

## Child Guidance Work with Adlerian Techniques In Chicago<sup>1</sup>

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For the past six years The Community Child Guidance Centers of Chicago has been operating four child guidance centers, each one with a local board consisting of men and women interested in the Adlerian approach to child guidance problems, citizens who are well established in their communities. Delegates from these local boards belong to the general board of The Community Child Guidance Centers. Dr. Rudolf Dreikurs is the director of professional services, and there are three other counselors, each of whom is in charge of a Center. One social worker and one playroom director are on the staff, and attend the sessions at the various Centers. Other workers are trained volunteers who work under the supervision of the social worker and playroom director. These volunteer workers contribute their time and energy with the greatest enthusiasm and are remarkably efficient. Some are assigned to the playroom where the children, during the counseling sessions, are not only adequately occupied but observed by the playroom director, who reports his findings to the counselor. A few have been trained as "recorders" and take notes during the counseling session, which become part of the case history.

The first Child Guidance Center, patterned after the *Erziehungsberatungsstellen* in Vienna, was started in 1939. Dr. Curtis Reese, a former Unitarian minister, and head resident at Abraham Lincoln Centre, was greatly interested in the Adlerian approach to child guidance; a pioneer spirit, Dr. Reese invited Dr. Rudolf Dreikurs to establish the first Center at the Abraham Lincoln Settlement House, in a densely populated Negro neighborhood in Chicago.

The name "Center" instead of "Clinic" was chosen because we do not want to give the impression that we are dealing with sick children. Our work with parents and children is mainly educational. We not only re-educate the parent and the child; we counsel the whole family. In helping the specific family that comes for aid, we help the school and the whole community as well.

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We invite to our child guidance centers, families, school principals and teachers from the immediate neighborhood, to discuss the problems of a specific child and to deal with family problems. The mother, and sometimes the father of the child who is maladjusted, joins a group of other mothers, fathers, and teachers, gathered together in the counseling room. The children are in a playroom next to this room, under supervision.

The counselor is seated at a table facing the group; next to him is the recorder who takes notes during the counseling session.

Usually two cases are scheduled for a session. The social worker has prepared a report based on an interview with the family. The family constellation, economic situation, living conditions, as well as the specific problem of the child who is in need of help, are stated in this record. The counselor starts the counseling session with this record before him.

The group takes a passive role at first, listening while the parent expresses his or her problems with the child. Usually it is the mother who comes, the father being at work; however, once a month an evening session is held so that both parents can attend. The counselor invites the mother, who has sat in on some of the previous sessions, to bring out her story fully. She usually feels free to speak about her difficulties with her child. The counselor offers explanation as to what the difficulty in the family situation might be. The other members of the group begin to participate in the discussion. They ask questions referring to the case as presented by the mother. The counselor leads the discussion, explaining to the mother the difficulties of the particular family constellation and also answering questions which other mothers or teachers ask. The questions of sibling rivalry, of punishment and reward, social integration, over-protection of the child, school problems, etc., are discussed.

The parents of the child begin to see an entirely new approach to their problem. They are encouraged; they feel that they are not alone with their difficulties, since many other parents seem to be having the same or similar problems. After discussion of the problem in the light of the parent's revelations, the counselor asks the parent to leave the room. Then the child, or all the children in the family, if there are more than one, are brought in. The group in the counseling room is asked, before the children enter, to refrain from any remarks or any demonstration of approval or disapproval in the presence of the children.

The children are seated on the bench facing the counselor and the group. It is important to observe the child as he enters the room, alone, or with his brothers and sisters; to notice the way the children seat themselves on the bench; to note whether one of them pushes another in order to be foremost. Sometimes the oldest, youngest, or middle child of a family will take a "back seat"; he is pushed out by the others, and it is apparent immediately why this particular child has so many adjustment problems. The counselor endeavors to make the children feel at ease by saying in effect, "You probably wonder why all these people are sitting in the room and listening to you. You see, they all have children, or are very interested in children and they want to learn how they can help their own children to be happier." That also introduces the next question, which the counselor directs to the child who is singled out by his siblings as the "dumbest," or the "bad" child: "Are you happy?" The counselor observes the facial expression of the child; he listens not only to the answer—which often is not honest—but studies the expression on his face by which the child may reveal his true feeling.

After a few minutes in which the children are observed closely as a group, the child who seems to have the most problems is asked to stay in the counseling room, when this seems advisable, and the other children return to the playroom. The counselor, after a little further talk with the child, now interprets to him his life style and his fictitious goals.

A typical remark might be: "Don't you think, Joe, that you always have to be the first? You are racing continuously with your brother. You throw temper tantrums and you fight so much because you really feel so little and weak and you have to show everybody that you are the boss." The child may deny this, but the counselor frequently observes a give-away look in his eyes, or often catches a grin or a big smile on the child's face, which shows that the counselor has "hit the nail on the head." (Dr. Dreikurs calls this the "recognition reflex.")

The younger child is reached with simpler language and understands that the counselor is trying to help him. The child goes back to the playroom and the parents return to the counseling room. The counselor, after having seen the children, is now able to explain the behavior of the child who causes trouble and is maladjusted. Usually at this point, the playroom director gives a report of his observations of the child. The counselor then makes recommendations to the parent, with the caution not to expect too much in the beginning. Explanations

are made that when the pressure which was used in the past is removed by the parent, the child may try even harder to deal with the parents on the old terms. The child who is greatly discouraged expects only punishment and at the same time provokes it. It will take some time, the counselor explains to the parents, before the child learns to believe in himself enough to get along without the usual pressure from the parents. Positive attention, encouragement, and acceptance will in time replace the mixture of pressure, punishment, and pampering which parents usually practice on their children.

The case is then scheduled again to be considered in two weeks. Very often, after the first interview, we see a great improvement in the attitude of the parents and an improvement in the child. The mother is asked to come every week, even if she has no individual interview. By sitting in the audience, listening, and taking part in the discussions, she is engaged in the training process of re-education. Sometimes the teacher of the difficult child is invited to the conference and becomes an important helper in the readjustment. It will be seen that the techniques which we are using in the Child Guidance Centers in Chicago are Adlerian, varied to some extent in accordance with the American setting. The following case may show the results which our Adlerian child guidance techniques were able to accomplish in a rather short time:

*Case 371—L - - , Sheila, 10, Arthur, 7, Bobby, 4*

Mrs. L. was advised to attend one of our Child Guidance Centers by the principal of the elementary school which her ten-year-old daughter, Sheila, was attending. Mrs. L. was first interviewed by the social worker, who reported that the family belonged to a lower middle-class group, that Mr. L. works for a supermarket and supports the family adequately. They live in a small apartment. Mrs. L. appears to be the "boss," is very ambitious, and puts a great deal of pressure on her children. Sheila, the oldest child, has a great many problems at school and at home. The second child, Arthur, is a "good" child, six years old, and the "baby," four-year old Bobby, is the "little charmer." Sheila is a real tomboy who does not want to wear dresses, and fights to wear only overalls and jeans. She is extremely defiant, neglects herself, and fights her mother, her brothers, the teachers, and all her classmates. She has no friends. At the time the mother came for help, Sheila was resorting to delinquent behavior. For instance, one day when her

mother left the house to go shopping, Sheila called the fire department. When her mother came home, she found a fire engine arriving in front of the house. Sheila said she did this only as a "joke." Severe punishment by the mother and father followed. The result was more defiance on Sheila's part. Scenes and battles between the mother and Sheila raged in the home. The two younger children did not show any difficulties at that time. This was Mrs. L.'s story when she first came to the Center.

Mrs. L. sat in the group for a few sessions. When she was finally scheduled for interview, she brought out all her complaints in a rather compulsive way. The social worker, who had seen Mrs. L.'s children, had the impression that Sheila was a pre-psychotic child. After hearing Mrs. L.'s story, and after some members in the group had added their impressions, the counselor tried to win over Mrs. L., who seemed not only extremely disturbed about Sheila's behavior, but also very hostile toward her. She was a perfectionist who put her prestige as a mother in the foreground and so was disappointed with Sheila. She had been called to school repeatedly and was ashamed and angry to hear what a behavior problem Sheila really was.

Having gained some insight into Mrs. L.'s own problem as a mother, the counselor called the children into the consultation room. Mrs. L. left the room at that point. Sheila seated herself with her back to the counselor, with an extremely wild, defiant look on her face, apparently expecting the worst punishment and criticism. Arthur and Bobby sat together like "little angels." Poor Sheila was completely isolated in her defiance.

Our teacher, Adler, often said about such children, "They live in a land of enemies." Sheila gave the impression that she felt that way; she seemed to see the counselor and the members of the group as sitting in judgment upon her. "We all want to help you, Sheila. You don't seem to be happy," was one of the counselor's first remarks, after the two younger children were taken back to the playroom. Sheila was very slow in warming up to the counselor, but later, after but three visits, she brought up her first remark that showed her great disturbance: "Mother always nags me; she hates me."

In succeeding interviews with Mrs. L. we helped her to see Sheila as a very discouraged child who expected constant punishment, and provoked it. The two younger brothers, trying to please mother with being so "good," were too much competition for Sheila. The counselor interpreted to Sheila her life style and her wrong goals. "Sheila," she

said, "you think of yourself as the bad girl who tries to get mother to pay attention to you by misbehaving. You don't believe in yourself. You want to be worse than anybody else in order to feel stronger than the others; you can't believe that you can be as good as Arthur, Bobby, and the children at school. You are fighting Mother and everybody else. You really can make Mother mad, can't you?" To this remark Sheila responded with a big grin, and looked more defiant than ever; but we had seen the recognition reflex on her face. From this moment on, the counselor knew that Sheila had moved one step ahead. The mother learned gradually to remove the pressures from Sheila and to accept her unconditionally. She was more and more able to ignore Sheila's destructive behavior. She began to use the "bathroom technique" which the counselor recommended, as follows:

"Whenever it seems too hard for you to ignore Sheila's provocative behavior, remove yourself and retreat into the bathroom, stay there for a while; read a magazine, wash your stockings, anything, until you have cooled off. Sheila never should feel that you give her 'negative attention' like scolding, nagging, and punishing. Give her a great deal of positive attention; sit at her bedside for ten minutes every night before she falls asleep and have a cozy visit with her. That should be your new attitude toward her. It is a new training for you. Sheila will feel your acceptance and will gain encouragement and new self-confidence."

Mrs. L. accepted these recommendations, especially since the rest of the group agreed. After four sessions, the counselor saw some improvement. Sheila faced the counselor directly; her hair was combed, and she wore a dress instead of the old overalls. Another change was noticed by the counselor. Arthur, the good boy—Sheila's biggest rival—was getting into mischief now and then. It no longer "paid off" for him to be so "good," because Sheila was improving, and was more accepted by the mother. The counselor had interviews with Mrs. L. and the children twelve times, which included talks to the mother, to Sheila, and the two boys. The family came regularly once a week. The mother sat in the group and gained insight each time through listening to discussions with other mothers. As time went on, Sheila's behavior, as the playroom director observed, became better. After a few months, Mrs. L. told us how Sheila had volunteered to help with the household chores. Mrs. L. lost her antagonism toward Sheila gradually, and pampered the boys less.

The counselor, who also is in charge of a mothers' therapy group connected with the Centers, suggested that Mrs. L. join this group.

She came, and for a whole season was an active member of this group. Ten mothers, who were all members of our Child Guidance Centers, came to this group once a week. They were selected from our four Centers on the basis of their own personal maladjustments because it was felt that this extra therapy would speed up progress with the difficult child.

Mrs. L. was able to speak about her own childhood, her family constellation, and her own maladjustment toward life. The counselor saw Mrs. L. again at the Center after the summer vacation. The situation was much changed. Sheila looked like a different child; the unhappy, defiant expression on her face was gone; she looked neat, quite feminine, and very pretty. Mrs. L. had few complaints about Sheila, but now Arthur had difficulties at school and seemed more rebellious. The teeter-totter business,—one child improving, the rival becoming more difficult,—was at work. This process was explained to Mrs. L. Her basic attitude toward the children had changed so considerably that we knew she would be able to help Arthur gain his equilibrium. She also said that her husband, who had attended only two evening sessions during the year, was cooperating much more. She told us, at one of her last interviews at the Centers, how much happier their family life had become. They discuss many problems and plans at the family council which they hold regularly once a week.

One of our recommendations had been to start the family council, a truly democratic procedure, which is helpful when it is handled in the right way. The children are in charge. Each time one of them is the chairman and one the secretary, who takes notes. All plans for week ends, entertainments, toys, etc., are discussed. The parents have no more and no less to say than any one of the children. Chores in the house, bedtime, behavior problems, are brought up. Whenever the parents want to bring up an important point, they do not offer it with authority, but rather as posing a question. A discussion follows, the pros and cons are discussed, and a vote is taken by the members of the council, to reach a decision. The better the family relationship became, the easier it was for the "L" family to succeed in making decisions which satisfied everyone.

As the counselor who worked with the family, I feel that we accomplished a great deal in one year through regular interviews with the mother and the children, as well as through the participation of the group at the Center. Mrs. L.'s attendance at the mothers' therapy group added to the improvement. Sheila, who was on the verge of de-

linquency, became a happy child and accepted her role as a girl. We have now an excellent prognosis for her development. The two younger brothers are acting like normal boys. The mother is able to give up some of her need for prestige and can see her family in much truer perspective. Her marital relationship has improved also.

The case of Sheila is only one out of many in which we were able to rehabilitate with the tools which Alfred Adler, our unforgettable teacher, gave us. We find that the Adlerian techniques are extremely useful in child guidance work. More and more parents and teachers are following our methods, and although there were times during our fifteen years of child guidance work when the difficulties and obstacles seemed unsurmountable, we have been and are now greatly encouraged and enriched in our work in Chicago.