

COUNSELING A BOY: A DEMONSTRATION^{1, 2}

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Before we start I should like to make some comments. What I am about to do is unusual for me. When there are problems with a child, we normally work with the whole family—the father and mother, and also brothers and sisters who often have a much greater influence on the development of the personality than the parents. Thus, if a child has problems, I would work with the family. On the other hand, the school counselor works with the children individually, sometimes even without calling the parents in at all.

We have, however, thought—and a start has already been made in Israel—instead of having a center for the guidance of parents, to have a center for children to find out what to do with their parents and teachers. Thus interviews with the child alone will become more frequent. But, to repeat, this is not characteristic of the Adlerian approach.

I am fully aware that at this meeting here there are many with a different orientation, and it may be very difficult for some to understand and to approve of this demonstration. There will probably be one rather frequent complaint, namely, the danger of an interview without follow-up. As it happens, in our two cases this morning, there will be follow-ups, in that both are presently in treatment with another counselor. But I want to state very emphatically: It does not do any harm if there is no follow-up. If what we have done has no effect, we do not need a follow-up. If it has an effect, this is worthwhile in itself. The patient knows more, and one never can tell how much he has gotten out of an interview.

Many with a different orientation call our approach a stunt, not believing that one can accomplish anything of significance with a child by what I did this morning. But we know from experience that sometimes children remember for the rest of their lives the first time they encountered somebody who could explain to them why they

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²Comments addressed to the audience are in large type; the interview proper is in small type.

³Since Dr. Dreikurs was ill at the time Mr. Robert L. Powers sat beside him during this demonstration. Mr. Powers made some comments toward the end.

are doing what they do. For example, a boy may have been convinced, "I am a bad boy," so long as he did not realize how he gets involved in a power conflict.

Our job is to help a child to understand his problems. We may understand more, or understand less, but no harm can come from our attempt. One of the most devastating aspects of present psychiatric, psychological, and social attitude is this horrible fear of what we might do to the client. We must stop being afraid. We are convinced that whatever we have to offer, the child may do something positive about.

DR. D.: Now, what is your name?

BRUCE: Bruce.

DR. D.: And how old are you?

BRUCE: Twelve years.

DR. D.: I heard you wanted to talk with me. Right?

BRUCE: I wanted to meet you.

DR. D.: Just to see me?

BRUCE: Yeah, I never met you before.

DR. D.: You just want to sit there and see me talk? Do you want me to talk about you and your problems?

BRUCE: Fine, do what you planned to do.

DR. D.: No, I think you must have something in your mind. Did you think I would ask you about your problems when you came here?

BRUCE: Uh, I don't know what you planned to do. I've never actually been counseled, except with Mrs. Rosenberg.⁴

DR. B.: Are you helped already? Now it is the same with me too. I want to understand what problems you have and to see whether I can help you to understand them and change them. Do you have any problems?

BRUCE: I think everybody does.

DR. D.: Will you tell us about yours?

BRUCE: Fine. I think that one of my main problems is that instead of turning kids on, since I have only one friend, I think that I turn kids off.

DR. D.: How do you do that?

BRUCE: Probably by aggravating them, making them mad somehow.

DR. D.: Do you do similar things otherwise too, besides with your friends?

BRUCE: Pardon?

DR. D.: Do you do it with your teachers too, with your parents, that you get them mad?

BRUCE: I don't think I do it with my teachers or parents . . .

DR. D.: No?

BRUCE: Maybe with my mother and dad.

DR. D.: What do you do with your mother and dad?

BRUCE: Let's see, uh, sometimes I do things like, uh, you know, I can't really describe it . . .

⁴Dr. Bina Rosenberg is an associate of Dr. Dreikurs.

DR. D.: Oh yes, you can; if you want to you can.

BRUCE: Let's see how can I say it, uh . . .

DR. D.: Are you ashamed to say what you are doing?

BRUCE: No.

DR. D.: You can openly talk, we can . . .

BRUCE: I can talk.

DR. D.: You're not afraid of me?

BRUCE: No.

DR. D.: Nor of them?

BRUCE: No.

DR. D.: You're not afraid of anybody?

BRUCE: No. They are just people. (*Laughter from audience.*)

DR. D.: Very well. Now tell me what you're doing with your parents?

BRUCE: Well, there is really nothing. Sometimes they get into fights and then I try to stop it.

DR. D.: You're a peacemaker?

BRUCE: Or else I get involved in it somehow or other, and then I get kicked out of it.

DR. D.: Don't you think your mother and father have any problem with you? If I would ask them, what would they say about you?

BRUCE: That I have no friends. That I can't keep myself, you know, I don't keep myself busy. Usually I'd ask my mother before my dad started to work. He's now a projectionist. But before, he had the complete weekends off. So I would, you know, ask him: Dad where are you going this week, you know. Every weekend.

DR. D.: Well that doesn't seem like much of a problem.

BRUCE: I don't know how to keep myself busy. That's about the way I am trying to say it.

DR. D.: Ah hah! Now may I make a guess why you can't keep yourself busy?

BRUCE: Well?

You see, here we have what I call a gold mine, a statement which requires immediate exploration, because there may be the opportunity of revealing something very important.

BRUCE: I think that the reason why I don't have many friends . . .

DR. D.: No, the question I asked was: Why can't you keep yourself busy?

BRUCE: I guess because I don't want to do anything without others with me, you know. I'm lonely.

DR. D.: Why?

BRUCE: Why? Because I have no brothers and no sisters.

DR. D.: And if you have no brothers and no sisters you should be lonely for life?

BRUCE: I mean like, I'm lonely, you know. I . . .

If I may, I should like to read here a statement by the teacher. It could be written by any one of the hundred thousands of teachers in

this country. Without the slightest understanding of what goes on, if you don't mind my saying this, the teacher had suggested: "Complete assigned work on time. Be present in reading class more. Study for tests. Stop daydreaming. Be more organized. Take more time in preparing assignments. Be in class on time." It is a wonderful plan, but who will carry it out I don't know. It is a tragedy when we encounter children, up to high school, up to college, who always had some troubles, and nowhere did anybody ever explain to them why they have these problems. And without knowing why, you can't do anything about it. Here is a wonderful opening for a strong statement. Why can Bruce not keep busy?

BRUCE: I wish I could answer that.

DR. D.: Would you mind if I tell you?

BRUCE: Fine, tell me, please do, I need help. That's what I came to you for.

DR. D.: No, you came only here to see me. Please. (*Long laughter.*)

BRUCE: Right!

DR. D.: In that case it wasn't true. Could it be that you can't keep yourself busy because you try to keep the other people busy with you?

BRUCE: That might be true.

DR. D.: You see, it looks to me that you are an only child . . .

BRUCE: That's true.

DR. D.: That you got all the attention, and for some reason you probably do a lot of things to keep people busy. That is what we call the goal of attention. As long as you can get the attention in a nice way, you are a wonderful kid—nice, pleasant, everything. But if you don't get enough attention in a nice way, you don't mind disturbing others, keeping them busy with you.

BRUCE: That's true. I do disturb people, I guess, because it does turn out that I get a bad reaction from that.

DR. D.: Now you don't mind that there is a bad reaction as long as there is any reaction.

BRUCE: I'd rather get a good one.

DR. D.: But you don't mind disturbing, and it is much easier to get attention by disturbing.

BRUCE: True. It is.

DR. D.: And that's what you're doing.

BRUCE: I guess, most likely true.

Now you see, it is actually a fact that he disturbs in order to get attention. Of course I can't prove it, but the discussion which I have with this boy this morning, can have a lasting effect on him when he now realizes that whatever he is doing is to show his power.

DR. D.: If you want to help yourself, I will give you some advice.

BRUCE: Please do.

DR. D.: Whenever you do something wrong, like provoking people, then say to yourself, "Aha, I want to keep them busy." Pinch yourself.

BRUCE: But sometimes I do it without myself knowing it.

DR. D.: Now I invite you to know it. I disturb your innocence. (*Laughter.*)

BRUCE: What?

DR. D.: You see, until now you could do all these things because you didn't know why, you were a helpless victim . . .

BRUCE: I'm not saying I was helpless.

DR. D.: There are two things you can do: You can get attention in a pleasant way, or you can do your job even if you don't get attention. But that you don't know; you always are trying to get attention.

BRUCE: I must admit that's why I came here. (*Long laughter.*)

DR. D.: Now you see . . .

BRUCE: I don't see myself. You see I have a friend who always makes personal comments. I think I'm taking up his practice, and if something comes along that turns out to be a little bit slow I try to liven it up.

DR. D.: And to liven it up you don't care whether what you are doing is pleasant or not.

BRUCE: Oh, I do.

DR. D.: Yes, you would like to.

BRUCE: I don't do any of that unless I think the people like me.

DR. D.: No, you don't mind that people don't like you as long as you keep them busy.

BRUCE: No, that is not true. I don't have anything to do with people that stay away from me. I stay away from them. If they don't like me . . .

DR. D.: You told me before, and I think you were right, that you can't make friends because you stir them up.

BRUCE: At times I do get them angry, or else at other times they might get me angry.

DR. D.: I don't want to argue with you. And do you know why I don't want to argue with you?

BRUCE: I'm not sure.

DR. D.: Because I am sure that nobody can win an argument with you anyhow.

BRUCE: Here I must agree. It's never turned out that anybody has won. (*Laughter.*)

DR. D.: That's right.

BRUCE: My mother and my dad and me are all stubborn, in the same sense.

You see, children can really catch on and can see that there are alternatives to them. We can now look at the statement from the teacher. Why does Bruce need special assignments? He should do all the things that he is supposed to do. Why should he?

DR. D.: You'd rather do what you feel like.

BRUCE: I feel that I should do it because it is assigned.

DR. D.: Yes, but you are not really doing it. We can't expect from you, that just because the teacher wants you to do something, you should do it.

BRUCE: Oh, may I ask, did you get that from one of my teachers?

DR. D.: Yes, yes. Now, the main thing is, do you think I could be right? That your trouble is that you always want people to be busy with you? Wherever you are?

BRUCE: I think that's true.

DR. D.: It is up to you whether you want to continue or not. You can change.

The important therapeutic feature in our cognitive approach is the so-called "Aha" situation. It means the patient suddenly begins to realize, "Aha, the doctor is right." We will improve only to the extent to which we are willing to say, "Aha here I go again."

BRUCE: But see, I'm going about it a different way, in the sense that I don't think that way is the right way, and that's why I'm coming to you.

DR. D.: Now do you think you will do what I say?

BRUCE: Yes.

DR. D.: I don't think so.

BRUCE: Well, I sure won't waste \$50 to see . . . (*Drowned by long laughter.*) If I wasn't here for free, it would cost a lot of money, and I wouldn't waste your suggestions and let them go up into the air.

DR. D.: Now I will tell you why I don't think you should accept my suggestions. If you would stop keeping people busy, you would feel normal.

BRUCE: That's true.

DR. D.: You wouldn't be the center. And you want to be the center, you want people to be impressed with you.

BRUCE: I don't want to be the center of attraction all the time; I want a little rest in between there too.

DR. D.: There's time enough when you sleep.

BRUCE: Yeah, that's good enough. And then when I'm playing with my friends I like to be quiet a little bit.

DR. D.: Yes, but you see, that is very difficult. You are a clever boy.

BRUCE: Thank you.

DR. D.: And all your life long you learned how to keep people busy—the teachers, parents, anybody.

BRUCE: I guess so.

DR. D.: Now to give all that up and to be like anybody else, that is not for Bruce.

BRUCE: Yeah, it is. If I could learn how to do it, I'd be . . .

DR. D.: Well you can do it, if you want to, but I don't think you will.

BRUCE: Uh . . . let's see, how can I put this? If you stayed here in Chicago and if I could see you again for free, I'd bet you that I'd be changed. Just because of this.

DR. D.: And if you can't see me for free, you can't change?

BRUCE: There you're wrong. Well, we can give you a report. Mr. Doe can give you a report.

DR. D.: Yes, I can hear what the outcome of our discussion is. But my job here is to open your eyes. You don't have to do these things. It is your decision

to be the center, it is your decision to upset other people, to keep them busy, and you are something special.

BRUCE: But what I'm wondering is, if I get a reaction out of a person, how do I get a good reaction instead of a bad one? I mean like . . .

DR. D.: Come on, you can't always get good reactions. For you the main thing is to get any reaction—good or bad, it doesn't make any difference.

BRUCE: See, I want to try to make friends instead of enemies and I think I've turned them into enemies instead of friends.

DR. D.: Do you want to have your own way?

BRUCE: At times, yes. I must admit I do.

DR. D.: Usually. Then how can you have friends?

BRUCE: But I'm starting to give in to them instead of me. I mean, in my sense it's giving in . . .

DR. D.: In your sense it's giving in. If you do the things the teachers and the friends want, you feel you are giving in. "I am something special."

BRUCE: Well I must admit everybody is special.

DR. D.: No, not everybody is. Many aren't, but you certainly are. You are different. You want to be different.

BRUCE: I don't really want to be different. I'd like to be like some other people, like my kids, like my fellow students in some senses and in other senses I wouldn't.

DR. D.: Yes, but I'm not so sure that you really find it easy, without saying: "Here I am giving in on something. I won't come in time. I won't do my assignment." And the more the teacher presses you, the more you get discouraged. "I can't do the things which the teacher wants. So I won't do it." Are you satisfied with yourself? Do you think you are good enough?

BRUCE: I'm very satisfied with myself, since I've proved to myself . . ., since I've done a couple exams and I've gotten a good grade on a lot of them, and so I'm pretty happy with myself.

DR. D.: That is worth the \$50 that you paid.

BRUCE: The \$50 I had in the bank, sitting in my account.

DR. D.: Anyhow, is there another problem? How about in the morning getting up?

BRUCE: No problem. I get up and I get dressed.

DR. D.: Is there anybody who has to wake you up?

BRUCE: At times, yes, because my dad always drives me to school, because I go early in the morning.

DR. D.: And who wakes you up?

BRUCE: My mother.

DR. D.: Does she have to wake you up several times?

BRUCE: No, once.

DR. D.: Uh, how about eating?

BRUCE: As you see, there is no problem in that.

DR. D.: There *is* a problem in it.

BRUCE: Yes. I'm fat.

DR. D.: Why are you fat?

BRUCE: Because I'm nervous. But I haven't eaten this afternoon, which proves I'm not nervous with you.

DR. D.: Aha. Now, may I tell you, may I guess, why you eat too much?

BRUCE: Because I get hungry, I guess. I don't know.

DR. D.: Well, that is your opinion. Do you mind if I tell you?

BRUCE: Fine, tell me, please.

DR. D.: Who makes a fuss when you eat too much?

BRUCE: My mom.

DR. D.: That's the reason why you eat. (*Laughter.*)

BRUCE: Right.

DR. D.: Now you admit it yourself. It is you who had the other opinion.

BRUCE: Uh, I have other techniques than that one to get her angry.

DR. D.: Let me hear some of your tricks.

BRUCE: Umm . . . "Mother do this, Mother do that for me."

DR. D.: Keeping her busy. "I want service."

BRUCE: I won't say I'm not like that. When I was younger they used to call me king of the Jews, but . . .

DR. D.: Ha, ha, ha. King of the . . . ?

BRUCE: King of the Jews. That's what they call Christ now, in *Jesus Christ, Super Star*.

DR. D.: You are King of the Jews. Nothing else but that will do.

BRUCE: I must admit that I don't think I am now (*laughter*) though people are treating me like that.

DR. D.: And that's the reason when they don't treat you like that, you may disturb them.

BRUCE: True. But . . .

MR. P.: They crucified the other one too. (*Laughter.*)

DR. D.: Now tell me, we have to come to an end, do you think you learned something today?

BRUCE: I do.

DR. D.: Honestly?

BRUCE: Honestly and truly. I think that my problem was that I tried to attract attention. You are telling me how not to attract; instead of go go go, do the opposite of the go, go, go.

DR. D.: Now the main thing is . . .

BRUCE: I mean, I pushed my way. Instead I've got to reverse that and let them push me.

MR. P.: Uhh . . . What Dr. Dreikurs is trying to say, Bruce, is that there are times when you can't stand it if you don't get attention. Everyone likes some attention, Dr. Dreikurs likes some, I like some. That's why I sit so close to him, and that's why we are all concerned that we all notice each other when we go places. But there are some times when we don't get it. The question is, can we stand it at those times? And he thinks, when you don't get it, you would rather have bad attention than no attention.

BRUCE: Yeah, bad attention rather than none.

MR. P.: Right. You feel that you're in danger, if you're overlooked, of being ignored, of being disregarded, that you won't count. You feel discouraged and frightened.

DR. D.: Yes. And before you change that, you have to learn to catch yourself. And the moment when you do it, say, "Aha, here I go again."

BRUCE: I don't think I should say that right out loud. The kids will call me a fool.

DR. D.: No, no I didn't mean telling the others; tell yourself.

BRUCE: Oh, you mean: "Aha, here I go again."

Now I want to ask a question. How many of you think that Bruce learned something fundamental today? (*Counting hands.*) How many of you doubt that he learned something? (*Counting hands.*) These are the different "religious" groups. (*Laughter.*)

BRUCE: What do you mean by that?

DR. D.: There are religions that have different beliefs—the Moslems, the Jews, the Christians. And so in psychology, there are also different religions—the psychoanalysts, the Gestalt people, the Adlerians, and so on. And each one of these religions has its own ideas, and they don't agree with each other. And all those who have not an Adlerian training, will find it difficult to believe that you really learned. They always say that this is superficial, and they can't understand it. And so we have to realize that at this stage there are different churches, different popes, different bibles, and there is the same confusion in psychology as in life.

BRUCE: Uhhh, may I ask you one question? I was sort of afraid of psychiatrists and psychologists. What makes a person this way? Is it a normal reaction for a person to get scared, like I was nervous when I came here.

DR. D.: Oh yes.

BRUCE: Then I calmed down.

DR. D.: When one doesn't know what will happen, we all get nervous. I appreciate your help and hope you got something out of this meeting.

BRUCE: Thank you very much. I've enjoyed it very much.