

The Value and Advantage of Planning

This training relates to any relationship and how planning can provide a positive way of assuring that a special time together can work out smoothly. In the following presentation the relationship is between a mentor and a mentee.

Planning is critical because it provides a framework within which the Responsible Adult and the Struggling Person are able to relate more easily. The structure of the framework is created collaboratively and agreed to in advance of any meeting with the setting of boundaries. Boundaries can be described within the following categories: Subjects for discussion, Activities, Time Frame, Risk/Safety Factors, Budget Concerns, and Transportation.

Planning allows the Responsible Adult and the Struggling Person to explore the meeting before hand, looking at all of the variables and coming to an agreement how best to deal with them. By collaborating on the development of the plan, the Struggling Person feels empowered and becomes more invested with keeping to the plan.

For people from dysfunctional families, continuity is rarely smooth flowing. By following the steps within the plan, the steps become reference points providing guidance leading to the goal of a successful and productive meeting. Just by staying within the plan the meeting is a success and communicates that both the Responsible Adult and the Struggling Person can follow through with an agreed upon commitment which in turn fosters trust. The formation of trust is the key element in any viable relationship and planning, and strictly adhering to the plan fosters this.

The following is an example of an initial planning session between the Responsible Adult and a Struggling Person. The Struggling Person in this example is a sixteen year old and is in the category of a Transitional Age Youth, (TAY).

Responsible Adult, "I've been looking forward to our time together because it gives me a good feeling to be able to share myself with someone. At this time we're going to make an effort to plan our next meeting. Here are some things I like to do. I like to go to movies, listen to music, go to the beach, and I like working-out. Still, I sure could use some help coming up with some more ideas for what we can do."

Struggling Person, "I like movies too. I also like going to the beach. I've never worked-out, but maybe that would be all right. Can we go to Disneyland? I like to shoot hoops too. What about you?"

Responsible Adult, "Yeah, shooting hoops is fun. About Disneyland. It's really a great idea. It's expensive though so to go there we will have to come up with a plan to save money and as we're just getting to know each other why don't we look at Disneyland in a few weeks. As to the other suggestions, it looks as though we have a number of things in common. I need some help deciding on what to do next time. We have a choice. We can either go to the movies or to the beach. I'm wondering what we should do."

Up to this point the Responsible Adult smoothed the social interaction by initiating the interaction by first sharing personal interests and then asked the Struggling Person for input/suggestions that would broaden their choices. By seeking suggestions rather than asking directly for input, the possibilities could be explored without risking an outright rejection. After listening to the Struggling Person's suggestions The Responsible Adult then provided two choices, yet asked for help deciding on which of the two activities would be best. The two suggestions were activities that matched both party's interests and therefore the Responsible Adult was in the position to agree to either choice. In this way the Responsible Adult was able to safely turn over to the Struggling Person the choice of which activity to do. This form of sharing power has the benefit of empowering the Struggling Person to express his/her interests yet at the same time this approach allows the Responsible Adult to maintain direction over the intended activity.

To continue on:

Struggling Person, "How about a movie?"

Responsible Adult, "Great. But I don't know what we should see."

Struggling Person, "How about The Campaign. It's with Will Ferrell and it's a comedy? I haven't seen that one yet."

Responsible Adult, "Hmm. That would be fun, still we have to ask your mom if that would be OK because I believe it is an R-17 rating."

Struggling Person, "Hey, I'm sixteen. They always take my money at the theater and in I go. Besides, my mom doesn't care what I see. She lets me see anything I want."

Responsible Adult, "Cool. Then when she says it's all right, off we go."

Struggling Person, "But she never lets me go to the coolest movies. Do we have to ask her?"

Responsible Adult, "That's a great question. I know it's tough when we have to get permission to do what we want. The reason we have to include her is because we're part of a team. You're a team member. I'm part of the team, and so is your mom. The only way a team can work together is when everyone is on the same page, when everyone is open and honest with each other. Still, I know it will be frustrating and disappointing if she says no. Hey, let's come up with a backup and choose a movie we know for sure that she won't have a problem with."

Struggling Person, "All right, but it's not fair."

So far in this example the planning has brought forth a number of issues. The Responsible Adult didn't challenge the Struggling Person's desire to see an R-17 movie. Instead the Responsible Adult guided the interchange with listening and support to the possibility of accepting a backup, which is age appropriate. Further, the Responsible Adult assisted the Struggling Person in understanding the nature of their relationship as being part of a team. In that way, they explored the importance of sharing honestly and working through conflict with alternatives.

Responsible Adult, "We'll be getting together on Saturday, and it won't be until Thursday that the local paper comes out with the preview of the weekend movies and the times that they are playing. I'll call you Thursday night and let you know what time I'm coming for you. Probably I'll come between 11:30 a.m. and 12:30 p.m. Also, let me tell

you that I have only enough money to pay to get in, and I won't be able to afford to pay for snacks because they charge so much."

Struggling Person, "My mom has money."

Responsible Adult, "Great, yet if she doesn't I can bring something from the convenience store. What should I get?"

Struggling Person, "I like chocolate."

Responsible Adult, "OK, I'll bring a chocolate bar if your mom can't help us out. Also, I'll have enough money to pay for two video games. One more thing. There's a rule that when we go together into the community that we aren't to let each other out of sight. Yet this isn't always possible. So, if I have to go to the men's room during the movie you got to stay in your seat until I come back. If you have to go, I'll have to wait in the lobby until you come out. It's nothing personal; it's just a rule. OK?"

Struggling Person, "You're kidding, right? You don't have to wait for me in the lobby. I'm not a little kid."

Responsible Adult, "Yeah, it might feel embarrassing. It has to do with liability. The rule is to protect everyone against problems that might happen. It's just something we have to do."

Struggling Person, "All right. No one will know you're waiting for me I guess."

Responsible Adult, "Thanks. That really helps."

In this section, the Responsible Adult is exploring with the Struggling Person strategies on very specific issues that if not worked out in advance can cause conflict at the moment. Discussing the budget, which includes the cost for getting into the movies, snacks and video games, paves the way for a smooth meeting. Discussing the liability issue of separating and losing contact as could happen should the Responsible Adult not wait for the Struggling Person in the lobby reduces the possibilities of upsetting problems.

When they get back to the Struggling Person's home they share with the mom about the choice of going to a movie. She had seen heard about The Campaign, and in this case she gives permission for the Struggling Person to see the movie. She says that she has money for snacks, and will give the Struggling Person five dollars. The Responsible Adult lets the mom know that he will call Thursday night around 8:00 p.m. to let her know exactly what time he will be there on Saturday to pick up the Struggling Person.

On Thursday evening the Responsible Adult makes the call and tells the mom that the pickup will be on Saturday at 11:30 a.m. and also she can expect a call on Saturday morning at 10:00 a.m. to confirm that everything is on schedule. The Responsible Adult then asks to speak to the Struggling Person to share the same information. This will give respect to the Struggling Person and this allows the Struggling Person to feel as a mature partner in the relationship.

This above example provides a good overview of the benefit of planning. Still there are other concerns that would be good to explore at this time.

In a long meeting, such as going to an amusement park, building in rest periods is very important. Adults as well as youth get burned out after extended activity, and rest periods help at regular intervals. Because the Struggling Persons have every day challenges that are causing them a great deal of stress, it is important not to add to that burden by engaging in activities that lead to physical and emotional exhaustion. It is not unusual for increasing tiredness to act as a trigger to various kinds of emotional behavior that can be difficult to manage. Thus planning the rest intervals is crucial to assisting the Struggling Persons to have a success when spending time with the Responsible Adult. This also applies to lengthy meetings with the family and support providers. Planning into the agenda rest opportunities helps maintain the collaborative effort that is so essential in a team meeting.

Furthermore in planning any outdoor activity it is important to consider the weather. Because weather is such a factor it is always a good idea to explore backup plans. A simple example of this in the case of exploring community resources such as going to the beach. It is important to explore in advance the question of what else can be done at the beach if the purpose of going is to surf or boogie board, and upon getting there it turns out there is no surf?

In review, planning supports the meeting. It reduces the possibilities of conflict. It provides structure and critical reference points to guide the Responsible Adult and the Struggling Person. It encourages collaborative interaction and joint responsibility. The plan also allows for a review of the meeting so that future meetings can benefit from such an endeavor. In addition, planning teaches living/social skills to the Struggling Person that fosters greater cooperation, trust and harmony in the home and isn't that a cool outcome?