

*Alfred Adler Institute
of Northwestern Washington*

**A Clinician's Guide
to The Collected
Clinical Works of
Alfred Adler**

A Unified System of
Depth Psychotherapy,
Philosophy, & Pedagogy

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Classical Adlerian Translation Project

The psychic life has a creative power that is identical with the life force itself. This creative power has the capacity to anticipate, which it must do, because human beings move. The psychic life means movement and direction with one goal.

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To fully understand this impetus toward the guiding ideal, the final fictional goal, is to come to know, compressed in a single point: past, present, future and the intended finale, all at the same time.

* * *

Another definition of neurosis is “Yes – but.” In the “yes” is embedded the recognition of social feeling; in the “but,” the retreat and its safeguards. The neurotic turns his whole interest toward the retreat, until it becomes an elaborate “Retreat Complex.” Even the question, “Why should I love my neighbor?” springs from the inseparable connectedness of mankind and the stern criterion of the community ideal. Only he who carries within himself, in his “law-of-movement,” a sufficient degree of the community ideal and lives according to it as easily as he breathes, will solve his inevitable difficulties.

Alfred Adler

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An Introduction by Sophia de Vries¹ - 1990

"The repeated rendering of an oral tradition over many generations inevitably leads to errors in transmission and the gradual loss of the original content, a degradation of information that occurs more slowly with the successive reprinting of written accounts."

Carl Sagan: "The Dragons of Eden"

To those of us who have had the privilege of learning Individual Psychology from Alfred Adler himself before his death on May 28th, 1937 in Aberdeen, Scotland, and who have worked together with his closest followers afterward, it is very satisfying that Individual Psychology has become known as an important discipline in psychology. However, certain aspects of what goes under the name of Individual Psychology today would not readily be recognized by its originator.

At one time music meant compositions by Bach, Beethoven, Brahms and the like. There also was "entertainment" music. Nowadays, anyone who can put his finger on an instrument and at the same time abuse his vocal chords, makes music. Creating art by means of painting was done by people like Michelangelo, Rembrandt, Renoir, etc. Today, four-years-olds do "art" work in finger-painting. Popularization can have its drawbacks.

When I introduced Adler for the last lecture to his audience in Holland before he left for England, his topic was "responsibility." To this day I recall his penetrating look, when he finished his talk with: "Those of you who really understand Individual Psychology and have learned to apply it, carry a heavy responsibility." In the following years we experienced this and still do. For that reason I have presented Adler's original Individual Psychology the way he taught it himself, and have added translations of some lectures and articles by Adler as published in the *Internationale Zeitschrift für Individualpsychologie*.

Some composers have used another composer's theme, calling it "variations on a theme" by the other's name. Others just used the theme

¹ Sophia J. de Vries, who studied with Alfred Adler, Lydia Sicher, and Alexander Mueller, wrote this introduction in 1990 to a series of journal articles by Alfred Adler that she had translated. At the time, she was living in Oakland, California and was a consultant and senior training analyst for the Alfred Adler Institute of San Francisco. Her work served as an incentive to carry on the translation of Adler's clinical works and served as reference documents for later translations.

and published the composition under their own name. Painters have copied great masters and called it a copy, while some have copied the style of the master, putting the master's name on the fraud. Art and science can be interpreted in different ways, except when the originator has been explicit in his interpretation. Toscanini interpreted Beethoven the way Beethoven had written his music. Alfred Adler was an originator who was outspoken in his interpretations, if one only listened and made an effort to comprehend.

The reader should not forget that Adler still got a “lot of flack” from the existing (early) group of Freudians. In some articles he clearly denounces his opponents. In others he warns his own followers who did not understand him or thought they could do better. Most of these passages have been included, because they will always remain valid.

During World War II Individual Psychology was dormant. Hitler had decreed that Adler's and Freud's theories should not be learned, as both men were born Jewish. Only Jung's psychology could openly be practiced. Practicing Adlerians had to be extremely cautious. Many got out of Austria, Germany, and the occupied countries.

In Holland Individual Psychology owes its rebirth in a large part to Dr. Alexander Mueller, who had been a close co-worker of Adler, Dr. Ronge, and others. Later Mueller established himself in Zürich, Switzerland, where his name is still mentioned in the Individual Psychology group he helped to form. During his years in Holland, we had worked closely together and later I visited him in Zürich. On my last visit, before his death in July, 1960, we discussed the inroads Individual Psychology had made. Mueller's conclusion was, "Adler has not yet been fully understood. He has to be rediscovered from the roots up."

Volume 11

Education for Prevention: *Individual Psychology in the Schools* *The Education of Children*

Vol. 11 of *The CCWAA* consists of two books by Alfred Adler: *Individual Psychology in the Schools* (1929) and *The Education of Children* (1930). *Individual Psychology in the Schools* was based on lectures Adler gave in the Pedagogical Institute of Vienna. Although the lectures were directed to teachers, Adler wished to gain the cooperation of psychiatrists, psychologists and families in trying to improve the lot of children, teachers and parents.

Part 1: *Individual Psychology in the Schools* (1929)

In **Ch. I: The First Five Years**, Adler tells his audience that all educators need to hear about both theory and practice; thus, he will be presenting case histories to illustrate his ideas. He then reviews the basic elements of his theory of personality development, adding that “The ideals of a nation reach into the heart of a family. Therefore, the means must be developed in the family and in the schools to ensure that education prepares an individual for society.” IP constantly looks for interrelationships, understanding human nature in terms of an individual's attitude toward others, which is revealed in all his expressive movements. This fundamental attitude toward others becomes crystallized in the first four or five years of life as the individual's life pattern, or life style. All subsequent experiences will be seen through the prism of this life style. Thus, the influence of the family, especially the mother, is crucial to prepare the child to face the demands of life with an attitude of interest in others and the courage to overcome difficulties. The first test of the child's preparation is school.

Both pampered children and hated children will have similar difficulties in school, and later life, because they lack the necessary preparation for interest in others and courage in the face of difficulties. Warnings and punishment do not change faulty preparation. Only training teachers in

IP can help correct the faulty preparation in the family, and promote the ideals of community, courage, and cooperation. “Our most important task is to practice the art of motivating a child to reach for that social ideal.”

Adler presents the case of a five-year-old pre-school boy who is hyperactive, breaks things, climbs on the table with dirty shoes, sticks his hand into a cake and stuffs his mouth with it, and pushes guests out of their chairs so he can sit.

When the mother slaps him, he laughs and stays quiet for maybe two minutes. The mother thinks that the grandparents pampered him excessively. Now he no longer is really pampered. (Adler: That is the reason he developed as he did. His social feeling was never developed since he clung only to his mother and father.) He does not think or concentrate. (Adler: His life style does not require thinking and he is also unprepared. By now, he should be able to function on his own, but cannot do it.) He never attended a kindergarten. (Adler: Apparently, the mother's task was to keep the boy for herself. We must recognize how all these factors interrelate. We can claim to understand this boy when we know that we are dealing with a part of the total individual. Understanding means seeing things in their context, not as a sum of fragments.)

In **Chapter II: On the History of Problem Children**, Adler begins by comparing how other psychologies approach understanding problem children with IP. “Without our being aware of it, the social context always becomes a prerequisite. Human beings are not born with directed drives. However, some people successfully detach their drives from the social connection. For that reason, most psychologists have assumed that human beings are bad by nature and from necessity train and change their drives so that they are not directed against the well-being of society. The opposite is true. Whatever a child brings with him into the world will be integrated with all inborn possibilities into a social framework which he will consider primary.”

As the child integrates “all inborn possibilities” with external influences into his life style, he becomes guided by his fictional goal, “which he cannot escape without insight. Awareness of this goal allows us to recognize a direction in the chaos we encounter in individual symptoms.” We must, therefore, look for the direction of the child's

movement: toward and with others, or away from and against them. Following a goal that does not conform to the rules of society, the problem child seeks a place where he can feel superior to others, but in a useless way. “With this principle, we find the starting point for applying IP.”

Our task is to investigate what has occurred in a particular child's life that has left him unprepared for the tasks he will face. The possibilities are endless, such as pampering, neglect, organic deficiencies, the birth of siblings, family economic difficulties, change of home or school, and so on. Any of these factors can lead to a similar result. “The explanation for an unwillingness to persist in a struggle to overcome difficulties is always the same: a lack of courage, a lack of interest in others, and self-centeredness.” Educators face a formidable challenge. “We get these children already completed and we are expected to correct what parents failed to achieve. We must begin by doing the right thing, because society expects us to do better than the parents have done at an earlier stage.”

In **Chapter III: Children's Lifestyles**, Adler focuses on how to uncover and understand a child's lifestyle. When a child faces a test, like school, his behavior will show whether he believes he is capable of dealing successfully with it. If he hesitates, stops, or behaves in other socially useless ways, we know he lacks the confidence he needs to succeed; he suffers from a serious feeling of inferiority. In order to gain a better understanding of him as an individual, we must examine him in several contexts: “We have to conduct a horizontal examination in various places to determine how this self-evaluation is expressed, and how it changes into action. We should also begin a vertical examination. We should compare present manifestations with peculiarities in the child's past. We will then have a line that shows us the genetic structure of the child's life style.” Because of the unity of our inner life, all the ways in which the child expresses himself, in the past, present, and future, will agree. If he gives us some early memories, and we understand them, they will show us “the focal point that reveals his system.”

Adler then cites an example demonstrating how even very young children recognize a lifestyle and can have an effect on it: “A two-year-old-girl was dancing on a table to the great dismay of her mother who yelled at her, 'Get down, you'll fall!' The girl calmly continued dancing. The three-year-old brother, who had looked on, yelled to her, 'Stay

there!' The little girl immediately climbed down from the table. The boy understood his sister's lifestyle. Clearly, a child can be taught to feel important by doing the opposite of what she is told."

He then presents the case of a thirteen-year-old boy who was expelled from the fifth grade because of stealing and a number of other deficiencies. Considered a hopeless case, he was sent to a reform school where he encountered a teacher who had worked with Adler. When the teacher investigated the boy's history, he learned that the boy was a good student in the first three grades, but started having trouble in the fourth and fifth. He suspected that the boy had gone from a friendly teacher to an unfriendly, strict one. The boy confirmed his suspicion, saying, "The teacher in the fourth grade did not like me." Adler comments that "What had occurred does not even have to be true. Whether I believe there is a tiger outside my door or there actually is one makes no difference. The facts are not important, only how we see them." This boy was from a poor, but indulgent family where his mother had prevented him from becoming independent and confident. He wanted to be pampered.

In his efforts to be liked, he even stole in order to buy gifts for his classmates. After his father had punished him, and he ran away from home, he secretly gathered wood and placed it at night outside his mother's door. Adler remarks, "Everything moves toward the same goal: to be someone, to be more than what he is now." The educators must now perform the mother's task, which is to expand the boy's social feeling and courage: "We must show him that he has unsuccessfully tried to be appreciated, liked, and honored before he has achieved anything."

Adler concludes, "We can discern the level of a child's self-esteem from his actions, and when we compare these with other forms of self-expression, the picture becomes quite clear. The more experience we have, the deeper we delve into this subject, the easier the task becomes. I have attached a questionnaire which should help in establishing the lifestyle and degree of self-esteem that can be found in these children." This comprehensive, fifteen-item questionnaire appears as Chapter XV at the end of Part 2: *The Education of Children* in Volume 11 of *The CCWAA*.

In **Chapter IV: Children in Difficult Situations**, Adler defines a lifestyle as a "habitual and restrictive attitude toward life," and states that he will attempt to show how it can be changed. In this process, the two

most important questions are: When did the complaints about the child's behavior begin? In what circumstances?

To demonstrate the core structure of this process, he gives a case example. A ten-year-old girl came to him with her mother, both of them crying. The mother explained that recently she had taken the girl back from foster parents who had raised her. The mother had given up her daughter because she had divorced the father before the child was born. While she was with the foster parents, the girl made good progress in school. She was about to enter the fourth grade.

Privately, the mother told Adler that the father had been an alcoholic and impossible to live with. Afraid that her daughter might have inherited "something of her husband's flawed nature," she now was determined to raise the girl in "a model fashion." When the girl started her new school in the fourth grade, she was put back into the third. There, she was still found unable to keep up with the class and told that she might have to be placed in the second grade.

To Adler, the girl seemed perfectly normal. Certainly, she could not have done well in her previous school if she had been mentally deficient. After questioning the mother further, he learned that the girl was frequently inattentive and sad. Describing her daughter, she said, "I cannot understand this. I am very strict with her in order to avoid what happened to my husband, and yet she fails to make progress."

In thinking about the child's situation, Adler put himself in her place. He thought about how he would behave, if he had been taken from a good life with foster parents to live with his mother who was strict. He concluded that the girl "recalled the good times with her foster parents and now despaired." He could imagine her saying to herself, "If I fail completely, then mother will throw me out and I can go back to my foster parents." She felt trapped and could not escape.

She told him how happy she had been with her foster parents and how much she had liked her school there. Adler spoke with the mother again, telling her that he did not think she was capable of doing what needed to be done. She asked him for his advice. He recommended that she speak pleasantly to her daughter, admit that she had made a mistake, and suggest that they live together as friends. The important thing was to help the girl realize that her situation was not hopeless, but caused by a

mistake. The mother agreed to follow his advice, and visit him in two weeks.

Two weeks later, the mother and daughter appeared, smiling and happy. The mother also brought a report from the teacher, who said that the girl went from being one of the worst students to doing quite well.

After reviewing the similarly discouraging consequences of pampering, ill health, and lengthy illness, Adler emphasizes the optimistic outlook of IP which does not consider talent and ability innate. "It is wrong and impedes progress to insist that not everyone can accomplish whatever life demands," excluding the mentally retarded or those afflicted with illness.

"Everything that is socially useful has universal validity. Morality sets the standards for social life. Every worthwhile political position endeavors to further humankind. IP has the task of pointing the way toward discovering the underlying interrelationships that fulfill the sense of community."

In **Chapter V: Real and Imagined Childhood Memories**, Adler examines the significance of early memories and what they can tell us: "Because of our theory concerning the unity of the individual whereby every single aspect is a part of the whole, from an earliest recollection, we can grasp the entire structure of a lifestyle, or a portion thereof, even if it is meaningless to others." All situations in a person's life have significance and can be related to and give meaning to childhood memories. Everything connects; the therapeutic task is to find the connections and their significance.

An early memory about "a Christmas tree full aglow" indicates a person with a keen visual sense, someone interested in colors and drawing; a memory about illness and suffering frequently occurs in people who become scientists and physicians, in order to associate with death and work to overcome it. Firstborn children often have memories concerning the arrival of the next sibling, the usurper. Realizing how quickly a position of power can disappear, they may later believe, "Do what you like, it makes no difference anyhow."

When a child has a memory or dream of being pursued by a tiger, the significance of the expression lies in showing us an attitude "that sees the

whole world as beastly. As a result, the child behaves like a hunted animal.” Or if a child dreams of running around naked, he tell us that he “dislikes being exposed and would like to remain a mystery to others from whom he wants to hide his true self.” Memories and dreams can offer hints indicating the burdens a child faced, the degree of social feeling he has developed, and his ability to cooperate: “Even his physical bearing expresses a degree of courage, optimism, and energy.”

Adler describes a memory of his own to demonstrate that memories do not have to be genuine in order to be significant: “When I was five years old and in first grade, I recall that my schoolmates and I routinely had to cross a cemetery. This was never a pleasant experience for me and while it depressed me, my friends happily went their way. The problem of death concerned me very early in life. I was three years old when my brother died. When I was four, I contracted pneumonia and the doctor gave up on me. At the age of five, when asked what I planned to be, I said that I wanted to be a doctor. It was during that time period that I found walking across the cemetery to be a heavy burden. I then decided to free myself of that fear. The next time I had to cross the cemetery, I decided to hang back and let my friends go ahead. I placed my school bag on the fence and started walking back and forth across the cemetery, until I was no longer afraid.

At the age of 35, I met a former schoolmate and asked him, 'What ever happened to the cemetery?' He replied, 'There never was a cemetery!' I had fantasized the whole story. It is an example of how a child may train himself to overcome a difficulty with courage.”

Fantasies and daydreams can offer clues to the extent of a child's social feeling. Many children describe fantasies of being wealthy. But one child may want to buy everything for himself, while a second child wants to buy a castle for his parents, a third child wants to give to the poor, and a fourth wants to “relieve the world of all misery.”

Adler concludes, “Childhood fantasies and daydreams allow us to measure the degree to which a child has the courage to live. I recommend that we assign children to write essays on subjects such as : 'What I Fear.' From these and similar reports, we can discern the individual's lifestyle.”

In **Chapter VI: Childhood Memories and Dreams**, Adler first describes and interprets a number of childhood memories. One six-year-old boy remembers, "I fell into the water when I was four years old." His choice of this incident tells us that he focuses on the dangers in life. A reasonable amount of caution is necessary, but hesitation, anxiety, and doubt will probably inhibit this boy from accomplishing anything as he grows up. Another child says, "Dad took away the pacifier and I cried." Expecting someone to take something from him, he will be on guard against having anything taken from him. A third boy recalls, "I alerted my parents to the need to change my sister's diapers when she cries." Acting as his sister's protector, he tried to help his parents help her. We can predict that he will be a fatherly type, showing concern for others. "The first two boys think only about themselves and show very little social feeling. In the third child, we can see the impact of social feeling in that he does not think only about himself. We can also see a striving for significance. However, we cannot object to that since he relates in useful ways to others."

Fantasies about work are valuable because they show us a child's interest and how he wants to express himself. By the age of fourteen or fifteen, a child should have some ideas about what he wants to be. If he doesn't, that is a sign of discouragement, indicating that he doesn't believe he can find his way in life. Adler recommends assigning children the writing topic, "What I Would Like to Be," which would force them to think about the future, or at least to write, "I don't know." Uncovering this uncertainty would allow teachers to help them. The occupations they name usually give strong indications of how they achieve superiority and how they want to develop themselves.

In discussing children's dreams, Adler reviews fundamentals of his dream theory which appear earlier in *The CCWAA*. For him the central questions are: "Why do people dream without understanding their dreams? Why can't we do something with our dreams?" His answer is that we dream in order to awaken moods and feelings which will allow us to accomplish something that we cannot do with logic alone. A fearful dream before a test we have little confidence in passing helps us lose all courage, so that we don't even show up for the test. On the other hand, a sunny, joyful dream confirms self-confidence we already feel, helping us awaken encouraged to face the test. Like all expressive movements, our dreams reflect our lifestyle and goal.

In Chapter VII: On the Meaning of Recollections, Fantasies, and Dreams, Adler continues his discussion of these expressive movements. They all contain fragments of the individual's lifestyle, similar to what we find in a person's manner of speaking, listening, shaking hands, and walking, in short, every slight movement he makes. Everything connects. Children's daydreams and fantasies concern what they would like to become, and often reflect what a particular child is really missing.

In one such daydream a mother who had very little money once told her children: You can wish every day for as much money as you like. (Adler: this daydream points to a child with a keen interest in money, which could have occurred only if that child experienced some problem concerning money. Were this not so, the child would not have arrived at this particular fantasy.) I bought a lovely coat and a straw hat. I then went home and asked for 140 billion. (Adler: With this sum, the child clearly expresses how much she exaggerates money. She suffers from a strong feeling of inferiority and believes that life cannot go on without money, which she needs for support.) The next day I invited every child I knew to a children's party. I first gave them a good meal, then we played games, and then they all went home. (Adler: She wants to connect with other children. We cannot say she has only egotistical feelings, because she does not want money only for herself. Of course, this tendency to spend money for others is also a feeling of superiority. She gains in esteem by doing something useful and by leaving some of her riches to others.)

Dreams demonstrate how “the human psyche tends to be governed not only by logic, but also by feelings and can create moods that contradict logical considerations. When someone has a problem that he feels cannot be solved while he is awake, then he will dream because he needs something else to deal with his difficulties.” Adler then relates his experience in World War I which provoked a disturbing dream. As the head of a large military hospital for soldiers suffering from war-related neuroses, he once saw a young man complaining of weak nerves, who asked to be relieved of military duty. His complaint turned out to be groundless, even though he walked around bent over. The hospital chief of staff refused the man's request, which Adler in turn related to him. The soldier suddenly straightened out and begged Adler to release him because he was poor and had to support his elderly parents, who would perish without him.

Consoling him, Adler promised to do whatever he could to get him assigned to guard duty, which would allow him to work part-time. This was not enough. The man cried, begging Adler for further relief. Knowing that the chief of staff could easily send the soldier back to the front lines, Adler concluded that the guard duty assignment was the best he could do to help.

“That night, I dreamed that I was a murderer. I did not know whom I had killed. I walked around in dark alleys and felt like the murderer, Raskolnikov, who vacillated between feeling guilty and not guilty. I awakened trembling, feeling that I had committed a murder. I soon realized that the dream related to this particular young man and in an exaggerated manner represented what I would have been guilty of doing if I did not comply with his plea. In my dream, I wanted to cancel my logic; I wanted to obtain for him an even lighter assignment so that he could save his parents. When I uncovered this self-delusion, I re-affirmed my logically conceived recommendation.”

Dreams are metaphors, and metaphors are a type of deception. “We use metaphors when we wish to explain or describe something and are unable to apply the naked truth. They are an artful trick.”

In **Chapter VIII: On the Theory of Dreams**, Adler first reviews three major points about dreams: “1) The dream has the task of creating a mood meant to lead the dreamer, against his own logic regarding a given situation in his life, to where his lifestyle actually takes him. 2) The dreamer employs certain means, which also relate to his lifestyle, in that in his dreams he reaches back to images in his memory that will ease his task and seem desirable to him for solving his problem. 3) The dreamer likes to find metaphors and similes in order to reinforce the mood he needs in order to attain his goal.” The dreamer also intoxicates or deceives himself with the emotion and mood he creates, allowing him to reduce “his problem so that he fails to grasp its full extent by selecting only one point as if that were the entire problem.” We also do this when we are awake.

Adler then interprets the dreams of several children. In the dream of a girl in the fourth grade: I once had a beautiful dream about an angel. I was in a garden when a man tried to throw me into the water. Suddenly, an angel appeared before me and held me in his arms. He said, “If you throw this child into the water, you will die.” Then the angel flew with

me into heaven. He also took my parents along. It was very nice there. Afterwards I was very happy. (Adler: This child is obviously looking for support. A relationship with a man appears to her as a dangerous situation. He wants to throw her into the water, meaning that a man is dangerous and we need an angel on our side for protection. Further proof of her pampering is her desire to take her parents into heaven with her.)

In the dream of an eleven-year-old boy in middle school: I once dreamed about a brook. I walked along the brook until I arrived at an arid spot and saw a young shark. I pulled out my cap pistol and shot the fish dead. (Adler: This young hero takes it easy. He has a revolver; the fish does not.)

Some people dream a lot, others only a little or not at all. “The reason for the lack of dreaming seems to be that people who dream little or not at all do not like to lie or deceive themselves. They are not subservient to their moods, are not driven by their emotions, and feel no impulse to solve a problem in which they are entangled. People dream more who are often guided by strong emotions, rather than by logic, in their daily lives.”

In **Chapter IX: Overview: Social Feeling**, Adler elaborates on the effects of a lack of social feeling, focusing on the problem child in particular. In order to work therapeutically with such a child, we must first understand him. And in order to understand him, we must exercise our own social feeling by imagining that if we were in his situation, we would make the same mistakes and set the same goal. “When we can feel as one with such a child, then we can understand him. If we cannot do that, then all efforts are in vain and useless.”

In our investigation into a child's history, the first important question to ask in order to uncover his mistake is: When did the complaints begin? The next important question is: “Why has this child no interest in others, no social feeling?” In IP, we know that three types of children are poorly prepared and have little or no social feeling: “1) Children with inferior organs, 2) pampered children, and 3) neglected children.”

“Know thyself” has been our primary guide for bringing up children. This principle requires us to help a child fully understand his mistakes and help him eliminate them. When a child understands the connection between his behavior and his mistaken thinking, then he has one more

way to determine the course of his life. He is no longer the same person as before. He can begin exerting control over himself and take steps to eliminate his mistakes. This is the true success achieved only by 'knowing thyself,' never with criticism, punishment, or bribery.”

Social feeling is closely tied to a child's overall development, both physically and intellectually. A child with social feeling sees and hears better, because he is interested in what others do and say. He makes friends easily, because others can sense his interest in them. He achieves more in school and in later life, because he works well with others and has the courage to overcome problems. He will succeed in friendship, work, and love, the three main tasks of life.

Chapter X: Four Case Histories focuses on four problem children. One history and Adler's interpretations will be summarized here.

An eleven-year-old girl in middle school, usually well-behaved, can occasionally become very unpleasant. (Adler: We proceed on the assumption that no miracles occur in the psyche of a young child. What causes this child to behave badly?) She behaves badly when her sixteen-months-older sister wants to borrow her younger sister's bathrobe and takes it out of the drawer. She then begins to yell and scream that her sister will dirty the robe. (Adler: Such cases are frequently found in family situations. We see a tendency to want to outdo her sister. A younger sister generally tries to equal or outstrip the older. The older sister, on the other hand, strives to keep her position or strengthen it.) The older girl tends to make trouble for her younger sister and seeks to get her sister into situations where she will appear less deserving. (Adler: This situation allows us to establish whether this girl is socially well prepared. It shows us that she has a great deal of interest in herself. She has a strong feeling of inferiority that does not give her any relief so that under certain circumstances, she lets herself go.)

The mother says that the older sister is remarkably beautiful, while the younger one is stocky and awkward to the point where it is difficult to avoid praising the older and making her appear the favorite whenever strangers come to the house. Seeing herself neglected, the younger sister believes she is disadvantaged by nature, and fears getting into situations where her disadvantaged position would become apparent. I advised the mother that the younger child has to be taught that beauty does not play such a big role in life and that good health is much more valuable.

The child also demonstrates her dislike of school by being absent frequently. She does not think much of school. According to the parents, neither daughter is favored over the other. However, I believe that the older is regarded with more pride because she is more beautiful and as a result, the younger feels neglected. She also has the disadvantage of being unable to overtake her older sister. She can see no way of becoming superior to her sister.

We can recognize this child's lifestyle and also see where mistakes were made. The mother failed in not being able to direct her child's interest toward the older sister. She was even unable to bond with the child herself. The mother said that her younger daughter favors her father because, "I am too abrupt with her." That is not a suitable method for winning over a child's affection.

We are not surprised to learn that the girl does not want to go to sleep at night. The parents had an arrangement by which the younger daughter goes to bed first. She finds that unfair and says she will not go to bed if her older sister is allowed to stay up late. The older sister insists that her younger sister must go to bed first. When they finally agree to go to sleep, the race continues in bed. Both children read under a light over each bed. Then the mother comes into the room, tells the children that it is late and turns off the light over the younger daughter's bed. She remarks that the older girl can continue to read but "not you," to the younger. Here again, the younger child feels shortchanged.

This child is in danger of becoming hostile to people. She is not a truly social person. She sees life as a struggle that turns on whether one is "on top"; one must be either the hammer or the anvil. If a person cannot be a hammer, then he is an anvil. She does not want to become an anvil. We should make clear to her that we gain much more in life with social feeling than by having people fight with one another. We must show her how her mistakes occurred in order to explain the delusion under which she lives when she assumes that she can never catch up with her sister, and, therefore, has to find ways to torment the sister whom she believes to be her superior in this race. We need to point out to her that because she is always tense, she cannot do well in school and make friends. Our task becomes to carry out the function of the mother: first, to win her over; then, to try to expand that affection toward others. We must help

her win friends. We must try to help her stand out in school by becoming a better student who excels in schoolwork.

Part 2: *The Education of Children* (1930)

In **Chapter I: Introduction**, Adler begins by stating that the problem of education is one of self-knowledge and rational self-direction. Obviously, with children the proper guidance becomes crucial. In providing that guidance, “the great obstacle is ignorance. The adult has difficulty enough knowing himself, the cause of his emotions, his likes and hates, in short, understanding his own psychology. He has even more difficulty understanding children and guiding them on the basis of proper knowledge. IP is especially concerned with the psychology of children, both for its own sake and for the light it sheds on adult traits and behavior. And unlike other psychological approaches, it allows no gap to exist between theory and practice.”

“The doctrines and methods of IP hang together as an organic whole. In this opening chapter, I will attempt to present the viewpoint of IP as a whole, and treat the various interrelated problems introduced here at fuller length in later chapters.” Adler then reviews the key aspects of IP: the purposive striving of the psyche toward a goal which promises “greatness, perfection, and superiority”; the subjective nature of that goal and its accompanying lifestyle, which leads to inevitable mistakes; the inherent feeling of inferiority and the dynamic of psychological compensation; the crucial importance of social feeling; entering school as the first test of social feeling; how the individual's response to the main life tasks of friendship, work, and love reveal his “general style of life and particular goal.”

“All these factors are closely interconnected and influence one another, forming an organic and unbreakable unity – a unity that cannot be broken until we discover the fault in construction and accomplish a reconstruction.”

In **Chapter II: The Unity of the Personality**, after pointing out that the individual's pattern of personality is established very early, creating a unique style of behaving which will characterize all his movements, Adler explains the futility of asking a child why he misbehaves. “When we ask a child why he is lazy, we cannot expect him to know what we

must know, i.e. the fundamental connection between his mistaken thinking and his behavior. Neither can we expect him to tell us why he lies. For thousands of years, Socrates, who understood human nature so well, has spoken in our ears: 'How difficult it is to know one's self!' By what right, then, can we demand that a child answer such complex questions, which even psychologists have difficulty answering? To be able to understand the significance of individual expression presupposes having a method for understanding the whole personality. Understanding means more than merely describing what a child does and how he acts; it means understanding his attitude toward the tasks which lie before him.”

Furthermore, understanding the individual's attitude requires the recognition that it has developed based on his interpretation of a situation, not on the objective facts or circumstances themselves. “The remarkable aspect of our psychic life is that our point of view determines the direction we take, not the facts themselves. This principle is extraordinarily important, inasmuch as all our activities are regulated and our personality is organized on the basis of it. A classic example of the effect of subjective ideas in human action is furnished by Caesar's landing in Egypt. As he jumped ashore, he stumbled and fell on the ground, which the Roman soldiers took as an unfavorable omen. Brave as they were, they would nonetheless have turned around and gone back, had not Caesar thrown out his arms and announced, 'I embrace you, Africa!' We can see from this example how little the structure of reality is causal, and how its effects can be molded and determined by an organized, well-integrated personality.”

In Chapter III: The Striving for Superiority and Its Educational Significance, Adler says that we all strive for superiority and success. “This striving directly relates to the feeling of inferiority, for if we did not feel inferior, we would have no desire to improve the immediate situation. The two problems – the desire for superiority and the sense of inferiority – are really two aspects of the same psychological phenomenon, but for the purposes of exposition, we will treat them separately.”

This urge to assert ourselves is common to both children and adults. “The feeling of degradation and depreciation, the mood of uncertainty and inferiority, always lead to a desire for reaching a higher level in order to obtain compensation and completeness.” Problems occur when the child's natural sense of inferiority, being “too small in a too-big

world,” becomes exaggerated, which can happen as a result of many factors. The greater his felt sense of inferiority, the higher and more unrealistic his compensatory goal will be. This striving for superiority can relate to striking character traits, such as envy, wishing his competitors evil, malevolence, vindictiveness, and angry outbursts. For these children, any test is painful, because their perceived worthlessness might be exposed.

Some children become so ambitious in their compensatory striving that they arrange their lives to surpass all others. They resent the success of others, having headaches, stomachaches and other ailments when others excel. The more insecure they believe their position to be, the more unpleasant they find contact with their peers. They may also feel burdened by the expectations of their family. “Gaining no satisfaction from accomplishing the task itself, over-ambitious children care only about the end result, which is the recognition of their success. We see the result everywhere in the number of people dependent on the opinion of others.”

“Some children whose striving for superiority originally took the form of ambition relinquished this ambition as unattainable because another child had already gotten so much further ahead. Many teachers follow the practice of treating children who do not manifest sufficient ambition severely, or giving them bad grades in order to arouse their dormant ambition. Occasionally, this method succeeds if the child still has some courage left. However, we do not recommend this method for general use. Children already close to the danger line in their studies become completely confused and are driven into a state of apparent stupidity by such treatment.”

The fate of the child and the adult he will become lies, to a great extent, in the hands of the teacher. Only teachers trained in IP have the ability to correct a child's mistaken style of life and re-direct his goal to ensure “that he plays his individual role harmoniously in the orchestral pattern of society.”

In **Chapter IV: Directing the Superiority Striving**, Adler focuses on laziness and stuttering as manifestations of the superiority striving in children. On the surface, so-called lazy children seem to lack ambition or any striving for superiority. On the contrary, however, their laziness “buys” them the prize they desire: center stage; parents and teachers pay

extra attention to them. Also, they gain certain advantages: people tend to expect little from them; small accomplishments gain them great praise; and they content themselves with “the recognition that they could accomplish anything, if only they were not lazy.”

Stuttering is another example of the striving for superiority diverted into a useless direction. Often, stutterers show no trace of difficulty when angry; or as they grow older, when reciting or in love. “The crucial factor lies in their relationship to others.” As with laziness, stuttering usually gains greater parental attention, except now the extra attention causes the child to become more self-conscious about his speech, thus aggravating the problem. “Children are especially content to lean on others, maintaining an advantage by a seeming disadvantage.” As with all expressive movement, laziness and stuttering have a purpose which suits the individual's lifestyle and goal.

“How frequently apparent disadvantages may be turned to advantage is illustrated in one of Balzac's stories. He tells of two tradesmen who tried to get the best of each other in a bargain. While they were thus bargaining, one of them began to stutter. The other one noticed, quite surprised, that the stutterer won enough time with his stuttering to think before making his point. Searching quickly for a counter-weapon, he suddenly made himself unable to hear any more. The stutterer was then at a disadvantage, because he had to strain himself in order to make the other one hear. Equality was thereby re-established.”

In **Chapter V: The Inferiority Complex**, Adler explores further the root of an excessive, misdirected striving for superiority: the exaggerated feeling of inferiority. This inferiority complex “necessarily seeks easy compensations and specious satisfactions, while at the same time obstructing the road to successful accomplishment by magnifying the obstacles and decreasing the supply of courage.” This “vicious circle of a neurotic inferiority complex” is demonstrated by the symptom of stuttering; discouragement is partly responsible for the stuttering, and the stuttering increases the individual's discouragement.

Children can find innumerable weapons to use when they do not feel they can succeed on the strength of their ability. Because their discouragement is the root of the problem, we must begin treatment “by increasing their courage and getting them to believe in their own strength and ability.” With friendliness, encouragement, and various strategies,

we must bring them to have faith in their own abilities. “The worst mistake in the education of children is for the parent or educator to prophesy a bad ending for a child who has strayed on the wrong path. Such a stupid prophecy makes the situation infinitely worse because it increases the child's cowardice. We should do just the opposite: inspire the child with optimism. As Virgil said, 'They can because they think they can.'”

“When a child is robbed of his faith in the future, he withdraws from reality and builds up a compensatory striving on the useless side of life. An educator's most important task, we might almost say his holy duty, is to ensure that no child is discouraged at school and that a child who enters school already discouraged regains his confidence in himself through his school and his teacher. This goes hand and hand with the vocation of the educator, for education is possible only with children who look hopefully and joyfully to the future.”

In **Chapter VI: The Development of the Child: Preventing the Inferiority Complex**, Adler states, “Obviously, children do not have sufficient intelligence to judge their situations correctly. What determines the development of the child is neither his own intrinsic ability nor the objective environment, but the interpretation that he happens to make of the external reality and his relationship to it. The potential a child brings into the world is not of primary importance, nor is our adult judgment of his situation of any importance. We must see the child's situation with the eyes of the child himself, and interpret it logically, according to adult common sense, but we must be ready to recognize that children make mistakes in interpreting their own positions. Indeed, we must remember that the education of children would be impossible if they did not make mistakes. We could not possibly educate or improve a child if the mistake he made were innate. Consequently, he who believes in innate character traits cannot and should not educate children.”

He then reviews the many possible situations that can lead to a feeling of defeat or inadequacy, such as organic deficiencies, illness, difficulties with school subjects, pampering, and neglect. These and a number of other influences may lead a child to misinterpret his position, undervalue himself, and pursue a compensatory, useless goal.

Finally, he systematically discusses how each item in the IP Questionnaire (found in Chapter XV of Volume 11 of *The CCWAA*) helps in our investigation of a child's history, strengths, and weaknesses.

In Chapter VII: Social Feeling and the Obstacles to Its Development, Adler begins by pointing out that “the desire for supremacy and the feeling of social-mindedness rest on the same basis in human nature. They both express a root desire for affirmation; they differ in their form, and their different forms involve different implicit judgments about human nature. Thus, the unique striving for supremacy involves a judgment that the individual can do without the group, while the feeling of social-mindedness involves a belief in a certain dependence on the group. Of the two views of human nature, social feeling is clearly superior to the egotistical striving. The former represents a useful, socially logical outlook, while the latter, although common, represents a useless, selfish outlook.” Thus, IP is built on a practical, optimistic foundation.

In reviewing the obstacles to the development of social-mindedness, Adler uses the example of speech. Whereas we tend to assume that children who speak well are more talented than those who do not, in reality, difficulties in speaking reflect deficiencies in social feeling. “Children who do not learn to speak well are frequently spoiled children, for whom their mothers do everything before the children have time to ask for anything. These children do not need speech. Some children are reluctant to speak because their parents never permit them to finish a sentence; others have been laughed at or ridiculed, and thereby discouraged. In one case, a child could speak and hear, but his parents were both deaf and dumb. He cried without making any sound when he hurt himself. He needed to let his parents see his pain, but he knew making his suffering audible was useless.”

Discouragement is the primary obstacle to the development of social feeling. “If we constantly tell a child that he is bad or stupid, he will become convinced in a short time that we are right and he will not have sufficient courage thereafter to tackle any task presented to him. He then fails in whatever he tries to do. The belief that he is stupid takes firmer root. He does not understand that the environment originally destroyed his self-confidence and that he subconsciously arranges his life to prove

this fallacious judgment correct. His attitude shows his depressed frame of mind, which is in direct proportion to the amount of pressure exerted upon him by an unfavorable environment.” However, while this influence creates a high probability for discouragement, it is not causal. Some children are able to transcend negative factors at home by responding to more positive influences at school or elsewhere.

The child's social feeling must be developed during the first four or five years of his life, because by the time he is five, his attitude toward himself and others is so fixed and automatic that it will direct his movements for the rest of his life. “He is caught in the trap of his private perspectives and repeats unceasingly his original mental patterns and the resulting actions. Social feeling is limited by the boundaries of the individual's mental horizon.”

In Chapter VIII: The Child's Position in the Family: The Psychology of the Situation and the Remedy, Adler states that “children develop in accordance with their unconscious interpretation of the position they occupy in relation to their environment.” This interpretation leads them to formulate a set of rules which will regulate all their conduct and reactions. Because this set of rules, or life style, is unique for each child, treating all children in school in the same way is often ineffective.

“Obviously, a child should have some imagination as well as a willingness to accept reality, but we must not forget that children do not regard these things as simply as we do and tend to divide the world sharply into two extremes. Most important, they tend to divide everything into opposites (above or below, all good or all bad, clever or stupid, superior or inferior, all or nothing). Adults also use this same antithetical scheme of apperception. Ridding ourselves of this type of thinking is difficult; for instance, thinking of hot and cold as opposites when we know scientifically that the only difference is in the degree of temperature.”

“Even today, almost every amateur philosopher tries to measure values by means of opposites. Some of them have established tables – life-death, above-below, and finally, man-woman. The present, childish division of everything into opposites and the old philosophical scheme of

apperception are strikingly similar, and we may assume that adults accustomed to dividing the world into sharp contrasts have retained their childish way of thinking.”

“People who live according to such an antithetical device have a formula which can be expressed by the maxim 'all or nothing.' Of course, human beings cannot have either all or nothing. A thousand and one gradations exist between these two extremes. We find this formula primarily among children who have a deep feeling of inferiority and become inordinately ambitious as a compensation.” While there are no rules for how to make great leaders out of children, we must never approach them harshly, but constantly encourage them, “and always try to offer them an appealing, manageable picture of reality, so they do not create a gap between their fantasies and the world.”

In **Chapter IX: The New Situation as a Test of Preparation**, Adler points out that because psychic life is a unity, “all expressions of personality at any one time fit together on a continuum.” Any new situation, such as entering school, reveals a child's hidden character traits in a way that familiar situations do not. If the child misbehaves, or seeks significance on the useless side of life in a variety of possible ways, and we punish him for it, we punish him for his lack of preparation and for making mistakes in his interpretation of his environment. We also confirm his belief that he is correct in rebelling against expectations. His mistakes may be childish, but they are not surprising, and we see individuals continue to make the same mistakes in adult life. As Adler has said, “Punishment is worse than useless.”

In his emphasis on how every aspect of an individual's character reflects his psychological movement, Adler takes a singular approach to understanding the personality in general, and problem children in particular. “The interpretation of gestures and subtle forms of expression is an almost unexplored field. One form of expression may have different meanings on different occasions and two children can do the same thing without having it mean the same. Furthermore, the forms of expression in problem children vary even when they arise from the same psychological cause. In short, many roads exist to any specific goal.”

“We cannot speak here of right or wrong from the point of view of common sense. Children make a mistake because they have a mistaken goal. Consequently, what follows as the result of striving to achieve this goal is also mistaken. Although we have innumerable possibilities for making mistakes, only one correct path leads to productive, socially useful living.” Hence, while IP focuses on the uniqueness of each individual, child or adult, it evaluates and helps to guide the development of that individual based on a universal standard: the values of courage, independence, and social feeling.

Adler then discusses how particular questions in the IP Questionnaire (found in Chapter XV of Volume 11 in *The CCWAA*) can help us investigate and assess a child's degree of preparation for new situations.

In **Chapter X: The Child at School**, Adler comments on different aspects of the potential difficulties involving a child's adjustment to school, and makes some recommendations for prevention. He begins, “Concentration on school subjects depends primarily on the child's interest in his teacher. Part of the teacher's art is to keep a child attentive and to find out when he is not attentive, or is unable to concentrate. Many children come to school without any ability to concentrate. Generally pampered, they are dazed by the presence of so many strange people.” Children need to be won over emotionally to want to cooperate; criticizing and punishing do not change a life style, and only make children “develop a pessimistic attitude” about school.

In order to help children succeed, Adler suggests making instruction as interesting as possible. For instance, arithmetic and geometry can be taught “in connection with the style and structure of a building and the number of people that can live there. Some subjects can be taught together. We have experts who know how to teach the interrelationships of subjects. They take a walk with the children and find out that they are more interested in certain subjects than in others. They learn to combine instruction; for example, instruction about the plant with the history of the plant, the climate of the country, etc. In this way, they not only stimulate interest in subjects which would otherwise be uninteresting to the child, but they also give him a coordinated, interconnected approach to things, which is the final aim of all education.” Again many years

ahead of his time, Adler thus anticipates the modern “child-centered” and “interdisciplinary” approaches to education.

Because the final challenge rests with the teacher, who has the “sacred, fascinating task of molding the minds of children,” Adler tried to train teachers in the philosophy and methods of IP. In addition to his own many lectures and publications, he joined with his colleagues to establish child guidance clinics throughout Vienna, which brought together teachers and psychologists to help parents with their problem children. In these clinics, “children have learned courage and the spirit of cooperation. Others, who have not been called into the consultation clinics, have also benefited. When a situation that threatens to become a problem arises in the class, the teacher will propose that the children talk the matter out. Of course, the teacher directs the discussion, but the children participate and have full opportunity for expression. They begin to analyze the causes of a problem – say, laziness in the class. By the end, they will reach some conclusion, and the lazy child, who does not know that he is the intended target, will, nevertheless, learn a great deal from the discussion.”

In **Chapter XI: Influences From Outside**, Adler points out that IP is both individual and social; “it does not concentrate on the individual mind to the exclusion of the environment which stimulates the mind, or on the environment to the exclusion of its significance to particular minds.” Parents and educators are not the only educators of children; many influences shape them both directly and indirectly. These influences cannot be avoided; therefore, we need to be aware of them.

Adler then describes the nature and potential effect of these influences: the family's economic circumstances; the family's “social atmosphere,” characterized by cooperation and friendliness, or suspicion and hostility; family prejudices concerning nationality, race, and religion; childhood sicknesses and their consequences; types of books and toys, which should avoid weapons, war games, and war heroes, in favor of stimulating cooperation, construction, and creativity. Also, children should be taught to consider animals not as toys but as companions “who feel and experience pain similar to human beings. Proper comradeship with animals may be regarded as a preparatory stage for social cooperation with people.”

Finally, while Adler acknowledges that beauty is a gift of nature, he objects to the overvaluation of it in our civilization: “The only way to combat the ravages of this cult of beauty is to teach children that health and the ability to get along with our fellow beings are more important than beauty.” Obviously, beauty has value, but we should not promote it as a supreme goal. “We can conclude that beauty is not sufficient for a rational and good life by observing how many extremely handsome boys, as well as ugly ones, become criminals. The handsome boys knew they were handsome, so they thought everything would come their way. Therefore, they were not properly prepared for life.” We might say that beautiful girls often make a similar mistake of exploiting the unearned attention they receive, rather than earning recognition for useful accomplishments.

In **Chapter XII: Adolescence and Sex Education**, Adler tells us that adolescence is an important topic, “but for a different reason than most people imagine.” In the first place, not all adolescents are alike, and we “find adults and even old people who look and act like adolescents. From the point of view of IP, this is not surprising, and it means that these adults have stopped at a certain stage of development. In fact, for IP, adolescence is simply a stage of development through which all individuals must pass. We do not believe that any stage of development, or any situation, can change a person. But it does act as a test – as a new situation, which brings out the character traits developed in the past.”

Adolescence allows us to read an individual's style of life better than ever before because he is “nearer the front lines of life” than in childhood. His response to the main tasks of friendship, work, and love become clearer, as he is given more responsibility and freedom. “If a person really knows a particular child, he can predict how he will behave in the period of adolescence, when he is given opportunities to express himself more independently than in the period when he was watched, guarded, and restricted.”

“One of the best preventives for the trouble of adolescence is the cultivation of friendship. Children should be good friends with one another, with members of the family, as well as with people outside the

family. The family should be a unit in which everyone trusts each other. The child should trust his parents and his teachers. Indeed, the only type of parent and teacher who can continue in his capacity as guide to the adolescent is one who has previously been a friend and sympathetic fellowman. A child will immediately shut out any other kind of parent or teacher during this period, not sharing any confidences with him, and even regarding him as a complete outsider or enemy.”

“Another aspect of adolescence is that every child, at some point, feels the need to prove that he is no longer a child. Of course, this is a treacherous feeling, for every time we feel the need to prove something, we usually go too far. This is indeed the most significant symptom of adolescence. And the way to counteract it is by explaining to the youth that he does not have to convince us that he is no longer a child; we do not need proof.”

“The real problem of sex education is not merely explaining to children the physiology of sexual relationships; it involves the proper preparation of the whole attitude toward love and marriage. This is closely related to the question of social adjustment. If a person is not socially adjusted, he will make a joke out of the question of sex and look at things entirely from the point of view of self-indulgence. This happens of course all too often, reflecting the defects of our culture. Women have to suffer because in our culture, men play the leading role. But the man also suffers because by means of this fictitious superiority, he loses touch with the core sense of human values.”

In the matter of sex education, as in all other phases of education, what matters most is “the sense of cooperation and friendliness within the family. With this cooperation, and with an early knowledge of the sex role and of the equality of men and women, a child is well prepared for any dangers he may face.”

In **Chapter XIII: Pedagogical Mistakes**, Adler advises that “In raising children, parents and teachers must never allow some things to discourage them. They must not despair because their efforts do not achieve immediate success; they must not anticipate defeat because the child is lethargic, apathetic, or extremely passive; nor must they permit themselves to be influenced by the superstition that some children are gifted or ungifted. IP claims that the effort should be made to stimulate the mental capacities of all children by giving them more courage, more

faith in themselves, and the belief that difficulties are not insurmountable obstacles, but problems to face and conquer. These efforts will not guarantee success, but the many successful cases more than compensate for the less successful ones.”

He then presents the case of a twelve-year-old boy to demonstrate how a series of pedagogical mistakes can seriously impact the development of a child. Because of rickets, he could not walk until the age of three, and could speak only a few words. When he was four, a psychologist told his mother that the boy was hopeless. Developing slowly, he did poorly in school, received low grades, and made little contact with others. By the time Adler saw him, he was still wetting himself and unable to control his bowel movements.

In further investigating the boy's history, Adler learned that an older brother was quite successful in school “without even studying.” This older brother called the younger one “a fool or an idiot,” and kicked him when the latter did not obey him. The mother had given up on him as hopeless, and the older brother treated him with contempt. Clearly, this twelve-year-old had lost all faith in himself, and suffered from an intense inferiority complex. In his compensatory striving for superiority, his only refuge was to cling to the past, when he was a baby – hence, the lack of control over his bladder and bowels, and his passivity.

Adler conferred with the boy, his brother, mother, father, governess, and teacher, attempting to explain his interpretation of the boy's situation and his recommendations. Because he could not win over the teacher to take a different view of the boy, he concluded that the boy's interest would best be served by moving him to a new school where, at least, he could make a fresh start. Having a teacher trained in IP might have saved this child from considerable suffering.

In **Chapter XIV: Educating the Parent**, Adler advises teachers on how to handle the parents of problem children. “Many teachers have remarked that approaching the parents of a problem child is often more difficult than approaching the child himself. Consequently, a teacher must always proceed tactfully. He must act on the assumption that the parents are not responsible for all the bad qualities the child shows. After all, parents are not trained educators, and they usually have only tradition to guide them. When they are summoned to school because of their children, they come feeling like accused criminals. Such a mood,

revealing as it does some inward consciousness of guilt, demands the most tactful treatment from the teacher. Therefore, the teacher should try to change the parents' mood to a friendly, freer one, placing himself at the disposal of the parents as an assistant and relying on their good intentions.”

“Suggestions to parents should not be made in an authoritative manner. The sentences should always include 'perhaps,' 'probably,' 'possibly,' or 'you might try it this way.' Even if we know exactly where the mistake is and how it should be corrected, we should never point it out to the parents bluntly, as if we want to force them.” Obviously, this style of counseling requires considerable tact, patience, and practice.

“Many parents do not want to hear any suggestions. They are astonished or indignant, impatient and hostile, because the teacher has placed them and their child in such an unpleasant situation. Such parents have usually been trying for some time to close their eyes to their child's faults, to blind themselves to reality. Suddenly, their eyes are forcibly opened for them. Many parents go even further. They meet the teacher with a verbal tide of indignation, making themselves unapproachable. In such cases, the teacher does better to show them that he needs their assistance; he must quiet them and bring them to the point of speaking in a friendly manner. We must remember that parents are often so entangled in the meshes of traditional, antiquated methods that they cannot free themselves quickly.”

“Pedagogical work requires practice and courage, as well as the unshakable belief that no matter what the circumstances, we can always find a way to prevent a child from becoming discouraged. First, it is never too early to start. Someone who regards a human being as a unity and symptoms as part of that unity will be able to understand and help a child far better than someone who seizes on a symptom and treats it according to some rigid scheme – such as a teacher who, when a child has failed to do his homework, immediately writes a note about it to the child's parents. The important thing to remember is that a single behavior has no meaning when detached from the personality as a whole, and we can understand it only when we study it in connection with the rest of the human being.”

Chapter XV: An Individual Psychology Questionnaire: For the Understanding and Treatment of Problem Children, Drawn up by

the International Society of Individual Psychologists is a fifteen-item, comprehensive questionnaire designed to uncover all relevant material about a child's history, in order to help uncover and treat his life style and goal.

Chapter XVI: Five Case Histories With Commentaries deals with five problem children: 1) a fifteen-year-old boy who is disobedient; 2) a ten-year-old boy with a speech defect; 3) an eleven-year-old boy with a high I.Q. who makes little progress in school; 4) an eight-year-old boy who has repeated every grade in school and talks baby talk; and 5) a ten-year-old adopted girl, now having school difficulties in New York, whose family left Germany two years ago, where she was doing well.