

# The 4 Goals of Positive and Negative Behavior

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One does not lightly propose changing or adding to the major postulates of Dr. Rudolf Dreikurs. His principles and techniques have stood the test of time with most having been in print since 1948.<sup>10</sup> A growing unrest about his Four Goals of Children's Misbehavior indicates, however, that a reexamination of this part is needed. There is precedent for such action because Dr. Dreikurs continuously restated and refined his concepts. In 1963 he added "logical" to his natural consequences statement. In the early 1960's he was adamant that his Four Goal technique applied only to children but in 1963 he announced that he was including adolescents and adults.<sup>14</sup> Since the treatment was different he chose not to include them in the regular Four Goal statement. Later in his posthumously published "Private Logic" in 1973, he urged that short term goals of adults be examined during therapy.<sup>16</sup> It should be made clear these were not limited to his four goals of Attention-getting, Power, Revenge, and Assumed Disability. He maintained to the end of his career that he never found any need for other goals for children under age eleven.<sup>12</sup> Dr. Dreikurs seemed not satisfied with his name for the Goal IV, Assumed Disability. Sometimes he called it "Display of Inadequacy" and at other times just plain "Give-up". Even though Dr. Dreikurs has said he has found all of the essential elements for his work, including the Four Goals, in Adler's writings, it must be conceded he introduced some unique innovations.

## Four Goal Dissatisfactions

Complaints have come in that the wrong emphasis occurs in study groups due to the Four Goals dwelling upon misbehavior. No corresponding presentation is made of children's good behavior. The reasoning is simple; if Attention-getting is misbehavior, parents take counter-action by not responding — and the child feels rejected. Power is a mistake so the parents confuse firmness with power — and train a young tyrant. Some parents look for goals of misbehavior where there are none because it is in the study group assignment. Parents ask, "Don't children have any other goals than misbehavior?" Try to explain what other goals they have. A disturbing number of parents have said they were happier before they began Dr. Dreikurs' methods. It is true that he is misunderstood and misapplied, but perhaps the single concentration in misbehavior found in the Four Goals statement contributes to the problem.

Numerous people have attempted to do something about it. Some have been helpful and others have added new confusions. Perhaps it started in 1960 when Bullard added to the Dreikurs' Four Goal chart a list of "social interest" items<sup>5</sup> and then assembled examples of all sub-goals<sup>6</sup> from Dreikurs' writing. Dewey<sup>8</sup> placed these in little boxes on a chart; behavior, no longer identified by

purpose, was mechanistically prelocated on a chart. Marlin<sup>15</sup> added a fifth goal of "belonging", a useful designation, but not a short-term goal at all. Another person, who wrote a book, attempted to simplify the whole thing by simply having two good "Useful" goals and two bad "Useless" goals. Fortunately, he was persuaded not to improve upon Dreikurs. Another article was submitted for publication in the Individual Psychologist in which the word "defeat" was proposed as the fifth goal. Needless to say, the Editorial Board was not enthusiastic about this discovery. Swenson<sup>17</sup>, the school psychologist, made one of the better contributions with an excellent statement on recognition of positive and negative four goals. But even this still had the problem of dumping all behavior into the extremes of very good behavior or very bad behavior.

With this background of unrest and miscellaneous attempts at change my own proposal is presented.

### THE PROPOSAL

Introduce a new concept in identifying the short-term goals or purposes of children's behavior as defined by Dr. Dreikurs. Discontinue the over-all title of FOUR GOALS OF CHILDREN'S MISBEHAVIOR:

Use a new title:

### THE FOUR GOALS OF POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE BEHAVIOR

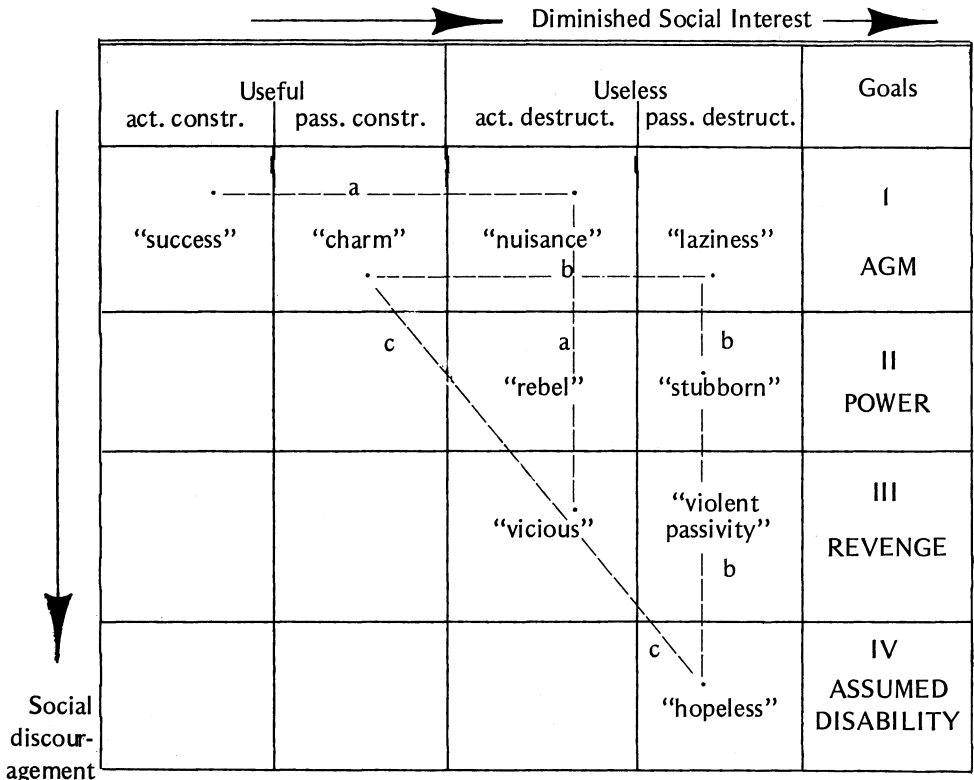


Chart I

(Dreikurs' original Four Goal Chart)  
From: Psychology in the Classroom

Family Guide to  
THE FOUR GOALS OF POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE BEHAVIOR

GOAL LEVEL	NEGATIVE BEHAVIOR				ACCEPTABLE BEHAVIOR		POSITIVE BEHAVIOR (with social interest)		GOAL LEVEL
	"Useful"		"Useless"		NEUTRAL		active	passive	
	act. con.	pass. cons.	act. des.	pass. dest.	nega- tive	posi- tive			
1	-----								

**IMPLICATIONS:**

1. All behavior, both good and bad, is included in this Four Goal Chart.
2. The section "Negative Behavior" is Dreikurs' Four Goal Chart unchanged.
3. Two more areas have been added to make up this chart - POSITIVE and ACCEPTABLE.
4. POSITIVE refers to activities and attitudes in line with Adler's Social Interest.
5. ACCEPTABLE refers to children who have been given the opportunity to learn to take care of their own needs and are quite self-sufficient. They, on occasions, exhibit unusual concern for others and at times resort to the misbehavior goals. Largely, they are pursuing their studies, their recreation and "growing up".
6. If in examining the family constellation, one child is in the misbehavior goals, and another child is excessively "good" and "useful", very careful examination of the purpose of the goodness must be made. If it is to keep the problem child in the negative behavior area, then the true place of the "good" child should be in the NEGATIVE Four Goal area as described by Dreikurs.

Positive goal section of New Four Goal statement

(with social interest) POSITIVE BEHAVIOR		GOAL LEVEL
Active	Passive	
"Caught being helpful"	"Caught being good"	I ATTENTION GETTING
Determined altruistic "doing"	Self-discipline; resists antisocial pressures	II POWER
Reciprocates benevolent acts for antisocial acts	Retains cooperative attitude in face of aspersions	III PAY BACK
Physically withdraws for reconsideration	Contemplates next approach	IV ASSUMED DISABILITY

**IMPLICATIONS:**

1. Exact limits of the **POSITIVE GOALS** are not defined; nor were they in the negative or misbehavior goals. Degree of Social Interest is the criterion.
2. Examination of positive behavior is made, not to determine degree of goodness, but to detect pseudo goodness used for personal superiority.
3. The **POSITIVE GOALS** do not have discriminating emotional responses identifying them as the **NEGATIVE GOALS** do.
4. Key words were not readily found for the different goal levels; it is more important to sense the qualities of a given level because continuation is to be encouraged.
5. The more highly the social interest is developed the less likely the person will be aware of his standing in this positive goal level. He does not evaluate and make comparisons with others.
6. There is a minimum of progression thru the goals; each manifestation occurs according to the situation. One does not have more value than another.
7. Display of this goal level without sincerity is disturbing to others.

Acceptable goal section of new Four Goal statement

ACCEPTABLE BEHAVIOR		
Negative (minor)	ACCEPTABLE BEHAVIOR	Positive (minor)
Seeks recognition	INDEPENDENT BUT CONSTRUCTIVE ATTITUDES AND ACTIONS	Concern for others
Selfish activities - attitudes	Actively independent SOCIALLY ACCEPTABLE ACTIVITIES AND ATTITUDES	Socially desirable activities and attitudes
Retaliates	IGNORES DISPARAGEMENT AND HOSTILE ACTS	Retains benevolence for aspersions
"Give up"	WITHDRAW FOR RECONSIDERATION WITHOUT ENCOURAGEMENT OR DISCOURAGEMENT	Constructive withdrawal

**IMPLICATIONS:**

1. This "acceptable goal" section is considered the most important section of the three part goal chart. It describes the way people live, and probably the way they should live.
2. Children in the **NEGATIVE GOALS** will be pulled up into this section. The focus of the family is on fun, cooperation and mutual respect rather than on fighting the goals of misbehavior.
3. Members may achieve the **POSITIVE BEHAVIOR** goal section without noticing it; it is a by-product of the total family living.
4. In fact there is a neutral quality about a well-adjusted family. Each has strength, self-reliance, courage, and the opportunity to make mistakes.

5. There are minor elements of each of the other two goal areas, but predominantly each is busy with family and personal responsibilities.
6. Observance of the standards of this section curb the "perfectionist" and deter the fault-finder.
7. The implications of this section are identical with much of Dr. Dreikurs' teachings: The Courage to Be Imperfect; How to Get Along With Oneself (I am pretty good as I am); accept the child as he is; great expectations often produce little results; over-protection pushes a child down, and many others.

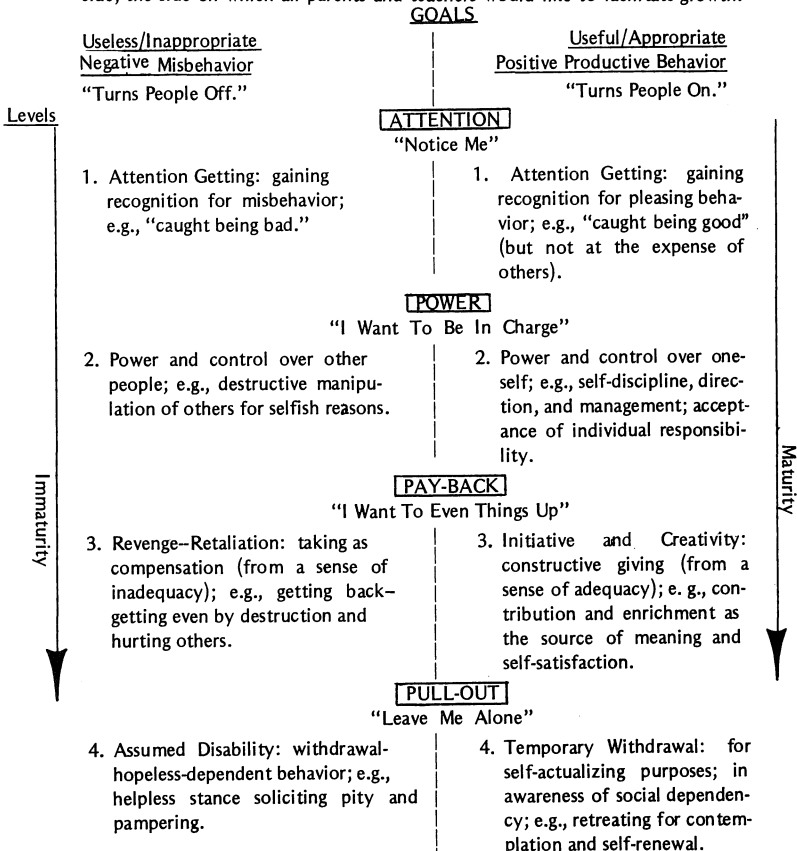
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#### FOUR GOALS OF BEHAVIOR

##### GUIDING PRINCIPLE: RECOGNITION

All children and people need to feel that they are important to, and needed by others. This need and consequent striving to be recognized is a primary motivational dynamic in human behavior. We all must be in a relationship with others in order to have and maintain our identity. It begins by "finding place" within the family constellation.

Rudolf Dreikurs outlined the four goals, or levels, of useless misbehavior. It seems logical to assume there are analogous goals on the positive or useful side; the side on which all parents and teachers would like to facilitate growth.



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## FOUR GOALS OF BEHAVIOR

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Inappropriate "Turns People Off"	Appropriate "Turns People On"
<b>ATTENTION</b> "Notice Me"	
Talking Out -- Noisy Name Calling Teasing -- Showing Off Bugging	Raise Hand Quietly Wait Your Turn Speak Politely Fair Play -- Follow Rules
<b>POWER</b> "I Want To Be In Charge"	
Bullying -- Bugging Bossing -- Arguing Sucking People In Pushing People Around	Do Own Work Ignore Bugging Self-Control-- Keep Your Cool Don't Get Sucked In
<b>PAY-BACK</b> "I Want To Even Things Up"	
Stealing Fighting -- Hitting Getting Even Revenge	Returning A Favor Helping Someone Out Returning Borrowed Things Paying Money You Owe
<b>PULL-OUT</b> "Leave Me Alone"	
Poor Sport Lazy & Day Dreaming "I Can't" -- Holding Out Crying -- Sulking	Ignoring Bugging Time Out Resting -- Relaxing Keeping Out of Trouble

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Developed by the Intermediate Behavior-Learning Problem's Class at Roosevelt School, Fall, 1973, in class meetings after being introduced to, Four Levels of Behavior, Positive & Negative.

TEACHERS: Jane Hanrahan & Jerry Borgens

These are literal translations of the Four Goals of Positive and Negative Behavior by children in this class.

A Family Guide to										
THE FOUR GOALS OF POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE BEHAVIOR										
Get out of here →				Family lives here →			Allow individuals to develop here			
Goal	Useful		Useless		ACCEPTABLE BEHAVIOR			POSITIVE BEHAVIOR (with social interest)		GOAL LEVEL
	act. constr.	pass. constr.	act. destruct.	pass. destruct.	Negative (minor)	NEUTRAL	Positive (minor)	Active	Passive	
I ATTENTION GETTING	"success"	"charm"	"nuisance"	"laziness"	Seeks recognition	INDEPENDENT BUT CONSTRUCTIVE ATTITUDES AND ACTIONS	Concern for others	"Caught being helpful"	"Caught being good"	I ATTENTION GETTING
II POWER			"rebel"	"stubborn"	Selfish activities - attitudes	Actively independent SOCIALLY ACCEPTABLE ACTIVITIES AND ATTITUDES	Socially desirable activities and attitudes	Determined altruistic "doing"	Self-discipline; resists antisocial pressures	II POWER
III REVENGE			"vicious"	"violent passivity"	Retaliates	IGNORES DISPARAGEMENT AND HOSTILE ACTS	Retains benevolence for aspersions	Reciprocates benevolent acts for antisocial acts	Retains cooperative attitude in face of aspersions	III PAY BACK
IV ASSUMED DISABILITY				"hopeless"	"Give up"	WITHDRAW FOR RECONSIDERATION WITHOUT ENCOURAGEMENT OR DISCOURAGEMENT	Constructive withdrawal	Physically withdraws for reconsideration	Contemplates next approach	IV ASSUMED DISABILITY

**GUIDELINES:** Let the "Acceptable Behavior" area be the objective as a standard for daily living. "Positive Behavior" means near perfect behavior and comes as a bonus for perfecting family living at the more realistic "Acceptable" level. Given encouragement and cooperation, any individual may advance into the "Positive Behavior" area according to his interpretation of the situation. No one can do it for him. In the "Negative Behavior" area, an additional element is added; the parents may have to discontinue wrong methods. But even so, they should look ahead to the "Acceptable" relationships and "win" the children into that area. These GOALS OF BEHAVIOR apply to children and adults; adolescents and adults have additional short-term goals.

## AN EXAMPLE

You have seen and listened to the proposal for expanding the scope of short-term goals. Allow me to illustrate this in a lighter vein.

No one was a better example of the FOUR POSITIVE GOALS than Dr. Dreikurs, himself. First he was a POSITIVE ATTENTION GETTER par excellence! With 500 persons waiting for a family counseling demonstration he would make the majestic entrance five minutes late, to the relief and applause of his audience. If he noticed standing room for 25 more he would say, "Maurie, where are the rest of them?"

He had great courage and corresponding POSITIVE POWER. He was unflappable in the face of adversaries and, I believe, a bit bored by lack of challenge. He seemed to never understand his own use of power, denying it as synonymous with autocracy - a quality he was dedicated to remove from the human race.

Almost without exception, after he had his class thoroughly indoctrinated he would raise the question, "How many of you think I am autocratic?" Invariably, 60% to 80% would raise hands, including me, his paid assistant, saying yes. And always came a good-natured roar, "No!" And then he would carefully explain why we were wrong. But as I think of it now, in this instance at least, he was right. He was paid to come out West and present his and Adler's methods. We had the right to disagree or reject without penalty. Fortunately for all of us he was convincingly powerful in spreading social interest as a way of life. Use of negative goal three, PAY-BACK was a waste of time and particularly in his later years of life he was more patient and persuasive with his critics. He had a marvelous attitude in relation to Goal IV. When going into a venture which seemed to have little possibility for success he would quietly say with finality, "We will see how it goes." If it did not go well he merely backed off and was already thinking of the next challenge.

## OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

1. Whether this extended goal statement gets any place or not depends upon its reception in the field. For those who do not wish to use it, the original chart is still available and valid as ever.
2. It should be noted that in the new chart much more emphasis has to be placed upon purpose of behavior. An unfortunate trend had taken place of mechanistically placing given behaviors in little sub-goal boxes. When possible purposes were examined each word could have been in several boxes.<sup>8</sup>
3. This statement of short-term goal directed behavior may be more compatible with Adler's system. At the best it was unfortunate that Dr. Dreikurs found it necessary to use the term goal when by long custom it had a different meaning as a component of the Life Style. But this extension of short-term goals to include all behavior may eliminate some of the conflicts. Both Alfred Adler, and his very competent interpreter, Kurt A. Adler, have consistently stated that the pattern developed in early childhood, according to how the child interprets his situation, gradually



becomes his life style.<sup>18</sup> Since the only goals included by Dreikurs were those of misbehavior it is understandable that many traditional Adlerians could not accept the literal statement of the Four Goals which is in popular use. The inclusion of all children's behavior within the newly stated short-term goals, thus making it the genesis of the life style, may be acceptable to the followers of both Adler and Dreikurs.

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