

THE THREE 'A's

Attention, affection, affirmation; these are the three 'A's. Without these, the process of human development remains incomplete. It does not matter how old we are and what we have experienced in our lives, if these three attributes were not central to the first three stages of our development (particularly the first two) then our whole life becomes a desperate search for these qualities. The real tragedy is that we do not know that these three things are what we are looking for. We are simply driven by our core need to be noticed, loved and celebrated for who we are. There is nothing vain, conceited, or corrupt in this subconscious drive, it is an important aspect of being a person and being whole. When we are noticed, loved and celebrated for who we are, we become balanced, caring, loving and giving human beings. We can experience the joy of living a full life and we freely share our intoxication with others. We are not selfish and self-centred because we understand that it is in giving that the greatest attainments are found. We learn that to give in the right way is actually to receive.

The current status for most families is there is a huge deficiency in the giving of attention, affection and affirmation and where such giving does exist it is often in a contradictory fashion. In a contradictory environment, boundaries and rules change according to the circumstances, events and moods that prevail and the three 'A's are not therefore enriching the child/young person because no sooner than they are in receipt of what they need then in some other way it is taken from them. The absence of the three 'A's leads to individuals who have low self esteem, who rarely fulfill their potential, who are indecisive and unable to take risks for fear of the consequences or who take excessive risks with no real care for themselves. Such individuals also attach themselves to almost anything that appears to offer them attention, affection, affirmation. For example, education and academic attainments may provide them with this illusion or a particular relationship may seem to be the answer for others. Using mood altering substances, whether they be soft or hard drugs, may appear to be the way. For many it is a career and the acquisition of status and material possessions. All these things at best can provide a temporary state of attainment and contentment, but to really acquire the three 'A's we need to look beyond all these things.

When our lives have not been underpinned by meaningful attention, consistent affection, and generous and sincere affirmation we as adults need to take responsibility for creating a reality that includes these things. We can of course go on blaming others for what we have missed in our lives but there is limited value in doing that. There comes a point where the activity of blaming drags us further down into the hole where we are trying to get out of and so we have a choice, we can either stay stuck in self pity, blame and anger which makes us a victim, or we can use our self pity, blame and anger to fuel our progress.

Attention, affection, affirmation can be cultivated in our lives by small adjustment to our lifestyle which will in time lead to more substantial changes. The key is to make some time for ourselves at regular intervals throughout the week and this time that we create must be centred around our needs and desires. We need to incorporate in this time activities that feed our mind and our body, for both need stimulation and care. The main areas that need to be focused on are diet, exercise and general health. Equally important are social and leisure activities and engaging in something that makes us feel useful, whether that be work, voluntary activities or hobbies. Last but not least, our minds need to be fed in creative, inspiring and nourishing ways; the essential ingredient of our mental diet must be self-love because this will propel us to our own highest point. It is when we build a life for ourselves which offers us fun, challenge, meaningful social contact, interest and inspiration, that the three 'A's become readily available to us, and the process of our personal growth can be complete. Remember, change begins with the self. Change begins now.