situation" . . . avoid "I" and "my".

Use specific descriptions, avoid interpretations. "I see a broken cup and juice over the wall" not "you threw the cup".

Body at 90° – be side by side rather than directly opposite. It feels less confrontational and then both of you are looking at the "offending issue".

The website www.michaelgrinder.com has much more on non-verbal communication.

EXPERIMENT

Experiment with a friend or partner, saying something like "that piece of work was not up to standard today".

- Firstly looking them in the eye, and deliver the words.
- Second time deliver words while looking at a piece of paper or simply a space to the side.
- Swap, so you both experience the effect.
- Debrief and share your experiences.

Notice how the same words land differently. The words with eye contact often feel very critical, personal and hurtful. They hit you at an identity level. Without eye contact they lose much of their emotional charge and are about what you did, the behaviour, not you as a person.

HNTGS AND LOGICAL LEVELS

By delivering a negative message using the "How Not To Get Shot" technique, the behaviour is commented on. It lands at the lower behaviour level, not belief and identity level. This is so empowering and helps keep our relationship with our children more positive and less contaminated by their bouts of ghastly behaviour.

HNTGS has also helped me disassociate from the event in progress and I've been less caught up in the drama of the situation; thus able to handle it and myself better. Living with traumatised children is incredibly difficult and the more we can do to protect ourselves from the chaos and distress they exude, the more we can nurture ourselves and them.

HNTGS, LOGICAL LEVELS AND THE BRAIN

If the brain is plastic, we reinforce positive self image, change some limiting and negative beliefs and provide positive sponsorship, we create an environment where traumatic pathways wither and the newer healthier synapses and neural networks are fired and reinforced.

It is the combination of the theory, the brain research and the "how to tools" that I believe has the power to help heal our children and provide a structure to understand why counterintuitive often is the way to go. Work with children that changes their beliefs, rather than modifies their behaviour, will stick long term and be far more effective. That's why therapeutic parenting and attachment therapy works with children traumatised in infancy and conventional interventions don't; because beliefs drive behaviour – not visa versa.

PLAYTIME

People watching is always fascinating. If you put the logical level frame on your observations it gives a refreshing new dimension to your viewing. So as part of your self care regime, go (on your own) and have a coffee in a public space, glance up from your magazine and watch interactions between parents and children. Notice which occur at a behavioural level, which at belief and identity. Then hallucinate on what beliefs that child might be forming about himself.

Other parents with seemingly "nice, well behaved" children are sometimes inadvertently developing children with negative self images. "You are a bad boy" . . . for knocking over a drink?! I don't think so, but at an identity level he might!

A by product of this activity may be that you realise how well you are doing as a parent. You are a good parent – own it – at an identity level!

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Previous articles published in Adoption Today are on her website www.helenoakwater.com where there are further useful links.

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