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# Kids' Skills

**in action**

A Solution-focused method for  
coaching children to overcome  
problems and difficulties



## Acknowledgements

This book would not have been possible without the generous contributions of people from around the world who have been willing to share their experiences of using Kids'Skills in their work and with children and families, and the permission of these children and families to make their stories public. Thank you all.

I consider my colleagues Tapani Ahola, Tuija Terävä and Sirpa Birn my co-authors. Kids'Skills is the result of my long-term team work with them. Also their input, comments and feedback have been important for me during the process of writing the book.

## Foreword

Kids'Skills is a solution-focused method for helping children overcome emotional and behavioural problems and this book will give you the confidence and the necessary nuts and bolts to use the method in practice. The bulk of the book is made up of full length case stories illustrating the use of Kids'Skills in practice. The stories have been contributed by professionals from several countries around the world who have used the method with the children they work with, or who, in a few cases, have used the method with their own child. I have edited the stories for consistency and clarity and changed names to protect anonymity. My changes have been inspected and approved by the contributors.

The first section of the book familiarizes you with the method and gives you some background information including its sources of inspiration and the story of how it was developed.

The second section outlines the 15 steps of Kids'Skills and provides a case history illustrating the use of the method in practice.

The third section comprises of stories describing how Kids'Skills has been used to help individual children overcome a wide variety of problems. The stories are arranged in the order of the age of the child starting with a story of a 3-year old child and ending with one of a 14-year old teenager.

The fourth section of the book has stories describing collective use of Kids'Skills with examples of using the method with child groups, school classes, and even an entire school.

Through reading the stories in this book you will be likely to gain sufficient understanding of Kids'Skills and enough confidence to give the method a try. The concluding section provides you with a summing up of the key principles to keep in mind as you set out to put Kids'Skills in action with the children you care for.

The book is meant to be an eye-opener to all people who work with, or care for, children. It demonstrates that, if approached in a respectful and cooperative manner, children are not only willing but also competent in solving their own problems.

## Section 1: What is Kids' Skills?

## Frequently Asked Questions

### ***What is Kids'Skills?***

Kids'Skills is a step-by-step procedure to help children learn skills and overcome emotional and behavioural problems with the help of family, friends and other people close to the child.

### ***For what age children is it intended?***

Kids'Skills is intended for children age three to twelve but its principles can also be used with teenagers, even adults.

### ***For what kind of problems is it suitable?***

Kids'Skills can be used to help children with a wide range of emotional and behavioral problems, including symptoms caused of neurological conditions such as ADHD or autism.

### ***Who can use it?***

Kids'Skills was originally intended as tool for people who work with children such as teachers, psychologists, counsellors, social workers and therapists. The procedure is, however, so simple and secure that parents can use it with their children independently of professional guidance.

### ***What is the basic idea of Kids'Skills?***

Adults tend to see problems as symptoms of an underlying disorder that needs be treated whereas children tend to see problems as lack of skills that need to be learned. Kids'Skills adheres to the children's view. Its objective is to encourage and help children acquire skills they need in order to overcome their problems.

### ***What is special about Kids'Skills?***

The main advantage of Kids'Skills is that by conforming to children's view of problems it promotes cooperation with them. Also, learning skills

can be done in a way that is enjoyable and rewarding for children. In addition, Kids'Skills fosters cooperation with parents because it is void of parent-blaming and regards parents as partners who are willing and capable of supporting their children in learning skills.

***For what kind of problems is Kids'Skills suitable?***

Kids'Skills is suitable for a wide range of problems including fears, disorders of conduct, concentration problems, bad habits, temper tantrums, problems related to eating, sleeping, going to toilet, etc. One can say that Kids'Skills is suitable whenever there is a problem that can be solved or ameliorated by the child learning a specific skill.

***Can Kids'Skills be used to help children with serious problems?***

Kids'Skills can be used regardless of whether a given problem is deemed serious or not. For example, Kids'Skills can be used to alleviate child psychiatric disturbances such as attention deficit disorder, autism, pervasive developmental disorder, depression and obsessive-compulsive disorder by helping children overcome – or gain control over – the specific features, or symptoms, of the given disturbance. For example, Kids'Skills can be used to help children with ADHD to gain control over problems such as hyperactivity and tantrums commonly associated with ADHD.

***Are there ethical concerns involved in using Kids'Skills?***

Generally speaking Kids'Skills is safe and the worst that can happen is that it doesn't work. However, Kid' Skills is a tool for learning skills and can, like any other tool, be misused. It can, for example, be used for having children learn skills that are questionable or it can, if its basic philosophy is misunderstood, be practiced in a way that is coercive rather than respectful of the child.

## A Short History of Kids' Skills

Kids' Skills was developed in the 90's by me and my colleague Tapani Ahola – we are teachers at and founders of Helsinki Brief Therapy Institute – in cooperation with Sirpa Birn and Tuija Terävä who are special education teachers at Keula, a preschool for 4 to 6-year-old children with various emotional and behavioural problems.

Kids' Skills was developed to function as a practical model, or a set of useful guidelines, for dealing constructively with the problems of preschool children. It is basically a compilation of ideas that we had used and found useful in working with children and their families.

The ideas were tested with the children at Keula and their parents. Gradually, through a process of trial and error, a description of the 15 steps of Kids' Skills emerged.

We created an illustrated workbook for children that had a spread for each step, and a separate booklet with instructions for teachers. We also created a small guidebook for parents so that it would be easier for them to understand the procedure and to cooperate with the teachers in using the method.

We soon started to offer lectures and workshops about Kids' Skills and the method began to be known in the country. People working with children from different parts of the country, some even from abroad, came to visit Keula to see how Kids' Skills worked in practice and we started to get a growing number of invitations to speak about the method at various events. Encouraged by positive responses we established a website dedicated for Kids' Skills ([www.kidsskills.org](http://www.kidsskills.org)) in order to spread information and to get feedback from people using the method.

A book about Kids' Skills describing its steps in detail was published in 2003 in Finnish and has since been translated to ten languages including Japanese and Chinese.



More recently, training in Kids'Skills has been made available internationally. There are currently a number of certified organizations around the world offering training for professionals to become what we call Kids'Skills Ambassadors and an international registry of these ambassadors is maintained at the Kids'Skills website.

Research about Kids'Skills is still scarce and scientific evidence of its effectiveness is still to be awaited. However, there is a wealth of accounts from people around the world suggesting that Kids'Skills works surprisingly well – at least when practiced by persons who subscribe to its underlying philosophy of respect and cooperation.

## The Roots of Kids' Skills

Kids' Skills has been influenced by many ideas that we have come across over the years. It would be impossible to provide an exhaustive list of the various sources of inspiration but as a minimum Milton H. Erickson, Jay Haley, Insoo Kim Berg, Steve DeShazer, Michael White, and David Epston deserve to be mentioned.

### Milton Erickson

Milton H. Erickson (†1980) was a legendary American psychiatrist who is known as the pioneer of brief therapy. He was a creative therapist who used a rich variety of techniques in helping his patients, including hypnosis, homework assignments, and telling his clients metaphorical stories. Erickson worked with adults as well as children and his stories of helping children with various problems such as thumb sucking, bed-wetting and phobias have been a major source of inspiration for us. The following story from Sidney Rosen's book *My Voice Will Go with You: The Teaching Tales of Milton H. Erickson, M.D.* gives you a glimpse of his creativity and his ability to connect with children.

*The desperate parents of a six-year-old girl, names Heidi-Ho in the story, came to see Erickson. Heidi-Ho's problem was that she stole things from shops and other people, including her parents and then lied about how she had gotten them. "Can anything be done with a kleptomaniac at that age? With a shoplifter and liar who is only six years old?" the parents asked Erickson.*

*Erickson promised he would take care of the problem. He then proceeded to compose a letter to her. This is what he wrote:*

*"Dear Heidi-Ho, I am your six-year-old-growing-up fairy. Every child has a growing-up fairy. Nobody sees a growing*

*up fairy. You have never seen me. Maybe you'd like to know how I look like. I've got eyes in top of my head, in front of my head and under my chin. That's so I can see everything that my chid, for whom I am growing-up fairy, does. Now I have been watching you slowly learning things. I've been very pleased with the way you learned a lot of things. Some things are harder to learn than others. And I have ears too. I don't have any ears on top of my head because they would interfere with my eyes seeing everything. I have ears in swivel joints on my cheeks so I can turn them in any direction I wish, to hear everything, in all directions. And I have a lot of ears here down my neck and side and all over my hind legs, all down my tail. And the ear on the end of my tail is very large – it is on a swivel joint. (Ask your dad to tell you what a swivel joint is) So I can turn that ear in any direction I wish, so I can hear everything that you say or any noise that you make, when you are doing things.”*

*The letter went on to explain the details of how the fairy looked like, how many front legs it had, how many hind legs it had, how it walked, and how it used it' toes to hold the pen to write letters. The letter ended with best wishes and warm regards.*

*According to Erickson the letter had worked and Heidi-Ho had stopped stealing. Soon thereafter Erickson had gotten an invitation from Heidi-Ho to attend her seventh birthday. Erickson declined — he was the six-year-old, not the seven-year-old growing-up fairy.*

What stands out for me in this story is focusing on the child rather than the environment; emphasizing learning, and using fantasy.

Erickson accepted to work with the presented problem rather than making the assumption that there must be something about the child's family that explains the problem that needs to change before the problem can be solved. Yet, by focusing on Heidi-Ho, rather than her parents, he

probably had an influence on the parents as well. Kids' Skills adheres to a similar logic. The focus is on helping the child overcome his problem but the process is carried out in such a way that it also has an impact on the parents of the child and on other people involved in it.

The concept of learning is central in Erickson's work. Sidney Rosen comments: "Erickson notably avoids prohibitions, 'shoulds', and rules. He emphasizes always the value of learning. The disciplinarian is not angry but, in fact, presents his teaching in an amusing way. In all his stories Erickson is firm but not punitive. His purpose is to help the child develop his own sense of will and autonomy."

The utilization of the 'six-year-old-growing-up fairy' is an essential element in the story. Children are enchanted by imaginary creatures and they enjoy communicating with them. This idea of having helpful imaginary creatures has been taken up by Kids' Skills where children get to choose a creature that will help them learn their skill.

## Jay Haley

The work of Milton Erickson has been a source of inspiration for many pioneers in the field of brief psychotherapy. One of them was Jay Haley (†2007), a family therapist who called his approach strategic therapy. He maintained that by focusing in therapy on the child it is possible to bring about significant changes in the relationships of the whole family (see for example Haley's book 'Leaving home: the therapy of disturbed young people', Brunner/Mazel, New York 1997). I was originally exposed to this idea of his in the early 80s in an international family therapy conference in Tel Aviv where he presented a videotape of a case to illustrate the approach. I will relate the story, as I remember it, because I believe it has played a role in the development of Kids' Skills.

*The family had been referred to therapy because of the 12-year old son's – I'll call him Jake – obsession with fire. The problem was serious. He had started three or four serious fires causing considerable material damage. The father of the family, a determined army officer with high principles,*

was extremely crossed with his son and appeared to be ready to disown him. The mother was softer and she was sobbing while the difficult situation was discussed. Jake was silent and apparently embarrassed for what he had done. Having gathered enough information about the situation the therapist, coached by Jay Haley via telephone from behind a one-way mirror, suggested that the problem was caused by the fact that Jake was incompetent in handling fire. The therapist then left the room and when he returned after a while he brought along a metal bowl, some paper and a box of matches. "Let's test you," he said, "to appraise your competence in handling fire." The therapist then asked Jake to lit the paper and put out the fire. Jake complied and when he was done the therapist said, deliberately provoking Jake: "That was not very good. You made at least six mistakes handling that fire." The therapist pointed out the mistakes that Jake had made, including holding the matches too close to the fire, not having kept his eyes on the fire, and putting the fire out in a hazardous way. He then pronounced that Jake clearly needed to learn to become better at handling handle fire. At this point he turned to the father and asked him if he would be willing to take on the job of teaching his son to become competent in handling fire safely. The father agreed and at that a rigorous program was designed which consisted of an hour of training per day where father would teach Jake things related to fire safety such as how to light up the fire-place safely, how to make a camp fire, how to handle matches, how to handle lighters, how handle the fire extinguisher, etc. The training program was drawn in detail and the father appeared to take pride in acting as a teacher to his son. A clip from one of the subsequent sessions showed that Jake had enjoyed the time he had spent with his father teaching him how to handle fire safely. Also his father appeared satisfied for having taken responsibility of helping his son rather than just being angry at him. In a later session, when father had been teaching Jake

*on a daily basis for a couple of weeks in a row, there was a touching scene on the video where Jake, who now appeared alive and happy, turned to the therapist and said: "Could we now start to do something else with daddy?"*

We were told that the therapy worked and Jake gave up his preoccupation with fire. In addition, we could all see from the video, the process had a significant positive impact on the family as a whole, particularly the relationship between father and son.

Not unlike in Erickson's story, also in this case the focus was on Jake's problem rather than on the family as a whole. The relations within the family were improved not by focusing on these relationships directly but as a result of uniting the family to help their son overcome his problem.

Another feature of this story is that Jake's problem – his obsession with fire – was reframed as a skill that he was lacking and needed to learn. Kids' Skills relies on the same principle: the problem is redefined as a skill to be learned and a project is designed for the child to learn that skill with the support of important persons in his or her life.

## Insoo Kim Berg and Steve DeShazer

Solution-focused therapy is another school of psychotherapy inspired by the ideas of Milton Erickson. This form of therapy was developed during the 70s and 80s at the Brief Family Therapy Center in Milwaukee, in the USA by a team of therapists led by Steve De Shazer (†2005) and Insoo Kim Berg (†2007). Solution-focused therapy is a branch of therapy where the focus is not on problems (and what might be causing them) but on goals, on what clients want to achieve, and what they can do to achieve it.

In solution-focused therapy the first task of the therapist is to find out from the client what the client thinks would constitute a good outcome of the therapy. "How would you want the situation to be better in the future?" is an example of a question that a solution-focused therapist might ask in the first session to get an idea of what the client's goals are. Once a

relatively clear picture of what the client wants has been established, the therapist focuses on empowering and helping the client to achieve that goal.

Kids'Skills follows the same pattern with the exception that the initial question "How would you want the situation to be better in the future?" has been modified, or narrowed down, to "What is the skill the child needs to develop in order for the situation to be better in the future?" This modification is based on the observation that when you work with children using the solution-focused approach, the answer to the question of desirable outcome is invariably an expectation that that the child changes his or her behaviour, in other words learns to behave or to react differently in a given situation.

Another characteristic of solution-focused therapy is the emphasis on any signs of progress. "Has there been any improvement lately?" or "Have there been times when the situation has been better?" are typical questions used to elicit information about progress and to open up a discussion of how the client succeeded making it happen. Focusing on progress is also characteristic of Kids'Skills where children receive a great deal of positive attention for talking about, for practicing and for demonstrating the skills they are learning.

## Michael White and David Epston

Yet another school of psychotherapy that has been a source of inspiration in the development of Kids'Skills is the narrative school of psychotherapy pioneered by Michael White (†2008) in Australia and David Epston in New Zealand. In mid-80's we came across an article by Michael White entitled "*Pseudo-encopresis: From avalanche to victory, from vicious to virtuous cycles*". In this landmark article White described a playful family-therapy approach he had designed to help children suffering encopresis or soiling due to refusal to go to the toilet. White's approach was based on the idea of blaming the child's problem on an imaginary creature called 'Sneaky Poo' that was held responsible for causing the problem. The article describes a systematic procedure where the child, sup-

ported by his parents, is engaged in a game aimed at defeating ‘Sneaky Poo’. The game is composed of several activities including running as fast as possible to the bathroom from locations where Sneaky Poo has attacked the child or made him soil his pants; assuming a routine of sitting on the toilet for 20 minutes after meals; and giving the child a tiger to support him in his battle against ‘Sneaky Poo’.

White reported surprisingly good results with his approach – which run counter to just about everything that had ever been written about encopresis in child psychiatric literature – and laid the foundation for a surge of interest into playful ways of helping children overcome problems with the support of their families and friends. Those readers familiar with this approach also known as “externalizing the problem” will be able to appreciate the influence of narrative therapy in Kids’Skills.

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It should be added that in addition to various professional influences, some of which have been discussed above, Kids’Skills has also been inspired by a number of creative ideas suggested by some children and parents that we have worked with over the years.



## Section 2: Kids' Skills Step by Step

# The Fifteen Steps of Kids' Skills

*If you are not familiar with the steps of Kids' Skills from before, I recommend that you read this chapter before you move on to reading the stories. Having an understanding of all the distinct steps makes it easier for you to follow the rationale behind the way in which the children in the stories are assisted to overcome their problems.*

## **1. Converting problems into skills**

Kids' Skills is about assisting and supporting children to learn skills. Therefore, if the child has a problem, it is necessary to find out what the child needs to learn or to become better at in order to overcome the problem. For example, if a child has the problem of shouting, or talking too loud, the skill for the child to learn would be to learn to speak softly or quietly. Likewise, if a child messes with his food, the skill to learn would be to eat nicely. These are simple examples where identifying a skill that would do away with the problem is straightforward. In reality, however, figuring out what specific skill a child with a given problem should learn can be quite tricky and may require a fair amount of thinking.

It is important that the skill to learn is not defined as something the child should not do, such as "I won't swear", or "I will not shout", or "I shall not hit other children". This is important because in order for Kids' Skills to work, the skill needs to be 'doable' and 'practicable', it needs to be something that the child can demonstrate and practice. A child cannot demonstrate or practice "not swearing", "not shouting" or "not hitting others" but a child can both demonstrate and practice the corresponding skills: "using nice language", "speaking softly" or "keeping one's cool in infuriating situations".

To find out what skills children would benefit from learning it is not necessary to start by focusing on their problems. The process works just

as well when the starting point is not what problems children have but rather what skills the child needs to learn in order, for example, to be happier at home, to enjoy school more, or to get better along with his peers.

## ***2. Agreeing about the skill***

In order to come to an agreement with the child about a skill to learn you can either ask the child what skill he or she would want to learn or you can offer your own suggestion. If you ask the child you can say: “Is there anything that is difficult for you that you would like to learn or to become better at?” and if you wish to offer your own suggestion you can say: “I (or we) would like you to learn (or become better at) ...”

Children are usually relatively aware of their weaknesses and therefore often capable of knowing what they need to become better at. “I need to learn to remember to do my homework,” or “I need to learn to sit still” a pupil might say to his teacher when asked what skill he needs to learn. The motivation to learn a particular skill tends to be stronger when the idea for the skill to learn comes from the child rather than from adults.

On the other hand, particularly smaller children, respond quite well to suggestions coming from their parents or teachers. “Love, mom and dad think that you are old enough to learn to sleep in your own bed through the night. We would like you to learn to do that and you can do it with the help of Kids’Skills.” Parents and teachers have the right to express their expectations to children and when they do it in a gentle and respectful way, children usually to comply.

## ***3. Naming a skill***

Once you have come to an agreement with the child about the skill the child will learn you ask the child to give the skill a name. The name can be descriptive of the skill, it can be funny, or it can be weird. It can be just about anything the child wishes it to be. By naming the skill, the child takes ownership of the skill and dedicates to the project of learning it. Therefore, it is important that the child gives the skill a name that he likes and feels proud of. The following snippet posted by Hans Klasson, a resource pedagogue working for a number of schools in the city of

Härnösand in Sweden, provides an example of a child naming the skill.

- *So what is it that you want to become better at? Hans asked Stefan who had come to see him.*

- *I want to become better at remaining in the classroom all day, he said.*

- *Remaining in classroom...? Hans looked perplexed.*

- *I get expelled from the class every day and it's not fun at all, Stefan clarified.*

- *Hmm... So this thing that you want to become better at, to remain in the classroom all day, what could it be called?*

- *The three-legged horse, said Stefan factually.*

- *The three-legged horse. Hmm, that's a special name. How did you come up with that name? asked Hans.*

- *Well, a horse that has only three legs sits still. It cannot run around much. That's what I need to become better at.*

#### **4. Exploring the benefits**

One of the main sources for motivation when it comes to learning skills is seeing the benefits of the skill. “What do you get out of it?”, “Why is it important for you to learn such a thing?”, “What good does it do to be able to do that?”, “Why do people want you to learn that?” are some of the questions that can be raised with the child to help the child become aware of the benefits of learning the skill. Parents, friends and other supporters can be helpful in terms of pointing out advantages that the child may not have thought of. When listing benefits of a skill it is important to include not only benefits that make sense to adults but also those that are meaningful to the child such as becoming more popular among friends or finding more time for one's favourite activities.

#### **5. Power creature**

Ask the child to choose a power creature that can help him learn his skill. The power creature can be anything from an animal to a cartoon character and from an imaginary friend to a super hero. It could be, for example, a tiger, a Pokemon, Spiderman, Maradona, the football star, etc. The pow-

er creature is a symbol of the child's inner strength and can be utilized in many creative ways during the process. The power creature can, for example, have ideas of how the child can practice the skill, it can be impressed by the child's progress, it can remind the child of the skill if the child sometimes forgets it, etc.

## ***6. Recruiting supporters***

In order for children to learn new skills – or to improve skills they have already acquired – they need other people's support, help and encouragement. Let the child decide who he wants to recruit as his supporters and encourage the child to include not only adults but also other children such as siblings or friends among his supporters.

Supporters are important to children because they can encourage the child in many ways. They can, for example.

- praise the child for having decided to learn a particular skill
- show interest in the child's progress
- congratulate the child for his achievements
- offer ideas about how to learn the skill
- remind the child of the skill when needed, and
- celebrate with the child when the child has acquired the skill.

To simply list a number of people as supporters is not sufficient. Those who are willing to be supporters for the child also need to be approached and a plan needs to be made with them about how they will help the child learn his skill.

If it should, for any reason, turn out to be difficult to find supporters for the child from his natural network, consider working with children in a group format – so the children can support each other – or inviting another child who has done Kids' Skills before to become a peer supporter for the child you work with.

## ***7. Building confidence***

In order for the child to make an effort to learn a particular skill he needs to believe that he can do it. Children tend to have confidence in them-

selves when it comes to learning skills but sometimes, if they have tried many times and been unsuccessful in learning a particular skill they may have lost their confidence.

To ensure that the child is confident that he will be able to learn the skill, engage him in a conversation about reasons for confidence. Ask the child, for example, “Do you believe that you can learn this skill?” and after getting an affirmative answer carry on with “What is it that gives you that confidence?” Another possibility is to ask the child’s supporters to tell him what it is that they know about him, or that they have seen or heard, that convinces them that he will be able to make it. This simple procedure – that is, persons close to the child telling him their reasons for believing in him – has been found to be particularly effective in boosting children’s confidence in learning specific skills.

### ***8. Planning the celebration***

One of the highlights of Kids’Skills for children is the celebration. You ask the child, before you plan how he shall learn his skill, if he would want to celebrate in some way when he has learned the skill. You can ask for example: “What fun would you like to do with your supporters when you have learned your skill? Would you like us to arrange a party for you or would you rather do something else?” Once the child shows interest in the idea, you should spend some time with the child planning various details of the celebration such as “Where would you want us to be?” “Who should be invited?” “What food or drink would you want to be served?” “What would you want us to do?” or “Would you want to wear special clothing or some sort of outfit?”

Children are usually excited about the idea of celebration, but in some cases, particularly if the child is in his preteens or if the problem that is being dealt with is embarrassing for the child, the child may decline the offer. In such cases it is usually possible to find some creative alternative such as doing something nice together with only the parents.

The celebration is an additional incentive that adds significantly to children’s motivation to learn skills. The celebration should, however,

not be seen merely as a reward for the child. It is also an important social event that demarcates a step in the child's maturation and communicates this achievement to his social network.

### ***9. Demonstrating the skill***

In order for Kids' Skills to work the skill the child is learning needs to be "doable" meaning that the child can demonstrate how he will behave – or react – in a given situation after having acquired the skill. The demonstration of the skill in a role play or in real life ensures that there is a shared understanding of what the skill means in practice while it also offers ideas of how the child may practise the skill.

The following questions are examples of how you can ask the child to show his skill in practise: "Can you show me how you will react to someone being nasty to you when you have learned that skill?", "Let's see how you will be eating when you have learned to eat nicely", "I would like to see how you keep concentrating on your work when your classmates try to distract you," or "show me how it looks like when you learn to be proud and happy about things that you have done." "Will you show me the 'Nail Queen Skill'? I would like to see how you take care of your nails instead of biting them."

### ***10. Going public***

Children usually don't like other people to know about their problems while, in most cases, they have nothing against letting their peers and significant adults in their lives to know about the skill they are learning. This makes it possible to 'go public' or to let other people know about the skill that the child is learning.

One advantage of going public is that it becomes possible for the social network of the child to participate in supporting the child by showing interest or by encouraging the child. Another advantage is that if the child has earned himself a dubious reputation because of his problems, going public about making a serious attempt to learn to behave differently, has a reparative effect on the child's reputation.

Ways of going public include a workbook that can be shown to people, a poster that can be placed for example on the classroom wall or on the refrigerator door, or a table mat to be kept on the dining table.

It should be noted, that there are situations in which children do not wish to go public about their skills. Some children want their parents and but not their friends to know about the skill they are learning and teenagers can sometimes wish to learn skills with support of their friends only. Going public should not be seen as a requisite but an option to be considered while respecting the child's preferences.

### ***11. Practice***

In order for a child to develop a new skill, or to improve an already acquired skill, the child needs to practice, to act out the skill time and again. It can sometimes turn out to be difficult to come up with ways of practising social and psychological skills. Fortunately, however, children are inventive when it comes to practicing skills. Ideas involving role plays, games or exercises come to them naturally. If the child finds it difficult to think of a way to practice the skill, you should feel free to share your ideas with the child or encourage him to consult his supporters to develop ideas of how to learn the skill.

### ***12. Forgetting***

In Kids' Skills the concept of relapse or setback – or the return of the problem – has been replaced with the concept 'forgetting'. The idea is that whenever we learn new skills, we typically experience moments when we temporarily lose the skill we are learning. This normal phenomenon does not need to be seen as a relapse or setback – it can equally well be seen simply as a temporary loss of the skill or an incident of 'forgetting' the skill.

There is an advantage of viewing moments of slipping into the old behaviour as temporarily forgetting the skill that one is currently learning: the deliberate use of the word 'forgetting' here paves the way for a discussion of how, in the event of forgetting the skill, the child should be reminded of the skill he is learning.



So instead of asking the child: “So what shall we do with you when you (the problem behaviour) again?” you ask the child: “If you sometimes forget the skill (the preferred behaviour), how would you want us to remind you of it?” The idea is to get the child involved in the decision making about how others are to react to those inevitable moments in the learning process.

### ***13. Celebration and thanking***

Once there is an agreement that the child has acquired the skill – or become skilled enough – it is time to arrange the celebration which has already been planned. This event is a kind of rite of passage, a declaration of the child’s acquisition of a new skill. An important part of the celebration is to ask the child to acknowledge all those persons who have supported him during the learning process. “Who have helped you to learn your skill?” “How have they helped you?” and “How do you want to thank them?” are questions that help children to become aware of how other people have contributed to their growth and maturation.

Acknowledging supporters by thanking them for their help is not only good manners. It is an important component in the social confirmation of change, a time of showing respect to all those who have made it possible for the child to take that particular step in his development.

### ***14. Teaching the skill to someone else***

An effective way of strengthening the newly acquired skill is to give the child a possibility to teach the skill to another child. Children take great pride in teaching what they know to others. In addition to boosting the child’s self-esteem helping someone else to learn the same skill also reinforces the mastery of the skill.

### ***15. Next skill***

Once a child has learned a particular skill, there is often another skill already in sight to be learned. A positive experience of learning one skill builds confidence and adds to the child’s motivation to learn yet another, often a more demanding, skill.

## Case illustration

The following story illustrates the steps of Kids' Skills. The therapist is Ulf Hammarström, who works in the town of Alingsås, Sweden to help schools deal with children who have problems. Eight-year-old Johan was referred to him due to numerous problems. He had been aggressive, he had hit other children, he had broken things and he had severe difficulties in sitting still, not only at school but also at the dining table at home.

Before meeting up with Johan, Ulf decided to arrange a meeting with all the adults who were concerned about Johan. Present in this meeting were Johan's parents, his teacher, the principal of the school and two staff members from the afternoon care center which Johan attended after school. At the start of the meeting the conversation was focused on Johan's many problems. Ulf took the liberty of shifting focus from problems to skills by asking everyone present to think about what specific skill Johan would need to learn in order to overcome his problems.

### ***Finding a skill to learn***

To Ulf's surprise it didn't take long for all those present to come to the conclusion that the most important thing for Johan to learn was to be able to sit still. There was a consensus that if Johan would master that specific skill – if he would learn to be at ease – this would have the effect of diminishing his other problems as well.

### ***Agreeing on a skill to learn***

Later during the same day Ulf had a meeting with Johan at school. Ulf told Johan openly about the discussion the adults had had about him and explained to him that they had come to the conclusion that it would be important for him to learn to sit still. Johan, who was quite aware of his problems, immediately approved. "Yes, I do want to become calm and good," he said.

### ***Naming the skill***

When Ulf asked Johan what he wanted to call his skill he said ‘Flipperduck’. Ulf who had never heard about Flipperducks before, asked “Why ‘Flipperduck’?”

“Cause Flipperducks are good at taking it easy,” said Johan without blinking an eye.

### ***Benefits of the skill***

It was not difficult for Johan to identify benefits of the Flipperduck-skill: he would avoid braking things; he would not have a need to fight other kids; he would not throw food; and above all, he would get friends who are not afraid of him.

### ***Choosing supporters and a power animal***

Johan wanted to have many supporters. As his supporters he listed his parents, grandparents, support parents (appointed by the social services), teacher, the principal of his school, and the two staff members from the afternoon care that had been to the meeting earlier that day. In addition to these ten adults Johan also wanted to have two of his friends and his dog as his supporters. He gave his cat Gustav the honor of being is his power animal.

### ***Dealing with setbacks***

Ulf and Johan talked about the possibility that despite his best efforts, Johan might sometimes forget his skill and start moving around instead of staying calm and sitting still. Johan understood the importance of this and suggested that whenever he would get “ants in his pants” – the expression as used for his restlessness – he would think of his cat Gustav until the bout would pass.

### ***Building confidence***

Another meeting was arranged with Johan and all his supporters to make a plan of how Johan would practice his skill with the help of his supporters. Here Johan found out that his supporters had faith in him. They pointed out, among other things, that he had accomplished many skills before and that there many people who wanted to help him make it.

### ***Practicing the skill***

Johan started to train the Flipperduck-skill both at school and at home by sitting still for gradually longer periods of time while being observed and praised by his supporters. At home he rehearsed every morning at the breakfast table - with his parents and his cat Gustav helping him. Johan made rapid progress and just after two weeks Ulf received a message from teacher stating that he had become much better at keeping his calm at school.

### ***Celebration***

Four weeks after the initial meeting a party was arranged to celebrate Johan's progress. All his supporters were invited and his friends surprised him by bringing him small presents. Johan said that he had liked the project, that he had become much better at taking it easy, and that he had learned to turn to adults for help in situations where he would previously had lost it and become violent. The celebration ended with Johan giving all of his supporters a hug and thanking them for having helped him learn the Flipperduck-skill.

## Section 3: Kids' Skills with Children of Different Ages

## Learning to wee in the toilet, boy 3

*This brief opening story was contributed by Ivar Haug, who offers training and supervision to the staff of day and afternoon care facilities through his company SFO-net located in Oslo, Norway. The story shows how with a bit of creativity and playfulness the principles of Kids'Skills can be used with children as young as three years old. The story also provides an example of how to use Kids'Skills flexibly, only applying steps that are relevant for the given situation.*

Ivar was supervising the staff at a day care centre called Isberg when he was told about a three-year-old boy, Arild, who had the bad habit of wetting his trousers.

“Is it possible to use Kids'Skills with so small children?” asked one of the staff.

Ivar found out that Arild was not the only child with that particular problem. A few of the other children also wetted their trousers now and then but to Arild it happened every day, sometimes twice a day.

“Kids'Skills can in principle be used whenever there is a skill that the child can learn that will help him get rid of his problem,” answered Ivar. “So what would you say is the skill that Arild needs to learn in order not to wet his pants?”

After some thinking the staff came to the conclusion that what Arild needed to learn was to stop, every once in a while, during the course of the day, and listen to his body to feel if he has an urge or not, and then to go to the toilet if the urge is there. They explained that Arild was such a lively boy, always running from one thing to another, that he simply didn't have time to think going to wee.

“That sounds like the right skill for him to learn,” said Ivar, “and when should he do that?”

The staff agreed that he should learn to stop and listen to his body whenever there was a shift in activity, such as when the children were going out, coming in, or getting ready for lunch.

“Makes good sense and do you think he would agree to learn that skill?”

The teachers thought they could probably get him to agree to try to learn the skill.

“In what way could you help him practice that skill?” Ivar asked.

One of the teachers said: “We could agree with him about a code word that we can use to tell him that it is time for him to stop and listen to his body in order to find out if he has an urge to pee or not”

“That’s right,” said another teacher, “and we could agree with him that when he hears the code word he will enter the bathroom and place himself in front of the flush toilet to feel if he needs to wee.”

“That sounds good,” said Ivar.

“And he could speak to the flush toilet,” said the first teacher, “he could let the toilet tell him whether he needs to pee or not.”

The following day the staff introduced the idea to Arild. He accepted to learn the skill of listening to his body and found the idea of talking with the toilet amusing. From then on, every day, whenever the children were going out to the yard to play, or they were coming in, or they were going for lunch, or getting ready for the afternoon nap, there was always someone from the staff to signal to Arild that it was time for him to have a chat with the toilet. Upon getting the signal, Arild entered the bathroom, placed himself in front of the toilet and looking into it he asked: “Do you need my pee?” The agreement was that if the toilet said to him: “No, not right now” he could leave but if the toilet said to him: “Yes, please, give me some” he was to pull down his pants and give the toilet what it wanted.

Arild enjoyed the game and within two weeks he was over his problem. In addition, having observed Arild have his talks with the toilet seat, some of the other children picked up the habit of having conversations

with the toilet as well with the result that in a couple of weeks the wet  
trouser nuisance belonged in that kindergarten to the past.



## Learning to Get Ready to Go Home, boy 4

*This story was told by Päivi Saari-Vesa who works as a visiting guidance counsellor for the day care centres of the city of Nokia in Finland offering advice to the staff in dealing with various kinds of problems that emerge in the work with the children and their families. Her story is about a four-year-old boy who was a concern to the staff because of several problems, in particular the obstinate reluctance to get dressed to go home when his parents picked him up from the kindergarten at the end of the day. The story is an example of how to apply Kids'Skills with smaller children and an illustration of how the approach favours cooperation with the parents of the child.*

When Päivi had heard about Viljo's problems, she suggested that Viljo's parents would be invited to a meeting at the day care centre and that the use Kids'Skills would be suggested to them. The meeting was arranged soon thereafter; present were Päivi and Alli, who was Viljo's designated teacher, and Viljo's both parents. Päivi told the parents about Kids'Skills. As they showed interest, Alli said that a good skill for Viljo to learn would be the skill of getting dressed and ready to go swiftly when the parents came to pick him up. Viljo's parents readily agreed and promised to do their best to help. The parents were also given a booklet to read describing the steps of Kids'Skills.

The next day Alli had a talk with Viljo.

"We met with your parents yesterday," Alli started, "and we decided with them that it would be good for you to learn to put on your clothes swiftly at the end of the day when they come and pick you up. What do you say? Would that be a good thing for you to learn?"

Viljo agreed.

“How would it be good for you? Why would it be good for you to learn to put on your clothes quickly?” asked Alli inviting Viljo to become aware of the benefits of leaning the skill.

Viljo thought for a while and then came up with an answer that was related to his interest in cars and particularly in driving in cars. If he would learn to put on his clothes faster, he said, he would be able to get to the car quickly, before his little brother, and he would be sure to get the best place in the car. The trip home would be quick and he would have some time to play in the yard with his friends before dinner. The more Viljo thought about the benefits, the more he became interested in the idea of learning to put on his clothes swiftly when he was picked up by his parents.

“So what do you want to call this skill?” asked Alli.

“Car-Skill,” answered Viljo proving that he was a true car-boy.

“You can have a power animal that will help you learn the ‘Car-Skill’,” said Alli, “What power animal do you want to have?”

Viljo was very attached to a soft cuddly tiger that he held onto when he slept and had with him wherever he went. The tiger was to be his power animal. He drew a picture of his Tiger into his workbook. Alli explained to him, that the Tiger will give him strength when he is learning his skill.

“Look Viljo, here is a picture of a sun and these are the rays of the sun,” Alli said pointing to a page in the Kids’Skills workbook, “On these rays we can write the names of all those persons that you want to help you learn the ‘Car-Skill’. So who would you want to help you?”

The page filled up quickly: Mother, father, little brother, the other children in his the day care group, and also Selma, a young teacher in training whom Viljo was particularly fond of.

“You know Viljo,” explained Alli, “we teachers believe you will learn the ‘Car-Skill’ because you are such a skilful boy. You have many supporters and your mom and dad have said that they will also help you. See, here in your workbook there is a page where your supporters can encourage you by drawing pictures to you, by attaching stickers or by writing to

you something nice. And once you have learned the ‘Car-Skill’ we can let you have a party. Would you like that?”

“Yeah,” Viljo said with delight in his eyes.

“Ok, so what kind of a party would you like to have?”

Viljo had an idea: he wanted to have a party outside, at the lake where the children could play games and grill hot dogs on sticks in open fire.

“Sounds good,” said Alli “and now, let’s imagine that you have already learnt the ‘Car-Skill’. Your mom is coming to pick you up and you are supposed to get ready quickly to go home.” Alli played the role of the mother and Viljo impressively demonstrated the ‘car-skill’ by putting on all his clothes, including winter over-all, boots, hat, and mittens, in record time. “Wow!” Alli exclaimed.

After the successful rehearsal, Alli and Viljo went together to the lobby of the day care centre. Alli took some coloured tape and used it to mark a ‘parking place’ in front of Viljo’s personal slot in the coat rack. This was the place where Viljo was to practice the ‘Car-Skill’. They then created a poster for Viljo that was attached to one of the walls of the entrance hall. Viljo’s name was on the top of poster and right underneath was the name of his skill in big letters: “The Car-Skill”. In addition, there was a picture of Tiger and a pocket with ‘parking slips’. Alli had come up with the idea that whenever Viljo would demonstrate the car skill, he would be allowed to pick up a parking slip from the pocket and attach it onto his poster where there was an empty area reserved for them.

The next day, in the morning circle, Alli told the other children about the skill that Viljo would be learning and explained to them that their task was to be Viljo’s supporters; they were to help him learn his skill by saying something nice or by clapping their hands when they saw him succeeding. Alli also told the children that they would be invited to a party at the lake when Viljo had learned his skill.

Viljo practiced his skill every day. He took great pleasure in reaching for parking slips from the pocket and pasting them onto his poster. The teachers, as well as the children, were generous in praising him and his parents supported him by waiting for him outside the building rather

than standing in the lobby – in order to allow him to concentrate on training his skill. Alli assumed the habit of praising Viljo to his parents in his presence. “Today Viljo has been successful with his car skill again!” Alli would say to mom, “you can really be proud of him. He is such a well behaved boy these days!” and mom would respond by saying: “That’s wonderful to hear. We shall tell that to grandma when we speak with her on the phone tonight.”

When about a month had gone by, there was a general agreement that Viljo had learned his skill. It was time to organize the party. Both parents were able to attend despite the fact that the party took place during the day. Games were played and hot dogs were barbequed on sticks in open fire. At the end the celebration Viljo shook hands with everyone to thank them for having helped him learn his skill.

When Viljo was asked if there was anyone he could help to learn his skill he named his little brother to whom he proudly demonstrated how to get dressed quickly so they would both get home fast. Not long thereafter another child at the day care centre started to learn a skill and Viljo, who now was a veteran of the method, was assigned as a supporter to that child.

## Getting the Bowel to Work, boy 5

*Raija Väisänen is a speech therapist from the city of Oulu located in the northern part of Finland. She provides training and guidance to schools and day care centres on how to care for children diagnosed with attention deficit disorder or with autistic spectrum conditions. She uses regularly Kids' Skills with the children she gives speech therapy to as well as when she coaches teachers and other staff to deal with the problems of special needs children. The story is an illustration of how a therapist working with a child on a one-to-one basis can make a big difference in a child's life by assisting the parents and the teachers in finding a way to deal with the child's problems at home and at preschool.*

Jesse was a 5-year old boy with autistic features and delayed speech development, who Raija was seeing regularly in speech therapy. Jesse's additional problem was that he was extremely picky with food at home as well as at preschool. Due to his restricted diet, Jesse suffered from constipation and consequently of refusal to go on potty because defecation was so hurtful to him. At preschool the situation had become so bad that Jesse refused to come to the table during lunch. Instead he would go hiding, for example, behind a door, for the entire duration of lunch and would only come out after the lunch was over and the children were returning to their play. He was suffering from stomach pains and he was grumpy due to hunger.

Raija coached the staff of the preschool to deal with the eating problem by slicing it up into smaller steps. The first step was to get Jesse to practise laying the table with the other children. This worked well and Jesse received lots of praise for his behaviour. The next step was for him to learn to sit with the other children around the lunch table without hav-

ing to eat anything, then to take some food onto the plate... In this way, step by step, Jesse made progress until he started to eat with the others.

Alongside with what was going on at preschool Raija was coaching the parents whose main concern was that Jesse refused to sit on potty and instead defecated into his trousers or onto the floor behind a large plant in the living room. It was not difficult for the parents to define the skill they wanted Jesse to learn: to defecate into the potty.

Raija asked Jesse's parents to explain to Jesse why they thought it was important for him to learn the skill of doing his poop into the potty. They explained that it would make them happy and it would make Jesse's tummy pain to go away.

Jesse wanted to have his parents, his grandma and Raija as his supporters. The name of the skill was "Poop-King", a word that was inspired by Bionicle Lego-characters that Jesse was particularly fond of. Not surprisingly, Jesse's power creature was a Bionicle and the reward he wanted was for his mom to take him to buy a new Bionicle.

"Potty training" consisted of regularly practicing, in mom's presence, sitting on the potty. During these exercises mom always gave him positive feedback, regardless of whether or not he succeeded in producing anything into the potty.

Raija acted as a supporter for Jesse. "Guess what? I did my poop in the potty this morning!" Jesse said one day to Raija when he came to his speech therapy lesson. "Wow, you are really learning quickly," responded Raija, "and I have heard from your mom that you have started to tell her when you need to go. I think it is a sign that you will soon be able to go to toilet every time you need to go."

Before long Jesse surprised Raija by coming to his speech therapy lesson with a new Bionicle in his hand. "I got this because now I can poop to the toilet!" he said with a proud smile on his face.

Jesse was so proud of his newly acquired skill that he wanted to teach it to his two-year old cousin. "Look, you can also get one of these if you learn to use the potty," he had one day been overheard explaining her while showing her his new Bionicle.

## Putting an End to Wetting, boy 6

*This story was told by Elsamaria Sverin, a school counselor from Hudiksvall, Sweden, who coached an acquaintance of hers to deal with the day wetting problem of her six-year old twin son. The case illustrates how siblings can be coached to help one another overcome problems.*

Olle, who was six-years old, wet his trousers almost every day. He was such a busybody that he simply didn't have time to go to toilet to pee. On the days he wet himself, he smelled of pee. His twin brother Lasse teased him by calling him "Wee-Olle".

Olle accepted to learn to take breaks to go to toilet in the midst of playing. Since Lasse and Olle were always together, the plan was that the brothers would take the breaks together. After all, if Olle would learn to mind his peeing, Lasse would no longer have to put up with a twin-brother who smelled of urine.

Both boys gave a name to the skill. Olle called it "Ants in the Pants" and Lasse called it "Wunderbaum" (the brand name for spruce shaped air-freshener).

Oskar's supporters included mom, daddy, Lasse, and his teenage brother whom he adored. In addition, he wanted both of his maternal grandparents and his paternal grandpa to be his supporters, as well as Aunt Anna and her two daughters, who were somewhat older than Olle and whom he looked up to.

Olle's power creature was Batman. It made sense as he was a true Batman fan and often liked to wear his Batman outfit.

When Olle was asked what kind of celebration he would like to have when he learned his skill, he knew what he wanted. He wanted to have a dress party. Olle and Lasse, who loved to dress up as Spider Man, got all excited about planning the party.

With Lasse's help and his big brother's daily support, Olle practiced his skill of taking breaks diligently. In the mornings, at the breakfast table, he spontaneously brought up the breaks and wanted to make a plan about how many breaks they would take during that day and what time the breaks should take place. Aunt Anna had made an "Ants in the Pants" poster for Olle onto which she attached a star for each day that Olle had been practicing taking breaks. It didn't matter if Olle had wet his pants or not during the day. He didn't get his stars for keeping dry but for practicing taking breaks.

When after a couple of weeks Olle, together with his brother, had learned to take breaks, to pee consistently into the toilet, and to keep dry for several days in a row, it was time to organize the much awaited celebration. Everyone came dressed up in costumes, even the paternal grandma, who would usually not do anything like that. To everyone's surprise she was wearing a bunny outfit that she had rented from a costume shop. Aunt Anna had prepared a Batman cake and Olle's big brother took Olle on a ride on his motocross motorbike.

Everyone enjoyed the project and there were also some ripples on the water. Lasse wanted to learn to give up his pacifier and Aunt Anna started to get ideas of using Kids'Skills to give up smoking.



## Letting Dogs Sniff You, boy 7

*The following story was contributed by Sari Remes, a psychiatric nurse from the city of Oulu located in the north of Finland. Sari was introduced to Kids'Skills in a psychotherapy training program she participated in and she decided to test the method with her seven-year-old son Emil who had for many years had an intense fear of dogs.*

As an allergic child Emil had never gotten used to dogs or cats, and there had not been any real reason to help him overcome his fear either. But now that he was attending school, the fear of dogs had become a real handicap. He could not visit any of his friends or classmates who had dogs and had had to turn down many birthday invitations. When playing with his friends outside, he was always on guard ready to dart inside the moment he caught sight of any of the neighbours coming by walking their dogs.

The fear of dogs had not been much of a problem before. He was an allergic child and there had never been any reason for him to be close to dogs or cats. But when Emil had reached the age of seven, and he was attending proper school, his fear of dogs had become a quite some handicap. Because of his fear he could not visit any of his friends or classmates who had dogs and had also had to turn quite a few birthday invitations. When playing with his friends outdoors he was always on guard and ready to dart inside the moment he saw any of the neighbours approaching waling a dog.

Emil's family was very close friends with Emma's family. Emma was same age as Emil and she was the goddaughter of Emil's parents. Emil and Emma were very good friends, but visits to the home of Emma's family were next to impossible because they had three little dogs. Those few times that they had visited Emma's family, Emil had always hung on tight

to his mother fearing that one of the dogs would approach him. Mother had gradually begun to get impatient. She had started to say things like “Come on Emil, stop it!” “There is nothing to be afraid of!” and “It’s timid, it won’t do a thing!” But it was all to no avail. Actually, Sari thought, in hindsight, that her well-meaning assurances probably only served to make things worse.

When Sari had learned about Kids’Skills she decided to introduce the idea to Emil with the hope that Emil would want to try the method to overcome his fear of dogs.

“Today we learned about an interesting method to help children who have problems,” Sari said showing him the Kids’Skills workbook, “Many children have problems,” Sari explained, “that make life for them difficult and with this method they can turn their problems into skills that they can learn.”

Emil showed interest so Sari continued: “As part of my training I need to practice using this method with a child. Do you have any problem that we could try the method with?”

“I have the fear of dogs,” said Emil.

“We could try that,” said mother trying to disguise her delight. “First we would need to find out what skill you need to learn. So what do you need to learn in order not to be afraid of dogs?”

“I would need to learn to be near to dogs,” was Emil’s answer. Mom was surprised at how natural it seemed for Emil to think in these terms.

“Let’s see. The next step is that you should give a name to the skill. What do you want to call it?”

“Murre-skill,” said Emil. Murre is such a common old time Finnish dog name that it can be used as a synonym for dog.

“Sounds good. What about a power animal or some hero that will help you to learn the skill? Who do you want to be your hero?”

Emil was a big fan of Spiderman so it was only natural for him to choose to have Spiderman as his hero. Spiderman makes a special hand gesture when he flings out his web and this hand gesture – you extend

your arm with palm up and point out your index and little finger – became his symbol for developing the courage to be near to dogs.

“Why will it be good for you to learn that skill?” Sari asked Emil following the instructions of the workbook.

“I can go to the home of those school friends of mine who have dogs... and I can to birthday parties even if they have a dog,” Emil said.

“Anything else?”

“We could visit Emma’s family,” Emil said.

“Yes, and I think you would enjoy more playing outside if you were not afraid of the dogs that live on our street,” Sari added turning the page of workbook.

“You will need supporters. Who do you want to have as your supporters?”

“You and dad, grandma and Riikka and Paula,” Emil said without hesitation. Riikka and Paula were sisters who lived next door, two girls that Emil often played with.

Emil also made a plan of how to celebrate when he has learned the skill. He wanted to have a little party at home with his mom, dad, grandma and Riikka and Paula where they would have grandma’s carrot pie and soda.

“Ok, and how will you want to practice the Murre-skill?” Sari asked.

“I will let a dog come near me and to sniff me,” Emil said.

Emil took a sheet of paper and sketched a plan of his project. It included the name of his skill, a picture of Spiderman, and a drawing of him allowing a dog to sniff him. He rolled the paper, tied the roll with a ribbon and kept in his own room.

On the street where Emil’s family had their house, there were two families with a small dog. The next day mom observed that Emil was eagerly waiting for one of these dogs to appear and when he saw one, he grabbed his mom and said: “Let’s go so the dog can come and sniff me.”

Emil squatted silently and let the dog sniff him. He was motionless and he kept his hands to his body. The dog sniffed for a while and then lost its interest. “Emil, you did it! I don’t believe it! That’s great!” ex-

claimed mom. Emil immediately wanted to go back in to call grandma to tell her about his accomplishment.

“Grandma! I just let a dog sniff me!” Emil pronounced to the telephone. Grandma rewarded him with words of praise.

Emil practiced sniffing daily. In just a few days he became brave enough to stretch out his hand and to let the dog lick it. Sari did not push Emil in any way. He himself determined the pace at which he moved ahead.

After a week Emil surprised mom by asking her if they could visit Emma’s family, the family with the three little dogs. They did and Emil surprised everyone by letting all three dogs sniff him simultaneously.

When two months had gone by Emil had become so good at Murre-skill that it was time to arrange the party. As planned, grandma and Riikka and Paula were invited. The speech was not long: “You know why we are here today Emil,” mother said, “it’s because you have learned the skill of letting dogs come close to you and to sniff you and you have conquered your fear of dogs.”

At the time Sari told this story, Emil was ten-years old and he was no longer afraid of dogs. He could visit any of his friends without fear, regardless of whether they have a dog or not. And he even showed signs of wanting to teach his skill to others. One day soon after his party, Sari witnessed him instructing his two-and-half-year old brother. “Come here you too and allow the dog to sniff you. You’ll see, it won’t do you anything,” Emil explained his brother who had never been afraid of dogs.

## The Boy Who Became the Fire Marshal, boy 8

*Ken Bennett is a firefighter in the city of Gold Coast in Queensland, Australia. He is one of the more than 70 fire-fighters who have been trained to deliver a successful program called Fight Fire Fascination (FFF) directed towards children and young people, who have been found playing with fire or engaged in fire-setting behaviour and are in danger of causing fires. The fire-fighter, wearing his official uniform, visits the home of the child a number of times over a period of a few months, developing trust and understanding with the child, explaining the consequences as well as the benefits of fire, and educating the child about fire safety. The FFF program has been influenced by Kids' Skills and includes the elements of learning skills, having supporters, organizing a celebration and giving the child the opportunity to teach the acquired skills to others.*

The Cassidy family lives in a small town called Nerang on the northern end of the Gold Coast of Australia, about one hour's drive north of Brisbane. Their son Jackson, who was 8 years at the time, has an autism spectrum disorder that was diagnosed when he was five. He knows the alphabet and he can spell his name but his reading is limited, he can only count to 20 and he does not remember the names of the weekdays. He also suffers from poor long term memory which makes it extra difficult for him to learn new things. Despite his handicap Jackson attended a normal class at school. He was "mainstreamed" which means that he was not placed in a separate school for handicapped children but he was attending school with his peers in a regular class receiving extra attention and assistance. Jackson was a talkative and sympathetic young man even if his ability to communicate was restricted.

One day, Jackson's mother, who used to smoke at the time, was looking for her lighter. She could not find it anywhere. In desperation she walked over to Jackson, who used to be an open and talkative boy but who had been alarmingly closed up for several weeks, and asked him if he knew anything about missing lighter. Jackson denied any knowledge of the missing lighter but mom noticed that he wasn't telling the whole truth. And sure enough, in a little while Jackson not only admitted to having taken the lighter but also to having used it to light a fire on the front yard of the family house to ignite grass, leaves and paper apparently – that's what the adults thought – to impress another the boy from across the road. He himself did not see any such connection. When asked, "Why did you do that?" Jackson said simply: "I just wanted to see the flames."

Mum was appalled. She didn't know what to do. In desperation she grabbed the phone and called the fire department hoping that perhaps they had someone there who could speak with him to make him understand how extremely dangerous it was do such things. The operator at the department hooked mum up with the FFF State Coordinator who told her about the program and helped set an appointment for Ken to visit the home to talk with Jackson.

When Ken came to the Cassidy house he started talking with mom and Jackson but little by little, as Jackson became more comfortable with the situation, mum moved to kitchen to "allow the men to bond". Ken used a set of cards called "Strength Cards for Kids" to establish contact with Jackson. "Pick three cards that describe things that you are good at," Ken said spreading out the set of picture cards on the living room table. Jackson looked at the cards for a long time before he made his choice. The cards he chose were: "I can make things", "I can be brave", and "I can be scared sometimes". These three cards and the subsequent conversation about Jackson's strengths laid the foundation for the candid conversation that ensued between him and Ken. During this conversation Ken found out that in addition to the fire setting incident that Jackson had revealed to his mom there had been, sometime earlier, another incident as well where Jackson and a 15-year-old boy had lit a fire to get warm in a drain

near the local park. In addition, Jackson revealed to Ken that he had been bullied at school for quite some time by a boy who had recently entered his class. Soon after his arrival the boy had learnt of Jackson's autism and started calling him names and physically abusing him. Worst of all, however, was that this new boy had managed to take over all of Jackson's friends leaving him lonely and isolated. The school had made attempts to address the bullying but a lot of what had happened was overlooked because of Jackson's deficient communication skills. A connection between Ken and Jackson was established and an agreement was made that Ken would come to visit Jackson again in two week's time.

When Ken came to his next visit he was met with bad news. The previous week the same boy whom Jackson had told Ken about during the first visits had stolen Jackson's lunch, stomped on it and then thrown it into the rubbish bin. Jackson had demanded an apology which had resulted in the boy calling him names. Jackson had then picked the bully up in self-defence and shoved him onto the ground. Upon landing the bully had hurt himself fracturing an arm. After this incident Jackson had totally "shut down" and it took Ken a long time to re-build rapport with him but towards the end of their meeting Jackson opened up. Mum was so relieved that she later said that this meeting had been their salvation.

During the third home visit Ken started teaching Jackson the skills of a "Home Fire Safety Officer". These skills included learning by heart the emergency telephone number and what to say when you call it; knowing how to escape safely in case of fire using the 'stopping, dropping and rolling' approach; designing a feasible escape plan; testing smoke alarms; switching off power-points such as electrical outlets and yelling 'fire fire fire' to get attention. Jackson's father was involved in working out the home escape which had the effect of strengthening the bond between father and his son.

Ken's fourth, and last, visit with the Cassidy family was the celebration visit with the whole family present. Mum had baked a cake and Jackson was given an opportunity to show off all his new skills to his family

before he was awarded the impressive Home Fire Safety Officer badge and Certificate.

The next day Jackson took his new badge with him to school and showed it to his teacher. When the teacher understood what the badge was all about she asked Jackson, if he wanted to tell the whole class about the badge and his experience of the Fight Fire Fascination-programme. Jackson accepted the offer. Standing in front of the class he told the whole story, his fire setting, Ken's home visits, and the fire safety knowledge and skills that Ken had taught him. By doing this he made a huge impression on his classmates – including those who had been involved in bullying him. Not only did he remember everything he had been taught by Ken but for the first time in his life he dared to stand up and speak in front of an audience. He was convinced that his presentation played a crucial role in winning back his friends and later getting an invitation to become a member of the school cricket team.

I had the privilege to meet Jackson and his mother on a visit to Brisbane. Jackson, who was ten at the time, was excited about the opportunity to be interviewed by a foreigner coming all the way from Finland to find out about the FFF program. When at the beginning of our meeting he realized that he had forgotten his Fire Safety Officer badge at home, in the Japanese treasure chest where he safeguarded it, he was at the verge of crying. So important was the badge to him.

After mom and Jackson had told me the story I asked Jackson to tell me what he had learned about fire safety during the program.

“For example,” Jackson started, “if there is a fire in the house you need to duck down to avoid the smoke which always goes up and you have to avoid grabbing doorknobs with your bare hands because you can burn your palm. You see, if you burn your palm it can be very difficult to heal. That's why you need to take your T-shirt or something like that around your hand and then grab the hot door knob with the cloth.”

“I never thought about that. That's good to know,” I said, “What else did you learn?”

“I know how to test smoke alarms and it needs to be done every week.”



“I didn’t know that either,” I had to confess. “What about if you saw some boy at school playing with a lighter? What would you do?”

“I would tell him not to.”

“That’s good. And what if the boy would not believe you? What would you then do?”

“I would go and tell the teacher,” said Jackson.

We continued for quite while and the more I heard Jackson explain how to deal safely with different situations, the more convinced I became that he had indeed deserved his Home Fire Safety Officer badge.

Mum was very proud of Jackson. She said that according to Jackson’s teacher he had matured much recently, he had learnt how to lead instead of always following others and he had become a good role model for other children. Because of his handicap, mom had over the years turned to professionals many a time in order to get help for Jackson. This, she said, had been the first time that anyone actually helped Jackson.



Ken and Jackson. The picture appeared in an article about the FFF program in Sunday Mail Brisbane 11th of November 2007.

## Making Friends with Little Sister, girl 8

*This story is about an eight-year old girl called Kimiko who was coached by Yuka Samata, a school counsellor in a private school in Tokyo. The story illustrates all the steps of the Kids' Skills process with the exception that Kimiko did not choose to have a power creature but, instead, chose to have a song that helped her overcome her problem.*

Kimiko was referred to counselling by her parents who were worried about her because she had become aggressive at home. She was frequently fighting with her younger sister making her cry. Her teacher had been worried about her too. She had told the parents that during the past month Kimiko had twice taken a friend's belongings and hid them, something that she had never done before. The parents told Yuka, that they wished Kimiko would learn to follow rules at home as well as at school and 'to tell right from wrong'.

Yuka agreed to talk with Kimiko and no later than the next day she was brought by her father to meet with Yuka. "I have talked with your parents," Yuka said, "and they are worried about you being aggressive toward your little sister. They have been so worried about you that they asked me if I could talk to you." Kimiko explained that her little sister had an awful habit of mimicking her at home when she returned home from school. It was because of the mimicking that Kimiko became aggressive toward her, trying to stop her from doing it by yelling at her or hitting her. It always ended with her little sister crying and calling for help. Kimiko knew that her little sister did not cry for real, she just pretended she was crying because when mother would scold her for making her little sister cry, the little sister would stick out her tongue and smile triumphantly when the mother was not looking. Kimiko also said that she was anxious about soon having to take care of her little sister all by her-

self while their mother would need to go to hospital to give birth to the new baby.

Yuka asked Kimiko what skill she needed to learn in order for her parents not to have to worry about her anymore. Kimiko said that she would need to learn not to fight with her little sister.

“So how can you do that? How can you stop yourself from fighting with her if she again starts to mimic you and you feel like shouting at her or hitting her?” Yuka asked.

Kimiko thought about it and then said, “I will need to learn not to become annoyed by her.”

“You will no longer become annoyed by her. Hmm, what does that mean?” wondered Yuka, “It must be difficult not to become annoyed when your little sister is mimicking you. What are you going to do in those situations instead of becoming annoyed at her?”

“I will ignore her mimicking and if she still doesn’t stop, I will call my mom to help.” she said.

“So, ignoring your sister’s mimicking and asking for your mother’s help if she doesn’t stop is going to be the skill that you are going to learn? It sounds like a good idea to me. Does it sound like a good idea to you too?” asked Yuka.

“Yes,” said Kimiko. She was determined.

When asked what good learning this skill would do to her, Kimiko said that being able to stay away from fighting with her sister would be a good thing because she did not like fighting in the first place. She also said that she would feel better if acquiring this skill would help her parents understand that it was not her who was starting the fights but her little sister with the mimicking. When asked what good learning the skills would do to her parents, she said that her parents would not have to worry about her aggressive behavior anymore and that it would be good for her mother who was pregnant and feeling sick at times. Mother would also no longer need to scold her and calm down her little sister after their fights. “If I learn the skill,” she said, “and I’m not going to fight with my sister any more my mother will be happy.”

“So learning that skill will bring about many good things!” said Yuka, “I bet you would want to start to learn it as soon as possible.”

“Yeah!” said Kimiko with a big smile on her face, “I would like to learn it right now”.

Yuka asked Kimiko who she would ask to help her to learn the skill. “I will ask for my mom to help me if my sister won’t stop annoying me” Kimiko said.

“Who else could help you?” asked Yuka.

“I want my father to know what I am going to do. I want to talk to him about it when he comes and picks me up and I want you to be there too.”

“What about your teacher? Should she know about this? If I speak with her, can I tell her about what we have planned?” asked the Yuka.

“Yes, you can tell her that I will be learning that skill at home,” Kimiko said proudly.

Kimiko didn’t have any clear idea of how she could ignore her little sister. Therefore, a role play was arranged, where Yuka took the role of the little sister and a big plant in the corner of the room “was” mom. Yuka then started to mimic Kimiko by mocking her expressions and repeating, with a smile on her face, every word she was saying. At first Kimiko found it amusing but gradually she began to become annoyed. “Please stop it,” she said. Yuka responded by mimicking her: “Please stop it!” Kimiko covered her ears with her hands and began to hum a song: “La la-la-la-la!!” in a loud voice. When Yuka mimicked her humming she run to the corner, where the plant was standing, and hid herself behind it.

When asked what she had thought of the role-play, Kimiko said that it had been quite hard for her to ignore the mimicking, but covering her ears and humming la-la-la in a loud voice had helped her. Yuka suggested that it would perhaps be more fun for Kimiko if she could sing a favourite song of hers instead of just “la-la-la”. Kimiko came up with a song that she was learning at school at that time, and decided to use it instead. Because the plan included her mother, Kimiko decided to tell about it to her as soon as she got home.

When Yuka asked Kimiko, what she wanted to call her skill, Kimiko wondered for a while and then said she wanted to call her skill “the outa skill”, outa being the Japanese word for singing.

It was time for Yuka to prepare Kimiko for setbacks: “I guess it can sometimes happen that you forget the skill and start to yell at your sister or hit her the way you have done before. If that happens, how could your parents help you to remember the outa-skill?”

“They can sing the song,” she said.

Finally an agreement was made that Kimiko would drop by Yuka’s office two weeks later to tell about how the plan had worked out. If she had learned her skill, a little celebration would be arranged, and if not, the plan would be changed and improved.

When Kimiko’s father came to pick her up, she told him about the skill and how she was going to learn it, and asked him to be her supporter. Father agreed to do his best and said he thought it was a good plan. Kimiko smiled happily.

When Kimiko returned home, she told her mother together with her father about the skill she wanted to learn and how she wanted her mother to support her. Her little sister did not bother her that day, but when Kimiko came home from school the next day, her sister started to mimic her again as usual. Kimiko tried to ignore her without any effect. Then she covered her ears and started to sing the song that she had planned to sing. The little sister still didn’t stop. Then Kimiko started to run towards her mother, singing the song with her hands covering her ears. The sister was very surprised but it did not stop her from starting to sing along with Kimiko. The two girls, both singing, went to their mother who was working in the kitchen. The situation was so hilarious that both girls were laughing and singing at the same time. Mother knew what this was all about, an indication that Kimiko needed her support, so she joined the song and started to sing along with the two girls. The whole situation became so comical that in the end all three of them were laughing.

Kimiko used this method several times – only with different songs every time - and it always worked. The whole problem was converted

into a game with the effect that Kimiko no longer got irritated by her little sister's mimicking and the little sister lost her interest in mimicking her.

Two weeks after the first meeting Kimiko Yuka met again. After hearing what had happened Yuka decided to arrange for an immediate celebration in her office. Kimiko taught Yuka her song and they sang it together. The counselor also gave her a small toy that was hanging on the wall of the office. It was to be her certificate, a symbol of her having acquired her skill.

On the New Year's Day Yuka got a letter from Kimiko's mother with a family photo. Mother wrote that Kimiko was no longer fighting with her little sister and that she was taking good care of her newly born baby brother. She had become a good sister for both her siblings and everyone was pleased with the change.

About a half a year later Yuka was surprised to see Kimiko again. This time she came in with a friend of hers explaining that the friend needed help because she was so upset with a classmate who was always bossing her around on the way back home from school. As soon as the friend had explained the situation to Yuka, Kimiko took over and begun to explain to her that she needed to learn to ignore this bossy classmate. "I can help you find a fun way of learning that skill," Kimiko said. Yuka could not help smiling as she was observing Kimiko and her friend sitting in her office and discussing seriously what would be a good way to learn the skill of ignoring the bossy classmate.

## Taming Violence, boy 8

*It is not uncommon that problems treated successfully with therapy reoccur sometime later in the child's life. In these situations it is useful to view the earlier success in overcoming the problem as a foundation onto which the next treatment episode can be built. This notion is exemplified by the following story reported by Tanja Simon, a psychologist who runs a private practice in Vienna, Austria. The story is about an eight-year-old boy who had been in therapy with Tanja the year before because of his violent fits of rage at school. He had attacked other children as well as his teacher with chairs, broken bottles and fists. The problem had been so serious that Fabian was temporarily expelled from school and the family had been mandated to seek professional help. At that time Tanja had seen Fabian in individual therapy weekly for a period of six months with the result that Fabian calmed down and there were no further incidents of aggressive outburst at school. However, about one year later, the problem had reoccurred, not at school but at home where Fabian had become violent toward his parents. Tanja decided to use Kids' Skills to help Fabian overcome his problem this time.*

Tanja got a phone call from Fabian's mother. "Could you please see Fabian again?" She asked.

"Sure, what's up? Has he had trouble at school again?" asked Tanja.

"No, not at all. He is the best-behaved boy at school these days, but now he has started to have violent outbursts at home and we don't know what to do with him," said mother with worry in her voice telling about his recent alarming behavior including an incident where he had tried to attack his parents with a full-size kitchen knife. Mother said that the inci-

dent had not only frightened the parents but also Fabian himself who had soon thereafter expressed a wish to see Tanja again.

When Fabian came to see Tanja with his parents, she told him about Kids'Skills and showed him the Kids'Skills workbook. Fabian showed interest and within a few minutes they were working together their way through its pages. The skill that Fabian wanted to learn was to control his rage and to keep his cool. This skill he wanted to call Ronaldinho, which is the name of a famous football player who is well-known for being cool in all situations, even when his team scores a goal and all the other players become wild with excitement. Fabian was an excellent football player himself and Ronaldinho was his absolute hero.

Fabian was well aware of the benefits of acquiring this skill. Currently his parents would not go with him to any public places. Restaurants, shopping, and holiday trips were all out of question. To learn the skill would mean that he would get to go to places with his parents and to plan a holiday trip with them. He would also no longer need to experience intense feelings of shame and guilt, which he always did after he had a violent attack. He said he would see his friends more, he would again be allowed to invite his friends over to his home, and he would avoid his parents' shouting and scolding.

Fabian chose his dog Medusa to be his power animal. Medusa is a Rottweiler who looks dangerous but is nice to everyone. "She would never bite a soul," Fabian explained, "not even if someone would step on her foot." Fabian placed a picture of Medusa on the display of his mobile phone and decided to wear one of Medusa's old chain-collars around his neck. This allowed him to feel that he had the magical power of Medusa with him wherever he went.

When asked how he would want to celebrate learning the Ronaldinho-skill, Fabian said, he wanted to have a garden party with his parents and grandparents. He envisioned them all sitting and talking in the garden, enjoying a fruitcake baked by grandmother. He agreed with Tanja that in order for such a party to be arranged, he six months would need to pass without any outbursts of violence.



Fabian was confident that he would be able to learn “Ronaldinho”. After all, during the past year he had not had a single aggressive outburst at school. Fabian’s parents shared his confidence. They said that he was strong willed and if he decided to learn something he would definitely be able to do it.

Tanja asked Fabian how he wanted to be reminded of his skill if sometimes he would be about to lose his temper and would show signs of becoming violent again. He quickly came up with the suggestion that should that happen his parents were to give him old journals that he could tear to pieces, or a pillow that he could bang on, or a rice-filled stress ball that he could squeeze until he calmed down. The stress ball turned out to be the best choice and he never forgot to bring it along when he went to places with him parents.

Fabian figured out quite a few techniques to contain his anger. He practiced deep breathing and using humor to laugh about situations that would typically make him explode. He also wanted to learn to talk about annoying situations matter-of-factly in a calm and composed voice so that his parents would understand him and be able to help find solutions. In family therapy sessions Fabian used role play to practice his skill. He enacted together with his parents some of the past scenarios where he had lost his temper and dramatized new versions where he kept his cool. Sometimes he switched roles so that one of his parents played him and he played the role of the parent.

At home Fabian practiced the skill twice a week, once with mother and once with father. The exercises at home involved role playing annoying situations while he would demonstrate keeping his cool with his deep breathing technique.

Progress was steady but not totally devoid of setbacks. Fabian never became physically violent again but he did have a few times verbal attacks with loss of control and shouting and swearing to his mother in public places. Despite these incidents, when seven months had passed since the first meeting, the family agreed that Fabian had learned the skill and they organized the garden party that Fabian had wished for.

In a follow-up phone call with mother some months later Tanja learned that Fabian had told about his skill to his friend Mario, who had the bad habit of attacking other children if they provoked him in any way. Fabian had demonstrated to him how to stay relaxed by breathing deeply, by ignoring verbal attacks and leaving the situation without beating anyone up.

## A Delightful Home Visit, boy 8

*Most professionals who work with children and families prefer to see their clients in the safety of their office, on their own home field, where they have control over how the meeting unfolds. Sometimes, particularly in child welfare and child protection, professionals need to do their work in the home of the families they try to help. Conducting a successful conversation in the home of the family is often challenging because of many distractions including children running around, telephones ringing, and family members entering and leaving the room where the conversation is supposed to take place. In such situations Kids' Skills may help to give structure, shape and purpose to the conversation. The following contribution, which is a detailed account of the first home visit to the home of a family with six children, is submitted by Simon Jackson who is the Operational Manager in Bradford of the national charity called Family Action specialized in providing practical, emotional and financial support to disadvantaged families in the whole of England. Pay attention to the amount of time that Simon uses to prepare the ground, to build a positive relationship with the family and to gain the confidence of James before he introduces the concept of Kids' Skills.*

The family consisted of mother, Karen, father Martin, and their six children with the youngest one being an eleven-month old baby. Due to a range of problems the family had been referred by the social services to Family Action. In particular, the social worker had expressed her worry about the two elder boys of the family, James who was eight and John, the oldest of the children, who was ten.

Simon went to visit the family in order to find out what the service could do to help them. Karen was present with all the six children. Mar-

tin, the father, was not home. He had left following an argument in front of the children with Karen about his use of alcohol. Martin had wanted Karen to buy him beer and Karen had refused. As a result of this, there was a sense of sadness and frustration in the house.

After having introduced himself, Karen showed him into the living room. Simon, quite aware of a sense of awkwardness created by yet another worker intruding the family's home, decided to initiate the meeting by breaking the ice with some playful humour.

"OK guys," he said to the children, "where can I sit down? I can sit on the floor or on that cupboard (pointing to the corner furniture), or you could put me in the corner over there or you could plonk me in that couch."

His light way of opening the conversation helped everyone feel at ease and allowed the children to think that it could actually be fun to talk with him. Simon continued with his kidding a bit longer. When he had asked the names of the four eldest children (these were John, 10, James, 8, Sharon 6 and Len 4) he said: "I think I've got that, just give me a second and I'm going to give a go." Pointing to Sharon he said: "Your name is John" and pointing to John he said "You must be Sharon." The children were keen on correcting him and the deliberate confusion continued like this for a while. "So if you are John and you're James, and that's Sharon and that's Len, then who's that?" Simon said pointing at mum. The children found Simon's name game funny and their laughter passed on to Karen as well.

Simon then allowed Karen some time to talk about what had happened with Martin previously during the day.

"I'm just not going to sit here and let him drink and I'm not going to buy him his beer either," Karen explained, "I told him that and he went off to his mum's house. I don't want Martin to drink here. It's not what you want for you or the kids. I know what it's like from previous times. It can last for days and it's not good for the kids."

- So by him not being here when he is drunk, what do you think the benefits are to you and the kids?

- Well the kids won't see him drunk and won't see us arguing will they?

- You don't want them to be around that?

- I don't but it's not just the drinking. They can see him drunk. It's just when he gets nasty with it. I don't want that.

- It must be difficult sometimes when he is drinking but you seem to keep what's good for the kids right up there in the front of your mind. How do you manage to do that?

- It's because I don't want them getting upset. I don't want them to be frightened of their dad. He's a good dad when he is not drinking but it's not good for them to be around when he is drinking.

- You're making sure that the kids are OK but you are giving Martin a chance as well.

- Yeah that's what it seems like sometimes and I've got to keep it all straight.

- That sounds really hard but from what you say you've got it just right. With Martin drinking and going off to his mum's and with six children in the house you're doing a great job at keeping things going.

Simon had started the home visit by introducing himself to the family, by giving them a flavour of the way he works and by giving Karen an opportunity to ventilate her immediate concerns with regards to the day's events. Karen had been described by her social worker as someone who constantly shouts at her children but Simon viewed her differently. For him Karen was a mother who indeed had the tendency to raise her voice when speaking to her children, but in a room with six active children under the age of ten this, for him, was simply an attempt to be heard and to bring some order into the chaotic environment of the family.

The family had been informed that Simon would focus on working with James so they were not surprised when he shifted the focus onto James.

- I really need your help now, Simon said speaking to all of them. Me and James have never really met before and I could do with knowing some things about him. Can you tell me a few things about James that I

don't know? It can be anything at all but there is just one rule, you have to let me know some things that James is good at, just those things that he does well.

- It's difficult to say, mum responded quickly, because he provokes me all the time. He gets under my feet, answers back, and doesn't do what I say and all that stuff.

- Those are important things to mention but have a think about what James is good at, Simon persisted. Something that's totally different to getting under your feet or answering back. Maybe something that you find funny or makes you laugh?

- Well sometimes he can be mischievous, not nasty with it like, but just a bit cheeky and funny.

- So sometimes he can be funny and cheeky, what happens when he is funny and cheeky?

- He makes us laugh and the teachers at school like him.

- That's brilliant, James, the teachers like you at school! Hey, just to help me remember all the things that you're good at do you think it will be OK to write some of these things down?

Simon wanted to have a record of James's strengths so that it could be used later if there was a need to have a meeting at school. He took care to write down everything that was said about James.

- What else do you think that James is good at? We know he's a bit cheeky and funny but what else can we write on this list?

- He's good at cleaning up, you know around the house and in the kitchen, mum said.

- That sounds great, what else is he good at around the house?

- He tidies his room and does the washing up and he doesn't complain too much when I ask him to help.

- Is that right James, Simon said. You help with washing up and tidying around the house?

James smiled and nodded his head. Now Karen was also smiling. They were both realising that this kind of work could be fun and exciting.

- OK, so far we have that James is good at being mischievous and a bit cheeky and he is good at doing work around the house. What about you guys, Simon said turning to the other children, what do you think James is good at?

- He's good at work at school. He tries hard in it all, said John.

- He's good at school? Simon said with a bewildered look on his face. But I was told that James was always in trouble at school? Is that no longer true?

- He used to get into trouble a lot at school last year but he's a lot better now, mother explained. All his teachers say he gets in less trouble in class and doesn't fall out as much with the other kids.

- This list is getting longer, Simon said to James. Can you remember what's on it?

James recites the strengths that his family has identified without missing anything.

- Can I ask you to think as a family of one last thing that James is good at, Simon continued, something that really stands out from all the other things we've mentioned?

- Behaviour, said mum. He's really good at his behaviour.

- His behaviour? So the thing that stands out for you Karen about what James is good at is his behaviour?

- Yeah, it's got so much better, I'm really proud of him, his teachers told me that he has really changed at school and I know he's changed at home as well.

- It sounds like you've made loads of changes both at home and at school, Simon said to James. How have you managed to do that?

- I just don't want to get into trouble no more. I want to make me mum happier.

- So you try and not get into trouble. What else have you changed at school?

- When other kids wind me up I just walk away and don't argue with them.

- So not getting into trouble and not arguing with other kids. I tell you what James, I wish I could take you with me when I meet other kids, your ideas are brilliant.

- Just to help me picture it, Simon said turning to mum, can I ask you to think about James' behaviour on a line from one to ten, where ten means James is a perfect kid, no problems and no worries. Now I know that that kids can't be perfect but let's make ten as close as we can get. The other end is number one and that means just the worst behaviour in the world, nothing goes right at all, and James would be in trouble all the time.

Simon drew a scale on a large piece of paper and continued:

- So let's have a think about James at school last year, where would his behaviour be on this one to ten?

- I'd say on number one, said mum.

- And what about now with all the things he is good at like being funny and cheeky, with teachers liking him at school, with him helping around the house more and doing his work and not arguing at school and like James says, 'trying not to get into trouble as much'.

Mum thought for a few seconds and then said:

- A six, I'd definitely say a six, he's gone from a one to a six and I'm really proud of him.

- What? said Simon turning to James, in just a few months you're telling me that you've gone from a one to a six, all the way from a one right down to a six! That is a fantastic achievement!

At this stage Simon decided to introduce the idea that there could be a skill for James to learn that would improve things even more.

- James' behaviour is a six right now, which is fantastic. I wonder what he could do to get his behaviour to move just one more number, to say a number 7? It could be anything at all; it doesn't have to be a biggy, just something that he could work towards changing.

- Well, he could stop interrupting people, mum said. He does that a lot here at home and his teachers say he does it at school as well.



- So straight away something jumps right up there that might help James move from six to seven. What would he have to do to stop interrupting people?

- Just not do it, just don't interrupt all the time, mother said bluntly.

- Sometimes it can be really hard to stop doing things. It's difficult to do. So it might be a good idea for James to start doing something new instead of trying to stop doing something old.

- I don't know what you mean, said mum looking confused. What do you mean by something new?

- Look at it this way, Simon explained to Karen: if I want to lose a bit of weight I could tell myself to stop eating ice cream. I could keep repeating to myself 'don't eat the ice cream' but I'm not sure that it would do me much good. It would be like taking something away from me. So instead of telling myself that I can't have the ice cream maybe I could replace it with something else, like say some fruit. So with James, to whom the interrupting might be a problem, it would be about him learning to eat fruit instead of ice cream. Let's have a think, said Simon addressing both mum and the children, if the problem is interrupting, I wonder what new thing could James learn to do instead that would help him with the interrupting?

- He could listen more to what mum is saying or what his teacher is on about, said John.

- So instead of interrupting he could learn to do what? Simon asked John.

- Listen more, said John.

- That is a really, really good idea! Instead of interrupting James could try and listen more here at home and at school. What do you think Karen?

- Yeah he could try to listen more, said Karen.

- What about you James, what do you reckon? John's come up with the idea of you listening more and your mum thinks it's a good idea too. Do you want to try and learn to listen more to others?

- I don't like interrupting, explained James, I don't know why I do it.

Simon decided to try to convince James that there was no need to know the reason for his behaviour. What mattered was to try to learn to behave differently. This is what he said:

- Do you know what James? I don't think we need to know where it comes from. How about we not bother right now trying to find out why you do it and get started with you learning to listen more?

James got the point and nodded his head in agreement. The next step was to give the skill a name.

- I tell you what though, Simon started explaining, if we have to keep calling it 'learning the new skill of listening to people more' that will get pretty boring as well, so how about we give this new learning thing a cool name. What do you think James, what cool name could you call it?

James spent some time thinking loud of different options. His mum and his siblings also came up with several suggestions. Eventually James decided with a proud smile on his face to call his skill "the Porsche Skill". Needless to say that Porsche was his favourite car and the coolest thing he could think of.

Simon now decided to introduce James to the idea of the power creature.

- James, as well as giving the new thing to learn a cool name you also get to choose something to help you learn "the Porsche Skill". This can be anything at all, it could be a superhero or an animal like a cat or a dog, or it could even be an imaginary creature like a dragon. You get to make up the creature and it'll help you in any way you want it to.

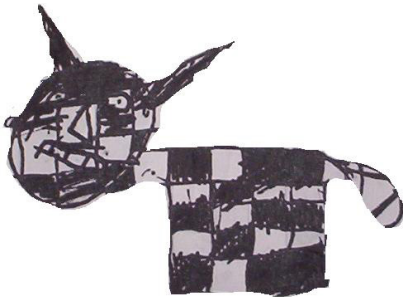
James found it difficult to form an image of what his power creature could look like. Karen tried to help him by offering several suggestions, but Simon did not want James to go with an idea that was not his.

- It can be really hard to come up with a power creature, Simon explained to James. There are so many things to choose from that it's hard to pick one. You don't have to stick to just one if you don't want to but there is a way to get to just one. Do you want to give it a go?

James nodded.

- OK, just shut your eyes, Simon suggested, and imagine that you are in a big hole full of mud. You've been stuck for ages and can't just seem to get out, the more you try the more stuck you seem to get. You're just about to give up and stay in that hole forever when in the distance you see something coming towards you ... Can you see it James? It's getting bigger and bigger and you just know that this is your power creature coming to get you out of that mud. In your mind have a look at the power creature, what does it look like, is it big or small, what colour is it, is it an animal, does it have legs and if it does, how many? Ok James I'm going to ask you to open your eyes and as soon as you open your eyes tell us what you saw. Get ready, one, two, three open your eyes and tell us what you saw.

- A bull! said James as he opened his eyes.



- A bull! Wow what a great power creature, why did you come up with a bull?

- Don't know. I think 'cos bulls are strong.

- I think it's a brilliant idea to have a strong bull as your power creature. Can you tell us what it looks like?

- Can I draw it? asked James. Simon gave him a card and he drew a picture of the bull on it.

- If you want, you can give the bull a name, Simon said when James had completed his drawing. You can call your power creature anything that you want.

James thought for a while and then decided to call it the 'Karen and Martin Bull' after his mum and dad. It appeared to Simon that it was particularly important for James to include his father in his project in this way.

In order to engage James in a discussion about the benefits of learning the Porsche Skill Simon decided to utilize the concept of a Time Machine.

- James, I really think you've come up with something cool with the Porsche Skill, and the Bull is a great idea. There's one more thing that I'd like you think about. Now it might sound a bit daft at first, it's about a – Simon lowered his voice – Time Machine! Do you know what a Time Machine is?

- Is it like the Tardis? asked James referring to a popular British children's TV program called 'Dr Who' where Tardis is a time machine disguised as a 1950's Police Box that allows Dr Who to move back and forward in time.

- Yeah a bit like the Tardis, said Simon, but this one is your Time Machine. It can you take you anywhere you want. For the first journey let's go six weeks into the future. You've had six weeks on this Porsche Skill and you've managed to learn it really well at home and at school. No more interrupting, just lots of listening to people when they are talking. If you stepped out of your own Time Machine in six week's time what might be different?

- I wouldn't be interrupting? James asked.

- Yes, that's right. And when you aren't interrupting what will you be doing more of?

- I wouldn't be talking as much when teachers and others are talking.

- So you're not talking but if you've got that Porsche Skill working for you what would you be doing?

- Listening to them in class.

- If you are listening more and not interrupting, what are your teachers going to be thinking of you?

- They are not going to be getting me into trouble as much and not telling me to shut up.

- So they are a bit nicer towards you in class. What else?

- I won't get sent out or have to go and be sent to speak with the principal, and the other kids won't get cross at me at all.

- I'm getting a picture of your school future with the Porsche Skill where the school is going to be a much better place for you? If the school is a much better place for you what will you think about it?

- I'd like it more and I'd have more friends.

- What about you Karen, in this future school with the Porsche Skill, what will be happening for James?

- He's going to get better marks in his class and his teachers will not get as annoyed with him much. They like him now but they'll just like him a lot more.

Before the meeting was to draw to an end, Simon wanted to raise the idea of celebration.

- James, I really like the ideas you have come up with today, your Porsche skill is brilliant and the picture you have drawn of the Power Bull is fantastic. I know already that you will be able to learn to listen to people more. In fact, today you have listened to me for ages and haven't interrupted once. How did you manage to listen to me all the way through?

- I don't know, I just want to learn it. That's all, said James.

- It's 'cos he can do it when he wants to, Karen added.

- Hey James, how about when we have finished working together and you have learnt the Porsche Skill we do something really cool to celebrate?

Simon then spent some time discussing with James and Karen what the celebration could be. James had several ideas from a family picnic to going swimming. In the end Karen came up with a good idea.

- There is something that he's always wanted to do but he never has, isn't there James? Karen said.

James nodded his head immediately. It's clear that he knew what his mum was referring to.

- Go on you can tell Simon what it is, Karen said.
- Can you tell him mum? James said shyly.
- James has always wanted to ride a horse but he never has.
- Is right James? You want to get up on a horse? asked Simon.

With a smile on his face James nodded his head.

If I could arrange it, said Simon, would you like to ride a horse to celebrate learning the Porsche Skill? If that's what you'd like to do I know somebody who owns a riding school and I'm sure she would sort it out.

That'd be great wouldn't it? said Karen.

- I'd love to do it, exclaimed James. Could me mum come to watch?

Of course she could, Simon promised. I tell you what, if you manage to learn the Porsche Skill how about your mum gets on a horse as well? I could come and pick you two up and we could all go to the stables together.

Could dad come as well? asked James.

He'll have to stay and look after the other kids while we are there so he can't come, said Karen.

Simon got an idea.

- I tell you what James, he said, how about I take a video camera and film you and your mum on the horses and then make it into a DVD so you can show your dad and keep the DVD for good.

James looked more than happy when he agreed to Simon's suggestion.

Karen came up with an additional idea.

- Because your dad can't come, how about if after the riding we all go out for a meal together, she suggested.

- Can we go to McDonalds? James said all exited.

- We could, Karen said, but I was thinking more like a sit down meal somewhere. We can go as a family when you've proved you can learn the skill.

Simon was ready to bring the meeting to an end.

- Before I go today, he said, I just want to say how impressed I am with how you've all worked together. Here I am, a stranger coming into your house, wanting you to talk about what's going on for you. It must

have been hard today because of Martin leaving but you have just done so well. What I'm really impressed with is how you Karen have helped James put together his plan and to figure out how he can work towards his Porsche Skill. I'm really looking forward to working together with you James, your Porsche skill sounds really exciting and I think you've got a good idea on how to get there. Are we going to meet again to see how we can get there?

James agreed and the next meeting was scheduled.

- OK there's lots of ways we could end the meeting but I have a special way to end a meeting when things have gone so well: high fives.

Starting with James Simon gave a high five to all the children excluding the baby. Having done that he said:

- Hold on, we've missed one person in all of this. Who hasn't had a high five yet? We've all had one so who is missing?

- Mum! exclaimed James.

- That's right, your mum is missing. How about we give her a high five. I will if you will too. How about that?

Karen was laughing loud when he got a high five from both Simon and James.

The session ended with the plan that Simon would contact the school in order to arrange for a meeting with James' teachers to let them know about his Porsche Skill and to ask them to support James in his mission to learn it.

After this initial meeting Simon met James a number of times at his home where the two of them played games and Simon coached James to fine tune his Porsche skill. A meeting was also soon arranged at school to inform his teacher, the class helper and the school head teacher about James' project and to recruit them to become his supporters.

In a follow up meeting at school, a several weeks later, James' teacher and the class helper were full of praise for him telling about profound changes in his behaviour. They reported that he was attentive in class, that he was behaving well towards other children, and that it was a pleasure to teach him. Due to his improved behaviour he had even been given

the special responsibility of cleaning the wipe board. In addition, he had voluntarily taken upon himself to act as an informal supporter to a girl in his class with learning disabilities. James was excited to tell Simon that he had received no “blue tickets” for bad behaviour at all during the previous week. Instead, he had received a “silver behaviour award” which is awarded for earning 30 “green tickets” for good behaviour.

James’ dad, who had continued drinking throughout this time causing a lot of havoc at home and been arrested three times for disorderly behaviour while drunk, was also full of praise for his son describing him as “having turned a corner” and being a whole different child. Dad had rewarded him by taking him to a local cricket club to enrol him in his first ever out of school club membership with the result that for the first time ever he had been selected to represent his school in a district wide cricket sporting event.



## Learning to Be There on Time, boy 8

*This story about an 8-year-old boy called Olli is one of the three stories that speech therapist Raija Väisänen from Oulu, Finland contributed to this book. The case is an illustration of using Kids' Skills by making use of only selected steps of process. His most prominent problem, as defined by his teachers, was identified and converted to a skill to learn. The skill was presented to Olli who accepted to try to learn it. He did not name his skill, he did not have a power creature, and there was no celebration but everyone at school, including other children, participated actively in helping him learn his skill.*

Raija was asked to participate in a meeting in one of the schools in her area. The meeting concerned Olli who had been diagnosed to have ADHD. Raija had been invited to the meeting with the expectation that she would tell about ADHD, how it manifests itself, and how the school can best support children suffering from the condition. When she was in the meeting, Raija learned that Olli's teachers had many complaints about him. He couldn't concentrate on school work, he didn't take notes of homework assignments, he failed to do his homework, he acted disruptively in the classroom... the list went on and on.

In order to get a clearer picture of the situation Raija asked the teachers which one of Olli's many problems they thought was the one disturbing his ordinary school days the most. The answer to this question was that Olli never came in from recesses with the other kids. Instead he was always late and when he finally came in, he would most often behave improperly, for example, by sitting in the waste paper basket piling papers onto his head or doing other sorts of clowning to get attention from peers' by way of questionable means.

Now that a key problem had been identified, the next step was time to find out what was the skill that Olli needed to learn in order to overcome the problem. The answer was simple. Olli needed to learn to come in after recesses together with the other children. Once the skill for Olli to learn was identified, there was a palpable shift in the tone in which Olli was talked about. The teachers, who had been demoralized, became animated and started to come up with creative ideas of how to help Olli acquire one of the many skills that he needed to adapt to the school.

After the meeting Olli was told that the adults would want him to learn the skill of returning to class after recesses promptly with the other children. He accepted to learn the skill.

A plan was made that one of the school assistant would approach him five minutes before the bell rang to indicate that the recess was over and say something like: "Soon the bell will ring and it will be time to go in". This plan was put to practice. The assistants actually took the habit of reminding him twice, firsts some five minutes before the bell rang and then one more time just before by saying: "Now the bell will ring soon."

All adults working in the school were harnessed to support Olli. The teachers, the kitchen staff, the assistants... just about everyone gave him immediate positive feedback when they saw him coming in from recession with the others by saying something like "Hey nice, you came in at exactly the right time". In the courtyard, the assistants gave him positive feedback immediately when they saw him head inside after the bell had rung: "Good! You started to head towards the door as soon as you heard the bell ring. That's nice."

In addition to the adults, also the other children were made aware of the fact that Olli was learning to come in with the others. They too participated in supporting Olli to learn his skill.

Olli was reminded of his skill so often, and by so many, that there was no need to develop a strategy for dealing setbacks. Also there was no celebration. The positive feedback that he received from others was enough to help him learn the skill quickly and to turn it into a permanent habit of his.

## No More Panic over Masks, girl 9

*The following story is a contribution by Susanna Tulonen, a psychiatric nurse from Finland who used Kids' Skills to help her daughter Pinja to overcome a tremendous fear of masks. Pay attention to how much time Susanna uses to build confidence by helping her daughter become aware of how many fears she has overcome before this particular one. A girl who has overcome many persistent fears before is likely to overcome one more.*

Pinja had been afraid of masks and wigs ever since she was in kindergarten. A particularly difficult time for her was the labour day, the first of May, when many people dress up and wear masks in the street. One day, weeks before the Labor day, Pinja had become panicky upon seeing a boy at school wearing a rubber mask of an old woman. She had started to scream, she run away from him trying to hide in a locked up classroom that she was unable to enter. The teachers tried to calm her down by demonstrating to her that behind the mask there was just a boy but it did not help. The mere sight of the mask, even when the boy was holding it in his hand, was enough to trigger the panic, to get Pinja to cry and to tremble from fear. Pinja's teacher contacted her mother, and suggested that that Pinja probably needed some form of therapy or psychiatric treatment since her reaction was so much out of proportion.

The Labor Day was approaching and Pinja's anxiety was on the rise. She informed her mother that she was not going to go to school that day. To stay home one day would not have posed a problem as such, but matters were complicated by the fact that on that day there was going to be an "idols" competition at school and Pinja wanted to participate because she was an excellent singer and had good chances of winning a prize. It made her sad to think that there was not even any point in participating

in the semi-finals as she could not participate in the finals anyway if she would be selected for continuation.

At home Pinja woke up at nights to nightmares involving masks and whether she was at school or in town, she lived in constant fear of running into people wearing frightening rubber masks.

Pinja's mother had learned about Kids'Skills in her psychotherapy training program and she decided to introduce the idea to her. Pinja showed keen interest in the method and wanted to start immediately.

The benefits of overcoming the fear of masks were obvious to Pinja. Her parents would not receive worried phone calls from school, she would be able to participate in the Idols competition at school and she would dare to walk the streets again.

Mother asked Pinja to find another name to her fear because the mere mention of the word "mask" was enough to provoke anxiety and nausea in her.

- What do you want to call your fear so that we can avoid that word that you so dislike? Mother asked.

Pinja thought for a moment and then said:

- "Finefear"

- Oh, why is that? asked mom.

- It's because it can easily be changed.

- Oh, and what do you want to change it to?

- Finefear is like fine sand that can run away like fine sand runs through the fingers, and besides, I think that finefear can also easily be changed into a bravery, explained Pinja.

- Wow! You came up with that all by yourself! You figured out all by yourself that you need to find a bravery that you can learn in order to overcome your fear. You are clever. I am impressed.

Pinja giggled and wiggled in her chair with delight.

- So tell me, what would you want to call that bravery?

- *Surprising bravery* answered Pinja.

- Ok, and how did you come to think of that name? asked mum.

- Because it will be such a surprise to no longer have that fear.

- By the way, you have been afraid of things earlier that you no longer are afraid of, haven't you, said mom.

- Yes, bees. I am no longer afraid of bees.

- That's right. Do you know how did you do that? What did you do to overcome your fear of bees?

I don't know, said Pinja shrugging her shoulders, I'm simply no longer afraid of them.

- That's true. Are there more things that you have been afraid of before but you are not any longer?

- Yes, all disgusting bugs like ants, flying bugs, beetles, and worms.

- You have actually overcome quite a few fears before. How have you done that?

- Beats me! Pinja said shrugging her shoulders again.

- But to be able to overcome so many fears requires a lot of persistence and courage so there must have been some tricks that you have used.

- I started to examine ants. When I got that nature examiner's kit I started to collect ants with tweezers into the jar and then they simply were no longer frightful.

- What about all the other bugs? How did you overcome your fear of them?

- It was when we got the swimming pool. The pool was so much fun that I didn't pay any attention to the bugs flying around. I have even picked some dead ones from the water with a net-bag and rescued some that have been still alive. It's been fun to try to save them.

- You are great! Is there still something that you have previously been afraid of but no longer are?

- Yes, there is one more thing. I am no longer afraid of ghosts.

- That's right. You used to be horrified by them. It was a big fear, wasn't it? How did you get over that one?

- When I became older I understood that ghosts don't even exist. It was just one of those child things. I even looked under the bed sometimes to see if there was someone there but there wasn't so now I believe that they don't exist in reality.

Next mom explained to Pinja that she needs supporters in order to acquire the *surprising bravery*. Supporters, she explained, are persons who are willing to help her and who will praise her for her progress. Pinja decided to ask, in addition to her mother, her father, her little sister, her grandfather and two schoolmates to become her supporters.

- It's a big thing to get from Fine-Fear to Surprising Bravery. When you have done that, would you like to reward yourself with a party or would you prefer some other kind of reward?

- Party! Yes, party, exclaimed Pinja with delight, and I could invite Suzy, Maggy, Betty.... the list went on and on.

- We can do that and what shall we serve for the guests?

- Coke, cake, ice-cream, chips, sweets and a surprise.

- Wow, that's going to be quite a party then, said mom.

- So, Pinja, do you have any ideas of how you will practice Surprising Bravery? You know, something like you did with the ants.

- I need to get used those Labour Day masks. And not just the easy ones but also those that are really terrible.

- How will you do that? How will you get used to the real terrible ones?

Pinja thought for a while and then said:

- I could look at pictures of people wearing them.

- That's a good idea. We could get some from the internet and print them out for you and put them into an album that you can look at. Do you have any other ideas of how to practice Surprising Bravery?

- When I have gotten used to the pictures in the album I could get a mask and put it on and see myself in the mirror.

- Hey, that's a great idea. And what do you want us to say if we want to remind you look at those pictures in your book?

- You should say: "Very good Pinja, you are soon going to reach your goal!"

- Ok, so you want us to say all that: "Very good Pinja, you are soon going to reach your goal".

- Yes.

- Ok. It's deal. We will let the others know that then.

Mom helped Pinja to print out pictures of masks from the internet. Lots of them were found on websites selling Halloween costumes. The pictures were glued on sheets of paper which were then stapled together to make an album with some 50 pages of pictures of mask, some quite horrifying indeed. Pinja came up with an idea of how she would manage to look at the scary mask pictures. She gave each mask a silly name and when she thought about the name she felt like laughing. This way instead of appearing frightening, the masks appeared funny. Pinja practiced at home industriously, sometimes up to three times a day. Her mom and her other supporters encouraged her in many ways, also using those exact words that Pinja had come up with: "Very good, Pinja, you are soon going to reach your goal".

Barely a week had passed since the first discussion, when a picture message ticked into to mom's phone. It was from Pinja and it portrayed her at school dressed in a skeleton costume! Pinja won the first price of the Idols competition in her own class but unfortunately the teachers did not allow her to compete on the Labour Day in the whole school Idols contest. They thought that Pinja would not be able to manage the big audience. Despite her disappointment, Pinja did attend school on Labor Day. She wore her skeleton outfit and she was not afraid of a single mask she saw, not even the one she had seen earlier that had so much terrified her. She had actually been sitting throughout the contest next to the boy wearing a witch mask and had had a good time. The witch-mask had not frightened her at all. In fact, she had found it amusing.

Pinja's celebration was organized only two weeks after the Labour Day. The serving was exactly as Pinja had wished for and games were played. In addition, Pinja's mom and dad surprised her by setting up another Idols contest where Pinja won the second price. The *Fine-Fear* had given way to *Surprising Bravery*. Pinja was proud of no longer being afraid of masks feeling that if she ever again would become afraid of something she would know what to do.

## One Child – Three Skills, boy 9

*This story is contributed by Johan Kist who is a family therapist employed by the Intensive Psychiatric Family Services Unit in the town of Drenthe in the Netherlands. An important part of Johan's work is offering guidance and consultation to clients within their homes. This case study is a prime example of how to use Kids' Skills to help children with multiple problems. In such cases it is often wise to put the most difficult skill on hold and to have the child learn one or two less difficult skills first. This allows the child to develop trust in the method and to build his self-esteem. In this case the boy's most serious problem, which was soiling, was dealt with only after he had successfully learned two skills, first one proposed by his parents and the second one proposed by himself.*

The parents of Jan, who was nine at the time, turned to the Intensive Psychiatric Family Services in order to get help for their son. The case was assigned to Johan, who commonly uses Kids' Skills when working with children. For a period lasting a year he visited the family regularly, sometimes mostly twice a week.

The family was struggling with many different problems. One parent was on medication because of psychiatric problems and there were problems also with the two other children, an older brother and a younger sister.

When Johan first visited the home, the parents wanted to concentrate on Jan's problems. The biggest problem, they said, was that he refused to go to the bathroom. He would not only defecate in his trousers but also frequently smear his faeces onto his clothes and the furniture in his room. The parents complained that they never knew what he was thinking and



what was going on inside of him because he did not express his feelings and or his opinions about the things that were going on in the family. They also mentioned that despite his age, he had still not learned to ride a bike.

After listening attentively to the parents' all concerns Johan told them about the Kids' Skills approach and asked them if they thought this could be a suitable way of working with Jan. The parents assumed that there was a good change that the approach would work with Jan.

"So where do you think we should start? Which one of the different problems you have told about should be addressed first?" asked Johan.

The parents thought about the question for a while and then said: "We think it is perhaps easiest for him to learn to speak up, to tell us what he thinks about things. If he succeeds in learning that skill, the method will work better on the other problems."

"Have you thought about the possibility" asked Johan, "that if he learns to communicate to you what he thinks and feels about different things, so he may also say things that are not easy for you to hear?"

The parents said that they were aware of this possibility but that they much preferred him to express himself than to protect them by saying nothing at all. At that the decision was made that when Johan would visit the family next time, Jan would be invited to take part in the conversation and Johan would inform him about the plan.

"I have talked with your parents," Johan said to Jan when he was visiting the home next time, "and they have told me that they would like you to become better at telling them what's on your mind; they would like you to learn to tell them your opinions about things that happen at home. They say they see that you are sometimes unhappy but you usually don't tell them what's bothering you. They think that you don't want to tell them what you are thinking for the fear of hurting their feelings. They think you want to protect them by keeping quiet and not saying anything. And they would want you to learn to speak your mind because they would rather see you speak about things you are unhappy about than see you being unhappy without knowing what is wrong."

Johan noticed that Jan became tearful as he agreed that it indeed was difficult for him to talk about his thoughts and feelings.

“So what do you think Jan, would it be good for you?” Johan asked. “Would you want to become better at telling your parents what you think and how you feel about things?”

Jan said yes and an agreement was made that he would start a Kids’Skills project to become better at this. The skill was defined as: “I am able to express my opinion about things”.

“Do you think it will be good for you?” asked Johan.

“Yes,” said Jan.

“I think so too,” Jan agreed, “but tell me, in what way do you think it will good for you? Why is it good for you to become better at telling your opinion about things?”

Jan thought about the question but it was difficult for him to find an answer. Johan let him think. Finally, Jan said: “I won’t have stomach pains any longer.”

“Wow, Jan, that was an example of telling your opinion about things,” said Johan, “Very nice. You are doing it already! You are telling your opinion about things. Anything else? Are there any other benefits of you learning to tell your opinions?”

Jan tried hard but he could not think of anything else. Johan then turned to the father and asked him the same question: “In what way do you think it will be good for him?”

“I could take his feelings much more into account,” father said.

“What about you mum?” asked Johan, “in what way do you think it would be good for him?”

“I think he would be happier. It would also be easier for us to be there for him when he is worried about something or when something is bothering him,” explained mother.

“Hmm, there’s one thing I am thinking about. ‘I am able to tell my opinion about things’ – that’s a pretty long name for the skill Jan will be learning. Could we come up with something shorter? Do you have anything in mind Jan, like a shorter name for your skill?” asked Johan.

“Snake,” Jan replied decisively.

“Snake-skill. Ok, that’s a really good name for your skill. And who could you ask to help you to learn the snake-skill? Who could you ask to be your supporters?” Jan wanted to have his parents and Johan to be his supporters. In addition, he said that his teacher could be a supporter and also one good friend of his from school who according to him was particularly good at telling his opinions about things.

“Hey, three of the people you want to be your supporters are present!” Johan said, “You could ask us all straight away to become your supporters?” Jan asked both his parents and Johan to be his supporters and all of them said ‘yes’. “What about your teacher and your friend at school? Will you ask them too the way you just asked us?” asked Johan. Jan said he would do it ‘together with his mum.

“Do you think he will learn the Snake Skill?” Johan asked the parents.

“Sure,” said father, “he is a smart boy and he will learn if he uses his smartness to learn it.”

Mum agreed with dad and added credence by describing a recent incident where Jan had stated his opinion.”

“I too think you will be able to learn the Snake Skill,” said Johan. “Actually, I have already seen you do it when you said that your stomach would not hurt if you learned to tell your parents when something is bothering you. There you were already doing the Snake Skill!”

Before Johan had a chance to ask Jan how he would want to celebrate learning the skill Jan, who had been browsing the Kids’Skills workbook, brought the subject up himself: “I don’t want any party with cake or candy,” he said, “I want to get an assembly kit model boat when I have learned the skill.”

The parents agreed to his wish. Johan said he would be curious to see the boat when Jan had put it together.

Then conversation then shifted to the question of who should be told about Jan’s intention to learn the Snake-Skill. Jan didn’t find the idea of going public the least appealing. He didn’t even want his big broth-

er to know about the Snake-Skill out of fear that his brother would begin to tease him. His parents agreed and said that they could not guarantee that they could prevent it from happening. So it was decided that only those persons that Jan had named as his supporters would know about the Snake-Skill.

“So tell me Jan how will you express your opinions about things? What would you say for example?” asked Johan to open a conversation about how Jan might start to put his skill into practice.

“How would I know?” Jan snapped, “If I knew I wouldn’t have to learn it, or what?”

“Hmm,” Johan nodded and then looking at Jan’s father he said: “You were right. He is a clever boy.”

“I’m just wondering what you might do to learn the Snake-Skill,” Johan explained, “How do you think you could practise the Snake Skill?”

“Just by doing it I guess,” said Jan.

“Ok, and what could help you to do that?” asked Johan.

“I could put a poster on the wall of my room to remind me of the Snake Skill,” Jan suggested.

“Excellent idea, Jan!” said Johan.

“And how could help him? Jan asked the parents.

They came up with the idea that they could offer him opportunities to tell his opinions by purposefully asking him questions such as “What do you want?” “How do you feel about this” and “What is your opinion about that?” Jan agreed with his parents’ idea and following Johan’s suggestion they decided try it right away. The parents did not find it difficult to come up with questions to ask: “What would you think if we told you that we are going to go and visit the neighbours tonight?” “What about if we told you that your aunt is coming to spend some days with you? What would you think about that?” “What would you say if we told you that you need to look after your little sister for a while?” Jan answered their questions one by one and received immediate admiration after each answer.

A plan emerged that everyone agreed to. The parents would ask Jan, at least once a day, what his opinion was about this or that and he would try to answer. Johan's role was to follow up on progress by asking either Jan or his parents, each time he visited the home, how the practicing was going.

The parents did what they promised. Every day they asked Jan one or more opinion questions and every time Johan visited the home, he asked how the practice was going. John had plenty of opportunities to praise Jan's parents for helping their son to practise the Snake Skill. Jan made rapid progress and as a 'side effect' of the project, the parents noticed that they too became better at expressing their thoughts and feelings to each other which had helped to decrease the tension in their relationship.

"How's going with the Snake Skill?" Johan asked Jan on one of his visits.

"Most of the time it works OK but sometimes it's still difficult to tell my opinion because I think about how it feels in my stomach afterwards," explained Jan.

"I know, it's not always easy," said Johan, "and when you find it difficult, is there anything you would like others to say to you that might help you tell your opinion?"

"They can tell me 'think about the snake'", said Jan.

After three weeks of practice Jan and his parents felt that he had made so much progress that it was time to celebrate and to give him the model boat kit. A small gathering was arranged at home where Jan spontaneously thanked his parents, Johan and his friend for their support. Jan got his model boat kit and spent the whole next day assembling it with his father. When Johan came for his next visit, Jan was proud to show him the boat.

Without Johan bringing up the idea of the next skill, Jan spontaneously suggested that he could use Kids' Skills to learn to ride a bike. Supporters were named and a plan was made, and when Johan visited next week Jan was already proud to show him that he was able ride his bike.

When Jan's triumph of learning to ride a bike was discussed, the parents brought up the problem with the soiling. They said that they wanted him to learn to go to the bathroom every day and to stop doing what he did with his faeces. The parents were surprised to find that for the first time in his life Jan approved of them talking about his problem with an outsider to the family. Jan agreed to try to learn to defecate into the toilet and when he was asked how his parents could help him in learning this skill he said that they could try to make sure that he would not be left alone in his room for longer than an hour at a time. He had himself made the observation that when he was alone in his room for longer times he often got overwhelmed by an urge to do it.

When Johan completed his engagement with the family Jan had completely gotten over the soiling problem. He went to toilet every day even if he still often needed his mother to remind him to go. The whole family, not least Jan himself, were truly happy that the persistent soiling problem was finally over.

## Learning to Walk Instead of Running, boy 10

*Raija Väisänen, a speech therapist from northern Finland whose two other stories Getting the bowel to work and Learning to be there on time you may have already read, provided this brief account of a 10-year-old boy who had the diagnosis of “pervasive developmental disorder”, a term referring to a syndrome consisting of a wide range of developmental problems including difficulties in reading, speech and behaviour. The story highlights the importance of making sure children know what the skill they are supposed to learn means in actual practice.*

One of the things that were particularly difficult for Ville was getting normally out for recesses at school. He simply could not walk down the three floors of stairs calmly but always run down with high speed and lots of noise.

“So if running frenziedly down the stairs is the problem that should be solved, then what is the skill he needs to learn?” asked Raija the teachers in a meeting where Ville was discussed. It didn’t take long for the teachers to figure out the answer: Ville needed to learn to walk (rather than run) down the stairs.

Soon thereafter one of the teachers spoke with Ville and explained to him that the teachers had talked about him and they had agreed that they needed him to learn to walk down the stairs calmly when he was going out for recess after the lessons were over. This was important, Ville was told, because in this way the risk of him, or someone else, getting seriously hurt could be avoided.

In order to make sure Ville understood what exactly was expected of him, a demonstration was arranged. “So, Ville, let’s see you walk down the stairs” said Ville’s personal assistant at the top of the stairs while his

teacher was observing down below. “We’ll do this together first, ok?” the assistant said as they started walking down slowly hand in hand. “Oh, you mean *this* slowly?” commented Ville to the teacher as they reached the bottom. “Yes, I mean *this* slowly and now, are you ready to try it by yourself?” the teacher asked. Ville was ready and upon “go”, with the assistant at the top of the stairs and the teacher down below, he demonstrated the skill of walking calmly down the stairs from the very top to the very bottom.

The entire staff of the school, from the janitor to the headmaster, was recruited to support Ville in learning the skill. Everyone was giving him praise whenever they saw him walk unhurriedly down the stairs: “Wow, Ville you are doing real fine in the stairway!” they would say.

In a couple of weeks Ville learned the skill walking down the stairs.



## Dropping the Habit of Swearing, boy 10

*Plantan is a remedial school located in the coastal town of Hudiksvall in Sweden. The school is small with six pupils on average, sometimes a few less and sometimes a few more. The pupils are between the age of eight and twelve and they are all placed in Plantan because of severe behavioral problems. The time the pupils stay in Plantan varies from one semester to up to three years. The story was told by Lotta Andersson-Damberg who is one of the teachers at the school and it illustrates well how important it is to cooperate with the child in finding a workable way of dealing with setbacks which should be seen as part and parcel of learning new skills.*

Kids'Skills is part of daily life at Plantan. Every now and then there is a meeting where the pupils get to decide what skills they want to learn and how they are going to learn them. Each pupil has his or her personal Kids'Skills workbook and in addition, there is a poster on the wall which shows the names of all the pupils and the skills they are learning. After some weeks of actively practicing their skills and daily evaluation of progress there is a mutually planned celebration where pupils are recognized for the progress they have made.

The idea of learning specific skills comes naturally to the pupils at Plantan; after all, they are all aware of the fact that they have been placed in Plantan for a reason, the reason being that their behavior in regular class was so troubled that they had had to be removed to a special remedial class. That the pupils support and help each other in learning their skills is considered self-evident and when pupils sometimes forget their skills, there is always someone there to remind them.

Linus was 10 years old. When he started in Plantan at the beginning of the school year he was given a Kids' Skills workbook. He wondered what it was but the other pupils quickly took care of explaining him what it was all about. He spoke with the teacher about the skill to learn and he agreed to learn to speak without swearwords, or speak decently. When asked what he wanted to call that skill he said "Hejmer" which, curiously enough, was his last name. '

Linus talked with his teachers about the benefits of learning to speak decently. For him the main benefit was to avoid being told off. The teachers agreed and said that they would also benefit from not having to tell him off but added that on top that he would be a more pleasant person to be around with. When asked who he wanted to be his supporters he listed the teachers, the other four pupils, and both of his parents. An additional supporter was called Naven, an imaginary friend of his, who according to his description was short, slim and sweet. Before Linus had even started to practice his new skill he was asked how he would want to celebrate when he had acquired the skill. Without hesitation Linus said that he wanted to invite his supporters to a party at the school where cake and coke would be served and everyone would watch a movie together.

Linus was clearly determined to learn his skill and it gave him an extra boost to hear why others believed he would be able to learn his skill. One of the teachers, for example, wrote to the following words to his workbook: "You have a strong will to do and to say the right things Linus so I believe you will learn your skill quickly. You are a tenacious little man and you put right whatever you want and think is good for you."

When asked what he wanted to do in case he started swearing again Linus said: "I won't mind, I'll just go on with the learning". He set out to learn his skill and tried his best to avoid using swearwords and indecent expressions. When he failed to keep up his skill he was reminded by teachers as well as other pupils about his skill. Initially he became provoked when others would remind him of his skill, but after the issue was discussed with him, he started realize that if he was to learn to speak decently, others would have to remind him in one way or another when

swearwords would leap out of his mouth. When he understood that everyone who learns new skills fails in the beginning he began to accept getting reminders from others.

When three weeks had passed, there was a general consensus that Linus had acquired his skill. The party was held at school as planned and Linus thanked his supporters for their help. Soon thereafter Linus was onto learning his next skill which was “raising his hand and waiting for his turn to speak”. When Linus sometimes was about to slip back to swearing his peers supported him in getting back on track. Once his classmate, for example, was overheard saying to him: “You have started to swear again. Have you forgotten your skill? Don’t you remember that you practiced getting rid of swearing words before X-mas!”

The pupils at Plantan enjoy Kids’Skills a lot. For them learning skills is “our thing”. Each pupil has his or her skill to learn and no-one needs to feel different from others. It is dictum in Plantan that children do not have problems, they only have skills to learn.

## Conquering the Fear of Spiders, girl 10

*This story which illustrates how Kids'Skills can be used in helping children overcome phobias was contributed by Susanna Tulonen, a psychiatric nurse and a solution-focused therapist the town of Aura located in the southwest of Finland. The case makes the point that Kids'Skills does not clash with other modalities of helping children but can be used simultaneously with other forms of therapy, in this case with ongoing long term individual child psychotherapy.*

Laura was a 10-year old girl who had suffered from a debilitating fear of spiders since she was four-years old. It started when one day she saw a spider in her room and reacted with such intense feelings of panic that her parents had to take her to the emergency ward of the paediatric hospital. She recovered rapidly from her shock but developed an intense and ever present fear of spiders.

Her fear was debilitating and particularly the summer months where difficult because of the abundance of spiders in the countryside where the family lived. The parents sought help from child psychiatric services but despite various evaluations and numerous psychological tests nothing proved helpful. When Laura was nine, her parents were told that she suffered from emotional disturbances and had traits of several different personality disorders apparently triggered by her intense fear of spiders. On this ground Laura was referred to intensive psychotherapy which was to last for at least three years.

Despite the fact that Laura was now in treatment her parents continued to be upset about the situation particularly because of the problems that Laura's phobia was causing at school. She could, for example, not participate in natural sciences classes if the topic in any way touched upon

spiders. The teacher was flexible and allowed Laura to work in the school library during the lessons when spiders would be discussed. The parents were also concerned about the possibility that Laura would be bullied by her classmates because of her problem.

The parents had heard about Kids' Skills and decided to give it a try despite their scepticism. They contacted Susanna who promised to visit the home of the family to talk with Laura. When Susanna showed Laura the Kids' Skills workbook and told her about the method she said she would do anything to get rid of her S-fear – which was her way of referring to her fear without having to utter the word 'spider'.

The initial conversation revolved around the question of what problems the fear was causing to Laura. She mentioned several problems including that she could not participate in all lessons at school that she was afraid her classmates would find out about her fear and begin to bully her, and she couldn't go swimming in the summer because there were always some spiders in the water.

- I cannot help it but even if there is just one dead one there in the water, I cannot go in." Laura explained. She had not revealed to anyone the real reason why she avoided swimming in pools. Instead she would complain that the water was too cold. She was at the brink of crying when she told about this. and she also disclosed that she had often started to cry just because someone had spoken about spiders. When saying that, she actually used the word "spider".

- I don't like to cry in front of friends, Laura added.

- What about benefits? What good will it do to you not to be afraid of spiders anymore? Susanna asked purposely using the word 'spider'.

- Well, for one thing, I can participate in all lessons, and I won't feel like crying when someone speaks about spiders (she was using the word spider again). And I can go swimming! Yess! I don't have to look to the bottom of the pool all the time in order to see if there are any of them. I can go out to play with friends and stay as long as I feel like...

- And then I don't have to search my room every evening to make sure there are no spiders, Laura added looking embarrassed.

- Good thinking. Are there still more benefits you can think of?

- Well, it might be fun to play with them and to collect them into a jar, Laura said with a mixture of amusement and disgust in her voice.

- You are a very smart girl. It appears to me that you have done a lot of thinking already. It's almost like you'd done half of these Kids' Skills assignments in advance.

Laura just nodded and asked to know what the next task was as if she was in a hurry to get on with the work, onto something she was anticipating.

Laura was so afraid of spiders that uttering the word 'spider' was difficult for her. It was not easy for her to come up with a name for her fear. Eventually she came up with the idea of calling it the S-fear but she did not appear happy with her choice.

- Would it perhaps be easier for you to find a good name for your fear if you tried to give it some funny name? Susanna asked.

- "Spy-fear!" exclaimed Laura.

- That's a fine name, how did you come to think of that?

- Spy like S and Spy like Spiral, it's a funny name, Laura said clapping her hands with excitement, Spy is something I can say and it doesn't feel gross.

- Good thinking, Susanna said.

- Yes, I know I just have to get rid of the spy-fear. I need to come up with a thought or something like that to change it, in order for me not to be afraid of them any longer... I know I need to learn a bravery of some sort, or to have some kind a different thought, that will make me no longer afraid of them...

Laura was thinking aloud like this for quite a while leaving little space for Susanna to say anything.

- That's fantastic, Susanna said when she finally got her go. I can see that you have been thinking about this before. You are very inventive and you seem to have a clear idea of how to get rid of the spy-fear.

Laura was unimpressed by Susanna's praise. She was thinking ahead.

- If I am to get rid of the spy-fear I will need to have a bravery and that bravery must be Spy-bravery, right? If I have spy-bravery, then I will no longer be afraid of them, or what? Laura was staring Susanna in the eyes waiting for her to answer.

- That's right, Susanna confirmed. You have really thought this through. All by yourself. You don't really need me at all. Maybe I should go and have a cup of coffee and leave you to do the workbook by yourself, Susanna said jokingly.

Laura laughed and said: "You cannot go anywhere. You have to sit next to me in case I suddenly don't come up with anything so you can help me." Susanna found it difficult to hide her amusement.

Do you remember any fears that you have had that you do not have any more? Susanna asked.

Laura thought for a moment. Then, all of a sudden, she said: "Darkness! I am no longer afraid of the dark. I used to always sleep with light on but then just started to sleep with the light off and I was not at all afraid. Sometimes I can even fall asleep with the light on if I am reading and then when I wake up the light annoys me because it makes it difficult for me to fall asleep again.

Wow, that's awesome! How on earth did you overcome such a big thing? Susanna commented.

Unimpressed by Susanna's praise Laura continued:

- I am not afraid of bugs any more either.

- Bugs? What bugs?

- Those that fly and all kinds of worms. You know what I mean.

- Yes I do but how on earth have you succeeded in overcoming two such big fears? You must have had a lot of persistence, courage and also some solutions to overcome them.

- That's simply me. If I want something or I decide something, so I will also do it. I must say that it was indeed difficult to start to like them. At first they didn't look nice at all but quite gross. Then one day I just decided to poke a hairy worm with a wooden stick and I found out that it wasn't that gross at all.

- Wow, you are more courageous than me! Is that it or can you remember one more fear that you have conquered?

Laura thought for quite some time. Then she started giggling and said: 'Bogeys'

- Bogeys? Susanna asked.

- Yes the kind that are under the bed. I was really afraid of bogeys but now that I am already older I know that they don't even exist. It's one of those children things, the Bogeys I mean.

- You are really brave and clever. It takes some cleverness to figure out that Bogeys don't exist. I must say that it is quite something that you have conquered so many scary fears. I am convinced that you will also conquer the spy-fear. That's for sure!

- Laura grinned and said "What next?"

Susanna explained to Laura that in order to be able to conquer the spy-fear and to turn it into spy-bravery she will need to work hard and be persistent. In addition, she will need to have supporters who are interested in helping her and who can encourage her, make sure she practices her skill, and praise her whenever she practises and is successful.

Laura thought about it and then said she wanted her mum, her dad, and her big sister to be her supporters.

As she was writing their names into her workbook, Susanna asked:

- Have you told any of your friends about your fear?

Laura said she had only told two girls about it, two friends, that she believed would not bully her about it. The names of these two girls were added into her workbook.

- Anyone else? Susanna asked.

No, there are no others and I don't want more, Laura asserted, and asked for the next assignment.

Your next task is to figure out some ways to practice turning your fear into bravery, Susanna explained, like you have done when you have gotten rid of the other scary fears.

Laura became serious, perhaps because this was the question that she had expected to have to deal with.



- I cannot look at pictures of them. I just cannot. I am disgusted by the mere thought of it. I cannot look at any nature book that has pictures of them, Laura said with a serious tone of voice.

- That's true. You have thought well about what you cannot do but could you know think of what you could do? Will you be able to do that?

Laura thought for a long time. Susanna did not interfere.

Laura was thinking aloud:

- I should somehow realize that they are more afraid of me than I am afraid of them... After all, I am much bigger than them... I would just need to realize that in one way or the other...

Suddenly Laura got an idea: "Now I know!" she exclaimed. I can learn to get to know spiders.

- Ok, sounds exiting but how on earth will you do that?

- I can find out about them by reading about them, you see. I like to read anyway and I like to watch nature programs and all. So I could find so much knowledge about spiders that I no longer would need to be afraid of them.

- That is an absolutely great idea, Susanna exclaimed. I don't think I have ever met a girl as clever as you.

This time Laura responded to Susanna's praising words with a broad smile. She was clearly proud of the idea she had come up with.

- You can get knowledge about spiders from books, for sure, but is there any other means of getting such knowledge?

- I could perhaps find something from the internet.

- Yes, I would think so. There's lots of information on the net and I am sure there's also information about spiders, Susanna said noticing that something was going on with Laura. She appeared happy but there was a hint of sadness that was for asking for an explanation.

- How will you get started with reading about them? Susanna asked.

Laura's voice was serious.

- It will be difficult because I cannot see pictures of them and all the books are filled with pictures about them. I would want to read about them but not to see them. Not yet, at least.

- That's a real riddle. Clever of you to come to think of that. It's good that you know that you are not ready to look at pictures of them, that you just want to read about them at this point and that the time to see pictures of them will come later.

- Exactly, Laura said.

- But what will you do in order to be able to read without seeing the pictures? You are so clever that I am confident that you will think of a solution.

- Hmm. If there would be a way hiding the pictures in some way, Laura was thinking aloud.

- That's a great idea, said Susanna, do you think your supporters could help you with this?

- I think they could try to cover the pictures in some way.

- Pity that the library is closed now, Laura said, I would want to go to read right now.

- You are a courageous girl and determined as well. You have decided to conquer your Spy-fear and it shows in everything you do.

It turned out that there actually was a nature book at home that had a section on spiders and that Laura's parents were willing to help her by covering all the pictures of spiders so that she was able to start practising immediately.

- It is possible to arrange for you to have a celebration or to reward you in some other way when you have conquered the Spy-fear, Susanna suggested.

Laura thought about it but she did not get excited about the idea of a party. She said she was going to have a birthday party anyway during the summer. Instead she wished to be rewarded with a pet such as a dog or a hamster.

- That's something you will have to discuss with your parents, but I am sure you will work something out with them, Susanna said.

Susanna explained to Laura that it can sometimes happen that a fear that one has already conquered returns and asked her how she would want her supporters to help her should she start to fear spiders again.

- I have conquered many fears before this one, you know, Laura proclaimed looking Susanna straight into the eyes, so I think it will be enough if they remind me by saying "Hey, think about what you have already conquered!"

When Susanna was getting ready to leave, Laura already had a nature-book in her hands where the pictures of spiders had been carefully covered with Post-it notes by the parents. With her nose in the book she was reading about spiders in Finland:

- Hey all, listen to this, she said as Susanna was leaving, "...the male has to be careful not to end up as the female's lunch after copulation." Isn't that unfair to eat the other one up just after having copulated?

Everyone responded with laughter.

As Susanna was leaving she exchanged a few words with the parents. They appeared sceptical about the approach but agreed to do their best to support her.

- She is an exceptionally astute girl. It is not impossible that she will make rapid progress. Keep me informed, Susanna said as she departed.

The next day Susanna got a phone call from Laura's mother who told her that Laura had informed the parents that she wished them to give her a Tarantella as a pet.

Susanna was wordless. In her bewilderment she laughed and said: "She seems to have made rapid progress!"

The parents didn't find the situation the least bit amusing. They thought it was alarming that Laura was moving in this way from one extreme to another, from an intense phobia of spiders to suddenly wanting to have a tarantella as her pet. Father, in particular, was opposed to the idea of getting her a spider. Susanna had a hard time figuring out what to say.

- It's really great that she has made so much progress, she said, but there might be a big difference in seeing a live spider and looking at pictures of spiders in a book. Perhaps you could go with her to a pet shop that has tarantellas and see how she deals with live spiders that are moving about. If she is quite ok with that, I think you can safely assume that she has indeed conquered her fear. But if it doesn't seem like a good idea

to get her a spider, would it make any sense to reward her with some other pet?

The parents said that they had not thought about it but that it was not totally impossible.

- Perhaps you could visit a pet shop and have her talk with the sales person about what it means to have a tarantella as a pet and then let her think of getting another pet. This way she may realize that a tarantella is not the kind of pet you can hold and caress like dogs, and cats and many other pets.

This calmed mum down. She promised to go along with Susanna's suggestion.

A week later the parents called Susanna again and told her that they had taken Laura to a pet shop where she had marvelled little baby tarantellas and a full-size adult one. Having heard what the sales person explained about having tarantella as a pet, Laura concluded that perhaps tarantella would not be the right pet for her because she wouldn't be able to hold it and to caress it. It was more of a 'show-case item', she had said. The parents then took her to see some endearing baby bunnies. Laura was allowed to hold one of them and became totally enchanted by it. The parents agreed to buy her a bunny as a reward for conquering her fear of spiders when school was out and the summer vacation would begin.

The parents expressed satisfaction with the situation. The only thing they muttered about was not having heard about this method before during the many years that Laura had had the problem. Laura continued with her weekly long-term psychotherapy but one big problem was now wiped away. She started to enjoy playing in the yard and there was news that one day she even held a spider on her hand. The whole family was looking forward to a summer with Laura swimming in pools and enjoying the short but lovely Finnish summer – without the fear of spiders.

## Water Can Be Milk, boy 10

*On the psychotherapy training courses at Helsinki Brief Therapy Institute it is the custom that trainees invite their clients – sometimes also friends or acquaintances – to the training sessions in order to have a chance to experience live demonstrations of solution-focused therapy. The following story is an example of such a demonstration.*

*A psychologist from the training group invited a family she knew well to participate in a session. The family had a ten-year-old son, Oliver, who had been diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome when he was just a four years old. As part of his condition, he had a variety of problems including oversensitivity to tastes and smells and anything that was hot or cold. Oliver's parents were unable to join the session but because they thought the idea was good they asked their adult daughter, 22-year-old Sara, to accompany him to the meeting to support him. The parents also hoped that Sara, who had herself also been diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome, would benefit from taking part in such a meeting. Sara, who had seen several therapists during the turmoil of her teenage years, was keen to join her brother to the meeting to see how therapists are trained.*

*The story is an illustration of a creative adaptation of Kids'Skills where the child learns a skill by teaching it to someone else. The trainer-therapist is my colleague Tapani Ahola.*

“You know Oliver, today we are here to learn about Kids'Skills,” Tapani opened the conversation, “It is a method by which it is possible to help children overcome all kinds of problems and difficulties.”

“Yes, I know,” said Oliver who had been briefed quite well by the psychologist who had made the invitation.

“If you want, we can do Kids’Skills with you so that all of us can learn and maybe you can benefit too. Would you want that?”

“Yes, that’s why I came,” said Oliver.

“All right, but then we will need to find some difficulty to solve. Do you have any difficulties?”

“No,” said Oliver.

“Hmm. What about skills? Do you have anything that you’d need to become better at?”

“I have this thing that I drink quite a lot of milk... actually far too much,” Oliver confessed.

Oliver had since early childhood had this strange problem: no matter how thirsty he was, he would not drink anything else but milk. His fixation to milk had become an annoyance to the family. Milk was simply not always available, particularly when the family was travelling abroad.

“Should you learn to drink other things than milk? Why on earth? Milk is a good isn’t it?” Tapani said playing devil’s advocate.

“It would be good for me to be able to also drink water, particularly when we are abroad in countries where milk is not always available,” Oliver explained in his charming precocious manner.

“All right then, and what should this skill, this ‘I-am-able-to-drink-also-other-things-than-milk’ skill be called?”

“Water-drinking I guess?” Oliver said.

“Are you happy with that name? Will you call the skill ‘Water-drinking’ or do you want to call it something else?” Tapani asked just to make sure.

“Water-drinking. That’s it,” said Oliver.

“You must have learned many skills by now,” Tapani said, “Can you tell me what skills you have? What are you good at?”

“I’m good at training dogs and I am good with computers,” Oliver said matter-of-fact. “Do you know what BSOD is?” Oliver asked with a self-assured tone of voice.

“BS... what? I have never even heard the term,” Tapani said hiding his face behind a sheet of paper pretending he was embarrassed about his ignorance. “Tell me!”

“It’s the Blue Screen of Death. It’s what you get when you do programming for windows and you make an error that makes windows crash,” Oliver explained and then went on to tell about the various applications he had programmed with his friend for Windows.

“Wow! You really seem to have some skills,” said Tapani. “You know, actually I think you also have the skill of drinking water. It’s probably just gone hiding somewhere. I wonder how we can lure it to appear. How did you develop your skill of doing Windows programming?”

“I collected programming information from the Internet piece by piece.”

“Would that work for the Water-drinking skill? Would it work to find information about water in the Internet?”

“I don’t think so. I don’t think I would find anything useful for the Water-drinking skill by googling ‘water’.”

“I must say that Oliver is really good at finding information. It is by reading books that he has become so knowledgeable about training dogs too,” Sara, Oliver’s sister butted in.

“Is that so?” said Tapani looking at Oliver.

Oliver nodded proudly.

“I wonder how you would train a dog who refuses to drink water to learn to drink water?”

“You would have start by getting him to drink just a little bit.”

“So let’s assume that he would drink just a little bit by accident or because he would be very thirsty... then what would you do?”

Oliver’s face brightened. “You would need to praise him immediately for doing that!”

“Oh, so you would praise him. How would you do that? How do you praise a dog?”

“You just say to him ‘Good – very good’ and you pat him at the same time. You could also give him a toy or a titbit. And when the dog drinks a bit of water again you continue to praise him.”

“You really seem to be an expert Oliver. I am impressed. Now, let’s see how that works in practice. Could you show us how you drink some water so we will praise you?”

“Why not but the water needs to be cold.”

“Ok, we will get you some cold water so we can see how it works.”

Oliver, his sister Sara, and the psychologist who had invited them to the session were all given a glass of water. They clinked their glasses and Oliver started sipping with a backdrop of praise and cheers. When Oliver had emptied his glass he smiled broadly and said ‘Aah! That was good!’

Sara patted his brother on the shoulder.

“You are good at this. Now, let’s make this a bit more difficult. Let’s imagine that I have exactly the same problem; that I also have the need to learn to drink water. Would you teach me?” asked Tapani.

“I can teach you,” said Oliver and walked over to the adjacent kitchenette. When he came back he had a full glass of water in one hand and a plate in grapes in the other.

“I definitely don’t want to drink that water,” Tapani said pretending he had an aversion for water, “it’s disgusting, it tastes crap, it’s wet...”

“Look, it would be very useful for you to be able to drink water,” Oliver started to explain seriously, “What if you are abroad and all of sudden you become very thirsty and there’s nothing but water available? Take that glass in your hand and imagine that it contains something that you like and then just drink it. Remember to think that you are drinking something that you like and you can close your eyes if you want to. After you have finished the glass you can reward yourself with these grapes.”

Tapani took a little sip of the water and made a dubious face.

“Just close your eyes, that will help you,” Oliver encouraged Tapani. “See, there you go!”



Tapani drank up while the workshop participants praised him and applauded to him. As he finished the glass, Oliver handed him the grapes with an especially supportive expression on his face.

“You are very good. It worked,” Tapani said, “but that water you drank was cold. I bet you couldn’t drink it if was lukewarm?”

“It is possible. I just need to close my eyes to do it,” Oliver explained.

“We’ll get you some lukewarm water and you’ll show us how to do that, ok?”

One of the trainees handed a glass of lukewarm water to Oliver. He grabbed it and started to stare at it. He appeared to be thinking. After a moment he said:

“I don’t even need to close my eyes,” Oliver said drinking up the glass in almost one go. When he was done he looked at Tapani and said jokingly: “Ahh! Milk!” The group responded with an appreciative laughter.

“What about when you leave from here and then at some point you are in a situation where you would need to drink water? How can we make sure that your skill does not go hiding again?”

“It will be enough if someone reminds me of Kids’Skills and my visit here. There are quite a few witnesses here!”

“It’s deal. Shall we agree that you can be reminded of your skill by saying ‘Kids’Skills’? Would that work for you?”

“Yes, ‘Kids’Skills’. That’s good.” said Oliver decisively.

“Do you know, Oliver, what ‘give-me-five’ means?” Tapani asked.

Oliver smiled and slapped his hand against Tapani’s symbolising that the conversation had come to an end.

Two weeks later the psychologist who had invited Oliver to the meeting reported to the training group that when Oliver had returned home after the meeting he had been quite excited to show his family his new skill and to prove that it had not disappeared or gone hiding. He was cheered by his parents and his siblings.

Since then Oliver has been drinking water at home every day at meals and has even demonstrated his skill when the family had been eating out.

At the time of writing this story he still dislikes lukewarm water but manages to drink it when needed. Oliver's parents were impressed by the results and have since used Kids' Skills to deal with Oliver's other difficulties.

## A Family Game to Start Eating Again, girl 10

*This story comes from Caroline Beumer who works as a counsellor in private praxis and as teacher of Kids'Skills in the Netherlands through her company The BrandNewWay located in Haarlem. Her story challenges the commonly held belief that creative and playful methods such as Kids'Skills are suitable only for minor problems while graver problems require more serious treatment approaches. It also serves as an example of how Kids'Skills can be implemented collectively in families so that not only the child with the problem but all family members, including parents, are learning a skill of their own. In interesting detail of this story is that there was a major change in the girl's eating behaviour even if her eating problem was never addressed. Her skill was unrelated to her peculiar eating habits and yet, probably due to a change in the way the family responded to her problem, she started to eat again.*

One day a couple came to talk with Caroline about the problems of their 10-year-old daughter Sandra. They had heard about Kids'Skills and they knew that Caroline was experienced in using it. The parents were in their early thirties. They were hardworking people running a family business. They had three daughters of whom Sandra was the eldest. They were extremely worried about her.

Sandra's problem was that she refused to eat normal meals. The only thing she would eat was a couple of candy bars and apples per day. The problem had persisted for over a year. Sandra had become alarmingly skinny and undernourished. Her parents had taken her to see a number of doctors to no avail. Gradually the situation had deteriorated. Family meals had turned into battles and Sandra had even started to skip classes

because of sheer weakness. Just two weeks earlier Sandra had been examined by a child psychiatrist who had recommended hospitalization and written a referral to the children's unit of a psychiatric hospital.

The mother cried as she spoke about Sandra. She blamed herself for having caused the problem and explained that when she had been a teenager she had had an eating disorder too. Her husband tried to comfort her by stroking her gently while she was sobbing.

Caroline sympathised with the difficult situation of the parents. She told them that she could very well understand how much distress the problem with their daughter was causing them and said she was impressed by the fact that they had not given up trying to help her. She complimented them on their courage to share their feelings with her and on their determination to find a solution to the problem.

Caroline then began to present the Kids'Skills approach to the parents. She was astonished to find that the parents had prepared for the meeting by reading the book about Kids'Skills. They were not convinced that the method would work with Sandra but they said that they were willing to try anything to help her.

Caroline informed the parents that she did not have previous experience of using Kids'Skills in a situation as serious as this one – after all Sandra's eating problem was potentially life threatening. "But we can try to do something," she said, "at least as long as we are waiting for her to be admitted to the hospital."

Caroline explained that the first step in Kids'Skills was to figure out what skill Sandra needed to acquire in order to overcome her eating problem. Many suggestions came up but nothing seemed to quite fit. What was a girl surviving on chocolate bars and apples supposed to learn? Finally, Caroline came up with an idea:

- What if we skip the problem and work on something else instead, she said with excitement in her voice.

The parents looked at her in bewilderment. She continued to explain:

- What if instead of focusing on Sandra, all members of your family will have a skill to learn? What if you make it into a kind of a family

game? You probably all have some bad habit that you could try to overcome. And it could be minor things, nothing as challenging as the eating problem and then we could see what happens in a week or so.

The parents took on Caroline's suggestion and made a plan with her about how to proceed. The next day, at dinnertime, they gathered their three children around the family table and presented them the new "game" that they were supposed to play. They used the Kids' Skills poster to lay out the "rules" of the game. The girls were immediately thrilled about the game. They were particularly keen on suggesting which bad habits their mother and father should overcome:

- You almost always fall asleep when you are reading us our bedtime story, they said to daddy. We hate that, and we want you to learn to stay awake! And you mom, you should learn to turn off your cell phone when you arrive home, because you always end up working with your laptop and talking with your clients on the phone all evening. If you turn off your phone, you will not work late, and you will have more time for us, they said.

The children took pleasure in having a say in which bad habits their parents should overcome. Their next task was to think of their own bad habits and to figure out relevant skills to work on. The youngest daughter, who was three years old, decided to try to give up her greasy and stained comfort blanket, or at least to allow it to be washed from time to time. The middle one, who was eight, said that she would want to learn to keep to her bedtimes. She explained that this would help her to be more rested the next day and to avoid the unpleasant arguments with her mom and dad about the matter. Sandra chose to allow her nails to grow. She had the bad habit of biting her nails to the degree that her fingers had actually been bleeding quite a few times.

When the family talked about how to celebrate learning of the skills they decided to arrange a separate celebration for each member of the family. The plan for the father was that when he would have succeeded in reading the bedtime story for the children for seven days in a row without falling asleep, he would be allowed to sleep in late on the next Sunday.

Mom wanted to celebrate with a large chocolate cake when having stayed off her cell phone at home for a whole week. The two youngest daughters wanted to have a joint party where they would dress up as princesses. Sandra, realizing that letting the nails of all her fingers to grow in one go might be too challenging for her, asked if it would be OK for her to learn to grow two nails at the time. She suggested that each time she would succeed in letting two nails grow she would polish them with colourful nail polish and glitters.

They all promised to support and to help each other in learning their skills. In addition, it was decided that grandparents and a few friends would be invited to act as supporters. Caroline was to be their main supporter and the family would maintain contact with her through e-mail and telephone.

Everyone was excited about the game right from the start and even a sense of contest set in. The family members observed each other like hawks. They complimented each other frequently and used gestures and signs to remind the other of their skills. Sandra's eating problem was not addressed. The parents followed Caroline's advice to steer clear of commenting on her eating. "Whatever she does, don't say a word," Caroline had told them, "don't even raise your eyebrows." The parents took her advice even if it was far from easy for them but they managed because, as they said, they were willing to do anything to help their daughter. Caroline supported the mother by speaking with her on the phone every other day to give her a chance to express her feelings and to blow off steam.

A week and a half into the game, the parents were taken by surprise when Sandra all of a sudden sat down at the lunch table and placed some food on her plate. She did it so inconspicuously that it took a while for others to notice it. She did not eat any of the food that she had taken but the parents followed Caroline's specific advice not to pay any attention if anything like that would take place.

Four days later, when the family was still engaged in their Kids' Skills game, Sandra ate her first bite of normal food. Over the next days, San-

dra begun to gradually eat more, and even to ask for bits of food in between meals.

Caroline was impressed. She knew that there was still a long way for Sandra to go but both serious malnourishment and hospitalisation had been avoided. In addition, the relationship between mother and Sandra had become better and the previously positive atmosphere of the family had been restored with the family members enjoying each other's company again.

Half a year later, when the family had reached a balance, the mother came to see Caroline. She had personal issues that she wanted to talk about, sensitive issues related to her past experiences that she had never dared to address before and that she now felt ready to deal with and to leave behind.

At the time this report was written, both mother and Sandra were doing much better. In addition, mother had become such an ardent a supporter of Kids'Skills that she had helped to organize a workshop about the method for the staff of the school her daughters were attending.

## Combining Kids' Skills and the Teachings of Quran, boy 11

*Hooshmand Ebrahimi, a child counsellor who teaches Kids' Skills in Iran, is searching for ways of combining Kids' Skills with the teachings of the Quran. As part of a project sponsored by Shahcheragh's Educational Council he has created a special room at the shrine of Shahcheragh in the city of Shiraz that he calls The Skills Room. The room is equipped with a computer, a printer and a beamer. Children come to the Skills Room by referral of their teachers and consent of their parents to talk with Hooshmand in order to deal with problems by learning social skills. The following story is an illustration of Hooshmand's work in the Skills room.*

Poorya was an eleven-year old boy, a smart and sportive fifth grader, and an elected member of the pupils' council. He and his classmates had to the shrine of Shahcheragh and to visit the Skills Room accompanied by their teacher. After the session was over and the children had gone to pray, the teacher stayed behind and asked Hooshmand what he thought about Poorya. Hooshmand said that for him Poorya appeared like a kind boy who cared for the well-being of his classmates. The teacher then told Hooshmand that even if Poorya was kind at school he had problems at home. His parents had told the teacher that at times Poorya was disobedient and oppositional at home. Hooshmand agreed to speak with Poorya's parents when he would visit the school for following up on the pupils' meeting at the Skills Room. The teacher promised to ask Poorya's parents to come to the school to meet him and to talk about what skills he should learn.



The next week Hooshmand met Poorya's parents together with the teacher. The parents were well-educated people with such high academic and behavioural expectations that Hooshmand found it easy to understand that Poorya sometimes – intentionally or unintentionally – felt like ignoring or disobeying them. Hooshmand spoke with the parents about different ways of disciplining children and told them about the more collaborative way of bringing up children that Kids' Skills is based on. The parents liked the ideas Hooshmand presented and assured willingness to try to use a more positive approach with their son. When Hooshmand asked what skill the parents thought Poorya should learn in order to resolve the problems at home, they said they would want him to learn "to respect his parents". Before the parents departed, Hooshmand asked the parents and the teacher to keep an eye on Poorya in the coming weeks and to record in a memo any incidents of Poorya showing respect for his parents.

After Poorya's parents had left, Hooshmand asked permission from the principal of the school to have a chat with Poorya. The permission was granted and when they met, Hooshmand said: "I have spoken with your mother, your father and your teacher and they all agree that if you learn to respect your parents, you will feel more relaxed and happy at home. What do you think? Would that be a skill for you to learn?" Poorya agreed and said that in order for him to be more obedient at home he would indeed need to learn the skill of respecting his parents. He could easily see that there were many benefits of learning the skill including parents being satisfied with him, being loved more by his parents and getting better grades at school. Poorya accepted to try to learn the skill and decided to call the skill "A Good Boy".

Hooshmand asked Poorya to ask his parents for permission to come and visit him in the Skills Room. His parents gave their consent and when Poorya came to the Skills Room, Hooshmand gave him two homework assignments. The first assignment was to go through his textbooks on Quran and to look for what God says about the relationship between children and parents. He was to write his findings into his note book and to

bring the note book with him next time in order to discuss them with Hooshmand. The second assignment was to go to the school library, to study Quranic stories for children and to choose one of the heroes from these stories to be his power creature.

A week later Poorya came to see Hooshmand again in the Skills Room to report his findings. He had visited the library, looked at several children's stories and decided to have Prophet Joseph as his power creature. "Because Prophet Joseph was the hero of Goodness who lifted his parents to the throne," he explained his choice. Hooshmand and Poorya then made a search on the web to find a picture of Prophet Joseph. On a Persian website they found a picture of Prophet Joseph as a child. They printed two copies of the picture. One Poorya pasted into his Kids' Skills workbook and the other he framed and placed on his bookshelf at home.

As for the Quranic teachings on the relationship between parents and children he had found two relevant quotes. One of them was "Do good to your parents" and the other was "Address your parents in terms of honour".

When asked who he wanted to be his supporters in learning the skill of "respecting parents", Poorya chose his teacher, who acted as the link between his school and the Skills Room, the principal of the school, who was known for being particularly kind to children, and one of his classmates, who had a particularly good relationship with his own parents. Hooshmand and Poorya then collaborated in composing and printing a unique invitation letter to each supporter with a photograph taken from Poorya's photo album of the person being invited.

Hooshmand then proceeded to show Poorya a Power Point presentation he had made for Poorya. The presentation was based on information that Hooshmand had gathered from the teacher and the parents. It portrayed a pictures and drawings depicting Poorya past achievements: a drawing of him being awarded a prize for a superb painting he had drawn in the kindergarten; a photograph of him learning to ride a bicycle at pre-school age, a chart showing that he was a top student in the first three

grades of the primary school; and a photograph of him being awarded a certificate for becoming a member of the pupil's council of his school.

At the end of the session Hooshmand asked Poorya how he would want to celebrate when he had learnt the skill of respecting his parents. He said, without a doubt, that he would like to drink fruit juice and watch a Pink Panther cartoon together with his supporters and his classmates in the Skills Room.

The next session, where Poorya's teacher was present, took place in the Skills Room. The time was spent on helping Poorya develop a clearer idea of what it meant in practice to respect one's parents. "If you want to show more respect to your parents, do you know how to do it?" Hooshmand asked.

"Ok, let's think about it," Hooshmand said turning on his beamer and showing Poorya a PowerPoint presentation he had prepared based on the two Quranic quotes that Poorya had found in his textbooks. Hooshmand started by showing Poorya a slide with the words "Do good to your parents" and asking him to give a few examples of good things that he had done for his parents during the previous week. Poorya said that he had helped his parents by doing chores at home, he had studied more to please them, and he had gone to bed early in the evenings.

"All these are good things to do," Hooshmand responded, "and they will surely satisfy your parents but even better – according to what God teaches us – is to do things that you can see on this next slide."

The next slide contained the following list of virtues:

- \* Express affection to your parents
- \* Obey your parents
- \* Consult with your parents
- \* Show your gratefulness to your parents
- \* Take care of your parents
- \* Respect your parents

Using role play, Hooshmand playing father and the teacher playing mother, they both coached Poorya to act out examples of these virtues.

The next slide showed the quote “Address your parents in terms of honour”. While Poorya was looking at the slide Hooshmand asked him to think about the following questions: “What does kindness mean?” “What does one do when one is polite to one’s parents?” and “How can a boy of eleven show his kindness to his parents?” Based on Poorya’s answers to these three questions Hooshmand composed the following list of behavioural directives:

- \* Speak calmly to your parents
- \* Do not interrupt your parents
- \* Follow your parents’ orders
- \* Use sweet words to address your parents

Based on these directives Hooshmand and Poorya wrote on the computer a one-page document which explained what the skill of respecting one’s parents means in practice. The document was printed and attached by the teacher to the classroom wall as a poster. On top of it were the two Quranic quotes that Poorya had chosen and underneath them was the skill Poorya was learning with a description of what it means in practice and. The session ended with an agreement that under his teacher’s supervision and with the help of his supporters, Poorya would in the coming weeks practice his skill both in simulated as well as in real life situations.

After three weeks the teacher reported that Poorya’s parents were satisfied with the improvement in his obedience and his progress in mastering the skill of “respecting his parents”. Therefore, it was time to organize the planned celebration. For this occasion, Hooshmand produced yet another Power Point presentation. The first slide showed a picture of the holy book of Quran coming down from the sky and the two Quranic teachings, “Do good to your parents” and “Address your parents in terms of honour” coming out of it. The second slide depicted Poorya’s power creature Prophet Joseph and the third listed various ways in which children can show respect to their parents.

The celebration took place in the Skills Room. The power point presentation that Hooshmand had prepared was shown with Poorya explain-

ing the slides and telling about his process of learning the skill. Having completed his presentation, he offered fruit juice to everyone after which the Pink Panther cartoon was shown with the beamer.

When the celebration was over and only Poorya, his parent and his teacher were present, Hooshmand asked Poorya to whom he would want to teach the skill of “respecting one’s parents”.

“To any student my teacher refers to me,” Poorya said.

“And what will be the next skill you want to learn? Hooshmand continued.

“To work with children in the Skills Room,” Poorya answered with a hopeful look on his face.

Half a year later Poorya was indeed helping Hooshmand every once in a while, in the Skills Room in teaching social skills to children.

## Restoring Happiness After Parents' Divorce

*Jocelyne Pouliot is a retired teacher and Kids'Skills ambassador with a private counselling practice in the town of Rimouski, eastern part of Canada. She contributed with this story about an 11-year old girl who responded with a number of problems to her parents' sudden and unexpected divorce. The case provides an example of using Kids'Skills to support children who are facing troublesome events in their lives. When working with children it is not uncommon to come across situations like this one where the child's problems are triggered by the circumstances of his or her life. In such situations we may not be able to improve the circumstances of child life but what we can do is to help the child develop skills that strengthen his resiliency and ability to cope with the situation.*

Sarah's parents had separated during the summer holiday. Her father had found a new girlfriend and had moved to another city four hours away from home. Her mother, who could not afford to keep the family house, was forced to move with her two children into her own mother's house located thirty minutes away from their little town. As a result, Sarah had experienced many unwanted changes: a new house; a transfer to a city school; the loss of her best friends and the activities she used to have with them; and above all, the loss of her father, who she only saw one weekend a month.

The separation had been a shock to the children. There had been no fights or any other indication of trouble. In Sarah's words: "We were a nice family. Even my friends said so." Sarah's mother contacted Mrs Pouliot, who had her private practice near the new school, and told her about Sarah's problems. She was particularly concerned about Sarah's

emotional state. Sarah was at times so angry and depressed that mother feared that she was harbouring suicidal thoughts. Sarah hated her new school, her new home and she argued constantly with her nine-year-old brother, her mother and even with her father on the phone. After losing her two best friends, she made no attempt at making new ones. She did try to find some new activities, like drama and self-defence classes, but had dropped out shortly after the inscription. She did not know anybody and felt out of place.

Mrs Pouliot explained the Kids' Skills approach to the mother and offered to meet with Sarah a few days later. For the second meeting, the mother came together with Sarah who appeared anxious and sat for the most part of the session gazing at the floor and biting her fingernails.

Mrs Pouliot started the conversation by asking Sarah about her favourite activities in and outside the school. She also wanted to know what Sarah dreamed of doing in about five to seven years from now. That's how she found out that Sarah was a true artist who loved dancing, singing and drama; all the things she used to do with her old friends. During the previous year, she had had a role in a school play and received excellent feedback for her acting. Also, she loved drawing whenever she had a chance. Her "big" dream was to become an actress, not just a regular actress but one who could also sing and dance.

Sarah also dreamed of her father moving back to their home town, a dream that was not totally unrealistic since that was part of his plans for the next summer holiday. He had not found enough work where he was living at the time, so getting his old job back was a real option. Her father's return would allow her to go back to her old school and get her friends back. Both parents were quite willing to share custody of their two children once the father had moved back.

With her mother in the waiting room, Sarah gradually opened up during the session and was able to confide to Mrs Pouliot many details regarding her difficult situation. She knew she had lots of anger inside but did not know how to control these strong feelings. She was aware of the impact of her unexpected outbursts on her parents and did not want to do

that anymore. It always resulted in her becoming more depressed after these incidents. She hated herself every time she behaved in ways that made her father and mother so unhappy.

Lately, she had forced herself to keep quiet and avoid arguments thinking this was the best way to deal with her anger. For example, she had not expressed to her father her annoyance when he had taken both children skiing and then spent most of his time with his girlfriend. Sarah explained: "I hate what he does but I do not want to say anything that would really hurt his feelings. I do not see him very often so I want to enjoy the time we have together, not fight." She related a similar incident from school where she felt the need to keep quiet. Her music teacher had made a remark in front of the class because she had hit some wrong notes with her flute. She thought it was unfair because she had only recently learned to play the flute at her new school while the other pupils had already had two years of practice. She had not said anything at all but felt very resentful and ashamed of herself.

"So what do you think would make you happy again?" asked Mrs Pouliot.

"I want to be able to have fun again with my family and I want to have some new friends," answered Sarah.

"In that case, I think I know what you need to learn. Would you like to know?"

"Yes!"

"I think you need to become better at communication. I think you need to learn to better express your feelings to all the people around when you are unhappy or when something is bothering you. This way you won't bottle up your feelings too long and will avoid exploding at the end. After all, this situation is not your fault and you have the right to feel the way you feel. What do you think? Would that make you happier?"

"It surely would," said Sarah.

Mrs Pouliot met with Sarah three more times. They used most of their time together talking and practising how to communicate feelings without resorting to anger. Sarah, who loved theatre, enjoyed to role play var-



ious real life situations where she needed to express her feelings. She practiced how to express her feelings to her father, to her mother, to her music teacher and even to her younger brother.

In one role play, which was repeated many times, she spoke with her music teacher after class explaining how much it hurts her feelings when he brings up her mistakes in front of the whole class. In the role play, she told the teacher that she would prefer to talk about such things after class when her classmates were not present. She also explained without any anger that all the other pupils had been practising the flute for two years but that in her case it was only for a few months.

Between the sessions Sarah was keen to put her new communication skills into practice. She had plenty of opportunities to learn how to control her impulsivity and to express her true feelings to her father, to her mother and particularly to her brother.

Mrs Pouliot advised her to “Take a deep breath and think twice before talking. Try to practice every day, like an actress, while thinking first about what you want to say and then saying it in a way that won’t hurt anyone’s feelings. And soon you’ll realize that you feel much better about yourself.”

“Think twice before you talk and life will be easier” Sarah said repeating Mrs Pouliot’s words. That sentence became like a mantra for her. She recited it, in her head, several times a day as she practiced her skill at home, at school and at her dad’s place.

The second time Mrs Pouliot met Sarah, she told her: “You know, Sarah, I think there is another skill that could help you become even happier?”

“I think it will make you happier if you learn to focus on things that make you happy and allow the adults to solve their own problems. I think it would be good for you to learn not to pay attention when your parents talk on the phone about such things as money problems or your time with your dad. Again this situation is not your fault. It’s not good for you to take such things on your shoulders. It’s their responsibility, not yours, to resolve those kinds of questions.”

Sarah agreed.

“If you want, you can have this book” said Mrs Pouliot while handing out a colourful little notebook to Sarah. “You can use it to keep a diary of the good things that happen to you. For example, each day you can write down two happy moments, perhaps nice little things that happen at home, at Dad’s place or at school. It could be anything like seeing a beautiful bird on the way to school, your brother doing something that amuses you, a schoolmate smiling at you or someone showing interest in your artistic talents. What do you say? Would you like to try that?”

“I don’t really want to write anything. I already have so much writing to do for school” said Sarah.

”You know, you actually don’t have to write anything, you could draw pictures of happy moments instead. You are such a good artist,” suggested Mrs Pouliot.

The idea of expressing herself through pictures rather than words appealed to Sarah.

“And if there are some days without any happy moments” said Mrs Pouliot, “that’s all right too. Don’t worry about it! You don’t need to make up anything. Just wait to see if tomorrow will be a happier day.”

For the next few weeks, Sarah drew lovely pictures almost every day into her little rainbow diary depicting happy moments and then she suddenly stopped. She gave the reason that “I can do it in my head now” and proved her point by saying that she had become friend with a classmate who also liked drama. They were planning to put on a play for the end of the school year. The girls had already proposed their idea to their teacher who was more than happy to approve and even offered her help.

Sarah added: “I have finally found a friend who likes theatre like I do.”

Sarah made such rapid progress that she was amazed herself. Her grades went up, she made a couple more friends while working on an art project, she enjoyed being with her mother and brother again, her father had been paying more attention to her, her music teacher had apologized and been very nice to her, and above all, she was all excited about this

new play and the idea that she might have a future in theatre while having fun dancing and singing.

At the last session Sarah looked quite different from the depressed and angry young girl who looked constantly at the floor and kept biting her finger nails.

“You have so many talents, Sarah. Go for it!” said Mrs Pouliot, “I hope to see you one day on TV or at the theatre. You’ve got what it takes.”

Sarah responded with a beautiful smile!

## Finding a Way to Deal with One's Teacher, Boy 11

*Carolien van Mourik is a special education at De Bron primary school in the town of Raamsdonksveer in Holland. As part of her work she supports the teachers of the school in dealing with mainstreamed children, or children with special needs placed in normal classes. Her contribution is a story of how she used Kids' Skills to help an 11-year old defiant boy diagnosed with ADHD and Tourette's syndrome to re-establish a good relationship with his teacher.*

Geert had the bad habit of commenting on everything anyone would say in the classroom, be it another pupil or the teacher. One day Geert said something insulting to a classmate. The teacher asked him to apologize and to stop talking in that way to other children. "This is a free country and I am therefore free to say whatever I want," Geert said with an arrogant look on his face. The teacher responded – in accordance with an agreement that had been made earlier – by telling Geert to move to the corner of the classroom, a dedicated time-out space. When Geert refused the teacher contacted Caroline and asked her to come and help her deal with him.

When Caroline came, she asked Geert to join her to come and talk with her. Geert was enraged but he did comply. When they were together Caroline told him that she could see that he was angry and asked him to explain the reason for his fury. Geert told about his many frustrations with his teacher. "I'm sick and tired of 'the bitch' because she is always in a bad mood," he exclaimed. Caroline allowed Geert to speak freely and refrained from commenting on what he was saying. When he had started to calm down Caroline asked him if there was anything he would need to become better at in order to get along better with his teacher.

Geert thought for a while and then came up with an idea. “Maybe I should learn to avoid talking with her. It could work better if instead of saying anything to her I would write down my disagreements into my notebook and then I would wait to talk to her during the next recess.”

“That’s a great idea!” said Caroline and continued by asking him what the benefits of learning to do that would be. Geert knew the answer. “I will be punished less and she will not be in such a bad mood,” he said.

Caroline then asked: “On a scale from one to ten, in terms of how well are you able to say nothing and to wait till recess, where would you say you are now?” “Seven,” answered Geert. “Look Geert, this spot here on the floor is ten and this one here is one,” explained Caroline pointing to two spots on the opposite ends of the room. “Go and stand at a spot you think you are now and tell me what is it that makes you feel you are there and not for example at five or four.”

Geert walked over to a spot corresponding to seven and said: “I’m here because there have been many times when I haven’t said anything even if I have disagreed with her.”

“All right, said Caroline and then asked Geert to walk over to the spot corresponding to ten on the imaginary scale.

- How does it look like when you are there? Asked Caroline.
- Better.
- What makes it better?
- There is no discussion.
- Ok, and how does that feel for you?
- It feels better.
- Good. Anything else that you see?
- No.
- What can other people see that is different?
- Hmm. Maybe that I am a bit quieter.
- What does your teacher notice that is different?
- Maybe that I’m doing better than usually.
- Hmm, what would she see you do differently?
- That I am not talking.

- No talking. Ok, that would be great.

- Yes.

- So, what will you be doing this week to move from seven to eight?

- I will lift my finger.

- You mean you will lift your finger to indicate that you want to say something? That's what you will be doing this week, lift your finger. Okay, sounds like a good idea to me.

Caroline made a workbook for Geert and decorated it with pictures related to football, which was Geert's passion. In their meetings they used this workbook to plan and work out Geert's project. On the first page of the workbook Geert wrote the following description of the skill he was going to learn: "When I disagree with my teacher I will tell her about it during the recess."

Geert chose one of Caroline's finger puppets to be his power creature, or 'buddy' as he called it, and decided to ask one of his classmates to act as his supporter.

Geert worked hard on his skill meeting once a week with Caroline. In these meetings they also spoke about how Geert would want to celebrate when he had learned his skill. Geert took up the question with his teacher and she agreed that when Geert had learned his skill the whole class would be rewarded by her letting them have a longer recess than usually in order to play football ten extra minutes. And sure enough, this happened soon thereafter.

Caroline observed that working in this particular way with Geert improved his ability to see and to reflect on his own behavior. For example, in one of the sessions at the end of their work together Geert placed himself on nine on the imaginary scale. Caroline asked him to take a step forward and move to ten. "No, I don't want to," Geert said, "because it didn't go that well this week. I don't deserve to be at ten. I will stay here at nine."

Geert learned to get along better with his teacher and to see the role he himself played in the trouble at school. He enjoyed the meetings with Caroline and he told openly to her about many things that were going on

in his life. He was used to getting lots of criticism for his behavior from just about everyone. In the work with Caroline the emphasis was on not on his problems but on something that was positive, the skill he needed to become better at in order to avoid getting into trouble with his teacher.

Geert's mother, who had been supportive of the work, commented to Caroline afterwards that the process had had a positive effect on his ability to reflect on his own behavior and on his self-esteem.

## Treating Hyperactivity by Developing Patience, girl

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*Christine Beuer is a counsellor working for a marriage and family guidance centre in a town called Donauwörth, in Bavaria, Germany. A couple whom she had been seeing for several sessions because of marital problems brought up their concern for their daughter, 12-year old Carla, an overweight girl, who was diagnosed as having ADHD and who was suffering from concentration problems and impulsivity. According to her parents, social situations in which Carla was among peers – whether at school, at dancing lessons, or in the company of friends – were particularly challenging for Carla. Making friends was difficult for her and in social situations she easily withdrew and experienced being an outsider. The paediatrician had prescribed her Ritalin but the parents had refused to medicate her and wanted to find non-chemical alternatives. Christine told the parents about Kids' Skills and they decided to bring her along to the next session. This is what happened.*

When Carla arrived with her parents, Christine found out that quite a bit of the work had already been done at home. Mother had talked with Carla about her problems at length and together they had worked out a list of skills she would need to develop in order to overcome them. She would need to learn, among other things, (1) to let adults complete their sentences without interrupting them; (2) to raise her hand at school to ask for permission to speak; (3) to be kind towards her handicapped little brother (she had hit him many times); (4) to sit still for longer periods of time; and (5) to focus on her school assignments at school as well as at home.



According to the parents, however, the most important thing for Carla to learn was to learn to behave appropriately in group situations, to control her impulsivity and to learn to wait for her turn.

“So what do you say Carla? Is that something you need to learn?” asked Christine.

“Yes,” said Carla as she went on to describe various situations at school, at dance lessons, and in the company of her classmates that she found particularly difficult to deal with. “I am simply too impatient,” she explained.

When the benefits of learning this skill were discussed Carla fluently listed many: “My friends would respect me more and they would like more to play with me, I would maybe even get some new friends; I would not be scolded so often by the teachers; I would not have to stand against the wall so often; I would be able to listen better to what the teachers are saying; I would not cause so much disturbances during dance lessons...” The benefits just poured out of her.

Carla decided to call her skill “Waiting tone”. She explained that many times when you call a number and you have to wait for the answer, they play you relaxing music which makes it easier to wait and to stay calm and to react appropriately when there finally is an answer.

As her power creature Carla wanted to have Cindy, her horse, which was well-known for her ability to wait patiently.

When asked who she wanted to support her in learning the “Waiting tone” skill, Carla listed her in addition to parents, her both grandmas, two friends of her, her school teacher and her dance teacher. Before the next session she had asked all of them to support her and she was proud to announce that that they had all been willing to be her supporters.

Carla knew exactly how she wanted to celebrate. She wanted to invite her dance group, her teacher, her parents and her grandmas to a garden party, similar to the parties that her parents used to have with their friends, and she wanted the party to be in evening – just as her parents with their friends. Carla’s parents agreed to her wish and promised to help her organize such a party once she had learned her skill.

Carla's teacher was present in one of the next sessions. In this meeting Christine asked everyone to tell Carla why they thought she would be able to develop the "Waiting tone" skill. "I believe you can do it," said Carla's teacher, "because not long ago you got quite a good mark in maths exam even if maths has always been difficult for you." The parents answered the same question by saying: "We believe that you can do it because being our daughter you are a strong girl."

As Carla's was listening, her eyes were shining.

"Tell me Carla, how will you be able to practice the skill of waiting patiently for your turn," asked Christine, "what can you do to stay patient?"

"I will carry a picture of Cindy in my pocket and I will look at it while I have to wait for something and then I won't put it back into my pocket until it's my turn," Carla explained.

"That's a great idea, but how will you remember to do that?" Christine asked.

"I will remember by saying to myself 'stop'." Carla said.

A plan was designed according to which Carla would start her training at school by taking small steps. Carla agreed with her teacher that the teacher would inform Carla's classmates about the plan so that they too could support her. She also agreed with the teacher that there would be a diary in the classroom where both of them would write notes about Carla's progress, and that her classmates too would be allowed to scribble down their observations in it.

"There's one more thing we need to think about, Carla, and that is how do you want others to remind you of your skill if you sometimes forget it and become impatient again?"

Carla, inventive as she was, came up with a good idea. She would ask her best friend, who was sitting right next to her in class, to say 'Cindy' in case she became impatient. The teacher was also informed about this magic word that she too could use to help Carla tune into the "Waiting tone".

Carla learned her skill sooner than anyone expected and her much anticipated celebration was a great success. After the celebration Carla expressed interest in extending her newly learned skill to other areas in her life, to dancing lessons, to situations in which she was with friends, and even to learning to be more patient with her brother. Carla was very happy for having learned such an important skill and her parents were very proud of her.

Carla's teacher was impressed about what had happened. She even recommended to one of her colleagues at school to try the same approach with a girl with similar kind of problems. The teacher not only took her advice but also asked Carla, who was now experienced, to become one of the girl's supporters.

"Since I have adopted Kids' Skills to my practice," Christine concluded her story, "I have learned a lot about problems – which are in actual fact nothing more than skills to be learned.

## Learning to Stop Playing, boy 14

*Saija Roine is a child and adolescent psychiatrist who works in the mental health care centre of the city of Kuopio in Finland. In her work she frequently sees youngsters who have become addicted to playing computer games. She contributed the following story to illustrate how she uses Kids' Skills to deal with this problem. This story is interesting because it appears to contradict one of the key principles of Kids' Skills, namely the rule that the skill to be learned should not be stopping doing the wrong thing but learning to do the right thing instead. However, reading this case, you will find that the boy was actually not learning to stop doing anything that was wrong, he was simply learning to be able to quit playing a computer game after having already played it for an agreed period time.*

When Niilo's mother reserved an appointment at the centre she gave some background information to Saija. She explained that Niilo, who was now 14 years old, had some years earlier been diagnosed as having Asperger's syndrome. Niilo was a bright boy, his academic performance and knowledge of computers was impeccable, but he had barely any friends and he tended to be clumsy in his social interaction with other people. He would often offend people by saying something inappropriate or un tactful. According to mother, he was unable to understand other people's feelings and it was not uncommon for him to be bullied by his peers at school. Another sign of Asperger's syndrome was that since early age Niilo had had a strong tendency to become fixated on things.

- What do you think we should talk about? Saija opened the session with Niilo and his mother.

- I don't know, said Niilo tongue-tied.

- What about you, what do you think we should talk about? Saija asked turning to mum.

- Niilo is having a bad fixation week, mum answered.

- That's entirely your problem, cause you don't allow me enough time to play computer games!" Niilo snapped back to mum.

- He is totally stuck to playing computer games, mum explained.

- Which games are you playing? said Saija showing interest in Niilo's hobby.

- My favourite is Flash Point. It is awesome. It allows you to create your own battleground, Niilo explained with excitement in his voice.

- Who do you play Flash Point with?

- Usually alone, but sometimes with my cousin or a friend of mine.

Mum interrupted:

- I am getting really uneasy about the situation. He gets so absorbed in the game that when he plays he shouts out loud 'Kill them! Kill them!'" she explained with a worried look on her face.

- How have you tried to deal with the situation at home? Saija asked.

- Well, I have once already threatened to unplug the computer because nothing else seems to work. It only made things worse. Niilo threw a dreadful tantrum!" mom explained with resignation in her voice. She explained that the situation had gotten so serious that Niilo had started to neglect his homework. He had even skipped showering for four days in a row. In addition, he had threatened with revenge if mum would lay her hand on the chords of his computer.

- Have you tried anything else, anything that has been helpful? asked Saija.

- We sat down, the whole family, and we thought of drawing up, for the first time, a written agreement about computer use both to Niilo and his little brother, mother said.

- That's an excellent idea, said Saija encouraging mum to go on with the plan.

Before the meeting came to close, Saija presented mum and Niilo the Kids' Skills workbook and told them the general principles of the method. Both mum and Niilo showed interest in the method. Saija said:

- I would like you take some time at home and to sit down together to think about what skill Niilo would need to learn in order to overcome this problem? What do you think? Could you do that?

They both nodded. Saija continued:

- Ok, that's good, and Niilo, I would like you to do something special. I would like you to think, before we meet next time, of a name – or a nickname – to the skill that you need to learn.

Three weeks later Saija saw Niilo and his mum again. Both of them appeared much more at ease as compared to the first meeting. There had also been much less clashes about computer use with Niilo. The family had indeed had a meeting where they had decided to draw up a contract about computer use that would bind each member of the family. In addition, preliminary plans had been made about deciding for a weekly computer free day. Mum was, however, still worried about Niilo not being able to quit playing on his own without mum or dad telling him to do so.

- Did you think of the skill for Niilo to learn, asked Saija.

- I think what he needs to learn is the skill of quitting playing, said mum.

- Ok, sounds good. Did you find the skill a name, Niilo?

- I call it 'Booting'

- Oh, you mean like booting a computer? Like when you push control-alt-delete?

- Yes.

- Hmm. That's clever. So now we have a skill and even a name for it. Great. The next thing to do is to think about what good it will do to you to become good at 'Booting'?

Niilo understood the question and without hesitation started to list various benefits: "Mum will not shout; it will be calmer at home; I have more time to play outside and to do my homework in peace..."

- ...and you will do better at school, mum added.

- Can you think of a power creature that will help you learn the 'Booting' skill? asked Saija.

- Can it be an animal? Niilo asked.

- Sure, why not.

- In that case I want Misse, our cat, to be my power creature.

- Ok, and who do you want to ask to support you?

- Mum and dad... and my little brother.

- Fine. Now I want to ask you mum, what gives you confidence that Niilo will learn the 'Booting' skill?

- I believe he will learn it because he usually learns whatever he decides to learn and because he can see how beneficial it is for him, mum said.

Saija then explained to Niilo that one part of Kids' Skills is to celebrate learning the skill in some way and asked him to think of how he would want to celebrate when he has learned the 'Booting' skill. Niilo thought for a minute, then looked at his mother and said: "Could we buy chocolate cookies and Coca-Cola and have a whole family yummy time?"

During the past two weeks Niilo had actually demonstrated the 'Booting' skill at home quite a few times and he was willing to continue to practice the skill. The agreement was that if he would forget the 'Booting' skill both Misse, the cat, and his mum would remind him simply by uttering the word "Booting".

Niilo also suggested that he could teach the Booting skill to his little brother too.

When Niilo and mum were about to leave, Saija had a word with mum alone. Saija told mum that if she wanted she could reinforce Niilo's positive development by practicing "gossip praise" by which she meant telling about Niilo's positive change to another person in his presence.

- That's a good idea, said mum. I could praise him to my husband as well as to grandma and his auntie.

Two months later Niilo came with his mum to the third session.

- I'm doing fine!" were Niilo's opening words.

Mum agreed and said that Niilo had minded his school work well and that several times he had been able to quit playing all by himself.

- I do my homework always before I open the computer,” Niilo added.

There were also other improvements. Mother said that Niilo had not picked any fights at school even if he had been bullied a couple of times with inappropriate remarks.

- Somehow he has been able to control himself and keep away from attacking others, mum wondered aloud, and on top of that he is telling more about his experiences to us as well as to his teacher and he has even found a couple of new friends in his class.

The session ended with a conversation about what kind of celebration Niilo would organize together with and his little brother when both of them had become good at the skill of wilfully quitting playing a computer game.



# Section 4: Kids' Skills as a Collective Activity

## The “Lazy Worm” and the “Worker Ant”

*Camilla Schöldberg, Stina Vildir, Lennart Mattson and Cecilia Jonsson comprise the staff of Liljanskolan, a small therapy school for children with special needs in Stockholm, Sweden. Their problem was that all the seven children on the special class were unmotivated. They didn't want to get started, they didn't want to work, and they had a negative attitude toward school work in general. The team decided to use Kids'Skills to get the children to become motivated to learn. An important step in using Kids'Skills with the whole class is that of introducing the idea to the children. In this story, as well as in some of the other stories involving the whole class, the teacher came up with a playful way of launching the project.*

“The School Council called us to a meeting at the City Hall,” they said. “At the meeting we were told that the Council has been informed that there was *something* that had been affecting many schools in the Stockholm district but no-one knew exactly what it was. The only thing that was known, was that many pupils around the city had been suffering from similar symptoms: low energy, lack of initiative, unwillingness to open books, not getting started with school work, doing tasks only half-way, pupils appearing like potato sacks at their desks and wanting to take a break before having barely started. The School Council had called in teachers from many different schools to a meeting because they wanted to ask children in the schools to try and find a way to overcome it. They wanted the teachers to speak with the children in order to try to find out what this could be all about and they also wanted to have a name for the problem in order to be better able to inform people about it.”

The children recognized the symptoms and agreed that their school must have been affected by whatever it was. "We have been thinking about it too," the teachers said, "and that appears to be the case." The teachers then wondered if the children would be willing to try to defeat it as the School Council had hoped for. Everyone agreed without a shadow of a doubt.

"Don't you think we need a name for this thing?" the teachers asked the children, "what could it be called?" Many suggestions were made and finally a decision was reached that "it" was to be called "the Lazyworm" and in order to get rid of it the children would need what they chose to call "Worker Ant". They identified many benefits of sending the Lazyworm packing and replacing it with "the Worker Ant". These included better marks, happier adults, less strict adults, happy and lively children and, last but not least, rewards. The teachers agreed that of course the children should be rewarded in one way or the other if they would become "Worker Ants".

A decision was made that a party would be arranged when the Lazyworm was gone. The children were offered the opportunity to wish for things for the party. They wanted the party to be on a Friday, there were to be soft drinks, games that everyone can play together and videos. In addition, they wanted to pick up something from the reward basket, an arrangement that had been introduced earlier to the class. They also agreed that there would be two celebrations instead of one. The first celebration would be arranged when they had made good progress in sending the Lazyworm packing and a bigger celebration when it was all gone. An agreement was made that every time the children completed their assignments at school they would receive a stone. The stone was to be placed in a vase and when the vase was full the celebration would be arranged. First the children filled up a smaller vase and thereafter a bigger one.

As the planning of the celebration was completed the children were told that they could have power creatures to help them on the way. The idea was well received and all children had soon made drawings of their personal power creatures. The variety was rich ranging from one boy's

pet dog to a fierce looking bee that was supposed to sting the lazy worm. All power creatures were placed on the wall in the front of the class room.

Then there was a discussion of what should be done if things wouldn't work as planned. "What shall we do if you sometimes lose it and the Lazyworm is suddenly back again?" the teachers asked the children. "You know, the Lazyworm is stubborn and it takes a lot of effort to get rid of it. You will need a lot of patience and persistence to become worker ants – it won't come to you by itself like a letter into a mailbox. What do you say, what shall we do when it's difficult?" The children came up with many ideas: they could keep their eyes on the pictures of their power creatures, the teachers could hold the vase and shake it so they would be reminded of the celebration, the teachers could use exclamations such as "Worker ant rules!" or "End to Lazyworm". That was the way in which the children thought that setbacks would be overcome. The children said that they were confident that they would be able to become Worker Ants because they were determined to have the celebration they had planned for. Finally, it was time to decide who would be invited to support the project and the children wanted all the teachers as well as their parents to support them.

As soon as the planning was done, the project started. Stones were collected into the vase and despite inevitable setbacks the children were good in maintaining their focus on the upcoming celebration. In addition to the teachers and the parents, the children were also supporters to each other by frequently encouraging and reminding each other. The level of school work improved significantly.

One day, in between the two celebrations the children received a letter from the School Council. It was read aloud to the whole class:

*The School Council has come to know that the children of Liljanskolan have given a name to the symptoms that we informed about earlier this fall. We think that "Lazyworm" is an excellent name for these symptoms. We have also been informed that the children of Liljanskolan are working towards*

*becoming Worker Ants in order to make the Lazyworm disappear. It is of great pleasure for us at the School Council to know that the children are struggling so hard to free themselves of the symptoms and we are confident that they will win the battle over the Lazyworm. When the battle has been won and the big celebration will be held I hope that my busy schedule will allow me to come by for a celebration inspection.*

*Warm regards,  
Igor Inspector  
The School Council*

The first celebration was held two weeks into the project. The children decorated the classroom with balloons and streamers during one of the lectures. After lunch the teachers laid the table and attached a revolving disco light onto the ceiling. The children listened to a reading in the hall while playing simultaneously silent cooperative games and then entered the classroom for the celebration. The children were taken by surprise when they entered the classroom: in addition to drinks, several sorts of ice-cream, and sweets, the table impressed the children also with birthday sparklers. “If this is the little celebration,” they said in awe, “what’s the big celebration going to be like?” The celebration was a success and each child got a balloon to take home.

The big celebration was arranged six weeks after the first one and it lasted a whole day. During before noon the whole class helped to decorate the classroom. Having done that they all went out to play a game called “can”, a popular version of hide and seek. The cook prepared tacos – children’s all-time favourite food – and after lunch there were games and disco. Later that day, as in the previous celebration, the children were allowed to choose one thing from the reward basket and the day ended with viewing a film that all the children liked. When parents joined the party in the evening they were acknowledged for their support and cheers were passed with Pommac, a sparkling soft drink known as children’s

champagne in Sweden. Unfortunately, Igor Inspector was unable to join the celebration but his letter was nevertheless appreciated by the children.

The teachers asked the children afterwards what they thought about the Worker Ant project and the response was very positive. The children said, among other things that they had noticed that they work better during lessons, that the celebration was fun and that all in all it was a good way to encourage them towards school work. The teachers commented that they were surprised that the children responded so well to the approach and that they enjoyed so much working in this way. There was a marked improvement in the work motivation of the children and the positive change persisted after the project was completed. “Making changes does not necessary have to be difficult. You can come a long way simply with clear goals and positive encouragement,” the teachers concluded. At time they submitted this contribution a new project was already underway called “Helper Ant” involving learning to be good friend for the other pupils in the class.

## The School Called ‘Children’s Joy’

*This story was submitted by Caroline Beumer, director of BrandNewWay, a Kids’Skills training institute in Haarlem, Holland. It is a description of her work with a small elementary school called Childrens’ Joy with some 250 pupils in a middle-sized city in the west of the Netherlands. The school was located in an area notorious for its many social problems. The number of pupils in the school had rapidly dropped because many families had moved to more affluent areas of the town, some had placed their children to more reputable schools fewer and fewer children were enrolling to the school each year. Caroline was invited to the school in order to speak about Kids’Skills to the teachers who had no previous knowledge about this method. Having explained the principles of Kids’Skills to the teachers, Caroline asked them if they would want to try the method to deal with some minor everyday problem. The teachers, however, could not think of any minor problem. Instead, they spoke at length about the recurring chaos that occurred whenever the children were entering or getting out of the school building. Many things had been tried to solve the problem but nothing had helped so far. The teachers decided to try Kids’ Kills to deal with the problem even if quite a few of them openly expressed their scepticism.*

When Caroline spoke with the teachers she found that they were frustrated. They complained that the pupils lacked social skills, had a short fuse, and had the habit of behaving in a macho way to impress peers. The teachers were also concerned that many younger children came to school in the mornings unaccompanied by parents or caretakers. The school was described by some of the teachers as a jungle.

It turned out that one of the biggest concerns of the teachers was what happened at times when the children were entering the school building at the start of the day and getting out at the end of the day. These events were described as chaotic. The elder pupils, rushing to get in or out as fast as they could, stamped or pushed the smaller ones. The children would be shouting and every so often there would be someone crying. Also accidents were commonplace. Recently, a four-year old girl had been pushed against a glass-door with the result that the glass, which was supposed to be safety glass, had broken. The girl had gotten injured and had to be taken to hospital by ambulance. The morning chaos was seen as a big problem also because it generated a negative atmosphere that affected the entire school day.

The teachers had tried everything they could possibly think of to solve the problem. They had increased surveillance, they had implemented punishments, they had ordered the children to enter and exit the building in rows... but nothing had worked. They felt that the problem was too massive for them to handle; after all there were only ten teachers trying to control a horde of 250 lively children.

“Ok, we can do that,” said Caroline, “If you want, we can try to design a project based on Kids’Skills to try to solve the problem.” A decision was made to try to engage the whole school in a project to support the children in learning to enter and exit the school building slowly and quietly.

The next day all the pupils of the school were informed about the plan and asked what they thought about it. The problem and its negative consequences were discussed in classrooms. The teachers had been advised to guide the discussion so that the problem would not get too much attention but, instead, the pupils would be invited to think about what positive consequences would follow from them learning the skill of “entering and exiting slowly and quietly”. The children were able to see lots of positive consequences with them learning the skill. Thinking about the positive consequences had the effect of creating a good mood. The children participated actively in the discussion and many jokes were made. In the end



everyone agreed that the goal was worth pursuing. Even those pupils who were more sceptical joined the band wagon when the discussion turned into what kind of mutual party should be organized when the goal was achieved. The children's positive response, in turn, helped to convince the more sceptical teachers that the plan might actually work.

A letter box was put up in the hallway for suggestions concerning the party that would be held when the children had learned to "enter and exit slowly and quietly". Each class was allowed to enter three suggestions. All suggestions were then attached to a bulletin board in the hall for everyone to see and at the end of the day everyone gathered in the hall to vote for the best suggestion. The suggestion that won the vote was that a whole day would be reserved for festivities at the school, games would be played and parents would be asked to join and to bring foods from their respective countries of origin.

The children liked the idea of having an opportunity to present their cultural background through preparing their favourite foods with their parents and the teachers thought that this would be an opportunity for the parents to become more involved with the school while having a chance to be proud of their cultural background. A positive surprise was that the headmaster said that he would try to contact the local newspaper to get them to write about the project.

A suggestion was made by some pupils, that a rehearsal would first be organized to make sure that everything would work when it was time to start implementing the new entering-exiting behaviour starting Monday the coming week. The suggestion was well received and it was agreed that on Wednesday that week everyone would participate in the rehearsal.

Some of the teachers voiced their concern suspecting that one rehearsal day would not be enough, that the rehearsal would need to be repeated at least for a week. Many also anticipated that there would be a need to be firm with some of the notorious troublemakers.

Wednesday came and it was time for the rehearsal. The teachers expected that things would work better but that there would still be lots of

room for improvement. The local newspaper had indeed sent a junior journalist and a photographer to report on this historical event.

Caroline who had helped in planning the project was not present during the day of the rehearsal but when she arrived home from work late that evening, there were several enthusiastic messages on her answering machine. The rehearsal had worked wonders from the beginning to end.

Not only did the rehearsal work but the children managed the entering and exiting well also on the remaining days of the week as well as throughout the next week. Whenever a child was about to forget what was agreed upon, he or she was kindly reminded about the agreement, and perhaps more importantly, about the upcoming party.

Three weeks later the local newspaper ran an impressive half page article about the project and about how everyone, including the parents and local shopkeepers had supported the arrangement of the wonderful festival.

Two years later, when Caroline again was in contact with some of the teachers from the school she learned that the small school “Children’s Joy” had merged with another school, that social problems had diminished and that the problem had not reoccurred. The new school had also been successful in getting more parents to become involved in their children’s school work.

Another piece of news was, that at least partly due to the article that was published in the newspaper, the local politicians had taken a stand: the school had gotten more funding and had at that time almost 500 pupils.

## Kids Learning New Skills

*This story is a contribution by Neal Kaer and Barbara Robinson who work for Strengthening Family Connections, a strengths-based family support program in the small resort town of Yeppoon on the east coast of Australia in Queensland. Neal and Barbara invited five boys, aged 9-11 years to participate in a Kids' Skills' project. All of them gladly approved. The story is an illustration of how Kids' Skills can be used with a group of children supporting one another in achieving their skills.*

Neal and Barbara started the project by inviting the parents and the teacher of each boy for a meeting to discuss the problems of that particular boy and to find an agreement about what skill he would need to learn in order to overcome his problem behaviour.

After these initial meetings with parents and teachers, a second meeting was arranged, for each boy and his parents. In these meetings the boys' problems were openly discussed. The focus was, however, not on the problems but on explaining the boy what skill the adults wanted him to learn in order for him to overcome his problems and what the benefits of learning that skill would be for him. All five boys were fine with these discussions and readily accepted to learn the skills they were proposed.

*Liam* had had major difficulties with school. Due to his problematic behaviour he had been suspended from school on several occasions. One of his problems was his inability to complete tasks, a difficulty which was getting him in lots of trouble at home as well as at school. It was decided that *Liam* would learn the skill of completing a given task. He called his skill The Fish Skill.

*Zac* had been placed for an extended period in a foster home due to severe problems in the family. Upon reunification of the family *Zac* had

started to have severe fights with his younger brother. Mother, who felt was desperate with the brothers' fighting, had sought help from the program. The skill that Zac decided to learn was to control his frustration with his younger brother utilising "the helping hand" skill. This skill, offered by his teacher, was composed of a number of self-control techniques including 'friendly talk', 'brave talk', 'ignoring' and 'walking away'. And if none of these worked, the last resort was 'going to tell an adult'. He dubbed the helping hand skill 'The Tobias Skill'

*Lethan*, who had a mother with a disability, resided with his grandparents. He was highly intelligent but also extremely competitive. He had lots of difficulties in the classroom as well as at home due to always having to win or come first. Lethan would, for example, often get into trouble at school for answering questions out of turn. His skill was letting others 'go first' or 'win' from time to time. This skill got the name 'The Turtle Skill'.

*Kaleb* also had major difficulties with the school system and had been suspended on several occasions. Kaleb was shy, he had great difficulty interacting in child groups and he suffered from a generalized anxiety. A decision was made that he would learn the skill of being more confident when speaking in groups. Kaleb, who was keen on learning this skill, wanted to call it 'The Horse Skill'.

*Blayne* had spent some time living with his grandmother. He had recently returned to his mother's home. Upon reunification there had been major conflicts including physical attacks between Blake and his brother and sisters. He agreed to learn the skill of controlling his anger when playing with his brothers and sisters, utilising what "the helping hand". The skill was named 'The Pink Panther Skill'.

The five boys then met with *Neal and Barbara* on a weekly basis for a period of seven weeks. In the first meeting there was a discussion about skills they had mastered up until now and how did they succeed in doing that. For example, Zac, the boy who fought his siblings, reported that he had learned to ride a motorbike. This led to a discussion of what Zac had

done to learn such a difficult skill and if he could do something similar to learn the skill of being able to control his anger toward his brother.

Another topic discussed with the boys in the first meeting was why it was important for them to learn their specific skills. Here the group turned out to be useful in terms of helping each boy see the various benefits that there would be of him learning his skill.

All boys wanted their teachers to be part of their supporter group. Other supporters included members of the immediate and the extended family. Surprisingly only one of the boys wanted to ask a school friend to be amongst his supporters. Blair Lewis, a famous ex professional basketball player, currently one of country's most popular motivational speakers, was a guest speaker at school during the project. He was recruited by all of the boys to be their supporter.

Each boy got to choose an animal that would help him learn his skill. The power animals included, among others, an eagle, a scorpion and a black panther. The power animals meant a lot for the boys. The boys took time and care to pick them, lovingly drew pictures of them, decorated the drawings, and proudly displayed them on the wall. The power animals were a source of inspiration for the boys as well as symbols of the boys' inner strength. The boys often referred to their power animals during the group discussions.

The boys were keen to inform their family, friends and teachers of the skills they were learning. They even said that they would like the newspapers to write about their project. *Neal and Barbara* promised to contact the local newspaper to see if it was possible.

In order to learn their skills each boy made a plan of how he would practice his skill. Liam practiced the skill of completing tasks by arranging to have a set time every afternoon to complete his homework. Zac practiced the 'helping hand skill' with his siblings on a daily basis. Lethan practiced his 'Turtle Skill', or the skill of allowing others 'be first' from time to time, at school by making an effort to refrain from calling out answers in the classroom even though he knew them. Kaleb practiced his skill of being more confident when speaking in groups by rais-

ing his hand in class and asking his teacher for a new task when he had completed the previous one. Kaleb also practiced his skill on Saturdays by going to the local shop and talking with the shopkeeper to purchase – all by himself – ice cream for the whole family. Blayke, who was learning the helping hand skill like Zak, took pains to figure out a new way of responding to feelings of anger in a variety of situations at home as well as at school.

Three weeks into the program Blair Lewis visited the school to talk about his career in basketball, about how he had set himself certain goals and how practice was essential in achieving one's goals. During the program the boys reflected on what Blair had said about the importance of practice and of quickly getting back on track in case of setbacks. They assumed the attitude that those times when they reverted to their old way of doing things were to be seen as minor setbacks and that all they needed to do at those times was to get quickly back on track.

Four weeks into the program the boys made plans of how they would want to celebrate at the end when they had all mastered their skills. They wanted to organize a celebration where there would be chocolate mud cake with vanilla ice cream, sweets, chicken chips, Cheerio's, and Freddo Frogs. Decorations were made, speeches were rehearsed, and invitations were sent to parents, teachers, friends, and also to their new hero, Blair Lewis.

The celebration was a great success. All in all, 36 people turned up, including Blair Lewis, to share the big chocolate mud cake which had the boy's names written in sugar on it. Upon receipt of the certificates for successfully completing the Kids' Skill program each boy gave a speech to thank his supporters. One mother spoke about the positive impact the program had had not only on her son but also the rest of the family. A highlight of the event was when Blair signed the boys' workbooks.

Neal and Barbara asked the parents for permission to place a story in the local newspaper about the project. All parents approved and some-time later the small local newspaper ran a piece of news with the headline

‘Kids learning new skills’. There was a picture of the five smiling boys posing together with Neal and Barbara. The text read:

Kaleb, Blayke, Zachary and Liam were part of a group of five boys aged between 9 and 11 years who took part in a seven-week program which involved supporter groups from family, friends and school teachers to give them encouragement along the way. The boys got to work through their problem solving abilities by practicing their new skills on a daily basis and in a variety of ways, including role playing and fun activities. At the end of the program the students planned and organized a graduation event to celebrate their achievements. Graduates of the first Kids’Skills program were asked to provide feedback at the end of the program and comments such as ‘it was fun’ ‘enjoyable’ and ‘fantastic’ were offered.

## How Can We Become an Even Better Class?

*Swetlana Teutscher is teacher from Vienna Austria, who after her retirement was still involved with the school where she used to teach. Having participated in a Kids'Skills workshop she decided to try the method with class 2C of her former school consisting of 24 pupils on most of them 11 years old. The home class teacher welcomed Swetlana to work with her pupils for a period of six weeks with weekly sessions.*

During the first visit to the class, Swetlana told the pupils a story. This is a summary of that story:

“I was going for a walk in the woods with my dog Sheila when we all of a sudden I bumped into Albus Dumbledore (the great magician from Harry Potter) who happens to be a good friend of Sheila and me. The three of us got into talking about class 2C. Sheila and I expressed our concern about the class to Albus telling him that there were many problems in that class but Albus assured us that there was no such thing as problems and that the children only needed to learn some skills in order to become a real super class.”

Sheila and Albus became Swetlana's accomplices for the entire duration of the project. They introduced each step and praised the children for their accomplishments.

The parents were informed about the project and offered ideas of how they could participate by supporting their children in learning the skills they would learn as part of the plan. This is what the letter to parents read:

*On Monday two weeks from now we are starting a small project called Kids'Skills to improve the class spirit. Our slogan is 'How can we become an even*



*greater class?’ In order to accomplish this goal each child will think of a specific social competence they want to improve that will have a positive effect for the whole class.*

*And you, dear parents, will also have an important role in making this work. When the children have decided what skill they will improve, they will ask family members and some friends to support them in developing that skill. Throughout the project the children will talk with their supporters about their successes but also their setbacks. As a supporter, your most important job is to praise your child for successes. This you can do, for example, by saying something like “Wow, that’s great to hear!” or “How did you do that?” or “I’m proud of you!” Children are also encouraged to talk with their supporters of their setbacks, or times when it didn’t work. In these situations, it is not important to think about the reasons why it didn’t work. It will be enough for you to say something encouraging like: ‘I’m sure next time you will succeed again!’*

*Thank you for your kind cooperation!*

In addition to parents, a group of older girls and boys from grade six, were recruited to act as big sisters and brothers. These children, some four years older than the pupils of class 2C, had the role of supporting and praising the pupils as they were learning their skills.

Each pupil was given a personal Kids’Skills workbook where they wrote the skills they were going to learn. The skills that the children decided to learn included among other things “being more attentive during lessons” “participating more actively in the lessons” “being more helpful” and “getting better along with boys (or girls)”.

During the weekly meetings the children worked with their workbooks where they drew pictures of animals that would help them learn their skills, listed the pupils that would support within the class, wrote a description about how they would practice their skills, made plans about how to deal with setbacks, and above all, scribbled notes of their progress.

The project ended with a celebration to which the pupils invited their parents, their siblings and, of course, the “big sisters and brothers” from the sixth grade who had supported them throughout the project.

Even if not all children mastered their skills fully at the time of the celebration, all had made marked progress and were going to continue learning their skills.

Sometime after the celebration Swetlana gathered some feedback from the pupils and the home room teacher. Here are some of their comments about the Kids’Skills project:

Marko: I have learned the skill to get along much better with girls.

Sivania: I have learned to understand others; we got to know the children much better.

Aleks: I am better at school, I get along better with others, we help each other more.

Karim: I believe many children have reached their goal with the help of our teacher. I’d like to thank her.

Andrea: I’ve really improved my grades a lot. I’ve got more self-confidence, I participate more the lessons and the teachers are quite pleased with me.

Philipp: We’ve learned a lot. We can work and play much better together, we get along better and we hardly ever fight any more.

Jasmin: By cooperating in groups I have got to know other pupils.

Niko: I’ve learned that other children can help me.

Chris: Some of us have achieved their goals. I haven’t really but it was lots of fun.

Sara: I’ve learned to talk about problems with others. This makes things much easier and it makes me very happy.

Teacher: I was delighted to find that above all the girls, but also most of the boys took the project very seriously and participated in it with great enthusiasm. I observed that as time went by the girls became more conscious of their contact with the boys, with whom they previously used to get into serious fights. At present boys and girls are getting along wonderfully and the class atmosphere is good. The project has certainly played a major role in this positive development.

Swetlana herself commented like this: “Even if I was involved only at the early stages of the six-week project, I was impressed by how enchanted the children were by my story and how ready they were to believe in their ability to learn skills. They loved their Kids’Skills workbooks and many of them took great pains to color pictures in it and showed great imagination in creating and naming their power animals. The project involved plenty of group work and class discussion and I was amazed at how mature, competent and creative many of the children were.”

## A Class Atmosphere Project

*This story was submitted by Nadine Callens who works as a school counsellor in a school guidance centre in Flanders in Belgium. It is a description of her cooperation with a secondary school teacher who was concerned with the disruptive behaviour of the pupils of her special needs class consisting of 11 to 13 old children some with low IQ (ranging from 70 to 85), some with severe learning difficulties and still others with serious behavioural problems. The secondary school was oriented towards occupation, toward giving the pupils a basis for studying to become carpenters, electricians, construction workers and the like.*



The teacher of the class originally contacted Nadine in order to ask her to help her design a system to reward the pupils for their good behaviour in order to improve the atmosphere of the class. Nadine responded by telling the teacher about Kids' Skills. The teacher thought the idea was worth trying and so they decided to join forces to find a way to use

the method with the pupils. Their intention was to develop a routine of some sort that the teachers of the school could use with their classes on their own.

The teacher and Nadine started by meeting with the pupils to ask them about their future dreams: Why they had they decided to come to this particular school, what did they hope to achieve by attending this school, and why was their goal important to them? Most pupils said that their dream was to get a profession in order to make their parents proud of them.

After having talked with the pupils about their dreams, the teacher and Nadine moved on to ask them what kind of skills they needed to learn, or to improve, in order to make their dreams come true. The skills that came up fell into five categories of skills. The first category included academic skills such as ‘to take care of my homework’, ‘to write neatly’, and ‘to concentrate on one task at a time’. The second category included skills related to classroom behaviour such as ‘to raise my hand for permission to talk’, ‘to stay at my own desk’, ‘to speak without raising my voice’, and ‘to exit and enter the classroom calmly’. The third category included skills related to classmates such as ‘to learn to play with others’, ‘to notice when others needs help and offering to help them’, ‘to put an end to a fight’, and ‘to learn to work also with those who are not my friends’. The fourth category had skills related to communicating with adults such as ‘to listen without interrupting’, ‘to give the letters that I get from school to my parents’ and ‘to use Mr. and Mrs. when talking with teachers’. The fifth category contained skills that had to do with feeling good about oneself such as ‘I dare to speak about my problems to adults’, ‘I am able to calm myself down”, and ‘I am able to express my opinion without shouting’.

The benefits of the skills were also discussed: “Why is it important to have this skill? What about this skill? Why is this one important?” For example, when the children were asked why is it important to learn to raise one’s hand and to wait for permission to talk, one of the boys said that he has noticed that when they do that the class is quieter and then the teachers tell more jokes!

When the teacher and Nadine met with the pupils the second time the next day, they gave each of them a sheet of paper listing all the skills that had been identified in the previous meeting and a pile of two kinds of stickers, shooting stars and badges of honour. They then asked the pupils to evaluate themselves by attaching a badge of honour sticker next to the skills listed on the sheet that they felt that they were already good at and a shooting star sticker next to the skills they needed to improve. When the teacher looked at the pupils' self-evaluations, she commented to Nadine that she was impressed by how aware the pupils had been of their strengths and weaknesses.

The pupils were then asked to pick one of the skills they had marked with a shooting star to be the skill they would improve. The idea was that there would be two rounds. During the current semester the pupils would decide themselves which skills to improve but during the next semester the parents would be asked to decide what skills they wanted their children to improve.

"I will ask you a special question," said Nadine to the pupils when she visited the class the third time. "It is an important question and I want you to concentrate and to think hard. The question is: 'Why will it be good for you to learn your skill?'"

Most children were able to provide an answer this question without much assistance. For example, Michal who wanted to learn to say 'no' to others when they asked him to do 'wrong things', explained that it was good for him because it would make his sister and his mother like him and to be proud of him, and it would help him not to end up in prison (which is where his father had been a number of times). Kevin, who wanted to become better at self-control, said that it was good for him because it would help him avoid the punishments that resulted from his lack of self-control. He added solemnly that he thought it would make him more popular and loved by the girls!

The teacher and Nadine divided the pupils into small groups of two or three and asked them to interview each other, holding an imaginary microphone in their hand, about how well they already mastered their

skill, when they had been able to ‘do’ their skill, and what was the trick that they had used to be able to do it. The interviewer was instructed to say something like “Good!” or “Wow” when the pupil being interviewed would tell about times when they had been able to ‘do’ their skill.

When everyone had been interviewed the pupils told about their findings. It turned out that the pupils had a wealth of little tricks that helped them to do their skills. One boy, for example, said that sometimes when he feels he is going to explode he goes to his room and plays his guitar. Another boy said that he puts his clenched fists into the pockets of his trousers. A girl explained that it helps her to imagine that she ‘plants’ the skill into her brain – much like you plant a flower into a pot. One boy said that for him it works to think about his grandfather because he wanted his grandfather to be proud of him.

The teacher and Nadine printed out a table with the names of each child and a brief description of the skill the child wanted to learn. A copy of this table was distributed to all teachers teaching the class with a request to keep a record of times when the child acted out their skill and to praise them when it happened.

Nadine joined one of the evenings where the teacher met up with the parents and the pupils to tell the parents about the Kids’Skills project and the skills the children were going to learn. The parents were asked to participate in the project by becoming supporters to the children: by encouraging and advising them, by praising them upon hearing that they have demonstrated their skills at school, and by continuing to be supportive even when it is difficult for their child to keep up the skill.

During the evening the parents were also asked to turn to their child and to explain to him or her why they thought the skill the child had chosen was an important one to learn and what made them confident that he or she would be able learn it. The children, as well as the parents, appeared to enjoy these brief conversations a lot.

During the project Nadine also met individually with some of the pupils who expressed a wish to talk with her one-to-one. These were all boys who had chosen challenging skills such as ‘better self-control’ or ‘to

say ‘no’ to bad proposals’. Nadine found the work with the boys enjoyable. In contrast to the more common situation where pupils are sent by their teacher to see her, these boys came to see her out of their own initiative in order to talk with her about a skill they wanted to improve, something that would make a difference for their future.

Louis, a twelve-year-old boy from Rwanda, was one of the boys who wanted to speak with Nadine one-to-one. He wanted to tell Nadine that there was an additional skill, the skill ‘to study more’, he wanted to improve. If he would be able to study more, Louis explained, it would make it possible for him to be transferred to a different class, a more demanding class, and that would make him more proud of himself. Nadine, who was surprised to hear this, opened up Louis’ file and found that unlike many of his classmates, his learning difficulties were not based on low IQ but on severe dyslexia. In fact, the record showed that his IQ score was 117, way above average. Nadine helped Louis create a plan based on the principles of Kids’Skills for him to learn to ‘study more’. Due to his strong motivation and the fact that the school supported him by acquiring a special educational computer suited for his needs, Louis was transferred the following year to a more demanding class.

The teacher continued the project with the class all through the semester. During her lessons she paid attention to the skills the pupils were practicing and praised them generously for behaving according to their skills. At the end of the semester the teacher organised a party that had been planned together with the pupils at the start to celebrate learning of the skills. All the teachers that were teaching the class were invited, as well as all the pupils from the two other small special classes whose teachers were planning to do something similar with their pupils.

The highlight of the party was a special concert where the pupils made music by playing their ring binders with chopsticks. The concert was conducted by the music teacher and it had been properly rehearsed during the music lectures. The story behind the concert was that the pupils had been fiddling with their Kids’Skills ring binders during lectures making clicking sounds by opening and closing the ring mechanism of the binder.



The teacher had consulted Nadine about this behaviour and together they came up with a creative solution. Rather than simply telling to the pupils to stop the annoying clicking, the teacher complimented the pupils of their creativity and said to them that she had told the music teacher about the sounds they were able to make with their ring binders and the music teacher had agreed to help them to make a concert for the celebration by playing their binders. The children had been delighted at this unexpected proposal that transformed noise into music. Redefining noisy behaviour as an attempt to make music helped the pupils to contain their behaviour and to restrict it to music lessons.

At the beginning of the next semester the teacher talked to the parents of each pupil and asked them what skill they wished their child would learn during that semester. The parents, who were pleased with the results of the project of the previous semester, were happy to suggest new skills for their children. The second round was also successful with the result that the customary spring BBQ party at the end of the school year became a celebration of the skills that the children had learned.

The teacher commented that the projects had not only improved the atmosphere of the class but also made it easier for her to talk about problematic behaviour with pupils as well as with their parents. She did not hesitate to say yes when Nadine suggested that they could run the project again next year.

## A Letter to Parents

*This letter is an example of a letter to inform the parents of the children of a school class of a Kids' Skills project.*

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

*wants to ask you to support him/her in learning the following skill*

\_\_\_\_\_

*In order to learn skills children need support, encouragement, and help from their family and friends. As a supporter, you are expected to*

- *help your child understand why it is important to learn this skill,*
- *boost your child's self-confidence with words of encouragement,*
- *show continuous interest in your child's progress,*
- *offer help if the child is experiencing difficulties in learning the skill*

*I hereby commit myself to be a supporter for \_\_\_\_\_*

*Signature \_\_\_\_\_*

*Your words of encouragement to your child:*

## A Letter to a School Class

*Maiju Ahola is primary school teacher who works in the town of Järvenpää in Finland. She has described a playful whole-class modification of Kids 'Skills called "The Hunt for the Master-class" for improving classroom atmosphere and pupil behavior. The Master-class project starts impressively. The teacher clears a space in the middle of the classroom where candles are lit. As the surprised children enter they are asked to sit on the floor to hear about the peculiar news. When all children are seated and quiet the teacher reads aloud the mysterious letter that she has found in her cubicle in the teachers' room. This is what the letter says:*

Do you know who I am?

I am not a taxi driver or a secretary,

Not a librarian, and not a construction worker.

I am not a teacher either,

even if that could be an interesting job.

I am someone who has been roaming around this country for a long long time to see how it looks like in classrooms. I have been looking for something special and now I think my search is over. I have finally found your school and your class.

You probably haven't noticed anything out of the ordinary but the fact is that I have had my eyes on your class for the past couple of days.

After having thought about it thoroughly, I have come to the conclusion that you have what it takes.

You are the class I would want to bestow this important mission.

I am old already and it is time for someone else to overtake the mission of the Hunt for the Masterclass.

But before you start you need to work together to figure out what being a Masterclass means in practice.

Good luck for your hunt,

Yours, Olokuza

With this letter from the mysterious Olokuza the children are invited to participate in a project which involves, among other things, identifying skills for the children to learn, creating groups each focusing on developing a particular skill, choosing personal power animals, engaging parents as supporters, developing a method for self-monitoring progress, planning a celebration and making plans about how to deal with setbacks.

## Encouragement Letters

In Keula preschool, where Kids'Skills was originally developed, the teachers have taken up the habit of writing encouraging letters to the children signed by Bam, the Kids' Wizard.

Bam is the name of a hand puppet dressed in blue gown and a blue hat embellished with yellow stars. The person holding the Bam puppet can insert his or her hands inside Bam's arms and thus make him gesticulate as he speaks with children. The children of the preschool love Bam and definitely want him to be present when they celebrate learning their skills. The idea of utilizing the wizard puppet comes from the computer program Bam, the Kids' Wizard, where Bam is the delightful animated character that steers the child through the steps of Kids'Skills.

This first example is a letter from Bam to Michael, a boy of six who had the problem of losing his temper for the smallest thing and whenever that happened he would fling away his glasses and often end up breaking them. His skill was to 'improve his nerves' and the name of the skill was 'Tiger-skill'

*Hi Michael, how are you? I am fine. I am Bam, the Kids' Wizard and I have noticed that those nerves of yours have gotten quite a bit better. Even if there are nuisances from time to time, you most often keep your glasses on. I must say that I really admire that a lot. It is not at all easy to master a skill like Tiger-skill. Well done. I am already waiting for your Kids'Skills party, that yummy red juice and marshmallows. Yam yam. That's why I want to say to you: 'Go for the Tiger-skill'.*

*Yours, Kids' Wizard Bam*

The following letter was written to five-year-old Rick who had just had his celebration for learning to be silent and to stay calm at the reading before the nap and in the bed during the obligatory rest. It includes a suggestion of what the following skill to learn should be.

*Hello Rick! How are you? I am fine. I am Bam, the Kids' Wizard and I think it is time for you to pick up a new skill to learn. It was fun to be in your party and it is remarkable how well you have learned to concentrate on listening to the reading and how calmly you rest on the bed. Excellent job! I think it would be great if you chose "eating nicely" as your next skill. That would be very good for you because I have noticed that you enjoy eating and you like many different kinds of food. The table would stay neat and your clothes would stay clean. Your mother would become happy from finding out that you have learned to eat calmly and tidily. Will you give it a thought with your mom? You could also think about what yummy things you could serve when it's time for your celebration. Will the sap be red or yellow? Oh how much I look forward to join your celebration Rick!*

*Yours, Kids' Wizard Bam*

The next letter is another example of Bam suggesting a new skill to the child.

*Hello Alex! How are you? I am fine. I am Bam the Kids' Wizard. I have visited many celebrations in Swans (the name of the unit) and gotten to know you there. It was nice to be in your party when you had learned to play with a friend. That's why I would like to suggest to you to start learning another skill so that we could have a party again! Alex, what do you say about this one? 'I learn to work silently at the table'. I think that would be very useful to you. Think about it so we can make plans together with your mom!*

*Yours, Kids' Wizard Bam*

The following letter is an encouragement letter that builds on what Ron had agreed with the teachers earlier on during the same day.

*Hello Ron, how are you? I am fine. I am Bam the Kids' Wizard and it was great to be in your last party. Thanks for the sweets! I was listening when you were speaking with your teachers today. They suggested a skill for you to learn: 'I learn to speak like big boys when mom and dad come and pick me up'. You even came up with an excellent name for the skill: 'Big boys' school'. Wow. When you have learned the skill, I thought we could celebrate with yellow sap and sweeties. You should ask your parents if that's OK. You gave us permission to remind you, if you would sometimes forget your skill. You agreed that if that should happen we can say to you: "remember the big boys' school!" I really hope to be a guest at your party soon again. I believe you will learn that skill because you have learnt a huge number of new things up until now!*

At Centre Académique Fournier, in Montreal, Canada, a school for children with different severe behavior disorders, the school psychologist Louise Paquin has adopted the custom of inviting pupils participating in Kids'Skills to 'correspond' with their heroes. She takes the time to compose short answers to the pupils' letters on behalf of the pupil's chosen hero. The following letter is a response to Espédie who had nominated Daddy Yankee, the world famous Puerto Rican reggaeton musician and singer as his hero.

*Cool! Wow!*

*What a great name... Espédie!*

*How cool of you to choose me as your supporter. It's an honour! Please accept my apologies for taking so many days to respond to you. I've been busy with one event after the other and I needed to find someone to help me write in French. I will do everything I can to help you and I will write to you*

*every week. You know, Espédie, when I write my best songs, I need to be in silence in order to do a good job... I gather, that if you are to work effectively in class, you too need to learn to do it in silence... I'm looking forward to hear from you soon again.*

*Your new friend Daddy Yankee*

The next example is a response to Jeffrey who had chosen Captain Jack Sparrow, the star from the movie *Pirates of the Caribbean* as his hero.

*Hi sailor Jeffrey!*

*Have you scrubbed the deck? Have you worked in the kitchen? Have you climbed the mast to see if there is any danger in the horizon? To be a good sailor you need to be able to perform several tasks in a day! If you want to be part of my crew, you must obey my orders. So you begin your practice by obeying the demands of your teacher Mrs. Isabella and then we will see if you can be part of my crew. I trust in you Jeffrey!*

*Yours, Captain Jack Sparrow*

The next letter is to Billy whose problem is that he swears and speaks rudely. He made progress the previous year but the problem reappeared and he needed to work on it again. He had chosen Batman as his hero.

*Billy my friend,*

*I have been thinking about you this week because I want you to succeed in your mission to learn to speak politely. I made some inquiries and I was told that last year you were able to make quite some improvements with your project "When I speak well, things will go better for me!" I think that if you have already been able to speak well last year, you will be able to do it again. We super heroes always speak politely despite all the strong emotions that we have to deal with. If*



*you want to take the place of Robin at my side, you will need to learn to keep your calm. To get there, just remember to take a deep breath and you'll soon be free of the problem! It does not do you any good to speak rudely; therefore, just drop the habit.*

*Your friend Batman*

The final example is a letter to Jérémy, who, not unlike most of the children on his class, has difficulties in controlling his hot-blooded temper.

*Hello Jérémy! Did you know that I come across lots of emotions when I'm on a mission? In order keep my cool what I do is that I set small goals and concentrate on taking deep breaths. My suggestion to you is that you choose as your first goal to give a name to the way in which you wish to express your emotions instead of shouting. Your teacher Isabelle will certainly be interested to hear what you come up with. Good luck and see you soon.*

*Spiderman*

Power creatures can be anything from stuffed teddy bears to good spirits and from rock artists to football champions. In case of teenagers, instead of creatures, also objects such as special toys, amulets, and symbols can be used as sources of power.

The power creature functions as symbol of the child's inner strength and it can be used in all sorts of imaginative ways during the process of learning skills. Children seem to particularly like the idea of establishing some form of communication with their power creatures. For them there is simply something magic about communicating with an imaginative creature which is geared toward helping them improve their skills and to become happier. It is often easier to take advice from the power creature than from other people and any words of encouragement and apprecia-

tion coming from such a creature, even if the child knows that one of the adults is behind the messages, fall in fertile ground.

## Section 5: Putting Kids' Skills into Action

## Things to Consider Before You Set Off

If you have been inspired by the stories in this book and you are contemplating of trying Kids'Skills in action, you may benefit from these directives that I have composed on the basis of questions that people often raise when they start using Kids'Skills.

### Make sure you have rapport with the child

Kids'Skills is based on cooperation and will not work unless you prepare the soil by building a contact, or rapport, between you and the child. You can do this in many ways, for example, by playing with the child, by showing interest in his hobbies and his favourite activities, or talking with him about his hopes and his worries. You can also tell the child about your work by presenting the Kids'Skills approach to the child. When working with Kids'Skills it is particularly befitting to build rapport by asking the child what difficulties he has overcome previously or what skills he has acquired up to now.

### Make sure the child agrees to learn the skill

If the child proposes the skill to learn, he will most likely be committed to learning it. If, instead, the proposal comes from an adult it is important that the child agrees to learn it. To get the child's consent it is advisable to present the proposal respectfully: "Your teacher would like you to learn to go to go to him when you become angry at the other kids. He thinks it would be good for you, that it could help you to avoid fights and make you happier at school. What do you think? Would that be good for you?"

In trying to convince a child of the importance of learning a particular skill, avoid taking upon yourself the role of persuading the child. Utilize,

instead, the child's parents and other supporters by asking them to explain to him why the skill is an important one to acquire.

In case the child refuses – or appears clearly uninterested – in learning a particular skill cajoling him into learning it is not advisable. A better alternative is to back down and to ask the child if he would prefer to learn another skill instead. By learning a skill of his own choice the child gains experience of this way of approaching problems, and – presuming the experience is positive – is likely to comply after that with learning skills proposed by the adults.

### Make sure the skill is doable

As stated earlier, it is very difficult, if not impossible, for children to learn will-not-do-so-and-so -skills such as “I will learn not to hit other children” or “I will stop lying” or “I will not scream and shout when I don't get what I want”. Make sure to figure out together with the child what it is that he needs to learn in order not to act in the undesired way. The skill needs to be “doable” meaning that the child should be able to act it out or to demonstrate it in role-play or in real-life situations. For example, “to learn not to scream and shout” would not count as a doable skill but “to learn to express my disappointment in an appropriate way” would be.

### Target specific features of disturbances

Most child psychiatric disorders, including ADHD, autism, conduct disorders, developmental disorders, anxiety disorders and affective disorders, are ‘syndromes’, that is, combinations of several features, or symptoms, that tend to occur in concert. Kids'Skills cannot be used to manage psychiatric disorders *directly* but it can be used *indirectly* by helping children deal with the distinct features of the disorder in question. In order to use Kids'Skills to help children who have been diagnosed with psychiatric disorders make an inventory of the features of the disorder – that is the actual emotional and behavioural problems of the child – and use them as a basis for identifying skills the child needs to learn. To make out

the distinct features of the particular disorder in question, it is often helpful to ask: “How does (the disorder) show in his behaviour?” or “What problems does (the disorder) give him?”

## Be flexible

When you start using Kids’Skills, you should play it safe by following the procedure step by step. However, as soon as you have gained some experience of using the approach, you should feel free to experiment with leaving out steps or altering their order. For example, instead of starting with step one – identifying problems and finding a skill to learn – you might consider starting with step seven – building confidence – by inviting the child to tell you about problems he has overcome or skills that he has learned up until now. Or you might even start with step fourteen – teaching the skill to someone else – for example by asking the child to help you figure out a way to teach a teddy-bear a skill that the child would also benefit from learning.

## Be prepared for setbacks and obstacles

The case stories in this book are contributions by people who have written reports of successful use of Kids’Skills. They serve well the purpose of illustrating how to apply Kids’Skills in practice but at the same time they may run the risk of falsely portraying Kids’Skills as a universal remedy that always works wonders regardless of problem or situation. In using Kids’Skills you should be prepared to encounter setbacks and obstacles. For example, the child’s initial motivation may fade, an unexpected problem may pop up, cooperation with parents or teachers may turn out more difficult than expected, etc. In many cases, such difficulties are surmountable, but nonetheless, there are certainly situations in which Kids’Skills needs to be combined with other forms of intervention, and probably also those where an altogether different approach might be more appropriate.

## See the bigger picture

Keep in mind that despite the manualized structure, the detailed instructions, and the workbooks to adhere to, Kids' Skills is not, in essence, intended to be a "method" or "procedure" to be followed rigorously but rather a proposal for one possible set of guidelines that can help us work with children and their families in a respectful, cooperative, and creative way.

# Resources

## ***Books on Kids'Skills***

Bauer, C., Hegemann, T. *Ich Schaff's! - Cool ans Ziel. Das lösungsorientierte Programm für die Arbeit mit Jugendlichen.* Carl-Auer Verlag, Heidelberg, 2008.

Arane Bentner (Hrsg.) Vom Meckern zum Wüncchen. Studie zur Wirksamkeit des lösungsfokussierten Programms "Ich Schaff's". Carl Auer Verlag, Heidelberg 2013. [Studies on the effectiveness of the solution-focused program Kids'Skills]

Furman, B. *Kids'Skills – Playful and Practical Solution Finding with Children.* St. Lukes Innovative Resources, Bendigo, Australia 2004. The book was originally been published in Finnish. Other translations include Swedish, Estonian, Danish, Norwegian, Icelandic, German, Polish, Russian, Dutch, Bulgarian, Japanese, Chinese, Chinese simplified, and Korean.

Furman, B. *I am proud of you.* Originally published in Finnish by Tammi in 2012. Available in Chinese, Danish, German, Norwegian, Arabic, Dutch, Japanese and Swedish.

Caroline Beumer. *Mission possible. Kids'Skills voor jongeren.* Uitgeverij Nelissen, Amsterdam 2010. In Dutch. [Mission Possible: Kids'Skills with teenagers]

## ***Kids'Skills Workbook***

Furman, B. *My Kids'Skills Workbook.* Helsinki Brief Therapy Institute, 2009.

## ***Kids'Skills Workbook***

Furman, B. *My Kids'Skills Workbook.* Helsinki Brief Therapy Institute, 2009. Available in English, Finnish, Swedish, German, Spanish, French, Dutch.



### ***Selection of books on solution-focused therapy with children***

- Freeman, J. Epston, D. and Lobovits, D.: *Playful Solutions to Serious Problems. Narrative Therapy with Children and Their Families*. Norton Professional Books, New York, 1997.
- Selekman, M. *Solution-focused therapy with children: Harnessing Family Strengths for Systemic Change*. Guildford press, New York, 1997.
- Haley, J. *Uncommon Therapy: The Psychiatric Techniques of Milton H. Erickson, M.D.* Norton Professional Books, New York, 1986.
- Haley, J. *Leaving home: the therapy of disturbed young people*. Brunner Mazel, New York 1997.
- Insoo K.B., Steiner, T. *Children's Solutions Work*. Norton, New York 2003.
- Rosen, Sidney. *My Voice Will Go with You: The Teaching Tales of Milton H. Erickson, M.D.* Norton, New York 1982.
- White, M., Epston, D. *Narrative means to therapeutic ends*. Norton, New York 1990.
- Ratner H., Yusuf, D. *Brief Coaching with Children and Young People: A Solution Focused Approach*. Routledge, 2015.
- Murphy, J. *Solution-focused counseling in schools*. Wiley, 2015,

### ***Related articles and book chapters***

- Franklin, C., Biever, J., Moore, K., Clemons, D., Scamardo. M. *The Effectiveness of Solution-Focused Therapy With Children in a School Setting*. Research on Social Work Practice, Vol. 11, No. 4, 411-434 (2001).
- Ratner, H. Solution-focused therapy in schools. pp 95-105 in Nelson, T., Thomas, F.N. (Eds.) *Handbook of Solution-Focused Brief Therapy: Clinical Applications*. The Haworth Press, 2007.
- Tolksdorf, S. *Tips and Tricks for Working with Children: Solution focused Brief Therapy in a German classroom*. pp 191-224 in Nelson, T., Thomas, F.N. (Eds.) *Handbook of Solution-Focused Brief Therapy: Clinical Applications*. The Haworth Press, 2007.

White, M. *Pseudo-encopresis: From avalanche to victory, from vicious to virtuous cycles* (Family Systems Medicine in 1984, Vol 2, Nr. 2, re-published in White, M.: Selected Papers, pp.115-124, Dulwich Centre Publications, Adelaide 1989).

### ***Internet pages***

[www.kidsskills.org](http://www.kidsskills.org)

[www.kidsskillsapp.com](http://www.kidsskillsapp.com)

[www.kidsskillsonline.co.uk](http://www.kidsskillsonline.co.uk)

[www.benfurman.com](http://www.benfurman.com)

### ***Apps***

Furman, B. *Kids'Skills App*. Helsinki Brief Therapy Institute, 2016. A free mobile app for smartphones and tablets. For more information, visit [www.kidsskillsapp.com](http://www.kidsskillsapp.com)

Furman, B. *Kids'Skills Online*. Helsinki Brief Therapy Institute, 2014. A web-based Kids'Skills workbook for children to use together with their guardian. [www.kidsskillsonline.co.uk](http://www.kidsskillsonline.co.uk)

Furman, B. *Bam, The Kids' Wizard*. Helsinki Brief Therapy Institute, 2005. Flash animated older version of Kids'Skills Online. Available on CD and online in English, Finnish, German, Dutch, French, Swedish and Danish.