

# **The Benefits of SleepTalk® – John S. Cheetham Consulting Psychologist**

## **Research into the Benefits of the Goulding Process SleepTalk® for Children**

Our organisation was commissioned by Joane Goulding to conduct research into the outcomes and effectiveness of their product: The Goulding Process - SleepTalk® for Children. Over a period of some months we studied the history of SleepTalk®, monitored the progress of children involved in SleepTalk® and received ongoing feedback from parents by way of self-administered questionnaires.

Our research into the process began with a discussion of SleepTalk® with its creator, Joane Goulding, and continued through the briefing of the program's facilitators and support staff. Observations made over this period suggest a long history and much experience has led to the inception of SleepTalk for Children®.

A major component of our evaluation of SleepTalk for Children® was an international literature search into the theoretical basis of the process. The outcomes of this aspect of our research is outlined below.

### **Research Literature Supporting SleepTalk®.**

SleepTalk® is a potentially powerful process that enables a parent to interact with their child in a powerful way. It is suggested by its creator that this educational technique enables a child's mind to be focused on positive messages whilst the child is at the correct brainwave frequency of awareness during sleep. Through SleepTalk®, the interaction between parent and child serves to reinforce a sense of security and an ability to cope with daily life.

The closest and most critical bond in life is that which exists between a parent and child. For this reason and due to the time and affection shared, parents are the primary educators of their children (Browne-Miller, 1994; Camerer & Capps, 1995; Connors & Epstein, 1995; Gordon, 1989; Howe, 1990; Kellaghan, Sloane, Alvarez & Bloom, 1993; Zill, 1994). Parents are responsible for the psychological and moral development of the child (Camerer & Capps, 1995) and the child's intellectual development as well (Beeler, 1992; Browne-Miller, 1994). It is possible to develop an environment in which this is facilitated (Camerer & Capps, 1995). Positive interactions between parents and children have also been found to foster the development of literacy (Snow, 1993). This is perhaps even more the case with children requiring special educational needs (Beveridge, 1989).

As caregivers and educators, parents and guardians are in a unique position to be able to have a positive impact on their children's self-esteem. There are numerous reasons why this is important – certainly people who are confident in themselves have a more enjoyable experience of life (Bednar, Wells & Peterson, 1989; Burns, 1989; Gordon, 1989; Snyder & Frankel, 1989) and are more likely to be successful (Berne & Savary, 1996).

Self-esteem is also a critical factor in learning (Browne-Miller, 1994; Druckman & Bjork, 1994; Johnson & Johnson, 1994; Lazarowitz & Karsenty, 1990; Nutting, 1988; Putnam, 1993). It reduces fear of failure and increases motivation (Covington, 1992) aids decision-making ability (Mann, Beswick, Allouche & Ivey, 1989) and increases children's potential for attempting new or difficult learning tasks (Bernstein, 1989). It has also been found to increase levels of academic attainment (Bennett, 1995), reduces the likelihood of under-achievement as a child or adult (McCall, Evahn & Kratzer, 1992) and high school dropout (Cichelli & Baecher, 1995). Self-esteem has also been related to workplace performance and career development (Carevale, Gainer & Meltzer, 1990).

Self-esteem and self-comfort have also been linked to creative energy in children and adults in any number of areas (Camp, 1994; Fodor & Greenier, 1995; Kalliopuska, 1991; Yau, 1991).

Specific studies have found a link between self-esteem and creativity in ballet (Kalliopuska, 1991) and poetry, music, painting, analytical, optimising, associative, synthesising and analogical thinking (Shukla & Sinha, 1993).

SleepTalk<sup>®</sup> recognises the principle that establishing a strong self-esteem before adolescence is crucial. The challenges of school, family and growing up that teenagers face are difficult to overcome for even the happiest and most content teenagers. For those who do not possess the emotional resilience to press on; depression, isolation and failure may become a way of life. It is important that self-esteem is developed early to ensure that a happy and healthy adolescence follows.

It probably comes as no surprise that adolescents with low self-esteem are more susceptible to peer group pressure (Hamlin, 1991), alcohol use (Kohut, 1994) and substance abuse (Hamlin, 1991; Miller, 1994; Steffenhagen, 1989). They are also more likely to become involved in multiple episodes of violence (Farrell, 1994).

One way that the bond between child and caregiver can be fostered is by the development of self-esteem and relationships, and consensus exists that there is a strong connection between the two. In these studies, the strength and stability of loving relationships has seen to be correlated with the self-esteem of those involved, whether they are children, adolescents or adults (Hatfield, 1995). Likewise, individual's perception of their relationships with their partners and others have been found to contribute to self-esteem and happiness (Blyth & Traeger, 1988) at all grade levels.

This love as experienced as a child, can be passed onto the next generation, as children who are loved tend to become loving parents themselves. Likewise, children who have suffered emotionally deprived upbringings are more likely to construct a similarly loveless environment as parents (Kaufman & Zigler, 1989; Rydelius, 1994).

The process involved in SleepTalk<sup>®</sup> is based on the principles of repetitive learning associated with the sleep state. For many years, repetition has been accepted as an important feature of effective learning (Greig, 1994). More recent studies have suggested that this is true in almost every area of learning (Wozniak & Gorzelanczyk, 1994), including learning whilst asleep (Druckman & Bjork, 1994). Added to this is the simplicity and importance of the message and the reinforcement of the loving bond between caregiver and child.

Few people would deny that quality and refreshing sleep has the power to re-energise people. In addition, an abundance of research has shown that feeling positive before and during sleep can have a number of positive consequences for a child (Druckman & Bjork, 1994; Kramer, 1993). These benefits stem from the child being able to take their optimism or positive mood through the night and into the following day. Feeling positive and secure about oneself can then colour the child's experience of everyday life. Their interpretation of all the incidents and activities in which they are involved is influenced by their feelings about themselves and the world. SleepTalk<sup>®</sup> is a technique that seeks to assist children to create a positive attitude to their world and to approach life with an attitude of increased belief in themselves.

SleepTalk<sup>®</sup> may hold the potential to help children improve their concentration through teaching them to focus their thoughts. For many years, martial arts have been successful in accomplishing this, through making use of the connection between positive experiences, self-esteem and concentrations (Weiser, Kutz, Kutz & Weiser, 1995). Through self-awareness and exposure to positive messages, concentration can be improved (Browne-Miller, 1994; Lauth, 1992).

One of the greatest potential benefits of SleepTalk<sup>®</sup> is that it provides context within which a child can safely negotiate emotions. These may consist of fears, anger, loneliness or uncertainty. Whatever the cause of the negative feelings, SleepTalk<sup>®</sup> seeks to provide a means of reassuring a child of their safety, value and love. This is an outlet that is much

needed. Unresolved issues can be acted out through any number of conscious or unconscious actions or symptoms (Cooke, 1987; Harris, 1987; Stefneos, 1987). These can include aggression, bed-wetting, self-isolation or depression.

Although most of the research described above has been conducted over recent years, SleepTalk<sup>®</sup> is based on principles and understandings that are decades old. The basic concepts of education, repetition and communication of affection are not new.

Our review and consideration of the research outlined evident above, leads us to believe that SleepTalk<sup>®</sup> is based on a broad range of sound theoretical principles. For this reason, one would expect that SleepTalk<sup>®</sup> has the potential to be a process of great benefit to many young people.

### **Empirical Research**

With reference to the proposed goals of SleepTalk<sup>®</sup>, we have designed a questionnaire to empirically measure parents' observations of their children's behaviour, using a five point rating scale. The questionnaire was trialled on a number of parents prior to the commencement of the study.

Parents are required to complete the questionnaire at intervals of 3 and 6 months. To our knowledge, this questionnaire was required by CMI to be completed by a parent or guardian of every child involved in SleepTalk<sup>®</sup>.

We have analysed the completed questionnaires submitted to us. The mean age of children within the sample was 6.5 years, comprising 19 males and 13 females. The 32 completed evaluation forms we received demonstrated a satisfactory significant improvement in the parents' perception of their children's happiness and behaviour after 3 months. In other words, the probability that improvements observed in the children who have participated in SleepTalk<sup>®</sup> for Children were due to chance alone, is less than 0.1%.

The completed evaluations we received identified improvements in children over a number of areas. These include self-like, enjoyment and participation at school, happiness, relationships with others and confidence. It seems, from our initial research, that parents can reasonably expect their children to have a more enjoyable experience of life, at least in the short term, as a consequence of their involvement in SleepTalk<sup>®</sup> for Children.

Furthermore, it may be that a child need not be 'different' in any way to experience some potential gain from being involved in SleepTalk<sup>®</sup>. Our experience with the process is that any child regardless of personality, intelligence, physical health or predisposition, may potentially receive benefit, as a result of the reaffirmation of the child-caregiver bond, which SleepTalk<sup>®</sup> seems to invoke.

### **Feedback from Parents**

Several parents have made comments relating to their experiences with SleepTalk<sup>®</sup> for Children some of the parents' comments passed on to us include:

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|-------|---|
| Bob   | "After SleepTalk <sup>®</sup> he is now more agreeable, happier, like a different child."                         |
| Julie | "She is happier, more co-operative."  |
| Eva   | "So far after 4 weeks it's been quite successful, looking forward to (further) improvement."                      |
| Ian   | "I chose SleepTalk <sup>®</sup> purely to bring peace and happiness to my child – we are on the road to success." |
| Sue   | "I believe there will be a positive outcome for my children."   |

- Michelle “As you heal your child you are also healing yourself with positiveness, reassurance of love and confidence. The energy exchange during the process enables you and your child to become more receptive to each other and others in your life.”
- Tammy “There has been a gradual improvement in his confidence in approaching school tasks.”

We have suggested that research continue on an on-going basis in order to determine whether specific attributes of changes in behaviour occur as a result of using SleepTalk<sup>®</sup> for Children and to ascertain whether any significant differences emerge in the long term, on the basis of the age, gender or background of the child.

### Long Term Changes

The research we have conducted in relation to SleepTalk<sup>®</sup> has all been short term in nature. The ongoing implications of the process are yet to be seen, except in anecdotal form. We do, however, agree with the creator of the process, when she says that for long lasting changes to occur, completion of the process over the recommended period of time is most likely to yield ongoing benefits.

### Conclusion

The evidence supporting the Goulding SleepTalk<sup>®</sup> for Children process is consistent. Historical research has demonstrated that the principles, upon which SleepTalk<sup>®</sup> is based, are important determinants of behaviour in childhood, adolescence and in some cases, adulthood. Our own empirical study into the effectiveness of SleepTalk<sup>®</sup> has brought about promising initial results. The vast majority of parents have observed noticeable changes in their children after relatively short periods of time. Finally, the parents themselves have also been motivated to provide anecdotal evidence as to the benefits of SleepTalk<sup>®</sup>. SleepTalk<sup>®</sup> seems to be an extremely simple and effective process that has been seen by parents to benefit many children in their everyday lives and will hopefully continue to do so.

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