

Children Lost: Today's Hansel and Gretel

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Would that it were different, but it is not. We are in 'today' and young and old are subjected to the changing times of home, parenting, politics, world economy, and life in general. Humans have the ability to stop, pause, think of the present, place themselves in the future and look back, evaluate, analyze, change their approaches to life, or just take each day as it comes and accept whatever it may bring for us and our families. I assure you that children are human too, although they do not have that same opportunity as adults to create a good life for themselves, happy in mind and sound of body, unless the adult takes an active part in their growing up. A child growing up is a cooperative adventure of the child and parents. Oh God! "I wish that I knew then what I know now". This may very well be a parent's lament when their young-child or adult-child runs into problems. Had I known then what I know now I would have looked at the child as a gentle, little flower with petals that are just waiting to be opened to the light of wondrous experiences. I would have known that the child looks at my every gesture, frown and smile, listens to every word, or grunt, or groan, or laugh, absorbs the tone of my voice, analyzes the glance of my eyes and feels what I am to him or her and to the world. Our present day economy is not good, but it has not affected present day parenting, for parenting changed 20 or 30 years ago because of the economy in place at that time. It was so difficult to survive when both parents were compelled to work whereas 50 or 60 years ago, it was the exception to the rule. And this was the beginning of many parenting problems....with hardly anyone to blame, except maybe life. What does all of this have to do with the practice of hypnotism? Adults who come to our offices for assistance with smoking cessation, weight management, stress alleviation, relationship issues, addictions, etc., know that they need help and believe that hypnosis is right for them. Sometimes they come out of desperation, other times because they have been enlightened to the strength of this modality. However, the value of hypnosis in relation to the child is seldom considered. It is thought that hypnosis is an adult's remedy. Hypnosis to some is a scary thing, to others it is as natural as using your imagination or daydreaming. We hypnotherapists would do better to not use the word hypnosis with children but just call it positive programming or positive thinking. I for one still call it hypnosis for children, and when we explain it properly to parents, there is no problem of acceptance.

In the early 90's Rollo May in his book, "The Cry For Myth" blamed the loss of myth for so many of our problems, so many crimes. He believed that society no longer took time to tell stories to children concerning the parents' heritage, of their culture, of stories of times told by grandfathers, grandmothers, and fathers and mothers to grandchildren and children. The working man had little time to spend with the child and this is understandable but nonetheless unfortunate. If I remember correctly Rollo May spoke out publicly when a young

man and young woman of wealthy parents got carried away with their amore in Central Park and the young lady was choked to death. May pointed to the rich parents and their refusal to spend the proper amount of time with their children while they were growing up leading to an absence of a cultural foundation, which resulted in moral problems for the couple. May firmly believed that *“Myths give expression to the universal truths of human nature, and guide human existence; these are narratives that make sense in a senseless world; myths provide universal themes to the individual regarding birth, death, love, marriage, good (Christ), evil (Satan), freedom, independence; memory and myth are inseparable; our earliest memories become our personal myths, that influence our perceptions about the world, others and self. Great literature gives expression to all-important aspects of human nature.”*

We hypnotherapists have a great opportunity to work with children in private sessions and in groups. Now is the time to mold the child, to open the child to positive thought and attitude, to give the child examples of the survival of right over might, good over evil, justice over injustice, independence vs dependence, love vs hate, etc. We use positive programming, affirmations, stories and choices to the child. Naturally in a private session, an adult shall always be present in the room. I personally enjoy telling stories, myths, and metaphors to my clients and especially to children. By the way, most myths apply to every age, every person, but may change from culture to culture. The underlying theme of myths are always true....even with fairytales. How many grown women still look for their 'knight in shining armor' and want to wear 'the glass slippers to the ball'? A myth that has stuck with me for all these years is 'Hansel and Gretel'. Long ago, and far away, yet ever so near there were a mother, father and two children, Hansel and Gretel. Times were hard then and people were starving and scraping together everything they could to survive. (Do things really change?) The father believed that desperate times called for desperate actions (rationalization) and told the mother that they should get the children lost in the woods, never to return to home, so that the parents could eat and survive. The mother refused to abandon her children. How many children are lost in the 'woods of society' without every seeing a green tree or smile on a face? How many children are abandoned by their parents without ever leaving home? Abandonment comes in many forms, many sizes and shapes. This is a reality and often the parent is truly well-intended and does not realize this reality. The father insisted and demanded and finally wore down the mother who was forced to consent. (Sad but true) The father said that they would walk the children into the deep part of the woods and tell them to sit there while the parents looked for food. Hansel heard the mother and father conspiring and stuffed little pebbles in his pocket. On the way to the deep part of the woods, Hansel dropped a pebble here and there so that he and Gretel would be able to find their way home. He told Gretel not to worry. All went according to plan, and after the children were walked into the woods, and the parents disappeared, Hansel and Gretel followed the path of pebbles back to their home to the dismay of the father and delight of the mother. Again the father told the mother they would do it a second time but

this time the father would look for pebbles in Hansel's pocket. When the trip was about to begin, the father took all the pebbles from Hansel's pocket and fear ran through the minds and hearts of Hansel and Gretel. But, children are ingenious, and sometimes we adults forget this. The parents, in an attempt to either assuage their guilt or convince the children that they would not abandon them, gave them some bread to eat on their trip. Hansel thought quickly and dropped bits of his bread along the way so that they would again find their way back home. After being abandoned a second time, the children began their way back home however birds had been there earlier and ate all of the bits of bread and Hansel and Gretel were truly lost.

So now the children have to shift for themselves. Gretel continuously cries and Hansel wants to stay strong to help and protect his sister. They walk in circles, and are extremely tired and ravenously hungry to the point where it appears that all is lost, the path and their lives. As they walk along, they come upon a gingerbread house and begin eating the bread to their fill. The witch returns to her home and acts friendly to the children as sometimes strangers do. But the children were unsuspecting because times were hard and their parents had to work hard to survive and had no time to tell the children of the dangers of life and its pleasures. The witch gave lavish food to the children to fatten them up for her own feast. Gretel thought the witch to be nice and ate and ate and got fatter and fatter. Hansel would not eat because he wanted to remain skinny so that the witch would not cook them and eat them. At one point when the witch was feeling his arms to see if there was a lot of meat on them, Hansel held out a bare bone which the witch thought was his arm and the cooking was delayed but not for much longer. The witch got so impatient and furious, that she was about to throw Gretel into the fire, but the very fury of the witch, cast the witch herself into the fire to burn and perish. Hansel and Gretel fled the gingerbread house and let all of the other children out of their cages so that they could return home.

What can we adults learn from this myth? Children can be abandoned intentionally or unintentionally, physically, spiritually, and morally. Children are ingenious. Children are strong. Children need our guidance and direction. When left to their own, they may become 'lost in the woods of life'. Children need our nurturing and love. Children listen to our words and know our actions even when we think that they are unaware. Children can be helped by other children. For example, repairing Childhood Obesity, can be facilitated by a hypnotherapist in private sessions and group sessions. Group sessions are great as the child has the company of other children in the climb and conquest of similar mountains. Hypnotherapists can offer the child an opportunity to gain understanding of the outer and inner impressions that cause overeating and other unhealthy eating habits. Dr. Sigmund Freud observed that a child is a marvelous creature who can speak a foreign language as any language is foreign to the child at a tender age, and the child can also do mathematics: "Mommy I want two dollies", "Daddy, I want two wagons". Freud also believed that a child picks up imprints between the ages of 3-5 years which can be

negative and positive, and which have the capability of staying with the child for the rest of his or her life, as they are buried deep within their subconscious minds. I believe that negative imprints must be addressed at an early age in accordance with Freud's beliefs, to provide space without clutter for new habits for health. We can teach adolescents to learn how to enjoy life with good eating and satisfaction while creating an active, full life so that the importance of food, television and computer activities is viewed in the proper perspective. Children can express their feelings in private and in a group setting and learn how to deal with various emotions and feelings that drive them to overeating.

There are many other issues with children that may be addressed in a hypnotic (relaxed) setting. How wonderful it would be if we can be part of a child's climb to the mountain top by assisting the parent's nurturing of the child in trying times. It is really a 'must' that the parent be enlightened as to the cooperative nature of the hypnotic and at-home work that is involved with the child. How many times have you said to your self "I knew that" when someone told you something, thereby refreshing your memory? Well, the same goes for parents, refresh their memory as to the wonders and needs of the child, and the cooperation of all parties.

CAVEAT: In strict compliance with the Ethics & Standards of our profession, always advise your clients who demonstrate symptoms of medical issues or psychological disorders to avail themselves of the best allopathic medical and psychological professional services that they can obtain. Request a written referral when warranted. Hypnotism is complementary to these traditional disciplines.