

Nurturing Positive Living Skills for Children: Feeding the Heart and Soul of Humanity

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Abstract

Teaching Positive Living Skills to children is all about making better people and better performers, by giving children the tools for enhanced performance and enhanced quality of life. The goal is to prevent problems, teach children positive ways to view themselves and others, give them experiences of success, put them on a positive path, catch them being good and guide them in positive directions - by beginning a positive education program at an early age.

The most important step we can take right now to create positive, real-world change is to go back upstream and give our children the tools and skills required for positive living. Many are willing to talk about problems. Some are willing to talk about solutions. Few are willing to take the necessary steps to implement meaningful solutions. We suffer from an absence of positive action. Yet positive action is the most critical step we can take as individuals and societies to influence real change.

On what we do with children rests the state of our world.

Three Gifts

If you could give your children three gifts that they could carry with them for their lives, what would they be?

The first gift I would give is a positive perspective - skills for seeing the positives in every situation, remaining positive with themselves, finding the positives in others, and maintaining a positive focus through adversity.

The second gift I would give is a pure and absolute focus - skills for being in the moment, enjoying the moment, focusing fully

in the moment and being totally engaged in each experience or task.

My third gift would be skills for relaxation, stress control and finding a sense of harmony and balance in life.

I choose these three gifts because I believe they have the greatest chance of enhancing a child's quality of life, and the quality life of those with whom that child interacts?

These gifts, or skills, are so important because they enhance the living of life itself. They apply to everything we do in life, as children, youth and adults, within every performance domain, and outside every performance domain.

If we could give these same “three gifts” to our husbands, wives, boyfriends, girlfriends, teammates, teachers, students, coaches, employees, bosses or neighbors, the world would immediately become a better place to live.

There’s Trouble in Paradise

We can live in the most beautiful place on the most beautiful planet and still not feel fulfilled, productive or happy, if our minds, or the minds of those around us, are not in the right place. Given the current state of our world, collectively we are not doing a good enough job on behalf of all of our children in terms of educating them to live positively, be in harmony, and contribute to their potential. Virtually every negative comment and destructive action grows from a negative perspective or underdeveloped skills for positive living.

We witness problems related to stress, negativity, abuse, violence, disharmony or wasted lives on a daily basis. We see, feel and talk about the consequences these occurrences - but we rarely commit to go back upstream to solve these problems. As a result, the problems continue to grow.

When watching the “news” where the most brutal acts of our species are highlighted daily, we might feel like throwing up our lunch or throwing up hands and saying, “Is there nothing constructive we can do about this”? It seems to be getting worse and worse - greater threats and more harm inflicted on other human beings, often on innocent bystanders going about their daily work, travel or leisure activities. And the age of those inflicting mortal damage appears to be getting younger.

Some acts are so destructive and dehumanizing that they inflict huge, life altering consequences. Lesser negative actions may not

have an instantly devastating effect; however if they occur on an ongoing basis they can pick away at us every day. Even small things can hurt how we feel each day, including negative comments, inconsiderate or disrespectful actions, put-downs, complaints, or ongoing whining.

Some people seem to rejoice in creating problems for others. They do their best to make the lives of others miserable. When most of your energy is directed at blocking the paths of others, or doing your best to create hassles for others, there is very little time or energy left for doing good things. We may label these people in harsh ways, which they may deserve, but the basic problem is that they have not learned Positive Living Skills or skills for positive human interaction. In the end these people can inflict a lot of damage on themselves and others. Both small and large acts of negativity on an ongoing basis have the potential to lower peoples’ confidence, motivation, belief in humanity and joy in living.

Is there anything we can do about it? The one opening, the one reason for optimism, is the fact that very young children do not begin life with negativity, hatred or a goal of destroying other human beings. In fact they are quite the opposite. All children have the potential to grow in positive ways. The more we commit to make positive growth a reality, the more it will occur. This is what keeps me hopeful.

Human Costs

What are the human costs of ongoing stress in the absence of effective coping strategies, on learning, performance, relationships, health and quality of life?

In today’s ever-changing world, too many people are living with more stress and less joy than is necessary. Relaxation, stress

control skills and a positive perspective can change this by equipping people with skills they need to relax and remain positive through periods of uncertainty.

What are the human costs of an absence of focusing skills on learning, performance, relationships, quality of work and quality of life?

Learning, becoming competent, and feeling connected with what you are experiencing is almost entirely dependent on effective focusing. Skills for effective focusing and re-focusing result in better listening, improved learning, more consistent performance and more joy in the moment.

What are the human costs of a negative perspective on confidence, learning, performance, relationships, health and quality of life?

Teaching children to view themselves, others, and their experiences in positive ways will go a long way in helping people become what they are capable of becoming.

What are the human costs of a lack of empathy on human interaction and quality of life?

Children and adults who commit the most destructive acts, lack the skills that make us human. One skill in which they show the greatest void is empathy - feeling what others might feel and caring about the feelings of others.

A lack of empathy is what creates bullies in the schoolyard, children who exclude or make fun of other children, children who hurt others physically and psychologically, and adults who abuse, hurt or take advantage of others. Teaching children to respect themselves and others, share feelings and

appreciate the feelings of others will solve many of our biggest problems and immediately reduce abusive relationships and crimes against humanity.

What are Positive Living Skills?

Positive Living Skills are the skills that are required to live our lives fully and joyfully. These skills include the ability to carry a positive perspective, focus effectively, listen attentively, empathize, cooperate, collaborate, relax, cope effectively with stress, dream of a better way, and remain joyful. Our children, teenagers and adults become advantaged or disadvantaged based on how well they learn these skills, regardless of place of origin, cultural background or income level.

The presence or absence of Positive Living Skills has a direct impact on our lives, every day. The state of our learning, performance, relationships, families, children, schools, health, education, places of work, governments, as well as the joy and harmony in our communities, societies, and world are directly affected by the presence or absence of these skills.

Positive Living Skills are essential for nurturing high levels of performance and greater contribution within individuals, teams, families and societies. When we are successful at nurturing essential skills for positive living, the result is better people, better performers, better societies and a better world. Mastering these skills not only creates quality performances but a greater sense of inner harmony and more harmony with others. In essence, our quality of life and quality of performance in every sphere is dependent upon the extent to which we, and those around us, master skills for positive living.

Part of my knowledge base for teaching Positive Living Skills has emerged from my applied work in sport and performance psychology – by learning from great performers in a variety of disciplines about what they do to excel in their performance domains and in their lives. Another great source of wisdom has come from my work with children – by learning what they do to embrace life and excel at living.

My goal in working with children, families, young performers and high-level performers is the enhancement of life. The process for achieving this goal comes through teaching, coaching, facilitating, nurturing, and refining skills for positive living. Helping people and performers acquire and refine Positive Living Skills is the most important part of the work to which I have devoted most of my life.

In creating and refining strategies for enhancing Positive Living Skills over the years, I have been fortunate to have the assistance of thousands of children, parents, teachers, athletes, coaches, undergraduate and graduate students, and performers in many different fields.

A series of intervention studies, theses, and extensive hands-on experiences, have made a meaningful contribution to the ongoing development and refinement of our Positive Living Skills program. This began with the cooperative play and games work in the early 1970's (Orlick 1972, 1974, 1975, 1976, 1977, 1978a, 1978b, 1979, 1981a, 1981b, 1982, 1983, 1990, 1995, 1997, 1998a, 2002a, 2002b, 2003, Orlick & Botterill, 1975, Cox & Orlick, 1996, Gilbert & Orlick, 1996, St.Denis & Orlick, 1996) and the performance enhancement and quality of living work which began in the mid 1970's and continued through the early 2000's (Orlick 1980, 1986a, 1986b, 1988,

1990, 1996, 1998b, 2000, 2002, Kreiner-Phillips & Orlick, 1993, McDonald & Orlick, 1995, Talbot-Honeck & Orlick, 1998, Towaj & Orlick, 2000, Zhang et.al.1992, Zitzelsberger & Orlick, 1998).

My programs for children were created in hopes of offering a new beginning, a new opportunity for people of all ages, in all phases and walks of life. My dream is that this beginning will guide us along a positive path that few have walked before. With support and nurturing this path has the potential to lead future generations to a better place and a higher level of humanity. Our children deserve this opportunity and it is our collective responsibility to give it to them.

Why Nurture Positive Living Skills?

Why is nurturing Positive Living Skills important?

Simple - Everyone gains when we nurture Positive Living Skills – and everyone suffers when we don't.

We all gain when children come closer to living their human potential.

We all lose when children fall short of their potential. We lose because they do not become the positive people and positive contributors that they have the potential to be.

The most profound loss is inflicted when children grow into teenagers and adults who behave in destructive ways. The worst of these people create fear, terror and disharmony in our minds, schools, homes, communities, nations and world. The greatest tragedy is that these same adults who act in cruel and destructive ways were once little

children who had the potential to grow in positive ways.

Why is it important to start with children?

Meaningful change at the individual and societal level best begins with children, by nurturing positive perspectives and positive actions from an early age.

If we really want to make a difference in the state of our harmony and texture of our world, we have to begin with children. We have to make a serious commitment to provide children with the tools, perspectives, mental skills and support that will empower them to become what they are capable of becoming, both as human beings and contributors to family and society.

If we fail to make this a priority, the problems we are now facing in all aspects of our lives will worsen - including increased levels of stress, bullying and exclusion in the schools, inattentiveness in the classroom, fear of walking city streets and nature trails, and serious concerns about safety for our children and family members in our homes, schools, playgrounds, and normal places of work and recreation.

The potential for humans to do good or harm, in little ways and big ways, is striking. We can do so much good or so much harm, to ourselves, to other human beings, to our natural environment and future generations.

It is essential to invest our collective energy towards nurturing the positive side of humanity, which lives within every child. It lives within all of us - even though it may never have been fully nurtured or tapped. Like the maple tree, the sweetness lives within our core but it can only be tasted if is tapped.

A small number of destructive people can have a huge negative impact on our lives - in little ways and big ways. The opposite is also true. A small number of positive people, passionately committed to a noble goal can have a huge impact on our lives, our communities and our world. Each of us can have a powerful impact on others - positive or negative - even when the contact time is short.

Everyone you come into contact with - every day - can influence your day (or your life) in simple ways, for better or worse. Likewise, you have the potential to impact positively or negatively on every person you come in contact with, every day. Even small things can have a heartfelt impact - a simple smile, a simple act of respect, appreciation, goodness, compassion, caring or support.

For those who are at risk of growing in negative ways, our goal is to reach them early, put them on a more positive path, catch them being good, guide them in positive directions and give them essential skills for positive living. Ultimately, this is the most important education a child/person can ever receive because everything else depends on it. What we do or do not do with every child directly impacts on everything that child does or does not do in his or her life.

Why Not Teach Positive Living Skills?

Given the importance of Positive Living Skills for enhancing so many aspects of our lives, why are these skills are not taught and nurtured more fully within our homes and schools?

For the most part the learning of these skills are left to chance. Considering the imperfect state of our relationships and world, chance is not working well enough.

Why leave it to chance when we don't have to?

Too many children and adults become disadvantaged because they dwell on the negatives, are stressed out much of the time, have difficulty focusing, are easily distracted or lack the skills for positive human interaction.

Why risk leaving our children, students and communities at a disadvantage when we can provide them with an advantage?

At some point we have to take responsibility and become accountable for our actions or inaction. As individuals and as a society, we have to take responsibility and make the required investment for teaching children Positive Living Skills.

Why don't we do it right now?

Is it assumed that children learn these skills automatically without any guidance or nurturing?

Is it a lack of knowledge about the importance of teaching Positive Living Skills at an early age?

Is it that teachers, parents, coaches and others in leadership positions are not aware that programs for teaching Positive Living Skills are available?

Is it assumed that these skills cannot be taught?

Is it a lack of commitment or caring from administrators, politicians, teachers or parents?

Or is it simply that no one has the time to do it?

Stay at home parents don't have time - they are struggling just trying to get through the day. Teachers don't have the time - they have large classes and a pre-set curriculum to get through. Caregivers don't have the time - they are too busy caring for other peoples' children. Parents in the workplace don't have time - they are too busy with their work. Politicians don't have time - they are too busy trying to solve other problems and get re-elected.

If teachers, parents, and politicians are too busy doing what they feel is more important, who is going to initiate positive change?

What could be more important, or have a more meaningful long-term impact on our children, society and world, than teaching children Positive Living Skills?

We can all become advantaged in living our lives through early exposures to experiences, opportunities and people who teach and nurture Positive Living Skills. When these opportunities are not available to us, we all become disadvantaged, if not immediately then down the road.

We have the knowledge, tools and capacity to teach and nurture Positive Living Skills right now. What we lack is the collective will, or wisdom, to act on this knowledge.

Certainly some parents, schools, communities, and countries do a better job than others at nurturing Positive Living Skills. Nevertheless in virtually all communities some children fall through the cracks and grow to become more destructive than constructive, inwardly or outwardly.

The highest cost to individuals and societies comes from children who slip through the

cracks, grow negative and unleash their negativity on others.

All children have the capacity to grow into adults who respect their own lives and impact positively on the lives of others.

Global Impact

Positive impact will be felt at an individual and global level by giving every child an opportunity to learn Positive Living Skills, one child at a time, one classroom, one family, one community, one nation at a time. The process can be likened to immunizing individuals, families, communities, against a dangerous disease by providing a positive antidote - one shot, one step, one skill at a time. Positive Living Skills can serve to protect all of us from an epidemic of negative actions and negative consequences.

As a culture we are good at pointing out negatives and shortcomings in people, performers, schools and societies. We are not so good at pointing out the positives and acting in positive ways. Collectively we need to invest more of ourselves to prevent problems from arising, and to provide a better, more harmonious path for future generations. As a society we become victims of our own negativity - perhaps because too few of us as children learned to focus on the positives and long-term solutions.

Both negative thinking and positive thinking have a powerful long-term impact on every person and every aspect of society. Which will it be?

Charting a New Path

The most important step we can take right now to create positive, real-world change is to go back upstream and give our children the tools and skills required for positive living. Many are willing to talk about problems. Some are willing to talk about solu-

tions. Few are willing to take the necessary steps to implement meaningful solutions. We suffer from an absence of positive action. Yet positive action is the most critical step we can take as individuals and societies to influence real change.

We need writers, program designers and teachers who understand children and know how children are affected by the activities, programs and stories they write, present or animate.

For example, when writing or presenting children's stories or film scripts that will be viewed by young children we must be careful to not add fear or stress to their lives. Some children will carry these negative or positive images with them into their bedrooms, homes and lives for a long time.

Children's imaginations should be freed to flow in positive, life enhancing directions. We need new goals for creating materials and programs for children - positive impact goals. Nurturing a positive focus and joy in everyday experiences should be a part of the daily goal.

Right now we need good people to chart this path. We need good people to help open the eyes of decision makers who have yet to see the light, and link, between what children learn and what they become, and what society becomes. Anything is possible when we carry a positive perspective; nothing of value is possible without it.

We need to implement a global program that allows all children in the world to become advantaged with Positive Living Skills. We need the help of passionate people who are committed to a higher level of humanity. We need the support of educational institutions, governments and corporate sponsors.

Our only goal is to deliver a positive educational program that is designed to feed the heart and soul of humanity - beginning with children.

We need good people who are ready and willing to chart this path, refusing to let anyone or anything get in the way of giving children the gifts for positive living that we all need and deserve. What we do to chart this path, and what children do when they enter this path, signifies nothing less than how we will be in this life. Where our minds and hearts go, everything else follows. Where the minds and hearts of children go, so goes our world.

Delivery Contexts

We need a multi-faceted approach. Our best chance for success is to all work together for the benefit of children and our collective future (parents, caregivers, teachers, Positive Living Skills consultants, counselors, mental trainers, coaches, health care professionals, doctors, nurses, principals, members of school boards, community leaders, politicians, corporate leaders and media). It is time that we all begin to act on the good things that we know will benefit our children and our society.

Entry Points - The home and school are ideal places to begin Positive Living Skills education. If parents and teachers participate in program activities with their children, each child, parent and teacher will gain from the process.

Other positive entry points for teaching and nurturing Positive Living Skills for children include grandparents, caregivers, siblings, relatives, neighbors, teachers in pre-schools, kindergarten and all types and levels of schooling, teachers and coaches in play, game and sport environments, community centers, hospitals, treatment centers and

counseling settings. It is important that we target contexts where every child can be reached so that Positive Living Skills are taught and applied in variety contexts, and reinforced on an ongoing basis.

The more venues that support a positive approach, the better the chance of wide-scale, meaningful impact and integration of positive change in real world settings. When a whole generation of future parents has been empowered with Positive Living Skills, the task of sustaining positive, life enhancing perspectives and actions will be greatly facilitated. With time, more and more people will excel at finding the positives in themselves, in others and in their experiences.

Models of Positive Living Skills – It would be wonderful if the example and encouragement provided by all parents and teachers modeled what is required for the successful acquisition of a wide range of Positive Living Skills. The fact that many children do not witness positive people exhibiting a complete array of Positive Living Skills makes our challenge more important and more difficult. Our task becomes greatly facilitated with the help of Positive Living role models, both in the form of real people who children see and interact with on a daily basis, and those depicted through various forms or media (e.g. children's television, animated movies, cartoons, fairy tales, nursery rhymes, books, DVD's, videos, CD's, video games).

Many children would benefit from seeing less “bad guys” or “scary people” as currently presented in most commercially produced material. All children would gain from seeing more good people, positive role models - who are living, interacting, coping and behaving in positive and life enhancing ways. It is often the case that what you see most is what you get, or what you become.

Cost of Complacency –The cost of inaction with respect to teaching Positive Living Skills is high. Ultimately inaction will lead to a loss of freedom, security, personal control, joyfulness, hope, optimism and productive contribution to family and society. In the long run, inaction will impact on all of us - emotionally, psychologically, physically - in our relationships, health, work or play.

Some concerns may be raised about the costs (in time and money) of introducing Positive Living Skills programs on a wide-scale basis. My view is that the costs are small in comparison to the human and financial costs of neglecting this component of a child's development.

The highest costs come from failing to educate children with skills for positive living. When a child is not educated with Positive Living Skills, the cost to that individual, that family, community and society is extremely high.

The Ultimate Goal

Teaching Positive Living Skills to children is all about making better people and better performers, by giving children, youth and adults the tools for enhanced performance and enhanced quality of life.

The goal is to nurture the best in people and prevent problems from arising, by beginning a positive education program at an early age.

The goal is to teach children positive ways to view themselves and others, give them experiences of success, put them on a positive path, catch them being good and guide them in positive directions. This starts at an individual level - one person moving in a positive direction, one step at a time.

This can begin in a meaningful way with programs that teach children Positive Living Skills. Ultimately this may be the most important education a human being can ever receive.

Positive realities are driven by positive perspectives, compassion, empathy, cooperation, collaboration, and a commitment to make a difference.

Great contributions begin with a vision to which you surrender yourself. Great tragedies also begin with a vision to which one surrenders himself or herself.

We need the wisdom to see the difference between positive and negative visions, the courage to make the right decisions, and the will to continue to move in the right direction, even in the face of obstacles. We contribute most when our actions make a positive contribution to our own development, to others, and to society as a whole. In living our lives, it is great when we can enhance the lives of others, but most important is that our actions do not impact negatively on the lives of others.

We are capable of making big, positive contributions and small ones, and lots in between. We are all capable of impacting on the lives of others in profoundly meaningful ways. Often it is the little things that make the biggest contribution - little positive actions that make that your life and the lives of others more joyful, hopeful, and fulfilling in simple ways every day. Every positive step - big or small - is important.

The goal is to teach, and nurture within ourselves and others, positive ways of living and interacting. Once acquired, Positive Living Skills become the "pixie dust" that frees children to fly in positive ways. Positive thoughts, positive actions and

positive interactions empower all of us to fly, adding focus and joy to every experience, every day.

We can all gain from a little more of this pixie dust in our lives.

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