Making Sense:

Changing Futures for Families

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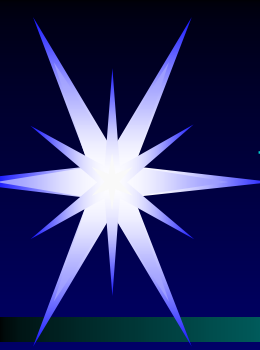## Changing Futures for Families

Our rulers, who rule our symbols, and so rule a symbolic class of life, impose their own infantilism on our institutions, educational methods, and doctrines. This leads to nervous maladjustment of the incoming generations which, being born into, are forced to develop under the un-natural (for man) semantic conditions imposed on them.

                          Albert Korzybski
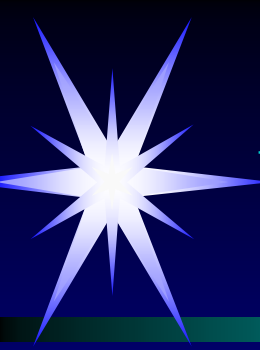
Uncapping Family Wisdom

Recognizing, Treating, and Reconciling Trans-Generational Dysfunction

Uncapping Family Wisdom
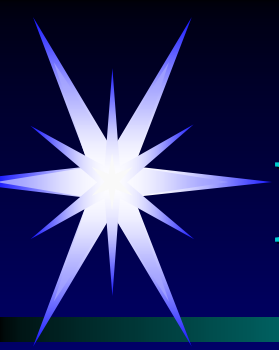
In this treatment program…

General Semantics is appropriated as part of a restorative treatment program for family systems in which the linguistic legacy negatively effects human development.

Uncapping Family Wisdom

In this treatment program…

General Semantics is appropriated as part of a restorative treatment program for family systems in which the families learn in a semantically controlled environment and use linguistically sound concepts to normalize their interactions.
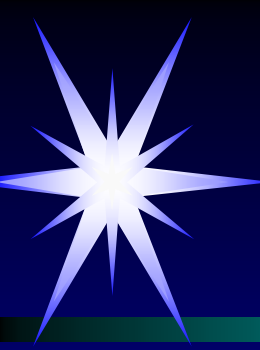
Identifying Semantic Errors

- Family potential is limited as dysfunction travels down the generations in the family speaking pattern.

- As part of a self-evaluative treatment program, participating families learn to identify the semantic errors in their family speaking pattern.
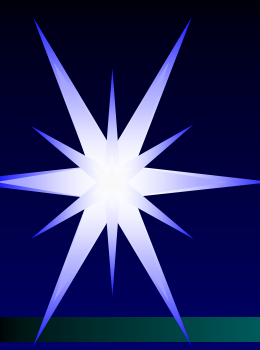
Identifying Semantic Errors

- As family members learn to identify family speaking patterns, they learn how these speaking patterns affect human development.

- Families learn how their language may not always make sense, causing frustration, then conflict.

Characteristics of the Population

The "normal child" profits by experience and outgrows the semantic characteristics that are characteristic at a given age. In the case of arrested development, the undesirable infantile characteristics persist…
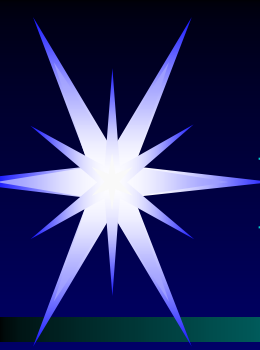
Characteristics of the Population

In cases of arrested development…they are a source of endless difficulties and suffering to them and to their associates.
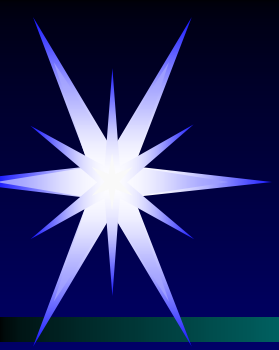
Albert Korzybski

Identifying the Scope of the Problem

- Before the 2005 hurricane disasters, families with children constituted approximately 40 percent of the urban homeless population (U.S. Conference of Mayors). Children constituted 39 percent (Urban Institute), the fastest growing segment, of the homeless population. Many of these children are stressed and now chronically homeless.

Identifying the Scope of the Problem

- In prison populations, two thirds of the women and more than half of the men are parents of children younger than 18 years of age (Hagan, 1995).

- This percentage accounts for 826,000 children in a state of crisis, understanding that a father's or mother's imprisonment can be the final, lethal blow to an already weakened family structure (Women's Prison Association, 1995).
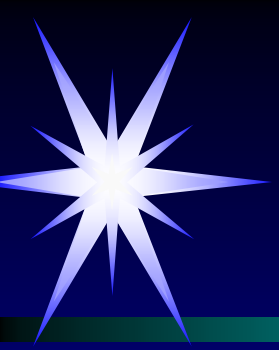
Identifying the Scope of the Problem

Through their inherited language patterns, the adults in these families, do not always know how to instill in their offspring the basic concepts and affirmations considered necessary for optimal moral, cognitive, social, and psychological development.

Identifying the Scope of the Problem

Moreover, the adults may not have passed through important developmental stages themselves.

Identifying the Scope of the Problem

In many cases, the language the children hear from significant others in times of early development largely determines the potential for the development of these children.

If intervention is not forthcoming, the children hear and learn defective language patterns, ensuring further dysfunction in succeeding generations.

Trans-Generational Dysfunction

- Trans-Generational dysfunction is a growing phenomenon found in most environments and virtually every social stratum to some degree.

- All of us here must have a degree of Trans-Generational Dysfunction, or else why would we be interested in General Semantics?

Trauma-Organized Families

- According to Bentoven (1992), because of the emotional pain incurred in the interactions in families that exhibit extreme dysfunction, the families become trauma-organized.

- Trauma organized families are trapped in a pattern of organization called trans-generational dysfunction.

Uncapping Family Wisdom Treatment Program

The vehicle for transmitting culture is language. In the Uncapping Family Wisdom Treatment Program the participants are invited to see how culture has influenced their language. This serves two purposes:

1. Shame factors can be bypassed.

2. The families are empowered. The participants learn how culture is an influencing factor on their family. By learning and changing they understand that they can influence culture for good.
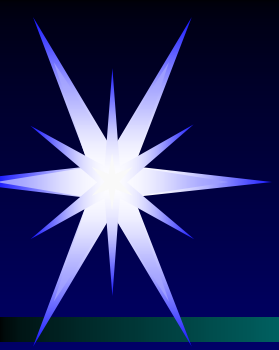
GLOSSARY

- *Acrolect:* In linguistic terms, *Acrolect* is the lect or variation of language generally found in highly educated families who speak the English Language. Acrolect is considered to be the standard English. This lect has conceptualizations, which allow optimal human development.

GLOSSARY

Mesilect: Mesilect is the average and most heard variety of English. The lect is value-laden and roles are carefully defined.
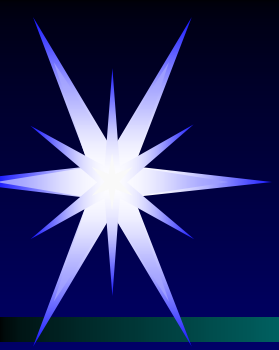
Mesilect is thought to reflect desires toward upward mobility and is considered a true lect as opposed to a dialect.

GLOSSARY

Basilect: *Basilect* is the restricted language generally found in families with low levels of education. The static nature of the language challenges advancement.

Basilect is prone toward semantic error and is considered a dialect of substandard English.

Glossary

Psycholinguistics: The study of adaptive and maladaptive language and its effect on psychological adjustment.

Uncapping Family Wisdom Treatment Program

The Program is based on the concepts found in this Acrolect. The program expresses the thoughts behind the developmental permissions that occur naturally in the lect.

The treatment program has a positive premise that latent wisdom resides in the family system and any barriers present can be removed to release the inherent wisdom.

Uncapping Family Wisdom Treatment Program

Three steps are necessary to uncap the latent family wisdom:

1. The families come to a safe community environment with healthy norms maintained by the therapist. The community mimics an Acrolet community where beneficial cultural information would have normally been acquired.

Uncapping Family Wisdom Treatment Program

2. The program itself is self-evaluative, putting the control into the family. The family shares the assessments results with the facilitator.
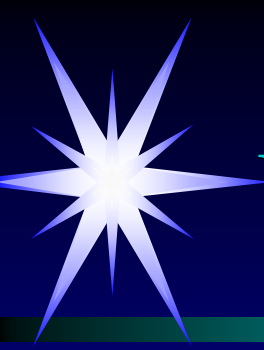
   Each assessment is preceded by an educational unit that prepares the families to determine what changes they would like to make.
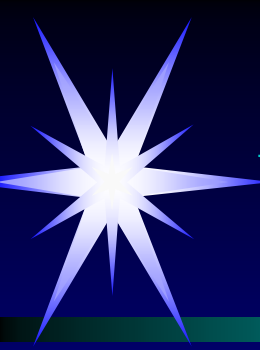
Uncapping Family Wisdom Treatment Program

3. As the family incrementally acquires information to determine the desired changes they would like to make, they are given exercises which enable them to reason and select choices for their family.
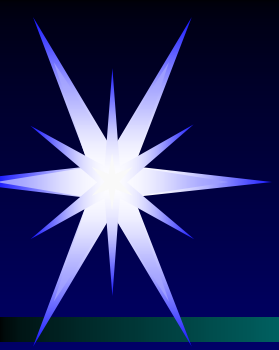
Uncapping Family Wisdom

Case Study Research

Uncapping Family Wisdom

Case One

General Semantic Variables
(Definitions by A. Ward)

Case One Semantic Evaluation of Family System

Allness

If a person names an object or person, the person mistakenly feels he understands and has said all there is to say, thereby missing the uniqueness of individuals within the group. Racial and ethnic statements often reflect this attitude that "all" of "those people" have certain identical characteristics. In this case a diagnostic label was used by the family to dismiss the possibility of the patient's telling the truth.

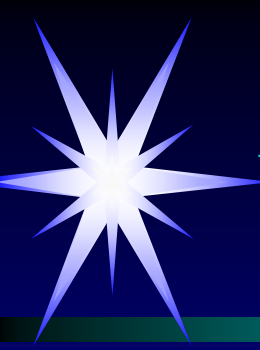# Case One Semantic Evaluation of Family System

Dead-Level Reckoning

The fact-territory is where "real" events occur. We abstract certain characteristics of those events when we speak. Factual descriptions are low levels of abstraction, inferences are higher levels, and judgments tend to be very high levels. A person can get stuck in his or her thinking and speaking, staying at the same level of abstraction. In this case the patient had to expand to all levels to decide her fate for herself.

Case One Semantic Evaluation of Family System

Intensional Orientation

The coined word "intensional" refers to words that point inward toward the speaker rather than outward toward the reality being discussed. They tend to be statements of judgment rather that statements of fact. In this case the patients sentimental view of her family did not match with reality or the feelings that were evoked by her fear of abandonment if she saw reality.

Uncapping Family Wisdom

Case Two

General Semantic Variables

(Definitions by A. Ward)

Case Two Semantic Evaluation of Family System

Fact-Inference Confusion

When a person consistently mistakes inferences for facts, he may act in non-rational ways. Gossip, hearsay, and backbiting may be confused with facts and cause the user perpetual misery.

"You are the laziest kid I have ever seen."

Case Two Semantic Evaluation of Family System

Dead-Level Reasoning

"My way is the way. You want to do things your way – see if you can take my job."

Case Two Semantic Evaluation of Family System

Polarization

When speakers see choices as "either or" instead of gradations in between, they may miss the rich possibilities available and be lost in meaningless arguments about something being all good or all bad, all right or all wrong.

"Get it out today. No excuses."