

New Directions

Reparenting the Parent in Support of Redecisions

Ken Mellor

Graham Andrewartha

Summary

Reparenting techniques are employed during Parent interviews (J. McNeel) to reparent the Parent ego state in order to provide support for rededitions made by the Child. Parent needs, wants, and feelings are identified and experienced to ensure that appropriate attention will be paid to them during the reparenting process. An annotated example of Parent reparenting is provided. Specific indications and examples of appropriate circumstances for the use of Parent reparenting are included.

—Barton W. Knapp

“Our goal in reparenting the Parent is to help people make changes in their Parent ego states which support rededitions. . . .”

achieved when the necessary decisions and rededitions have been made and consolidated with agreements between the relevant “Parent personalities” and the Child ego state.

Introduction

We separately discovered the frequent value of using a reparenting orientation when conducting Parent interviews (McNeel, 1976) from early on in our use of that technique. We also separately decided to write about our experiences, “accidentally” told each other of our plans and decided to pool resources: hence this article.

The Goal

Our goal in reparenting the Parent is to help people make changes in their Parent ego states which support rededitions they need to make or have already made in relation to their own feelings, needs and wants. To do this we work to get relevant “Parent personalities” (mother, father, brother, teacher, etc.) to incorporate new messages, take in relevant information and then make decisions consistent with the new messages and information. The goal is

The Procedure

The procedure for reparenting is similar to the spot-reparenting procedure (Osnes, 1974) except that it is done with the Parent. There are five steps:

(1) get the person’s agreement to work in his Parent (see McNeel, 1976);

(2) respond to the parent personality as a separate person with three fully functioning ego states and identify needed parenting;

(3) get the “Parent personality” to move into Child (CP) so that Parent needs, feelings and/or wants are experienced;

(4) give the appropriate parenting in relation to the feelings, needs and/or wants, both as they relate to the “Parent personality” and those of the person’s Child; and

(5) get an appropriate decision from the “Parent personality;” this may involve the resolution of first degree or second degree impasses (Goulding and Goulding, 1978) for the “Parent personality.”

A transactional diagram of the procedure is given in Figure 1.

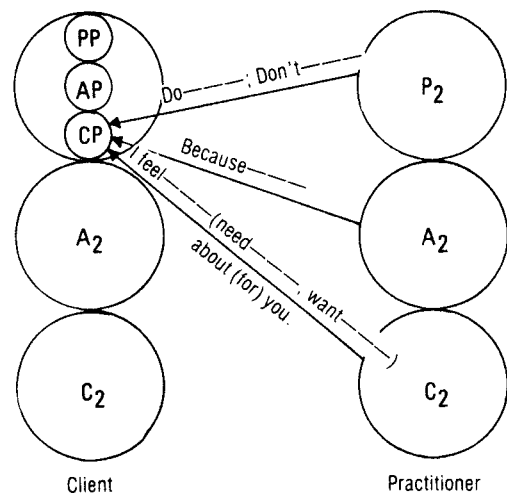


Figure 1
Transactional Diagram of Reparenting the Parent

The Parenting

Several guidelines are relevant when doing the reparenting (see also Schiff, 1975); they apply as much to this type of reparenting as to any reparenting or parenting. It is important for the person doing the parenting

- (1) to relate to all of his own ego states and use them when appropriate;
- (2) to give clear verbal messages, both prescriptions—what to do, and injunctions—what not to do;
- (3) to give reasons for each message that are experienced by the person being parented as relevant to his own feeling, needs and/or wants; and
- (4) to get a decision to use the parenting.

This approach is designed to ensure as far as possible that those being parented will participate actively in and benefit from the work.

The Overall Process

The reparenting steps may follow redecisions already made by the person or be a prelude to necessary redecisions. Whatever the order, we have found it advantageous to follow the reparenting of the Parent and the redeciding processes with multiple chair

dialogues in which the “Parent personalities” parent the Child from the new position. It is useful to coach the Parent according to the parenting guidelines if necessary. Contracts about how the parts of the person will react to each other in the future on the issues concerned help further consolidate the changes by confirming the general nature of future internal dialogues. Following this by stroking the Child and checking that he has the issues resolved will ensure that the person does not finish the work thinking that the “Parent personality” got all the attention and “I missed out again.”

Therefore, we place the reparenting procedure in the context of other steps:

- Step 1: Reparenting the Parent (or Redeciding)
- Step 2: Parent-Child Dialogue
- Step 3: Redeciding (or Reparenting the Parent)
- Step 4: Contracts and Stroking

The final outcome of the overall process is shown in Figure 2.

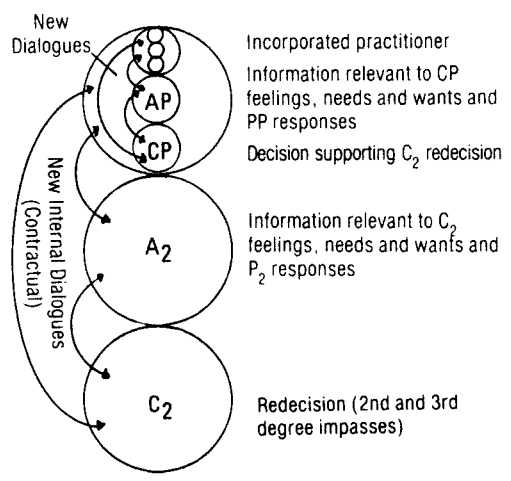


Figure 2
Result of the Overall Process

Overall Example

Mary is a quiet thirty year old who contracts in her group to learn to deal with her anger differently in different situations and stop hurting people.

In a two-chair dialogue she describes the time when she was ten years of age and was playing cricket with her cousin. She gets angry and hits her cousin with the bat. Her father punishes her and she decides to sulk and not to show her feelings from then on. Her father (Geoff) seems to have little idea of how to respond to Mary's needs.

"Geoff": "You shouldn't show me up like that by hitting David."

Leader: "How does that show you up, Geoff?"

"Geoff": "Shows I haven't brought her up proper, showing no respect; I've got a good mind to hit you."

Leader: "Hmmm. I thought you were trying to teach her not to hit people."

"Geoff": "Well I am!" (angry/defensive).

Leader: "I think you're on the wrong track then. Do you know what to do to get kids to learn not to hit others?"

("Geoff's" last response is from Parent and the question is aimed at getting an Adult response as a prelude to a further move into "his" Child and to giving some coaching in how to parent.)

"Geoff": "You tell them and bash them if they don't do it!"

Leader: "Is that what was done with you?"

"Geoff": "Sure was. And it worked too!" (angry/righteous).

Leader: "It worked so well that you're thinking of hitting your daughter. (Pause to let the contradiction sink in.) "What was it like to be hit for hitting and to be told you shouldn't hit? How did *you* feel?"

"Geoff": (Thoughtful) "Come to think of it, it was pretty bad. I felt scared and confused and then angry at my dad for being so inconsistent."

("He" is in Adult and beginning to respond to Child.)

Leader: "Say more Geoff."

"Geoff": "It wasn't fair" (starting to cry). "I didn't know what to do. He told me not to hit people and he used to hit me. I thought there must be something wrong with me so I'd better not show him I was upset."

("He" is now in Child and open to some parenting.)

Leader: "I think he was wrong. You should not hit people and it's very confusing to say that and then hit them anyway. It's important to make what you say fit what you do—and you know what it's like when people don't."

"Geoff": "Yes, it's rotten!" (suffering anger).

Leader: "And it's OK for you to know your dad was being confusing and to express your feelings about that. You sound angry and upset now. How about telling him."

("Geoff" expresses his feelings to Mary's grandfather with encouragement from the leader.)

Leader: "Next time someone does or says something confusing or something you don't like, what will you do?"

(The aim is to get a redecision that relates to expressing feelings generally because this will open more options for Mary than making it only in relation to anger.)

"Geoff": "Next time someone's confusing or upsetting with me I'll think of a way of telling them or I'll deal with it another way without pushing down my feelings."

Leader: "And what about hitting?"

"Geoff": "I won't hit people; I'll tell them what I feel instead."

Leader: "Great! Now what about what you were planning to do with Mary?"

(Most of the reparenting of "Geoff" (Step 1) is completed and it is time for Mary to reap the benefits directly (Step 2).)

"Geoff": "Yes. I guess I've done the same thing with Mary as my father did with me."

Leader: "You guess?"

"Geoff": "Yes; I mean, no—I have done that." (To Mary) "I'm sorry I've tried to stop you expressing your feelings. It's OK for you to get angry. I sometimes get angry when things don't go right for me. But when you get angry you're not to hit people. It's not OK to hit people."

Mary: "But what else can I do, and besides, I want to hit them."

"Geoff": (To leader looking helpless)
"I don't know what to do."

Leader: "What do you do when you're angry and you don't hit someone?"

"Geoff": "I shout at them. Yes! Mary, you can shout about it. Tell them what you're upset about and, if necessary, shout to get them to listen to you. But don't hit them."

Leader: "I suggest that you also tell her that she can want to do things very much, like hitting, and not do them. Some kids need to hear that."

(More coaching in reparenting is given here and with the leader's next response.)

"Geoff": "OK. Mary, you can want to do things very much and still not do them—like hitting. Yesterday I was feeling really mad at my boss and I sure wanted to hit him, but I didn't."

Mary: "Alright."

"Geoff": "Good."

Leader: "Geoff I think it's a good idea to get kids to say their decisions clearly. 'Alright' can mean anything. You might also think about making agreements with each other about what you two will do when Mary is angry with you."

(This is paving the way for a clear decision from Mary—Step 3, and making contracts—Step 4.)

"Geoff": "Good idea." (To Mary)
"What will you do when you're angry?"

Mary: "I'll express it and shout about it if I decide to and won't hit people."

"Geoff": "What about with me?"

(Mary, as "Geoff", moves into Contracting—Step 4.)

Mary: "I'm not so sure. I still think you might hit me if I get angry with you."

"Geoff": "Well in the past I might have. But not any more. I won't hit you if you yell. I might yell at you, but I won't hit you and yelling doesn't hurt."

Mary: "Alright then, I will yell at you if I'm angry. (Then to leader who nods and smiles agreement) "I can tell him all my feelings." (Turning to her "father") "When I decide, I'll tell you whatever I'm feeling. I won't hide my feelings from you all the time anymore. When I decide, I'll tell you and show them."

"Geoff": "I'll like that."

Mary: "Me too."

Leader: "How do you feel?"

Mary: "Great! I feel like a huge weight is off my shoulders. Somehow I also feel more in harmony, as if I'm not fighting with part of me any more."

Leader: "Do you need to do anything else?"

Mary: "No I feel really good!"

Leader: "OK. I think you're great."

Indications

We have found this reparenting procedure of special value under a number of different circumstances.

"...reparenting is useful when someone identifies the need for an option but does not have it within his frame of reference."

First, reparenting is useful when someone identifies the need for an option but does not have it within his frame of reference.

Example:

Harold's mother and father were both "very nice" people who encouraged Harold to "be nice" too. He got heavy "Don't feel angry" injunctions throughout his life to which he overadapted. When grown up his Parent, Adult and Child were almost completely integrated and aligned against anger in favor of being nice, although his ulcerative colitis was increasingly eating a chink into this armor when he sought help. Working with his Parent was the fastest way to help him with his problem by helping both his "mother" and "father" develop some assertiveness and willingness to express anger themselves.

"...reparenting may work well when one or more of the people in a person's Parent are disoriented, confused and/or 'crazy.'"

Second, reparenting may work well when one or more of the people in a person's Parent are disoriented, confused and/or "crazy." (Our experience contradicts John McNeel's two injunctions against using Parent interviews with "crazy" Parents. We have found that, when a practitioner is experienced in working with very disturbed people, he can valuably use Parent interviews with such people without undue risks being taken.) The "craziness" in people's "Parent personalities" is as amenable to the provision of clear parent structure as any "craziness" from their Childs. That is, the "craziness" goes when the needs, feelings and wants stimulating apparently incoherent or bizarre responses are identified and are accounted, when the "craziness" is affirmed as the person's best effort to deal with those feelings, needs and wants, and when new methods, experienced as effective, are provided and tried.

Example:

Antonia's mother had acted in bizarre and disoriented ways for much of Antonia's childhood. For a while a voluntary exclusion of this aspect of her Parent cleared the way for important changes. But she eventually blocked herself, using fear of her "crazy" mother's reaction to further changes to stop herself. A Parent interview quickly revealed a "mother" who was acting bizarre in response to "her" desperation at having to care for a child whom "she" experienced as too much. To her "mother" Antonia seemed bigger than "herself" and so demanding that "she" ran out of energy long before "she" had met Antonia's needs. However, her "mother" responded quickly to instructions on how to get help in caring for Antonia and specific parenting on how to care for Antonia while meeting "her" own needs better. The result for Antonia was a great sense of relief and rapid resolution of a large number of issues.

Third, reparenting is of value when there is a need for internal permission and protection to countermand previous injunctions and parent messages, especially when the Parent also has those injunctions and messages.

Example:

Liz had accepted "Don't have fun" injunctions from her parents, both of whom had accepted the same injunctions from their respective parents. Life at home was dull and depressing, except when there was a crisis. Parent interviews with both "mother" and "father" helped them become aware of "their" inhibitions and "their" hankering for fun too. "They" decided to have fun "themselves," and encourage Liz to do the same. Liz followed "their" lead quickly.

Fourth, it may be useful when a person's Parent is actively interfering in his Child making new decisions and/or incorporating new parent messages—"You're not going to tell my kid what to do!"

Example:

Jose was in big trouble at college and asked for help. For a long time, though, he held himself back from change by using his Parent to interfere in the process with messages, such as, "Don't listen," "Do what we tell you," "Don't shame us by talking about that," and "You must think we're bad parents." Parent interviews revealed two competitive and scared "children." Both were jealous of what he was getting out of life and were scared that he would end up hating "them." Parenting about living for "themselves" and not through "their" children, as well as training in how to talk to "their" children when "they" were feeling scared made the difference. Jose experienced a new inner peace and freedom to make the changes he needed.

Fifth, when a person has made a redecision but experiences it as tenuous or difficult to maintain because it is in conflict with an aspect of his Parent, reparenting the Parent is often useful.

Example:

Horst made a series of redecisions about having fun, working in a satisfying job and taking care of himself. He lived high on the excitement generated for some weeks and then he stopped himself using his Parent. Both "mother" and "father" were hard workers who put duty before pleasure and always managed to find duties. Each of "them" responded to reparenting

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The internal harmony, centered feeling and strength people often experience as a result of using the process is clear clinical support of these claims.

Ken Mellor, BA, Dip. Soc. Studs., CTM, is a social worker working in private practice in Clifton Hill, Victoria, Australia.

Graham Andrewartha, BAA, AUA, PTM, is a student counselor and in private practice at Impact Personal Growth Centre, Magill, South Australia, Australia.

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Ten Years of the TAJ: A Retrospective Issue

With the January 1981 issue, the *Transactional Analysis Journal* will mark its tenth anniversary. To celebrate, this edition will be dedicated to exploring what has happened to the science of TA in the ten years since the death of Eric Berne and the beginning of the *Journal*. We are looking for overview articles which summarize the growth of TA in various areas during the last ten years. We need retrospective articles on script theory, game theory, redecision theory, the Aesklepion Program, miniscript theory, re-parenting theory, the growth of TA outside of the US, the major theoretical contributions of the 70's, TA and family systems theory, TA and organizations, etc. There will also be a specialty section on predictions about the future of TA; where will we go in the 80's? Where will we be for the twentieth anniversary of the TAJ?

John McNeel, Editor