



COMMON LANGUAGE for PSYCHOTHERAPY (clp) PROCEDURES
www.commonlanguagepsychotherapy.org

SKILLS-DIRECTED THERAPY (SDT)

Tammie RONEN & Michael ROSENBAUM, Bob Shapell School of Social Work, Tel-Aviv University, 69978, Israel; ph +972 3 0546615215

Definition: Skills-directed therapy (SDT) trains children to develop skills that help them feel good and accord with long-term goals.

Elements: The therapist assesses the child to see which skills s/he: 1. performs competently; 2. lacks and how that affects behavior; 3. requires to resolve existing problems and adapt better. Parents, teachers, and peers are involved as needed. The child learns new skills in verbal (conversation, role play, behavior rehearsal) and nonverbal (drawing, sculpting, imagery) exercises in order to understand and to change thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.

Related procedures: Behavior rehearsal; cognitive restructuring; contingency management; linking thoughts, feelings, and behaviors; learned resourcefulness; promoting resilience; role play; self-control; self-monitoring; self-reward; well-being therapy.

Application: To reduce children's aggression and other problems and increase self-control, social, and coping skills. Given individually or in groups, with significant others involved as required.

1st use? Ronen T (2004)

References:

1. Ronen T (2004) Imparting self-control skills to decrease aggressive behaviour in a 12-year old boy. *Journal of Social Work*, 4, 269-288.
2. Ronen T, Rosenbaum M (2001) Helping children to help themselves: A case study of enuresis and nail biting. *Research in Social Work Practice*, 11, 338-356.
3. Ronen T (2006) Cognitive behaviour therapy with children: Skills-directed therapy (SDT). *The Hellenic Journal of Psychology* [Greece], 3: 1-22.
4. Ronen T, Rosenbaum M (2009 in press) Developing learned resourcefulness in adolescents to help them reduce their aggressive behavior: Preliminary findings. *Research in Social Work Practice*.

Case Illustration (Ronen 2004)

David age 12 lived alone with his mother. He was referred for aggressive, undisciplined behaviour over the last year at home and school, and worsening school grades over 4 months. He mistreated and fought other children and was rude to adults. David truanted or came late to school, where he was disruptive, often moved around class, wandered in hallways, ignored teachers, and did no homework. Friends stopped playing with him or inviting him home and complained about him. At home he sat still playing on his computer or watching television.

The therapist assessed David together with his mother and alone, and then saw his mother and teacher (each alone), to pinpoint skills he needed to improve e.g. resist temptation in order to sit still in class, converse with children. SDT for David included counselling of:

A. *Main teacher*, in two 40-minute meetings at school plus 20-minute phone calls twice weekly over 5 weeks, to reward positive behavior, ignore undesirable behavior, and encourage David in positive assignments e.g. lecture the class on basketball.

B. *Mother*, in four 45-minute weekly clinic sessions, to reward David's good actions, ignore unwanted behavior, and talk differently about him e.g. replace "He's hard to handle" with "*He uses my inconsistencies to get what he wants*"; replace "I'm a weak mother" with "*I need to learn skills to have him obey me*".

C. *David*, in twelve 40-minute sessions, first weekly then 2-weekly, to develop self-control skills. In a '*research course as a scientist*' he was asked to hypothesise about his behavior and seek support for his hypotheses e.g. "*When subjects are interesting it's easier to sit still and attend*", and to rate his own and friends' behaviors over the next week for interest levels and disruptions in each class. David learned to use: (a) *cognitive restructuring* e.g. redefine "I'm strong because I can disturb others" as "*Disturbing others is weak because I can't delay temptation; I'll prove I'm strong by sitting still and not hitting others*"; (b) *problem analysis* to link his behaviour with others' reactions to him e.g. "*I think my teacher hates me (which angers me) after I've been loud and disruptive*"; (c) *focus* on feelings affecting his behaviour e.g. "what I feel when shouting compared to what I feel when my teacher praises me"; and (d) *exercises and practice* to relax when angry, restrain urges to hurt others, imagine rewards for success e.g. "*I see and hear my mother saying she'll give me the amazing robot she's holding if I complete my homework this week*", and when successful to praise himself e.g. "*I was wonderful today*".

By termination at week 24, David had behaved mainly positively over 6 consecutive weeks.