

Empowering Kids Under Domination Structures

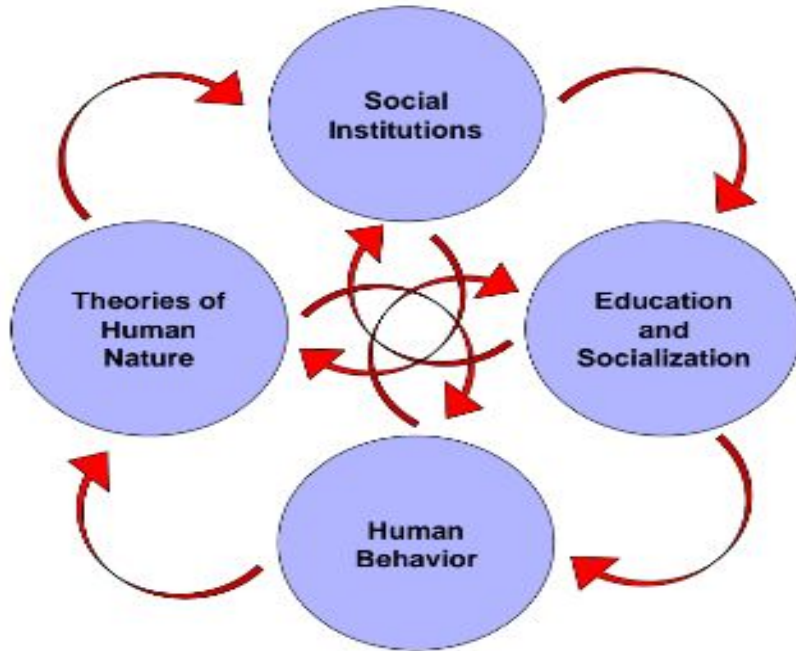
NVC Conference, 2023

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If we are to reach real peace in this world and if we are to carry on a real war against war, we shall have to begin with children; and if they will grow up in their natural innocence, we won't have to struggle; we won't have to pass fruitless idle resolutions, but we shall go from love to love and peace to peace, until at last all the corners of the world are covered with that peace and love for which consciously or unconsciously the whole world is hungering.

~ Gandhi

Marshall Rosenberg's Social Change Diagram




It all starts with our story about human nature...

- Every human society tells a “story” on who human beings are, and what life is about.
- Institutions and systems (like healthcare, education, economy, governance) reflect the story told in that society.
- Socialization: the process of preparing the next generation to function in the existing society.
- Based on how children are treated in the society, they learn to behave in ways that confirm the story (example: people don't ask for support because 'you don't burden others with your needs')



Domination-based societies

The story about humans:


- 'Sinners' - the story of Adam and Eve
 - Driven by unconscious, dangerous, ill motives (Freud)
 - Are separate and compete over scarce resources.
 - Greedy and selfish - would meet their needs regardless of the cost to others/the planet.
 - Are either winners or a losers - the winners take it all...
 - Fear based authority is needed in order to create and maintain order and safety.
 - People in authority decide what's right and what's wrong.
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How do you make humans “good slaves”?

In domination systems people are trained to think in ways that reproduce the power dynamic and maintain the domination system.


- **Moralistic judgments** - thinking in terms of right / wrong / good / bad - when you don't do what is expected of you (social norm) - you are bad/wrong, when you do what is expected of you are good/right.
- **Self judgment** - we are taught to hate ourselves when we are not doing what's right (shame, guilt) .
- **'Say sorry'** - take on the blame, make yourself wrong/bad and you may be forgiven.
- **Denial of choice** - we are made to believe that we don't have choice through the concepts of 'should' and 'have to'.
- **Deserve thinking** - if you are “good” you deserve a reward, if you are “bad” you deserve to suffer / be punished.

Domination-based socialization

- In the family and in the society at large, some people (parents and teachers, for example) have the authority to make decisions and others (children for example) are expected to obey those in authority.
 - Children get prepared for living in the society by learning to act based on extrinsic motivation:
 - Fear of punishment (don't get in trouble)
 - Desire for reward (good grades)
 - Obligation - do things because you should and have to's
 - Shame & guilt - internal mechanisms for compliance.
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Typical example:

My son got called out at school for **breaking a rule** about not having candy and then (more seriously, according to his teacher) **"talking back"** when **he was told** to get rid of it. **She asked his father and I to come meet briefly after school and told us the story, while my son was present. He didn't say anything.** His father **commanded him to tell her he was "sorry"**, which **he mumbled**. Then the next day, his father told me how **furious** he was that when he'd **instructed** our son to go to school the next day and **say "sorry" again** to that teacher and to the other teacher **our son refused**. I could sense his dad's **helplessness** in the face of that refusal and, actually, **I felt proud of my son.**



Collective Trauma

- In domination systems we tend to find ourselves either in the role of ‘oppressed’ (when we don’t have access to power, like children) or the role of ‘oppressor’ (when we have access to power, like parents).
- Usually we play both roles in different contexts.
- Especially affects the development of kids' brains as they struggle to adjust to an environment that is not designed to support our human needs (biology of love).
- We all suffer from ‘innocence fragility’.

***Suicide** is a leading cause of death among college and university students in the United States. In addition, many other college and university students have suicidal thoughts and attempt suicide.

“For your Own Good - Hidden Cruelty in Child Rearing and the roots of violence”

By Alice Miller



Adverse Childhood Experiences Test (ACE)

- Measures 5 areas of adverse childhood experiences:
- Physical abuse, **verbal abuse**, sexual abuse, physical neglect, and **emotional neglect**.

Statistics:

1 in 6 adults experienced four or more types of ACEs.

At least 5 of the top 10 leading causes of death are associated with ACEs.

Preventing ACEs could reduce the number of adults with depression by as much as 44%.

People with an ACE score of 6 or higher are **at risk of their lifespan being shortened by 20 years.**




Moralistic judgements, threats, demands, punishment, rewards, shame, guilt, deserve thinking, denial of choice = **Violent Communication** (verbal abuse)

Non empathic responses = **emotional neglect**



NVC: An antidote and medicine

Alternate story about humans:

- Everything human beings (children included) are doing or saying is an attempt to meet their human needs, no different than our own.
 - Everyone's needs matter.
 - There are many ways to meet needs. People use different strategies to meet their needs based on culture, gender, age etc.
 - We are interdependent and so have an innate need to care for each other's well-being.
 - People enjoy giving and contributing to each other and to life, when at choice.
 - We care for everyone's needs by collaborating and sharing resources.
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Power-with based socialization

Children are raised with trust that their needs matter. Empathy and dialogue are the primary tools to attend to conflict. Force is used only to protect, not to punish. The innate capacity for empathy is nurtured through modeling. Decisions are made in partnership with children. Authority is followed by trust rather than by fear.



Empowering kids under domination systems

Given none of us is capable of changing these structural conditions as individuals... what can we do?

- Liberate ourselves from the domination systems that we internalized.
 - Create collaborative systems within our families (shared decision making, conflict resolution, etc)
 - Acknowledge when we fall short, and do the repair work ('own and mourn').
 - Repeatedly reflect to our kids that there is nothing wrong with them and that the challenges are in the systems (for example, when they don't want to go to school, or do their homework)
 - Become allies - actively advocate for our kids, even in front of authority, when they don't have the capacity to advocate for themselves.
 - Teach them to use their power to advocate for themselves.
 - Build alternative communities and resources for our kids and for us to rely on for support.
 - Be prepared to support them if they choose to exit the system.
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- Work on systemic change (within the current systems and outside of them).

[My work at Ghidotti High - 13-minute film](#)

- Grief work - making space for mourning our losses and gap between where we are and where we want to be (as individuals and as a society).
- Do all the above within capacity, tons of empathy and tenderness for all.
- Get more support...

[Join our Teen Parenting Group](#)



What can you do to empower the children in your life?



Kids Media

"I have worked closely with Aya over the past year on several preschool shows for HBO Max and Cartoonito. The overall learning philosophy for our preschool programming is called Human Centric Learning, and NVC inspired communication skills fit perfectly into this framework. Aya develops specific curriculum for our shows, and reviews scripts at every stage, to ensure that we meet our educational goals in age-appropriate ways. She works closely with writers and creators to craft storylines that entertain, inspire and educate our littlest viewers. She has made a huge impact on our children's programming offering by integrating NVC philosophy into several of our shows. Her innate understanding of both the audience and of storytelling makes her work with storytellers particularly valuable. Writers are not only inspired by how she deepens their narratives, but how in doing so, she's actually changing their own lives."

~Kimberly Howitt

Senior Creative Executive Kids and Family Warner Bros, HBO Max and Cartoonito.

Example episode:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WkxKPiYRroQ>



Kidscreen Summit Panel

Rebel WITH a Cause: Creative Disobedience Makes Kids their Best Selves

Obedience requires submission. You give up your own choice to follow an external authority, whether that means apologizing only because you are told to, playing what the majority voted to play, or sharing your toys because it's "nice".

Believe it or not, the obedience we model on kids' programs may inadvertently disempower kids and disconnect them from self understanding. Plus, when we're disempowered, it's harder to empathize and advocate. For example, a child who doesn't want to share a toy may be accused of being a "bad friend" instead of encouraged to brainstorm options that work for all. But it's the latter approach that truly cares for everyone, including the needs behind the child's 'No'.

Empowered communication is a new social interaction model that helps children stay connected to their needs and self-advocate, while simultaneously cultivating their genuine and innate need to care for others. It's a "me with you" rather than a "me or you" communication model that transforms either/or' thinking into a 'both/And' power-with approach.

In this panel, we will discuss how supporting kids in expressing dissent benefits them and the world around them. We will analyze stories from two new shows that use empowered communication to give children a taste of their true inherent power and illustrate how these subtle changes radically alter the stories. And, this isn't only for children! We'll show you how to use this communication model in your teams too, and ask for what you need while elevating others.

Any rebels out there? Come join us in disobedience !

Reflection from my daughter's teacher

7th Grade End of Year Narrative for Dana Caspi

It has been a pleasure working with Dana throughout her 7th grade year. She has brought her calm demeanor and light hearted sense of humor to all of her school activities. Her unique and nuanced perspective on the world helps make our classroom a more diverse and dynamic place to be.

One strength that I have seen Dana exhibit this year is a tactful yet insightful commentary on a variety of different school activities. Dana offers criticism and feedback to her peers and to her teachers that cuts to the quick of an issue, but she does it in a way that is both respectful and kind. This ability to move a conversation forward while respecting the relationships involved in that conversation is a mature and valuable skill that will help Dana immensely in her life.

Another strength that I have seen Dana demonstrate throughout the year is her gift with younger children. Dana's buddy in second grade was a bit of a handful. Yet every time he ran off or had difficulty following directions, Dana was patient, yet firm. When her buddy was having a hard day and wanted to go home, Dana was able to comfort him and help him reset his mood so he could stay at school. Dana was a supportive, creative and engaged older buddy who brought great joy to this second grade student.

Dear Highlights Magazine,

My name is Hayes and I'm in 5th grade. I'm a big fan of your magazine. In your latest issue, on the cover, there is a statue that looks like a statue of General Robert E. Lee, who in the Civil war fought for slavery with the Confederacy. You might not have meant it to look like General Lee, but perhaps you can change it because we want to be as anti-racist as possible. Here is a picture of the drawing and an actual statue of General Lee.

I look forward to your response. Sincerely, Hayes (11 years old)

