

Can **NLP** help support Children's Mental Health?

Nowadays, our younger generation seem to be facing greater pressure than generations before with Social Media bombardment, peer pressure, working parents, high divorce rates and constant testing at school.

This can have an impact on their mental health in many ways such as low self-esteem, lack of confidence, self-harming, eating disorders and sometimes even suicide. By nature teenagers tend to become more removed and less communicative in adolescence, just think of Harry Enfield's character Kevin Patterson, so it is sometimes difficult for parents to identify any underlying problems.

Neuro Linguistic Programming is used globally to improve the performance of individuals, businesses and has the power to facilitate immediate and lasting change to all who use it successfully.

Is it therefore possible to use these proven life and business changing techniques with our children? Will it have the same effect of helping to create lasting and positive changes in our children, as it has in other parts of our own lives?

Mark Shields explains...

The nature versus nurture debate is still discussed and debated today as regularly and often as ever. Children's habits and behaviour whether good or bad has either been accredited or blamed on the parents, or on the lessons they have learned growing up and the habits and behaviours that have been formed as a result of this.

Recently, researchers from the Queensland Brain Institute collaborated with researchers at VU University of Amsterdam to collate 2,748 studies involving more than 14.5 million pairs of twins. They were looking into the nature versus nurture debate and found the average variation for human traits and disease is 49% due to genetic factors and 51% due to environmental factors so this in fact shows that environmental factors make up over half.

Now, let us look at what three well known psychologists believed. Sigmund Freud found that *"all children's behaviors and habits were learnt from their parents and have little change after the age of eight years old"*. Whilst Carl Jung believed that *"we learn through life's experiences and events and our happiness is based upon how we react and handle certain situations and what we learn"*. Alfred Adler's beliefs are a mixture of both Freud and Jung's.

So how could this technique NLP work then? In a nutshell, NLP is the study of how we make mental maps inside our brain, how we use those maps to make sense of life and, especially how we communicate those maps with others.

Consider, for example, the child who is timid of others. This child's map (or template) will be based on an early experience. This means each time they go to interact with others, a set of responses are activated, which bring up the same set of uncomfortable feelings in each situation they find themselves. By using an NLP skill set, children can be taught how to change their maps, so they can gain confidence, or motivation, or overcome their fears. Properly taught, NLP is fast and profoundly powerful.

Even when two people witness the same event, they often have different opinions about what happened. That's because we design our own mental maps based on our own individual experiences of the world. Often those who have difficulty understanding others are simply operating from their map of the world.

The Benefits of using NLP with Children

Sometime ago, Channel 5 broadcast a programme called "I Can Make Your Child Brilliant" which used Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) and displayed profound changes in children's behaviour. NLP was shown to increase confidence, motivation and self-esteem in the children filmed.

The benefits for children are many from making smooth transitions into secondary school, feeling confident amongst their peer groups to communicating effectively in the classroom.

Just some of the things that NLP can help with:

- Conquer Fears & Worries
- Increase Confidence/Self Esteem
- Enhance Friendships & Communication
- Increase Motivation & a Positive Attitude
- Overcome Peer pressure & Bullying
- Overcome Anxiety/Panic attack

During the past several years we have supported many children in our private practice, for a multitude of problems. When working with children we have discovered that:

- 1) Change is rapid
- 2) Techniques are easily learned by the child. This enables them to carry the skills through life and use them in adult life
- 3) Children are very susceptible to change and quickly embrace the enjoyable experience of positive feelings, whilst adapting their lifestyles to reflect these favorable modifications

We have had children with sleeping problems overcome their fears in minutes. The rest of the session we would spend teaching them how to use their brains for change.

Parents too can benefit from a new set of skills to communicate more effectively with their offspring. From the use of choosing your language style to motivate your child to do those important things that they often seem to miss – like tidying up, to assisting them in overcoming obstacles, swiftly and effectively. Using these skills they can help teach your child to adapt to the future ahead in a positive more and resilient way.

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