The secret new parenting tool

Even before we became parents we probably had beliefs about what sort of parents we would be and what a good parent says and does. These are based on our own parents and our peers, on TV images of parents and celebrity culture, what we read in parenting books and magazines, what we learn in parenting and NCT classes and from the Internet.

Yet these beliefs can sometimes restrict our parenting choices. They limit not only our behaviour but also the behaviour of our children.

Examples of limiting beliefs are

“A good parent makes sure their child eats healthy food”

“A good mum breastfeeds her baby”

“A good parent doesn’t let her toddler dictate what they do”

“A good mum doesn’t allow a child to have a tantrum in the supermarket”

Other limiting beliefs refer to our own abilities and these can also be passed onto our children.

“I’m not good with maths”

“I’m shy around people I don’t know”

Think about your beliefs and ask yourself where they came from and whether by changing them you could have more choices in your parenting. Beliefs are not values. Beliefs are like believing in the tooth fairy, they can be changed by new experiences and increased knowledge. Here’s an example of how Chloe’s mum changed her beliefs and had a successful outcome.

*Four year old Chloe didn’t want to go to school and played up every morning yet she came home happy and had obviously enjoyed it. Her mum didn’t understand why she had temper tantrums and refused to go. It soon emerged that mum thought she was too young to go to school. She and her husband had started school at 6 and her belief was that Chloe should be at home playing rather than learning to read and write at such a young age. Her beliefs were transparent to her child and despite her words of encouragement, her voice tone and body language communicated her belief to Chloe. By looking at her values instead, the importance of Chloe mixing and socialising with other children her own age, she was able to change her belief and communicate this to Chloe who now goes off to school happily every morning.*

What is your belief in these types of situations? What belief would you need to have to get the result you want? Where else in your life do you have that belief? The belief you need in your parenting may be associated with your work life, social life or sports. You have the belief you need; you just need to apply it to the situation where you need it now.

*Catherine struggled to get Max to do his homework. He is 6 years old and is tired at the end of the day and doesn’t want to do it. They get so cross with each other over this that she loses her temper with him and the homework issue has become enormous between them. When she looked at her underlying belief that he should do his homework after school she realised that this was a limiting belief. Her value was that homework should be done but she was able to switch her belief such that he now does it in the morning before school when he is fresh and alert. It is done well and quickly with no fuss.*

How many of us, when our children are quietly playing nicely, take advantage of this and go off to make supper or make a telephone call? Suddenly there is a rumpus as the children bicker and fight and we reappear to tell them off. We are only giving them attention when they are in trouble and nothing is said when all is going well. Isn’t it easy to see how children associate attention with being noisy or boisterous? Instead, when they are playing nicely, give them lots of attention. **What you focus on is what you get.**

Knowing whether your child is visual, auditory or kinaesthetic is essential to effective communication. A visual child notices what he sees around him and responds best to visual words such as ‘Look’ ‘See’ ‘Notice’. An auditory child is aware of sound and responds to what he hears. He likes to talk and he remembers what is said to him. A kinaesthetic child wants to be active and they learn by doing. Recognise which language your child prefers and adjust what you say so that they understand better what you want of them. This way you will understand their needs and concerns as you will see in the three case studies below which are real case studies from my Kids Therapy practice.

*Joe is visual and he’s worried about going to ‘big school’. His dad can’t understand why, after all the new school has great sports facilities (Dad is kinaesthetic!) It emerged during his therapy session that Joe is visual and the reason he is worried is because he has no visual recollection of his visit to the school. There are no images in his mind, it is just blank and scary. Once they had taken him for an extended visit he was fine and he was able to appreciate the fine football pitch and the science labs that his dad liked and he also noticed the happy smiley faces of the children there which made him feel much better about going.*

*Nikki is auditory, she lives in a very noisy house, shares a room with her brother and shares the house with her younger cousins, their parents, her own parents and grandparents. The only quiet room is the prayer room and even that has music playing constantly. There are strict rules about use of this room which precludes her doing her homework in there. She is struggling with low confidence and can’t make her needs heard so she no longer tries and is sinking into depression. Her parents are concerned and can’t understand the problem, they are not auditory and barely notice the noise. After a few sessions Nikki found her voice and expressed her needs. As a result she now uses her grandparents’ room in the evenings when she needs some peace and quiet.*

*Max is a very lively 7yr old, he is kinaesthetic and reminded me of a puppy in the therapy room. He didn’t sit still for a minute! He experimented with sitting on various parts of the couch, the floor and the chairs. However, he was not, as his mum had feared ADHD. She is visual and her first son also. Max’s older brother loves to read and has no interest in sport so his mum had never been involved in all the outside school sports activities that Max needed. Also, as a middle child with a younger sister, there was little energy left for mum (whose husband was often working away from home) to explore these options. School choice was based on her first child’s needs and now mum is looking at moving Max to a more sporty school to suit his kinaesthetic needs.*

The theories I use in my therapy with children and parents are based on NLP which were developed by John Grinder and Richard Bandler and have formed the basis of management training in companies since the 60s. They studied how effective people communicated and developed their communication model which includes VAK and meta programmes.

Meta Programmes categorises how we process communication. The ones I find most useful with children are choices/process, towards/away from, big chunk/small chunk.

A choices child likes options whereas a process child just wants a plan of action. Giving a process child options can be overwhelming and giving an options child a plan without choices leaves them feeling resentful and uncooperative.

*Alice is ‘choices’ but until her mum realised this she was having trouble getting her to go to bed. Now she gives Alice a choice, not whether or not to go to bed of course! She asks her which cuddly she wants to take to bed or which book to take up to read and the process is much smoother as a result.*

Some children want details, we call this ‘small chunk’ and other want just a broad picture ‘big chunk’. A child wanting the detail can be daunted by general instructions and a child who wants the big picture will feel overwhelmed by detail.

*Lucy finds the ideas of homework quite daunting. Before she’s even opened her reading book she tells mum she can’t do it. Mum now knows she is small chunk and instead of just asking her to start her reading she asks her to open the bag, take out her book and reading record book and open the page. This was the right chunk size for her.*

Children usually know what they want and what they don’t want. When children talk about what they do want it is called ‘towards’ and when they say what they don’t want , this is ‘away from’. Notice which they use most often and encourage them to say what they do want as this is more positive and leads to children being confident. It also gives them the ability to reframe or rethink negative experiences and turn them into positive ones.

We will be most effective in our parenting if we have good rapport with our children and pass those skills on to them. Good rapport is all about matching. Have you noticed how when two people are having a really good chat they almost mirror each other? Their body language , tone of voice, language patterns and volume are identical. By matching that of our children we achieve this rapport. Once we have that, we are in a good place to influence what they do and are most likely to achieve the result we want from them.

However, when we see something we don’t like in our children we need to ask ourselves, how are we like that too? Our children are modelling us so we may be behaving in a similar way ourselves. How could we behave or communicate differently so we show them a different and more resourceful way to be?

You know how they say ‘mind the gap’ at the tube stations? I find that a useful guideline as a parent. When something happens that we don’t like

STOP

PUT YOURSELF IN THEIR SHOES

HOW CAN YOU GET A WIN WIN

COMMUNICATE IT IN THEIR PREFERRED VAK AND META PROGRAMME.

Have you heard of the feedback sandwich? This is a really good way to encourage the behaviour you want.

TELL THEM WHAT THEY DID WELL

WHAT WOULD BE EVEN BETTER

OVERALL WHAT YOU ARE PLEASED WITH

Here’s how it works in practice.

*Cath has trouble getting Sam out of the door to get to school on time. She is big chunk though and he is small chunk. She is visual and he’s kinaesthetic so she says ‘look at the time’(VBC) and ‘you’re not ready yet’ (VBC). After one of our parenting workshops she now says ‘put your shoes on’ (KSC) and then follows it up with a feedback sandwich ‘It’s great that you’ve put your shoes on and it would be even better if you could put your coat on as well, that’s great, you’re doing well this morning’.*

I found NLP an invaluable tool for parenting my four children and have written a Teach Yourself book published by Hodder Education called ‘Be a happier parent with NLP’ as well as a series of books for Parents, Children, New Mums, Back to Work, Teens and Teachers. They are called the Engaging NLP series. They are workbook style so you can write in them and learn NLP that you can immediately apply to your parenting. You can find out about my workshops and individual therapy on my website [www.engagingnlp.com](http://www.engagingnlp.com)

**Top 10 tips box**

1. **Focus on the positive behaviour and that’s what you’ll get more of. Ignore the rest.**
2. **Your child’s map of the world is different from yours. Step into their shoes and take a look.**
3. **If you always do what you’ve always done you will always get what you’ve always got.**
4. **Tell them what you DO want not what you don’t want. The word ‘don’t’ is a toxic word.**
5. **If you ask them to ‘try’ that’s all they’ll do. Ask them to ‘do it’ instead.**
6. **Children copy you naturally and unconsciously. Model the behaviour you want.**
7. **When a child says they ‘can’t’ do something, this is a limiting belief. What if they could do it, how would that be?**
8. **Match and mirror your child’s language patterns, tone and pace to build rapport.**
9. **Children need and want attention. Give it in a positive situation to reward the behaviour you want.**
10. **There is no failure, only feedback. Take the learning from every setback and do it differently next time.**