EXTENDED INSIGHTS...

PARENT WORKSHOP – ASPEN STYLE

By: Lon Woodbury

The first week of December 2008, up to 30 educational consultants and therapists from throughout the country were invited to Asheville, NC. The center of the activity was a demonstration of the regular Parent Workshop given to parents at the Wolf Creek Lodge of SUWS of the Carolinas. Although this demonstration was unique to SUWS of the Carolinas, all the other programs in the Aspen outdoor division have their own similar family program. The rest of the week was filled out through visits to Four Circles, Stone Mountain, SUWS of the Carolinas and Phoenix Outdoors, all Aspen programs and all an easy driving distance from Ashville.

The workshop was conducted by Brooke Judkins, PhD, a Family Therapist for SUWS of the Carolinas, to demonstrate the approach Aspen uses to help its parents learn to better their relationships with their child. The Workshop usually takes two days to give the parents plenty of time to process and internalize the perspectives shared. For us, it was abbreviated into a couple of hours, which meant we talked more about the major steps taken rather than experiencing it like the parents do.

The first step, vital to the success of any group process, is developing a sense of safety among all participants. The parents would be reassured that although they would need to get out of their zone of comfort to obtain full value from the workshop, they would not be required to do anything that might create a sense of panic. All participants are helped to find their own personal challenge level throughout the workshop. In this demonstration this was just mentioned for us, but for a full fledged workshop with parents participating, this step would take a fair amount of time. Continuing on to the next step would not begin until everyone felt safe and comfortable with what was going on.

Once a group has come together to where all were feeling comfortable with being there, each participant would be asked to fill out some short questionnaires designed to measure their parenting styles. In these questionnaires, there are no right or wrong answers. It was just an attempt to help the parents gain insight into the assumptions and habits of their own personal parenting styles.

Once this exercise was completed, the parents would be given a scoring sheet to be used as a guide to learning what parenting style they favored. The styles were broken down into three major styles consisting of Authoritarian (Do What I Say!); Permissive (Do Whatever You Want); and Authoritative (Consistency, Limits, Respond rather than react, and within those limits, allow their child

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