

Helping Children to Make Wise Choices



**A model to help
young children solve
ethical problems and
make wise choices.**

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The primary question to be resolved is how the present world, with its entrenched pattern of conflict, can change to a world in which harmony and co-operation will prevail. World order can be founded only on the unshakeable consciousness of the oneness of mankind, a spiritual truth which all the sciences confer. Anthropology, physiology, psychology, recognizes only one human species, albeit infinitely varied in the secondary aspects of life

(Universal House of Justice, 1986)

Morality foundational to living together

Morality is concerned fundamentally, with respect for persons, and hence with person-in-relationship; beyond that, with the whole quality of social life within which persons have their being. The study of morality takes us deeply into the areas of relatedness, trust, and responsibility; into the experience of value, the sense of freedom, the transcendence of social conditioning, the coming together of intellect and feeling in concern for other

(Kitwood 1990).

Morality key to student success

- ‘Quality Teaching’ movement (Newmann et al., 1996; Darling-Hammond, 1997).**
- The Quality Teaching movement has overturned many notions as to what helps students succeed**
 - The development of caring, trusting relationships are at the heart of student success (Rowe, 2004; Hattie, 2004).**

Factors that impact moral development

Research findings of Berkowitz and Grych(1998) on factors that influence moral development in children

- **Meta-moral characteristics**
- **Psychological morality**
- **Factors of effective parenting**

Foundational blocks of morality

- **meta-moral characteristics:**
 - **Social orientation** - Moral behavior flows from an interest in and concern for other people. (Hoffman, 1976), (Lamb & Feeny, 1995)
 - **Self-control-Control in the face of temptation** (Kochanska, Murray, & Coy, 1997, p. 264). Etzioni (1993)
 - **Compliance-** internalize external standards for behaviour
 - (Eisenberg & Mussen, 1989), (Westerman, 1990)
 - **Self-esteem-positive sense of self** (Coopersmith 1967)

Foundational blocks of morality

Psychological moral factors

- **Empathy** - to become attuned not only to their own emotional reactions but also to those of others. (Hoffman, 1983)
- **Conscience** – internalization of moral standards and guilt (Hoffman and Saltzstein, 1967, Kochanska, Murray, & Coy, 1997)
- **Moral reasoning** - progression of increasingly more effective ways of thinking about and resolving moral problems (Kohlberg, 1972)
- **Altruism** - giving to another at cost to oneself (Eisenberg and Mussen, 1989)

Researched approaches that influence effective parenting in raising a moral child.

- **Induction** – name the action and impact of behaviour on self and others
• (Kagan, 1984, Hoffman, 1991)
- **Expression of nurturance and support**- Warmth, responsiveness
• (Baumrind, 1980 and Damon, 1988).
- **Use of demandingness and limit setting** -set and communicate high realistic goals (Baumrind, 1980)
- **Modelling of socio-moral behavior** -Teach by example (Lickona, 1983)
- **Implementation of a democratic open family discussion and conflict resolution style**- Kohlberg's Just Community school approach (Power et al., 1989, Lickona, 1983).

Doctoral research findings

- The degree of emotional safety and care a person felt in the situation
- The ability to overcome self pre-occupation (temptation and deprivation) which was influenced by the level of respect towards other people and the degree of responsibility one felt towards others and oneself
- Critical to the learning process is the ability to reflect on and analyze one's feeling state and to consider in an empathic way the implications of one's actions for the other parties involved in the moral encounter
- The degree to which one could exercise a situational virtue seemed to provide the necessary impetus to finally act-on-judgement

Findings on moral learning

- **Evoking feelings of guilt and shame - insufficient cause to move a person towards moral action.**
- **Findings suggest that there are two interactive learning-cycles based on two different emotional (joy or sorrow) responses (emotional landscape) either**
 - **initially not acting-on-moral judgement**
 - **this cycle is based on a form of ‘restorative justice’ whereby a person, in order to overcome emotions of guilt and shame, needs to make amends by an act of restoration that repairs the wrong that has been done to another person**
 - **or consciously choosing to act on-moral-judgement**
 - **this cycle of learning centres on a conscious act to set a moral goal (patience, empathy) and work towards its achievement with encouragement and resultant feedback of a positive emotional state (peaceful, contented, happy)**

Making Wise Choices

Findings on moral learning

Map of Self

**Emotional state
as a feedback
loop**

Draw down from the **unknown** through
power of prayer, meditation, service,
music and the arts

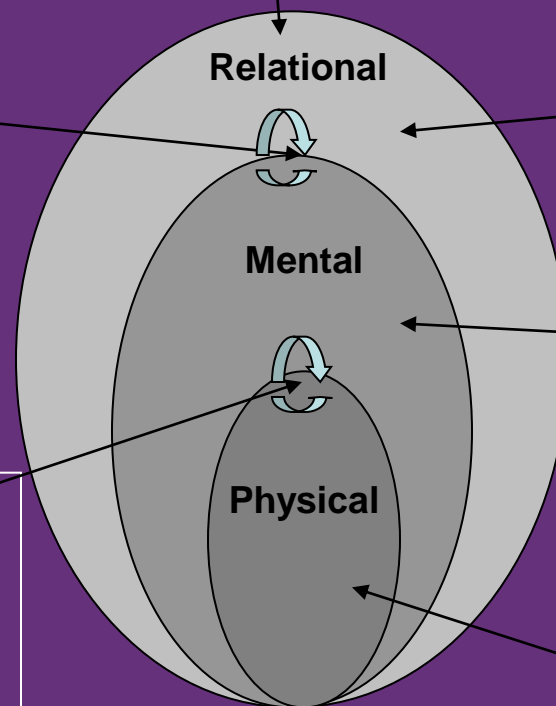
**Powers of each
level of being**

Spiritual Susceptibilities

Such as joy, happiness,
contentment and all the
virtues such as love,
kindness, mercy, sourced
from acting out of the
higher nature of
humanity

Natural Emotions

Such as anger,
frustration, depression,
anxiety, blame, shame
are all sourced from the
ego or lower or
instinctual nature of
humanity



Relational

Mental

Physical

Our capacity

to **know** (consciousness)
to **love**
to use our **will** or power of choice

**Imagination, thought,
comprehension and memory** which
we use to interpret our perceptions
gained through our interpretation of the
outer world

Perception of our environment
gained through our five senses
of sight, hearing, taste, touch
and smell

How does the brain learn?

- Under conditions of stress cortisol is released which freezes memory
- A relaxed, joyful and loving environment provides the best conditions for learning
- Learning to improve one's behaviour is supported by a process of facilitated reflection on action

- To discipline means - to learn
- To punish is - the wrong deed itself
- To reward is - the good deed itself
- Memory is patterned by emotions such as joy and **SORROW** (Damasio, 2003)
- The brains learns through feedback of trial and error
- (Jensen, 1998)

Therefore external rewards distort the natural learning process!

How do we learn to act morally?

In the same way we learn to read and write:

(Connectionist Theory - Churchland, 1996)

- Through Rhyme, Rhythm and Repetition.
- In behavioural terminology this means to be Consistent, Systematic and Repetitive.
- Guilt and shame will get our attention but we need to **reflect on our actions** and work out what to do differently next time to make all parties happy.

- We **create pictures** of how to respond on the front part of the brain (somatic maps)
 - -if we have not processed the information ourselves or seen the desired action, the brain will not have access to what to do next time.

(Churchland, 1996, Jensen, 1998, Damasio 2003)

- A safe and caring environment will support the memorisation of the desired actions.

Making Wise Choices

A model for learning how to choose



- Is appropriate to the age and mode of learning of the child
- Needs to integrate research findings
- Uses methods based on brain compatible learning
- Uses a reflective process
- Is systematic and sustainable
- Incorporated into day to day living

6 Steps for facilitated reflection

Step 1

- Share your story - Respectful engagement
Sara the Sharer no judgement



Making Wise Choices

Steps for facilitated reflection

- Step 2
- Open your heart - Validate the emotions

Freddy Feeling



Steps for facilitated reflection

Step 3

- Step into the shoes of the other - Empathy

Ellie Empathy



Steps for facilitated reflection

Step 4

1. In the wishing chair - What else could you do

Wanda Wish



Steps for facilitated reflection

Step 5

- The other side - Consequences –joy or sorrow

Charlie Choice



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Steps for facilitated reflection



Step 6

- In the mirror - Reflection
Theo Thoughtful



Rectifying and refining character -3 steps

Step 1

- Clear goals & **-Little by little, day by day** expectations (Name virtue or make a virtues correction)

Sunny



Rectifying and refining character -3 steps

Step 2

- Encouragement - **Spot the good**
(acknowledge the virtue)

Sunshine



Step 3

- Role modelling - **Follow in the Footsteps**
Saint & Angel (demonstrate the virtue)



- With the specially designed stories
- With stories that have a moral
- As a method of discipline (teachable moments)
 - Introduced step by step as the developmental stage presents eg
 - recognise facial expressions for each emotion
 - Match faces with the same emotions
 - Name the emotions
 - Name your own feeling in the moment

Benefits of model

- Based on love and clear expectations
- Removes power assertion over the child creating an emotionally safe environment
- Models a process of making moral choices
- Provides opportunities to reflect on action
- Develops child's capacity to think systematically and internalise the process
- Uses teachable moments
- Results in new moral prototypes being formed on the frontal brain
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