

# CHOICE THEORY: A New Look At How We Behave

## Introduction

by Dan Sliwinski, SBCS Staff Member

Every morning, I enjoy coming to school and seeing excited young minds waiting to learn. In most cases, these same faces are smiling as they walk out the door at 2:55 pm. Many of them enjoy coming to school everyday and some even say they prefer to be in school than at home. While most of the reasons the kids had for this preference were positive (seeing their friends, working on cool projects, etc.), some of them were negative. I asked some of those children what made their school life better than their home life. They told me it was because their teachers don't yell and scream at them.

They liked that teachers listened and talked to them when they did something unacceptable. While I am unfamiliar with the home situations of these children, I do see unhappy students at other city schools because their teachers scream at them for little things like tying their shoe! With the wrong approach to relationships with students, the students will never learn to motivate themselves from within and their relationship with their teachers or parents will only grow more distant every time there is a coercive encounter.

This document is an introduction to Choice Theory, the discipline of choice here at SBCS. The purpose of this informational document is to introduce you to the concept of Choice Theory in a nutshell. An in depth look at Choice Theory would take a lot more than the 4 pages allotted for this packet. While this document is not designed to change the way you parent your child, it would be beneficial to your child if you understood some of the tactics practiced at SBCS.

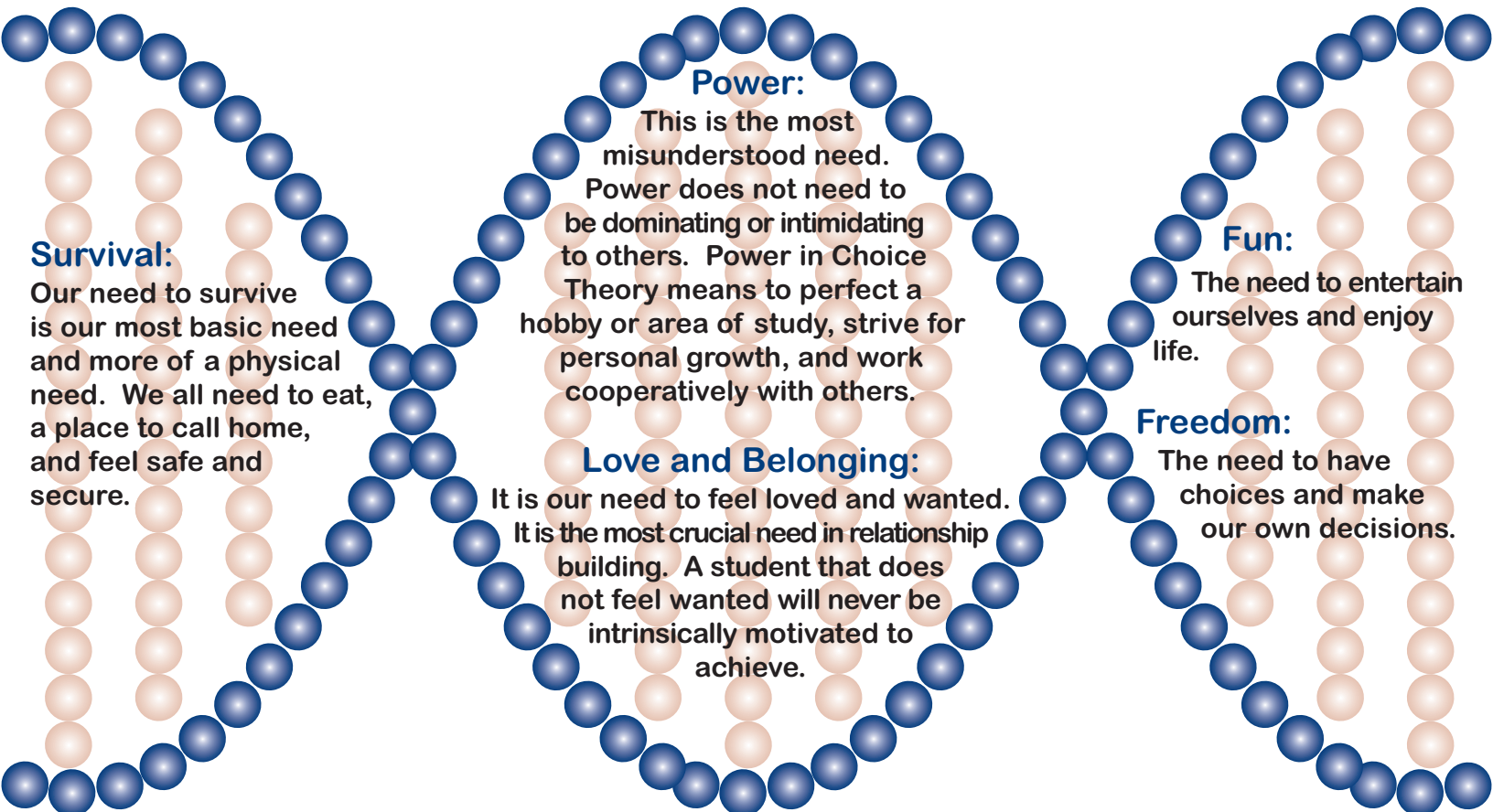


## What is Choice Theory?

Choice Theory tells us that we choose everything we do, whether we choose to be happy or choose to let others control our life and make us miserable. All we can do is get or give information from others. We are in control of our own selves and that information from others cannot make us do anything. All of our behaviors have a purpose, whether they are responsible or not. We choose to behave in ways that we think will improve our quality world and help to meet our 5 basic needs. As you read through this, you will learn more about the quality world and the 5 basic needs.

# 5 Basic Needs

Everybody's genetic structure has a built-in set of instructions that control how we think and act called our basic needs. Everyone is wired differently so everyone has a different priority for each need.



## Survival:

Our need to survive is our most basic need and more of a physical need. We all need to eat, a place to call home, and feel safe and secure.

## Power:

This is the most misunderstood need. Power does not need to be dominating or intimidating to others. Power in Choice Theory means to perfect a hobby or area of study, strive for personal growth, and work cooperatively with others.

## Love and Belonging:

It is our need to feel loved and wanted. It is the most crucial need in relationship building. A student that does not feel wanted will never be intrinsically motivated to achieve.

## Fun:

The need to entertain ourselves and enjoy life.

## Freedom:

The need to have choices and make our own decisions.

# The Quality World

The quality world is how we want our world to look. Everybody's picture of a quality world is different which is what usually leads to the conflict in all of our relationships. It is our job to remember that we are all different. In the classroom, acting out might be in one student's quality world, but not in the quality world of their teacher or their peers. A Choice Theory teacher will combat this conflict by creating natural consequences with the help of their class that fits the disruptive behavior. This eliminates punishment and coercion in the classroom and helps keep school in their quality world. Don't confuse consequence with punishment because they are slightly different.

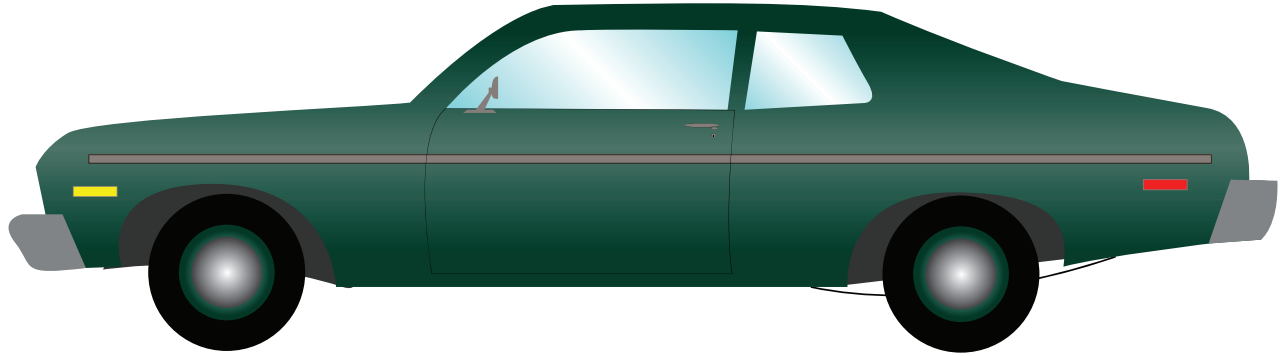
Behavior	<del>Punishment (Coercion)</del>	Consequence (Choice Theory)
Student disrupts a class meeting.	<del>Student is sent to office and gets a phone call home.</del>	Student is sent to a seat outside the circle where they can still see what is going on, but not distracting to their peers.
Student is playing in class instead of doing their assignment.	<del>Student is screamed at until they sit causing them to be embarrassed in front of their peers.</del>	If they choose to play during work time, they will work during playtime. (Missing recess or a special to finish the incomplete assignment.)

Can you see the difference? A punishment does not relate to the problem, it can be excessive, and can help you to be removed from the student's quality world. The more a child is engaged by their parent or teacher and their needs are met, the less likely they are to act out in a disruptive manner.

# Behavior in Conflict

Choice Theory can aid in successful anger management. This can be best seen in the Glasser Institute's behavior car model. There are 4 components of our total behaviors: Doing, Thinking, Feeling, and Physiology (How are body is behaving). Just as a car's wheels are all in motion together, these four components also work simultaneously. You hold the keys to your car and your actions pave the way toward the right or wrong choice. Below is an example of the behavior car in action:

Roger accidentally bumps into Peter and spills his juice.



Front Wheels

Rear Wheels

Doing

Thinking

Feeling

Physiology

Peter's Great Choice

Peter accepts that it is an accident, cleans up, and continues with lunch.

"It was an accident. I can't let it ruin my day. The stain will wash out."

Calm.

Body is relaxed.

Peter's Bad Choice

Peter pushes Roger and calls him a dummy.

"Roger is a jerk. He wanted me to spill my juice."

Very angry.

Peter's body is tense and his heartbeat is increased.

If Peter has made the right choice, he will not have any consequences imposed on him and while he may be upset initially, he doesn't let it bother him and he can enjoy the rest of his day. If Peter cannot control his anger, his teacher can conduct a reality therapy session using the WDEP model.

## Reality Therapy (W'dep?)

Reality Therapy is a method of counseling others to make better choices in situations and in life. I like to refer to it as W'dep? because it sounds like a slang derivation of What's up? and the initials W, D, E, and P help you to remember the 4 steps of Reality Therapy. The WDEP model was created by Glasser Institute senior staff member Dr. Robert Wubbolding.

### What do you **W**ant?

Exactly what it says. What are you trying to achieve?

### What are you **D**oing to get it?

What are some of the things you have tried or steps you have taken to get what you want?



### **E**valuate the situation.

At this stage, the counselor will review all of the information with the client.

### **C**reate a **P**lan.

A counselor will help the client come up with a plan to get what they want without giving them advice.

# Reality Therapy Continued....

A good Reality Therapy counselor will **NOT GIVE ADVICE**. The counselor's job is to **LISTEN** and help the client make the plan themselves. A good counselor will always tell the client to focus on the present because the past is the past and you can only control your current relationships and how to improve them. SBCS staff members are skilled in this practice and would be more than happy to show you reality therapy in a mock session. You can find many great examples of Reality Therapy and Choice Theory in the sources listed at the bottom of this page.

## Does Choice Theory Work?

Yes! SBCS students have reaped the benefits of Choice Theory. They are happy eager learners that are motivated from within. The Choice Theory model looks different in a school of young children because they need more structure to help them visualize what internal motivation is. In time they will progress and not have to be reminded of the consequences for their actions because they have good relationships with the caring SBCS faculty that avoids screaming and coercion.

## Closing

Thank you for reading this crash course in Choice Theory. Remember that it takes hours of training and studying to fully understand its full potential. This is just an informational packet about the discipline taught at SBCS. While the school does not want to tell you how to parent your child, please keep in mind that the SBCS environment is one that tries to avoid rewards and punishment and focuses on motivation from within. We strive to make the classroom needs satisfying to every student and make it part of their quality world. If you are inspired about trying this method of discipline at home, feel free to contact an SBCS faculty member to share more information and ideas to make your home a Choice Theory Quality Home.



## Sources and Recommended Reading

For more information, I encourage you to read the following books. A bulk of the information used in this packet was acquired and inspired from these sources. For a complete list of Dr. Glasser's books and works by other members of the Glasser Institute, visit the Glasser Institute Website at [www.wglasser.com](http://www.wglasser.com).

Erwin, J.C. (2004). *The Classroom of Choice: Giving Students What They Need and Getting What You Want*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD

Glasser, W. (1998). *Choice Theory: A New Psychology of Personal Freedom*. New York:HarperCollins.

Sullo, R.A. (1999). *The Inspiring Teacher: New beginnings for the 21st century*. West Haven, CT: NEA Professional Library.

Wubbolding, R.E. (1988). *Using Reality Theory*. New York:Harper Collins.