

"Effective Group Strategies for Children with Autism and Disabilities"

Overcoming Obstacles and Embracing Solutions

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*"Nothing you do for
children is ever wasted."*
~ Garrison Keillor



OPINIONS ABOUT LEARNING SKILLS, USING SOLUTION FOCUSED METHODS

Some opinions from children and youths with ASD, ADHD, Down syndrome and other disabilities, with chronological age between 9- 29 years :

- „ It makes me feel myself important, like Spider Man.“
- „Learning skills makes me deal with lessons from school better.“
- „It helps me smile more often, and I discovered that even an autistic person can make others happy.“
- „It makes me understand why others are usually mean to me: they have a lot of skills to learn in order to become more valuable persons.“
- „It helps me not to give up when something seems difficult.“

OPINIONS ABOUT LEARNING SKILLS, USING SOLUTION FOCUSED METHODS

- „ Nobody from the Children`s Home wanted to play with me before, because I am different. I felt lonely... Now that I have my „Hachimaki``, the other kids want me to teach them also how to become better in something, or to learn some new skills.“
- „ Kids`Skills method is like *Intoku* (it is a Japanese expression, meaning: Do something good secretly)...I can get help when I have difficulties, but in the same time I can also support someone who needs help learning a new skill, or becoming better at something.“
- „ Since I learned to deceive the evil Elf who sits on my shoulder and whispers in my ear what kind of bad things I should do, I can control myself better.“

MAIN OBJECTIVES

1. How to implement solution focused approaches within a group of people with different disabilities
2. You will discover how can we use our own abilities, special skills in the therapy of people with disabilities, and you can also discover different ways to apply the Kids`Skills method.
3. How to transform our qualities in „superpowers“

ABOUT MY TEAM

The members

- 17 young people from Gheorgheni and the surrounding villages, Harghita County, with physical and/or mental disabilities associated with other diagnosis such as ADHD, ASD, Down Syndrom, having chronological ages between 9-29, but mental age between 5-12 years only.
- They were separated on two groups based on they abilities.

Objectives

- At the beginning, the specialists from the NGO asked me to prepare 1 or 2 children from the association for the Special Olympics in Judo, but the Romanian Federation of Judo for people with disabilities denied our wright to participate without a reasonable explanation
- After that, all the specialists from the center wanted was that the students to have some sport activities
- After a meeting with the president of the NGO and all the other specialists working there, they approved my proposal to combine martial arts with psychology to develop and improve the students skills.

EXERCISE

- 1) Please write down your best qualities, skills – 2 or 3 of them
 - 2) Choose one of them, then recall a situation when it was the most useful to you. Or when did you discover that you have this quality, skill...?
 - 3) Reflect on how can you enhance this quality, skill to make it more effective in your practice
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ME AND THIS EXERCISE

- 1) My best qualities are: perseverance, funny, belief
 - 2) Perseverance: I used to be a martial arts instructor, with over 100 students, and also participated at several championships. At one point they started to call me „The Tiger from Harghita“, because no matter how hard I got hit, I was not stopping, backing off, or quitting the fight- I was keep moving forward. As a result, many of my best opponents had to go to psychologist after fighting me, for several months, even had az interdiction to fight me in the future.
 - 3)details later in the presentation...
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FOCUSING ON SOLUTIONS BY TRANSFORMING PROBLEMS IN SKILLS

1. INTOKU - it is a Japanese expression, meaning: „Do something good secretly” (without expecting something in return)
 - Group experiment: if you have the opportunity to do something good to someone, his/her reaction should be:

A. „To return the favor``



A.

-How many people felt good, had benefit from your kindness?...

B. To help someone else who needs it...rather than „returning the favor to you ``

B. Intoku...

-How many people felt good, had benefit from your kindness?...

(The movie: „Pay it forward``, 2000)



In practice:

Each member of the team was learning a skill, such as:

- to whisper
- or making others laugh
- to do things faster and on time
- to masturbate in the toilet instead of publicly
- to start a conversation with another person

B. To help someone else who needs it...rather than „returning to you the favor“

In practice...

- to make a friend
- to be able to do some things independently
- To be able to touch others and let others to touch her, even hugging
- To look better
- To read more fluently
- To learn to do pushups
- To run faster
- To learn a poem (he had attention and memory difficulties)
- To listen more to the teachers and his parents
- To let others finish what they have to tell, instead of interrupting them all the time





FOCUSING ON SOLUTIONS BY TRANSFORMING PROBLEMS IN SKILLS

2. „The art of transforming suffering in sadness ``
-from a buddhist saying : „Suffering is a choice!``
-„If I can not change something, I will us it as an
opportunity!``
- It is a way for me to deal with difficult cases- a
metod I started to develop in 2004, after I had two
„dead sentences`` from two different doctors in four
months. Later, I started to apply it on yooths, working as
an educator and sport teacher in a privat school in
Deva, Hunedoara County,RO, with 150 students,
between ages of 11 – 18. Most of the students from
there came from disfunctional families, even ghettos, a
few of them with mental disabilities.

FOCUSING ON SOLUTIONS BY TRANSFORMING PROBLEMS IN SKILLS

- Based on a study performed by hungarian psychology students in 2004 among the children from that school, 80% of the students were abused in the past, even sexually, starting by their own fathers.
- One of my main starting theory was: „If a problem causes problems to me, why should not be me,who causes problems to my problem instead?...“
- I started to use it on myself,then it has been proven very useful with children,youths who were victims of sexual abuse, or with suicide attempt, who did not wanted to talk about what happened to them, especially since I am also a man (in cases of sexual abuse)
- In most of the cases Tai Chi (Chinese martial art) is an important

In Kids`Skills method...



“Kids’ Skills is based on the idea that issues confronting a child are best resolved by having the child learn a specific skill.”

Applied at people with mental disabilities...

Creating a controlled chaos around myself



Learning skills...

- Learning to control myself in a limited „circle/ring”, then expand „the circle” – to generalize
- Transforming stereotypical movements into something more functional, instead of stopping them, for ex. some basic movements in martial arts, or dancing...
- A 14 years old girl with autism, with the help of that „ring” managed to transform her stereotypical movements in dancing moves (she liked dancing), and the chaotic, uncontrolled laughter in something functional: she wanted to learn how to make others happy when they are sad

Applied at people with mental disabilities...

The name of the skill: „Finding the smurfs...“



Learning skills... Preparing her for group activities

- 11 years old blind girl was able to walk only if somebody was holding her hands. She was sitting on the floor, being afraid to get up. She preferred to crawl on the floor.. For years she had panik attacks, sometimes aggressive behavior, so she was left alone, not doing anything in most of the time, both at home and in the special school she attended. She often sad to me : „Miklos, I can not see... I am afraid...“ Then she learned to move around in the circle/ring holding my hands, then without help, just following my voice. Next step was instead of holding my hands, we were holding a jumping rope, and she followed me everywhere. After 3 weeks...as you can see on the video, she was searching for the smurfs until she find

them...it was my phone, hidden somewhere, ready to play an episode from „The smurfs“.

„ If you can not change something, use it!``



To stay down, or to get up is a choice

- Once shes parents panicked, because they couldn't find her at home. After a short while she entered to their yard and explained to her parents that she wanted some candy so she took some money out of her parents wallet and went out shopping. The small minimarket was on the other street, about 200 m from their house. After that, she wanted to do everything alone.



FOCUSING ON SOLUTIONS BY TRANSFORMING PROBLEMS IN SKILLS

3. Externalization – a narrative therapy technique (White and Epston 1990)

-This technique allows the child to name not only the skill he/her is going to learn, but the problem also. This way the pressure on the child decreases. For every behavioral difficulties we „blame something or someone else“- something imaginary. This way the child understands that the real „problem“ is his/her manifestation, behavior, which can be overcome by learning skills.

EXAMPLE

- A 12 years old boy with mental disability, who had a stroke when he was born told me, that an „evil Elf“ sits on his left sholulder and whispered in his ear every naughty and bad thing he did until now. He named him „Joco“. He was very relieved. On his right shoulder had another Elf. This one was good, but he was whispering in a low voice, so all he was hearing was the voice of „Joco“, who had a stronger voice. The boy was all the time „slow as a snail“ in everything, even in speech. So he decided to lear to be „fast as a lightning“, and called this skill „Lightning D.“ When in the group ,or in the classroom the persons who were chosen by him as a support team observed that he is not exercising the „Lightning D.“ ability, they had to remind him with the phrase: „Come one D., you can do it! You are a valuable person!“ And the

RESULT

- After a few months he was able to do his daily tasks faster
- We observed that even his attention and memory improved
- ... But all these only in the Dojo during the martial art classes and in the classroom... because at home they always „forgot to support him`` the way he wanted to, so at home nothing changed.



FOCUSING ON SOLUTIONS BY TRANSFORMING PROBLEMS IN SKILLS

4. The „positiv gossip“

- If I asked any adult from the center (psychologist, special educator, even parent, or a student) : what can they tell me about any of the other student, they started to list all the behavioral problems the other student had.

-So, during the martial arts class, if one of the students started to lose control, I started a conversation with his/her team members about all the things he/she is good at, what do we like about he/she. We made no eye contact with him, but we had a gossip conversation about him, in front of him, instead of starting arguing with him.

EXAMPLE

- One of the students decided that he will not help us anymore in preparing the Dojo (the place we were training) before starting the session, he even refused to bow before entering. We followed the traditional Japanese way, meaning, we cleaned the Dojo before and after training with rags, and water, using our own hands instead of modern tools. It was a very important process in our training, so because he refused stubbornly to involve himself in the activity, I asked him to stay and wait outside of the Dojo, only watching us, until he changes his mind. In the next 3 weeks (we had 2 classes every week) he stood outside of the Dojo, in the doorway, watching us, even tried to disrupt the training several times. At the same time, we were using the „positive gossip“, over and over again, to remind him all the positive qualities he has, all the good things he did, what is that we still have to learn from him when he will

RESULT

- After 3 weeks, one of his team members, a teenage girl with ASD got mad, right after we started the training, and started to almost yell at him:

-,, I am sick of you, just standing there and meow like a cat! You are a valuable person, member of this team, so get your ass back here and train hard to become a more valuable person! We love you and we miss you! Why can't you understand that?"... After the others agreed, he looked at me, started to cry and asked my permission to enter and continue his training. Then everybody started to cry, they hugged him, except the girl with ASD, who had to walk around from wall to wall until she calmed down and stopped crying.



Training like a soldier...

-Before finishing that day's training, I asked the student in front of his team members how he managed to trick his behavior, leaving it outside of the Dojo (Externalization). He answered us proudly: „ When Gabi yelled at me, my behavior got so scared he started to have diarrhea. And when everyone told me that they love me, I realized that I didn't like my behavior either, so I sent him to the toilet, and I came back to train like a soldier, to become a more valuable person!“

ABOUT MY TEAM

Special training...

- After they found out that I used to be not only a martial art instructor, but also taught soldiers, they asked me to train them like soldiers
- Their favorite tools where the tyres.



ABOUT MY TEAM

The „Hachimaki``

- A Hachimaki is a Japanese headband, usually made with cloth. It is a symbol of effort, courage by the wearer, especially by soldiers. The famous Samurai warriors wore it. In modern days, many martial art practitioner use it. For getting a personalized hachimaki, my students had to pass an exam...



Befor and after every training the whole team had to answere some questions with specific answers. They had to answer together and loudly:

Question...

1. Who are we?...
2. What is that we never do?
3. Why?
4. What does it means?
5. Why are we training here?

The answers...

1. We are valuable people!
2. We never give up!
3. Because we are brave!
4. It means that we do the wright thing, even if we are afraid, or it is hard, or we are tired, even if we don't feel like it!
5. To become a better man!

THE EXAM-TEACHING AS A CONSOLIDATION OF KNOWLEDGE

Teaching Judo to volunteers

- As a martial art instructor and later also a sport teacher, the best way to ensure that someone learned well what I was teaching to him/her was to give him/her responsibility – teach the skill you learned to someone else to. This process consolidates the knowledge.

Teaching Judo to volunteers



Teaching Judo to volunteers



Training to become a more valuable person



Training to become a more valuable person





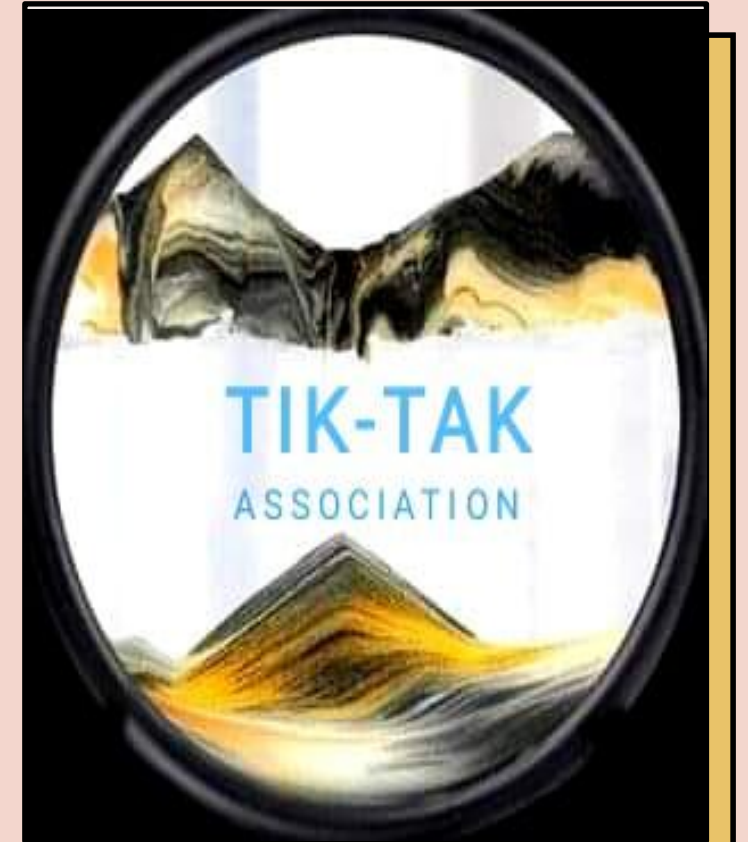




From volunteering to being solution-focused

www.asociatiatiktak.ro

- In 2023 we founded together the TIK-TAK Association
- Our main objectives are the early detection and intervention on different kinds of mental disabilities, and inclusion, also for the families who can not afford the therapy.















LEARNING SKILLS IS „CONTAGIOUS``

-First case

- Soon after we started to learn skills, the word spread very fast among the other kids, specialists from the NGO, parents, even in one of the orphanage from the town about the Kids`Skills method. -„ What is that we need to do to join the judo classes, and learn some skills to become a better man?...`` - they kept asking me...
- A 40 years old man with mental disability, but also with schizophrenia asked me to help him control himself. When he had a crisis, he just blocked in a position (sitting or standing), and wasn't able to move, or neighter to speak after some time. He looked very frightened, sometimes got violent. Once he has beaten 6 big construction workers. He used to say that the devils (between 3-9 of them) visited him, and told him to beat everyone, even to kill people. Sometimes he stood in the same position for hours, even 12 hours. Only his eyes were moving and he was only mumbling. He seemed that he understood us, just couldn't answer because of the devils from his head. His crisis usually had 2 intensities: I. - he blocked in a position, but he could speak; and II. -he was not able to speak or move, only his eyes were moving. If we tried to force him to move, there was a good chance to become violent, so we dropped this idea. There was a very interesting, even strange thing about his crisis: the only person who could end it, it was me, or if we just waited to stop. So every time I was around, the special educators called me to deal with him, befor his crisis becomes more intense, even dangerous.

LEARNING SKILLS IS „CONTAGIOUS``

First case

- One day, he started to have the crisis when it was time to go home. Until I got to him, he was completely blocked already. At first I started to speak to him, than I turned to the devils and started to speak to them. I took the man`s hand and I told the devils that it doesn`t matter what intentions they have with him, he is not alone. If they want him, they will have to come to me to, and look me in the eyes... And we were waiting... After a few minutes he started to move his hands, to squeeze my hand, than to move his head also. Suddenly he started to laugh. He told me he laught because even the devils are afraid of me, and when I took his hand, they started to panic, because they couldn`t get to his left hand. The devils were kept telling him to kill everyone in the building, including me. But because they were afraid of me, they couldn`t take control of him completely. But they are still in his head, demanding him to kill me, to go to the kitchen, bring a knife and cut my throat. I told him that I know they are afraid of me, because after I will count to 5, they will start to get out of his had, and line up at the Dojo`s door. After I counted to 5, he told me that now he can also see them, one by one lining up at the door. There were 9 scary devils this time. This was the upper limit; 9 devils were in situations when he was starting to be violent. I asked him if he knows why the devils are afraid of me. He said no, so I told him because they know that I am a valuable man. And asked him who else is a valuable man. After a few seconds he said that he is. I started to explain to him that devils are getting scared when they see a valuable man.

LEARNING SKILLS IS „CONTAGIOUS``

First case

So, because they are afraid of me, a valuable man, means that they are afraid of him too, because he is also a very valuable man. After we repeated twice and loudly the main 5 questions with the specific answers, I told him that I can already smell one of them making in his pants. He started to laugh, and told me that he can also smell it. And they want to run away through the Dojo's windows. ... At that point I told him not to let them run away. If they want to run away, first they have to come forward, face him, then they can use the main entrance to go away, but one by one, in order, not running, because it is not allowed to run on the corridor. (This was another principle of „The art of transforming suffering in sadness``: Do not let problems go away when they want, how they want it. First, they have to face me, look into my eyes, then after I am done with them, they can leave, but only when ,and how I say so!...)

- He did as I told him: he called them one by one, showed them the way they can leave, and he even kicked them in the butts laughing, as they were leaving.
- After this event we found out that his mother has interrupted again his medication; at home they did not follow the psychiatrists indications.

LEARNING SKILLS IS „CONTAGIOUS“

Second case

- One day I was stopped in the break by one of the students. He was about 22 years old, as I can remember, he had mental disability and he was in a wheelchair. He wasn't paralyzed, but he had several surgeries on his legs, but he couldn't stretch them and couldn't walk. His physiotherapist said that even he couldn't understand why. So, because the building's elevator was broken in the last couple of years, the special education teachers had to carry him up to the second floor, then down every day.
- He asked me if I could teach him some skills also. He wanted to have a running race with me, and he also wished to become a better man, even if he couldn't learn judo with us. After a consultation with his teachers, they gave me a free hand dealing with him. He was sitting all day in his wheelchair anyway, he couldn't participate the activities because his vision wasn't so good neither.
- The next morning he asked me when do we start to prepare for our race, and I told him: wright now! ..But this is a very big skill, so befor that, maybe he has to learn some other skills to. Which skill has to be the first to learn?...After a few moments of thinking he said: „To climb the stairs alone!“

LEARNING SKILLS IS „CONTAGIOUS``

Second case

- Befor we started to climb the stairs, we followed the same routine as befor the judo classes: we answered the same 5 questions. He was so happy when I helped him to get up from the wheelchair. Leaning on me we started to climb, one step at the time, step by step. I was speaking to him all the way up, encouraging him. First days were very difficult. He was havy, so even I got tired until we reached the second floor. We had to stop, even to sit down a few times. We both were sweating all the way up, and all the way down every day, even if going down was a bit easier. Every time we reached the second floor we repeated the 5 questions with the answers.
- At the walls,all over up he had something to hold on with his hands, so after a few weeks he was climbing the stairs almost alone, using his upper body muscles more. Sometimes he fell to the stairs, so we sat down for a few minutes, then we continued climbing. Every time he fell, he started to say that it is to hard, he can not continue enymore...he will never be able to do it alone... Every time he fell, I sat next to him, telling him that it is ok to be exhausted, and I will wait for him until he will be ready to continue. He also tried to convince me to leave him there, or to call someone to help me carry him up, because the other kids are waiting for me upstairs to play with them. And every time my answer was: „ There is no other place I rather be, then here with you...even if we are tired.“

LEARNING SKILLS IS „CONTAGIOUS``

Second case

- Instead of quitting, I taught him how to breathe correctly. This way, climbing up the stairs become a bit easier. After a while, every time he fell or just needed to rest assured me that he is only resting a bit, he is not giving up, because he is a valuable person.
- At the beginning I asked him if he would like to have support team, but he said he needs only me. But every time I had the opportunity I used the „positive gossip`` talking with the other kids about skills, training, becoming a better man. He was so happy when he listened to us from distance speaking good things about him. This not only motivated him, but also got him a big support team, who were encouraging him on the stairs not to give up, because he is a very valuable person also. On his difficult days I organized a „welcome on the second floor moment``, when after we reached the dining room everyone was applauding him for his effort. And I asked the other kids who is curious about how he did climb up the stairs. Many of them surrounded him and he started to tell them how he did it, even if it was difficult. Once I whispered in his ears : „ You see?... I think you are like a teacher for many of them. `` - He started to laugh happily, and told me that he wants to be like me, and if some day he will meet someone in the same situation as him, he will teach him how to become a better man with Kids`Skills.

LEARNING SKILLS IS „CONTAGIOUS``

Second case

- After about one year , he was not only able to climb the stairs alone (I was just keeping him company), but he managed to stand up from his wheelchair and come to me for about 3 meters and back to his wheelchair alone, step after step. When the special education teacher saw him walking alone, they just froze.
- After a Christmas celebration he received a lot of gifts from sponsors, but he decided to give them to the other kids. If curse, his mother stopped him. But I got curious why he did it, so I asked him. His answer was:
 - „ I don't need gifts, I learned Kids`Skills from you. `` -than he reached for me, he hugged me and whispered in my ears : -„ Miklos, you are a valuable person... you sat next to me on the stairs...``
 - After he let me go, he started to laugh, and said to me that he hopes I am also training hard for our running race, and he won't go easy on me just because I am fat.



Preparing families for SF approaches

- When I am contacted by families or couples for therapy, my first request to them is to make a family meeting before they come to me, and tell each other at least 2 things that the other did good or better in the past week.
- If I work with families, my and the children's favourite rule is: the only way you can say something negative about the other member of the family is if you can also add something positive about him/her. Otherwise, the negative thing won't be considered.

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Thank you!

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