

I DON'T FIX KIDS

The following is a summary of what I have told parents about the kind of work I do. I think it is helpful for teachers and therapists as well. ~ Violet Oaklander, PhD

I usually ask parents in our first session together, "What are you wanting by coming here?" (or something to that effect). The response is generally something like, "I want her to start doing her homework" or "I want him to stop having tantrums" or "I want her to stop being so sensitive" or..... (substitute any of the variety of symptoms or behaviors that bring children into therapy).

My response is, "I need to tell you that I don't fix kids." At this point I have the parents' full attention.

"But let me tell you what I DO do."

1. One thing I do is help your child feel better about herself--to feel stronger inside and have a clear sense of herself.
2. Another thing I do is try to help your child feel happier, more peaceful in life, and to make better contact with his environment and the people in his life.
3. I work toward helping your child express deep feelings, particularly anger, in safe, appropriate ways.
Some of these feelings may be old, buried ones that create problems when held inside for a long time. I also want to give your child skills for expressing feelings, that come up in everyday situations, in healthy, non-hurtful ways.
4. Sometimes I need to give your child experiences with aspects of himself or herself that he or she has cut off, restricted, blocked. When children are inhibited in this way, they tend to veer off their healthy path of growth. My job is to help them get back to this path.
5. I will work with you to help you set clear limits for your child. These consistent, fair limits are important for your child to find his or her own boundary of self.

We often use many tools to achieve these goals geared to your child's interest and developmental stage. These creative and expressive techniques include graphic arts, clay, sand scenes, puppets, music, creative dramatics, and various games.

As we do these things, very often the behaviors and symptoms that worry you, that seem to need fixing, melt away, disappear. And if they don't, we, you and I, will need to look hard and fast at what we are doing, or not doing, to perpetuate these behaviors and symptoms.