

# The Golden Path for Adults

**Gill Avery and Mike Vernon**  
explain how The Golden Path  
can help us develop as adults

**This is the third and last in a series of articles about The Golden Path.** Previously we have looked at The Golden Path as a way of parenting children up to the onset of puberty (Issue 22, Winter 2010), and then at guiding them through adolescence (Issue 24, Summer 2011). Here we apply The Golden Path to ourselves as adults.

Our image of a developing human being includes not just knowledge and memory capabilities, but also reasoning, emotional processing and behavioural expression. It is a lifelong process to develop, or renew the development of, our personality and neural networks. No matter how fixed we believe these to be, there is always a choice in our own behavioural expression. We therefore see parenting as a process that develops the psychological, emotional and behavioural capacity of a person to enter and contribute to society and then benefit from this experience by using their rational/emotional reactions to learn and develop.

How we parent is shaped by the fashion of the times and the behaviour transmitted from our grandparents through our parents. The product of the parenting we received in our childhood lies embedded within us, largely hidden from our awareness. As a result, although we are aware of our own emotional reactions to the troubling behavioural patterns of others – in particular our partners and children – we are often unaware of the behavioural patterns we habitually use that others find troubling. For this reason, we introduce the concept of self-parenting in The Golden Path: at any age, each of us has the potential to consciously participate in our own neural and personality development. If we look at behaviour as an expression of our own sense of self, our identity, something that we implicitly ask others to support, then self-parenting begins with questions such as

- What kind of woman/man/partner/parent do I wish to become?
- What do I wish to do with the rest of my life?
- How do I deal with these issues/people in my life?
- How do I deal with the parenting I received?
- How did I get into this situation?

These questions start a process of self-examination and awareness around the questions “Who am I?” and “What do I need?” We believe that we are a product of our genetics



and interaction with the environment in which we grew up (including the parenting we received), moderated by the beliefs we hold about our fundamental self and our individual experiences.

Our genetics will favour certain behavioural tendencies (assertion, avoidance, acquisitiveness, adoration, and so on), whilst the environment in which we grew up influences the form our innate behaviour will take (asserting through words or with gesture, avoiding through silence or physical withdrawal, acquiring as a reaction to scarcity, adoring to express love or defuse conflict).

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Experiences such as stress, illness, abuse, as well as the joys and deep bonding we can experience with other human beings, can have an epigenetic effect: that is, they can create traits that exist in addition to the molecular basis for inheritance. Some researchers believe that these epigenetic traits can be passed from one generation to another. If, at the deep level of DNA, we can be subjected to genes switching on and off through our reactions to experiences (a process of which we are profoundly unaware), then it is only a small step to accept that we can take conscious control of switching on and off our behavioural expression. With this awareness, it is no longer credible to say, in response to a given experience, “It’s just the way I am.” Instead the message is, “It’s just the way I now choose to be.” >

> It is up to us as adults to consider whether the 'work' of our development was completed for us by the time we 'left home', or whether we will now take parenting responsibility for ourselves. Can we recognise that the people around us did the best they could for us as children and that we can choose to change our inheritance and legacy through the act of self-parenting? If so, The Golden Path becomes

**Welcome:** Do we care enough to welcome difference? Do we care enough for ourselves to truly listen to our personal narrative, to content, emotion and intention? As we listen, can we hear and welcome echoes in ourselves, memories dimly activated in our sub-conscious, stirrings of our own habits, strengths or troublesome patterns and feelings? Can we notice these echoes whilst listening to the difference that others bring, and use them to explore and deepen the conversation?

**Recognise:** Can we recognise our typical reactions to what we are hearing and how our own response may need to change, not just in behaviour, but in mindset, attitude, belief and motive? Each of us carries a basket of emotional memories waiting to be activated, unwittingly, by the trigger another provides. For example, where we carry unmet needs, we may feel anger triggered in us. Our typical reaction may be to hold the other responsible for 'making' us angry, or we may ask ourselves, "Where does this anger originate in my life?" "Who was there?" "What was the occasion?" "Does the person in front of me deserve my anger?" Part of self-parenting is to revisit those aspects of our lives, to learn how to be better in this moment, right now. To do this we need

**Support:** Can we support our own and another's maturation, through what we say or do, or the quality of our presence in this moment? Bringing true support to others and ourselves enables us to

**Strengthen:** How do we learn to express the person we choose to be, whilst simultaneously acknowledging the right of others to be their own unique selves? How can we then use these differences to expand our knowledge, relationships and behavioural repertoire?

**Separate and return:** Our emotional memories are stored in our sub-conscious, surfacing in awareness in response to a trigger, usually provided by someone else. Can we consciously generate in ourselves the mood or quality of presence that will influence the emotional memory of all connected, as we move between people and events in our lives? If we can, we may part from each other knowing that the mood on our return will be one of welcoming. From this place, we may then travel The Golden Path together.

**do we wish to repeat history, or lay the foundation for the person we wish to become?**

When we self-parent using The Golden Path, we choose which aspects of ourselves we wish to revisit and understand from a different peak of experience. As we consciously evaluate, right now, what we are about to do, we can choose: do we wish to repeat history, or lay the foundation for the person we wish to become?

### Gill's story

At one level it was trivial. She, my daughter, had been the only one left out of the team. However, as I read the team list my heart – and stomach – sank. I felt deflated... and then angry! How would this support her growth of skills or confidence? I wanted to speak to someone about this quickly so that my daughter might be protected from what I construed as possible hurt arising from this decision.

And then I paused. How come the feeling that welled up in me, causing me to shake with its force, was so strong? This wasn't like me. I couldn't remember taking up an issue like this on my own behalf. Pause. An out-breath. A clue. Follow it. What were the patterns? If the parenting I had received equipped me to imagine and understand the logic of those in authority, without challenge, at the expense of my needs – then maybe there was an untapped legacy of anger in me. And now, as parent, I felt that my reaction was justified, and that it was 'safe' for me to express my feelings as if, on behalf of my child. Phew. Now I could welcome this opportunity to revisit part of me.

So, having recognised the source of this pattern in myself, I had a choice. One option: continue my legacy pattern and bury my feelings as I had learnt to do so well as a child. Another, vivid in my imagination, was to rant at the perpetrator of this injustice (which I had never done as a child). Or I could explore another way... "If I was the woman I wish to become, how would I support my daughter, right now?"

What I chose to do was to use the hierarchy within the club to direct attention to the issue of selection. In doing so, I took the conscious step to support myself in dealing with my perception of unfairness and hierarchy. (Subsequently, the club changed its squad policy.)

My daughter and I discussed her needs around the situation. She gave me the gift of revisiting my own childhood patterns, and I hope I gave her the gift of feeling supported and loved, as well as a vision of what a mother does. ●

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**Gill Avery** and **Mike Vernon** co-founded Consulting People Ltd., and Gill is also co-founder of Consulting Women. They develop tools for navigating personal and cultural patterns, and use them with their clients, their children and themselves.