

THE NURTURE-STRUCTURE HIGHWAY

The idea behind the Nurture-Structure Highway is that children/young people thrive in environments where the adults strike a healthy balance between appropriate forms of care (nurture) and of rules and boundaries (structure). First created by Clarke and Dawson in relation to parenting, it provides some useful pointers for teachers and support staff.

Down the centre of the highway you have the 2 healthiest forms of nurture (Assertive and Supportive Care) and structure (Negotiable and Non-Negotiable rules). This is the road we want to be on as much as possible.

One of the strengths of this model is that it recognises that all adults will at times veer off of the highway and onto the verge. Under stress, pressure or simply being tired, we might find ourselves slipping into nurturing that is characteristic of what Clarke refers to as Conditional Care or Over-indulgence. Similarly, our ability to enforce boundaries might be characterised by either Marshmallowing and Criticism.

Perhaps more pertinent to parents than school staff, there might also be times when the adult veers all the way over onto the hard shoulder. Here the nurturing either takes the form of Neglect or Abuse and the structuring the form of either Abandonment or Rigidity.

The point here is that we are only human – we won't get it right all the time. Using this chart, we can become more mindful as to the ways in which we drift off the highway and consider a) how we can steer back onto it and b) whether we need help and support from others to do so.

Consider the different ways you provide nurture and structure in relation to the children/young people you work with:

NURTURE

- When do your pupils require Assertive Care (the younger they are, the more likely they will need this style of nurturing) – you essentially 'take over' the caring for them. How do you do this?
- When is Supportive Care a more appropriate response? How do you provide this?

Under times of stress, which of the less-helpful nurturing styles do you find yourself slipping into – Overindulgence or Conditional Care?

How could you steer yourself back onto the highway by providing either Assertive or Supportive care?

What are the stresses and pressures? What could you do to take better care of yourself?

Consistency of approaches

Are there adults working alongside you who adopt different styles of Nurturing? What might this mean for the experience of the pupils? Security? Confusion? Opportunities to exploit different styles depending on which adult they are with?

STRUCTURE

- What are the Negotiable rules within your classroom? How do pupils engage in the negotiation? Are there any rules that, on reflection, should be non-negotiable?

- And what are the Non-Negotiables? Are pupils clear as to why they are non-negotiable?
- Given the pupils' age and developmental stage, is the balance between negotiable and non-negotiable a good one? Is there anything you would tweak?

Under times of stress, which of the less-helpful structuring styles do you find yourself slipping into?

How could you steer yourself back onto the highway by holding to either the Negotiable and/or Non-Negotiable rules?

What are the stresses and pressures? What could you do to take better care of yourself?

Consistency of approaches

- As a teacher, are support staff who work in the classroom clear as to the rules and which are negotiable/non-negotiable? How are they involved in the process of deciding on the rules?
- If you support teachers, are you clear as to what are their negotiable and non-negotiable rules?

References:

Jean Isley-Clarke and Connie Dawson 'Growing Up Again – Parenting Ourselves, Parenting Our Children' Hazelden Publishing 1998

Giles Barrow and Emma Bradshaw 'Improving Behaviour, Raising Self-Esteem' David Fulton Publishers 2001