

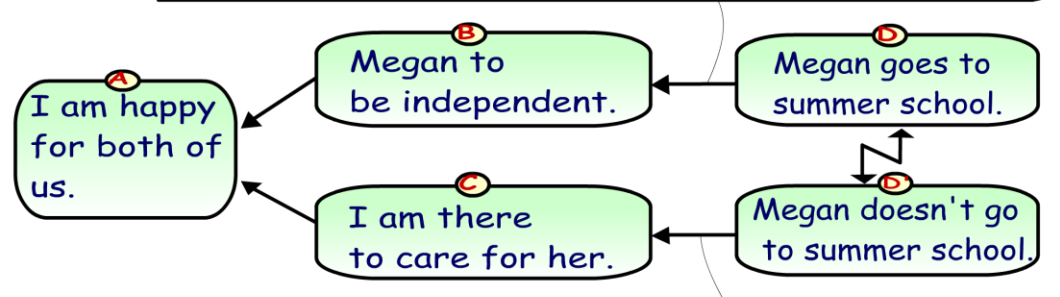
USING TOC WITH CHILDREN WHO HAVE SPECIAL NEEDS

I have been teaching TOC to the Mum of Megan, a 7 year old child who has a mild case of Downs Syndrome and who frequently has tantrums. Her tantrums are very troubling and bothersome for everyone with whom Megan has to interrelate. Although I focused on teaching Megan's Mum how to use TOC on some everyday decisions/situations, we soon discovered that these seemingly 'one-off' problems were a piece of the deeper problems. Therefore, the solutions to these more simple, specific situations also began to solve the deeper problems as well.

Here's an example by Megan's Mum:

My daughter has been invited to take part in the Special Needs Summer Fun School. The course is for five days from 10:00-3:15. Megan already attends the school on Friday evening for 2 hours and one of her cousins always accompanies her. Megan is fearful of going to the school on her own. Megan has been offered the last slot and I have to decide now whether to enroll her.

Megan will develop social skills.
Megan will meet new people.
Megan will be positive about going next year if she is offered a place.
Megan will learn to do things on her own (practical daily skills).
Through regular communication Megan's behavior will improve.
Megan will gain in confidence.
Megan will have fun.
Megan will learn self discipline.
Megan will develop team spirit.
Megan will become more sporty.



Megan can't take care of herself-she is ill-equipped for the summer school
I'm afraid that Megan will be unhappy at the summer school.
I won't worry about Megan.
I'm a possessive Mum-I need to keep her with me all the time.
I won't miss Megan.
I won't be able to take her out.
I'll stop making excuses for Megan not going.
I'll stop arguing with myself.
She will not gain self confidence.

Megan's Mum decided to focus on the assumption that Megan is ill equipped for the summer school and her solution was to:

"Prepare Megan and myself to become well equipped for Megan to go to summer school."

Yes, but how???? This solution became an "Ambitious Target" and we used another TOC tool to eliminate all the obstacles as identified in the assumptions. Here is a list of the intermediate steps she came up with to achieve the target:

Ambitious Target:

Prepare Megan and myself to become well equipped to go to summer school:

1. Let Megan go out more often with other people and attend other clubs-starting TODAY until the start of summer school.
2. Build on previous successes to different places and with different people to increase confidence.
3. Go for a family swim and allow Megan to swim and get ready on her own with her older sister's supervision and guidance (I can then go for a coffee and allow her some space).
4. Make her more independent at home-get herself bathed and dressed on her own.
5. Prepare to do the things she finds difficult-like tying shoe laces and doing buttons up).
6. Give Megan a run down of the daily timetable of what is going to happen and in which order so she can identify with her day to come.
7. Plan my day for when Megan is away from me, so I will not miss her so much.
8. Come to terms with Megan going and enjoy all the news when I collect her daily.

Results:

Megan and Mum followed this plan and Megan attended the summer school. Since then, her Mum has sent me the following written messages:

"Megan took part in an obstacle course race and finished the race unaided. She took a long time getting there, was very hesitant at first. Family encouragement spurred her on so she gained in confidence with each successful attempt till she reached the finish with a huge smile on her face. After that, she did that course over and over again, enjoying newly discovered abilities!"

"It has been noticed by school staff that (in their words) 'Megan has matured so much and seems more confident. I can see a distinct change in her attitude and behavior.' I was so pleased that somebody else has seen the difference in her as you can easily take it for granted that the changes are there when you live with a person everyday and almost forget the improvements."

"There are far less violent tantrums from Megan these days. She even said to her younger brother: 'Be quiet, can't you see Mummy is getting wound up!' NEVER before has she commented in this way, or perceived people's feeling and expressed them."

Everyone (family, friends, school) has noticed a dramatic improvement. The good thing is, that it seems to be lasting. This is certainly an unexpected bonus.