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Saying “NO” to Abuse and Victimization

Three Little Words

By Dave Hingsburger

I was four years old. It may be my earliest memory. Certainly, it's one of my fondest. “No, you're wrong!” Three little words that told my mother that she no longer defined the world for me. I saw her as fallible. I saw myself as capable of expressing my own opinion. Sure I got spanked, but even as the blows fell, I knew that she was using strength, not logic. Red bummed but unrepentant, I slept that night knowing full well that I was separate from those who made me. I was, unquestionably, unique. It was an awesome feeling.

I had almost forgotten it. Lost in the busyness of adult life, I made decisions based entirely from my own thoughts and feelings. I could determine the good people from the bad people. The angels from the devils. And more importantly, right from wrong. I came to take this for granted.

It was in Windsor. I had been asked to do an abuse prevention class for people with developmental disabilities. I had a simpleminded approach for people who had for centuries been thought to be “simple minded.” I taught them to say “NO!” loudly and clearly to abuse and victimization. I was having fun. So were they. Seventy people with disabilities shouted the word “NO!” to my prompting. Role plays were done. Games were played. And then the lights came up, it was over.

In my little corner of the world, it had been a success. As people with disabilities, my audience, were milling about waiting for rides to come, parents to gather, I saw a woman, who looked to be around 24 years old.

She sat, alone. Thinking. I loved it. I like to see people with disabilities ponder what they have learned. Review the things that they have experienced. Her face darkened. She looked at me with what approached ... hostility. That she was angry was clear. I wondered what had bothered her. But that lasted only seconds. I was quickly gathering up my gear, ready to escape for a quick beer and then bed.

She rose and began to approach me. I sped up. I wanted to get out of there. I had done what I had been paid for, it had been a long day, I wanted just to go. But the crowd at the door, the mess of people meeting people, blocked my exit. She arrived before I could leave.

“Hey,” she said having forgotten my name. I am not happy to admit that I tried to ignore her. Tried to get away.

“HEY!!” she said more loudly. I turned to face



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her. "Yes?" I asked.

"This was all wrong," she said and began to cry — only a little. I put my best, "I'm listening" face on. I paid for four years of education in psychology to learn that face. I like to use it.

She didn't speak. She waited for me. "What was wrong?" I asked. "I said 'no' and he raped me anyway. It doesn't work the way you said it does. This was all wrong."

Before I could answer, she was walking away from me. She was done. I stared at her retreating form. Stunned by her assertion.

A few feet away from me she turned. She wasn't crying now, she was smiling. I waited. She thought for a second and then she said, "I didn't think you people could be so wrong." Then she turned and walked away from me.

My briefcase was packed and I hurried to walk beside her. For a second we simply walked together. I didn't know what to say and it didn't matter. Without looking at me again she said, "Are you mad at me?"

I assured her I wasn't. She walked away saying, "I've never told anyone they were wrong before." I asked her if it felt good. She said that it did.

I don't know who she was before she came to my workshop. I don't know what she had experienced. But I knew that she left fully apart and distinct as an individual. She had been able to separate herself from me. From what she was learning. She was able to evaluate, from her own experiences, the information that came towards her. She was completely able to determine that her life had taught her something more than what I ever could have. She knew that she was right and I was wrong. That night she was able to

assert that people like me, people who were supposed to be smarter, wiser and stronger, could be completely wrong. She left a person, an individual.

For me, it happened when I was four. For her, it happened when she was twenty four. The only thing that really mattered was that it happened.

It wasn't until I was nearly six that I learned that I could be wrong. Really wrong. That how I saw the world, how I viewed other people, was not always right. I have been reminded of that a thousand times. I was reminded of my fallibility that night. I have never taught that class the same way again. She changed me.

I wonder, now, who she will be in a couple of years. I'm guessing she will be awesome. It took her a while to catch up. To assert herself. To become separate from those who have supported her. To be right, or indeed wrong, on her own terms. But now that she had, I'm guessing that nothing will stop her. To be sure, individuals who can tell us we are wrong are more difficult to serve. From my experience, though, they are a heck of a lot more fun to be around.

Growth is what it's supposed to be about. For them. And most decidedly, for us.

Dave Hingsburger is a writer, activist, and consultant on issues related to sexuality, communications, and behavior supports. Comments about this article may be addressed to daveandjoe@sympatico.ca

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Videos

Ease into Fitness: Beginner Workout for People with Developmental Disabilities shows parents and staff how to encourage adults with developmental disabilities to begin and maintain an exercise program. Three fitness trainers combine coaching with music and fun and take a group of developmentally delayed people through a 35 minute workout session. V-HLT39

Fair Chance: Parents with Developmental Disabilities takes the viewer inside the homes of six parents who have various types of developmental disabilities. They join in a frank discussion about the prejudices they face, effective support services, and the lack of standardized services for them. V-PAR69

Language and Terminology discusses why people and organizations use or object to certain terminology. Commonly used terms that are used in the field today are discussed as well as terms that were once acceptable but are no longer used. V-STAI53

More Like a Dance: Whole Life Planning for People with Disabilities is an overview of person-centered planning and shows the life planning of three individuals with significant disabilities. Accompanying manual explains options and gives examples of the planning processes. A pocket

guide for families is included to learn what to expect from their planning meeting. V-STAI58

My Life, My Dream covers the elements of person centered planning and introduces two individuals who communicate a desire for change. Tells how the planning process was used to make changes happen in their lives. Guidebook provides examples, ground rules, action plans and suggestions to make the process work. V-VOC132

On the Spectrum: Children and Autism is designed to help physicians and other professionals recognize the early warning signs of autism spectrum disorder and understand the impact of early and appropriate intervention. Provides guidelines for conducting a developmental screening, outlines the diagnostic criteria for autism spectrum disorders and describes how to relay developmental concerns to parents. V-AUT100

Safe Driving reviews basic safe driving techniques that may have been forgotten over time due to greater dependency on habit and less attention to the actual skills and techniques behind safe driving. V-SAF46

Supporting Self-Determination: Strategies for Direct Support Staff provides direct support staff with positive strategies for supporting self-determination for people

with developmental disabilities. V-ADV99

Understanding Behavior: Building Positive Supports discusses the meaning of behavior and the factors that can influence it. Will help staff learn new skills and behaviors when interacting with others. V-STAI54

The New What Do You Do When You See A Blind Person? will help the viewer to know when and how to lend a helping hand and how to interact comfortably with someone who is visually impaired. V-VIS31

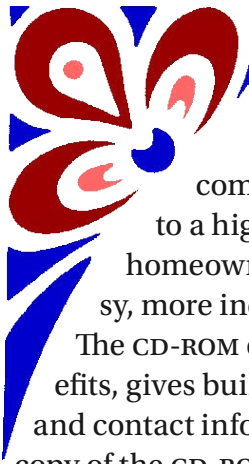
Wheelchair Getaways: Accessible Van Rental (Sales, Service, Lease) demonstrates the features of the Braun van. V-REC16

Winning Attitude demonstrates how a human service manager prevents an overwhelmed case manager from delivering bad customer service. Shows manager and supervisor techniques and strategies that will help motivate employees and solve some of the most common problems they face. V-STAI55

CD-ROMs

“Possibility Build,” a project between Courage Center and Twin Cities Habitat for Humanity in Minneapolis, resulted in building the first accessible Habitat home using assistive technology. The library has a virtual tour of this

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home which features more than 50 assistive technology accommodations from simple devices to a high-tech lift system that gave the homeowners, a couple with cerebral palsy, more independence in their daily living. The CD-ROM explains the features, the benefits, gives builder's tips as well as manufacture and contact information. You may request a free copy of the CD-ROM at from virtualtour@courage.org or borrow it from the TRIC/PLUK library.

Books

Building a World Fit for People: Designers with Disabilities at Work discusses the potential for young people with disabilities to have a career in design-related work and profiles 21 designers with disabilities from around the world. ACC71

Family Handbook on Future Planning is a guide to help families develop a future plan for their child with cognitive, intellectual or developmental disabilities that will provide personal, financial and legal protections for the child after the parents die or can no longer provide care or support. Can be downloaded off the Internet at <http://www.thearc.org/index> or borrowed from the library. TRA167

Forgotten Generation: The Status and Challenges of Adults with Mild Cognitive Limitations explores what it is like for adults with mild cognitive limitations to manage in adulthood with few or no specialized supports. AGE84



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Helping Adults with Mental Retardation Grieve a Death Loss provides information on typical grieving, presents some features unique to adults with mental retardation who are grieving, and gives concrete ideas that can be used to assist adults as they move through the grief process. DEA63

Positive Behavior Support Training Curriculum: Supervisory Trainer's Curriculum is a training curriculum for training supervisors of direct support personnel in the values and practices of positive behavior support. This is for supervisors working in any setting providing supports and services for people with developmental and related disabilities. It consists of 26 training modules which focus heavily on teaching performance skills related to positive behavior supports. STA159

Reach for the Dream: Developing Individual Service Plans for Persons with Disabilities, 2nd Edition discusses integrating individual written plans such as IEPs or ISPs with the futures planning processes. TRA168

Reflections for a Different Journey: What Adults with Disabilities Wish All Parents Knew contains forty essays written by successful adult role models who share what it is like to grow up with a disability and what they wished their parents had read or been told while they were growing up. FAM236

Strategies for Anger Management: Reproducible Worksheets for Teens and Adults contains reproducible worksheets to be used by educators, social service professionals, and others working to help people cope with anger in healthier ways. It is divided into three sections: understanding anger, interventions for anger management, and conflict resolution. SKI150

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