

KidNews Today

The Catholic School Edition

Holy Family Catholic
School

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Practical Psychology, Part 2

This month, we continue to explore practical uses for psychology. Sometimes the studies we read about (really? Rats in mazes?) can seem so arcane and even goofy. It can be easy to forget that the roots of psychology—theology, philosophy, and medicine—are all rooted in the search for a truly good life.

Behavioral psychology took off in the 1920s. It was an attempt to make psychology a “serious” science, like chemistry and physics. Researchers like Thorndyke and Watson focused on aspects of life that were measurable, so actions were what counted; emotions couldn’t be quantified so feelings weren’t a priority. Modern behavioral psychology studies ways to influence behavior, how people (and those pesky rats in mazes) make decisions, and how to use those insights for good things.

One technique from behavioral psychology is shaping. If you’ve ever gradually gotten a toddler to be potty-trained or learn to “help” put toys away, you’re familiar with this strategy. In shaping, we reward closer and closer approximations to the desired behavior (getting the toys into the basket). Combining shaping with positive reinforcement of very specific praise, focused on the effort, is an excellent approach. Positive reinforcement is “psychobabble” for a good thing that happens when a desired behavior happens.

By praising closer and closer steps towards the desired outcome, you encourage rather than discourage. A child who feels she never quite lives up to your expectations will begin to feel ashamed and hopeless, the kid-version of depression. Praising the effort helps shape an attitude that embraces trying hard and learning, rather than just doing what it takes to get the A or the pat on the head. Focusing on effort (thank you for your hard work in picking up toys with me! Good job wiping off those cabinet doors! Thank you for being such a good helper!) encourages the development of learning goals.

Learning goals are internalized goals; the person who has learning goals is inspired to keep trying, and loves the process of learning and mastery. The alternative is a focus on performance goals. The person preoccupied with performance goals is focused on rewards, praise and competition. The love of learning and the joy of the effort don’t matter much, if at all. When there’s no prize or incentive, the person with performance goals doesn’t see the point. Meanwhile, the child with learning goals will be exploring, studying, learning and rehearsing skills for the love of the process as well as the outcome.

You may realize that you have been using a combination of shaping and positive reinforcement on yourself as well as others! Perhaps you set small objectives for yourself as you develop new habits, and reward yourself in some way. You may have used this strategy with your partner, friends, family members and coworkers!

It may seem very manipulative, but while it’s possible to be manipulative and unkind with these strategies, these techniques reflect the wisdom of our grandparents: you catch more flies with honey than with vinegar (positive reinforcement beats criticism, hands down!) and, every journey begins with a single step (shaping).

As you explore ways to use psychology, how you are already using it, and perhaps tweaking your tactics, be sure to consider that the most important factor is the quality of relationship we have with one another. This makes all the difference! - Dr. Lori Puterbaugh, LMHC, LMFT

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Faith-Friendly News
You Can Use

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April Holidays

Holy Thursday 4/5

Good Friday 4/6

Passover Begins at Sunset
on 4/7

Easter 4/8

Greek Orthodox Easter 4/15

April resources for parents & professionals

More fun with applied psychology for real people with real lives! Bill O'Hanlon, a leader in solution-focused brief therapy, has revised an earlier book, *Do One Thing Different*, to the new, simpler, **The Change Your Life Book**. O'Hanlon writes simply but he doesn't talk down to his readers; he respects the difficulty of making changes in our lives and has expertise in helping clients break big changes into small, achievable steps.

Toddler 411 by Denise Fields, and a team of experts, picks up where Baby 411 leaves off, with practical tips on handling temper tantrums, skills development, normal vs. not-normal milestones and childhood illnesses. It's not really narrative therapy...but **The Freedom Writers Diary: How a Teacher and 150 Teens Used Writing to Change Themselves and the World Around Them** (1999) does explore how reading, storytelling, reflection and writing change self-perception, relationships and possibilities.

HEALTH NEWS: Psychology has much to do with health. **Binge eating disorder**, which will be added to the American Psychiatric Association's diagnostic manual in 2013, is a prime example of the overlap between psychological health and physical health. It's estimated that 2 to 4% of the adult population in our country—or as many as 1 out of 25 adults—meets the strict criteria for this disorder. Other statistics indicate that perhaps 10 to 15% of mildly obese adults suffer from binge eating, while even more morbidly obese suffer with this. Contrary to many people's opinions, binge eating isn't someone just being greedy. Binge eating is using food to cope with painful feelings, just like alcoholics use alcohol or drug addicts use other substances. Treatment includes medical care, individual therapy, group therapy and family therapy. Eating too much, past the point of feeling full, feeling ashamed and guilty about eating habits, weight fluctuations and feeling a loss of control while eating are major symptoms.

Psychology: psyching out the poisonous messages in the media! Bizarre messages about health and body image, priorities in our lives, and what it means to be a success are everywhere. We won't change all of it, but we can help kids learn to be good consumers. If your family watches television together (family-friendly, of course!) use commercial time for Advertising/Psychology Bingo. Make up some cards on your home computer, with items to identify instead of numbers. Here are some examples you may find in advertising that are examples of advertisers using psychology to trick you into thinking, feeling, and eventually spending your money the way they'd like: Dads being dumb; pretty is better; skinny is better; muscles are very important; bigger things are better; junk food makes you happy; the right clothes make you happy; being smart is nerdy; being rude is funny, old people are silly. Think of your own examples, and have your kids help identify other things to put on those bingo cards.

Inhalant abuse continues to be reported as one of the most common types of substance abuse among younger teens and middle school students. Inhalants, such as paint, gas, Freon, markers, and other substances are relatively inexpensive and easier to obtain than illegal drugs or alcohol for young people. Don't assume your kids "know better." It's definitely something to talk about with your kids, early and often! - Dr. Lori Puterbaugh, LMHC, LMFT

Relationship Corner:

Life tends to unfold at different paces for each of us. College friends who thought they'd be friends forever drift apart as choices about career, marriage and children take them in different directions, at least for the time being. Years-long friendships that seemed so solid fade away when one of you leaves the employer. Perhaps most confusing, family members, who "should" be close no matter what, reach milestones at different points and this creates real problems.

A common source of tension in families is the process of each child maturing and leaving the nest. Often the first child to create an independent life is viewed as a sort of

traitor who has abandoned the family. The other siblings, and parents, may view this child with anger and resentment. The new spouse and/or job may be seen with suspicion as somehow interfering with family cohesion! It may not be overt. In fact, the siblings and parents may not realize they are acting out resentment and hurt, but the one who moved on is usually well aware of the anger. He is probably confused; after all, isn't he doing what we're supposed to do—move on, be successful, and keep in close touch with family while creating a new family of his own?

The problem often resolves itself as the other children mature and move

on to their own lives. The challenge will be for the oldest to not give in to resentment over the years of being treated as a pariah for being the first to fly out of the nest.

Parents and grandparents can help by stepping back and trying to put a positive, rather than negative spin, on the first-to-fly's new life. Sighing and implying that somehow it's a grave disappointment that the newlyweds rotate holidays between the in-laws and sometimes choose to develop their own, new traditions only reinforce the message that the other siblings and extended family should be angry and hurt by normal behaviors. Put on your "game face" and be gracious. The long-term payoff will be worth it.—Dr. Lori Puterbaugh, LMHC, LMFT



Reaching life's milestones at different times can create family tensions

Something to Talk About for Big Kids and Teens: What is, and isn't, your business?

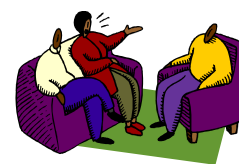
What's your business? If it affects you, is it necessarily your business? It may seem so, but adults, even parents, have some areas of their lives that ought to be kept private from the children and even the teenagers affected by their decisions. The rules about privacy may change when you reach adulthood. On the other hand, out of respect to one another, par-

ents may decide to keep all the reasons for a divorce (for example) private from adult children, too. It is very possible that your adults will decide that the following are not your concern, even if you feel very concerned, confused or angry:

The "real" reasons your parents are getting divorced; how much money your parents make, or used to make, or hope to make.

If you have 2 homes—one with each parent—it isn't your business to know everything the parent you're not with is doing at every hour of every day. If you have concerns or questions about these issues, or the fairness of adults keeping some things private, it's definitely something to talk about!

- Dr. Lori Puterbaugh, LMHC,



Classical Conditioning

Classical Conditioning—that first venture into behavioral psychology—was inspired by Pavlov and his dogs. How Russian research into dogs' digestive processes led to an understanding of how our natural responses can be manipulated into unnatural, or learned, responses, is an interesting piece of psychology-history. For our purposes, though, the close approximation of a neutral event (meaning, it has no biological trigger) to an unconditioned event (something that we naturally respond to in some way) can result in our wires being crossed, so to speak, so we have the "natural" response to the previously neutral event or stimuli. This is how the dogs began drooling when the kennel doorbell rang...and a major source of concern about violence and sexuality combined in movies, television, video games and music. By combining elements that are naturally compelling with grotesque violence, young (and not-so-young) brains are unconsciously and naturally learning to link the thrill of the naturally compelling with violence that should be abhorrent and repulsive. It's something to think about when kids rally for violent games and it's tempting to give in and shrug it off as merely make believe. The brain isn't differentiating real and not-real, and the risk of the child becoming not only numb to violence but beginning to "wire" it in as something exciting and thrilling, should be too big of a risk for parents to take.—Dr. Lori Puterbaugh, LMHC, LMFT

Can you go without television for one week? *That includes: television on the television; streaming shows off Hulu or some other online service; movies on television. If you limit yourself to one newspaper or visiting 1 news site online for the time you'd read the daily paper (no lying! No cheating! Would you really pick up your local paper on a weekday four times for 15 or 20 minutes? Really?), keep track of what you do with the extra time. Notice how you feel: is it hard to sleep? Do you feel bored? Do you find yourself automatically reaching for the keyboard or remote and thinking, this is stupid? What is it like to have quiet around you for a couple of hours? What feels uncomfortable? Notice these thoughts and feelings. This sort of self-awareness will help you decide how much you want to surrender your life to outside influences. If you are getting the psychological version of withdrawal after a couple of hours without television, perhaps it's time to give yourself a self-help type of intervention! - Dr. Lori*

Grownup Tip of the Month: A Sabbatical



Here's an experiment: pick something that takes a couple of hours a week. Perhaps it's an extra film from Netflix or a couple of hours of television. Maybe it's time you spend surfing the internet, reading news and blogs and checking to see what "friends" are up to on social websites.

Give yourself a one-month sabbatical from that activity and deliberately do not choose something else to put in its place. In other words, no "I'll give up a movie and watch TV instead." Experiment with using the time for something entirely new: doing "nothing." Try taking that time to merely be with friends or family, without an agenda, or to sit quietly, or be outdoors in nature. Take 5 minutes to jot down what the experience has been like each time you do this. It should be about 4 or 5 times, over the month, depending on how you break up the week. At the end of the month, review the notes you've made and reflect on whether it was a worthwhile experiment. You're combining making one small change (behavioral therapy) via reducing a time-killing activity and replacing it with either immersion in nature or social contacts, two things associated with improvements in mood, with some narrative therapy homework in terms of writing about what an experience was like for you with the intention of using those insights to help you reflect on how you are living your life and the stories you tell yourself about yourself and your world.—Dr. Lori Puterbaugh, LMHC, LMFT