

Moms and daughters: Changing Cycles of Violence into Cycles of Affirmation and Growth

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As we start the magic shoes program each mother and daughter is asked to take off their shoes. Then hold them up and switch the feet putting their shoes back on but on the “wrong foot”. Then the music starts and the mothers and daughters are asked to dance but wearing shoes on the “wrong foot”. As everyone laughs and dances and when the last pair falls they take a refecation break. Finally someone spontaneously says, "Here let me help you put your shoes on the right foot." and the music and dance start again.

What did they learn? What is the correct foot and what is the wrong foot in relationship to each other. By having their shoes on the wrong foot some of the mothers said they realized how a person with a handicap might feel a little bit odd at times. Many said well I just could not dance and all laughed at each other as they attempted to dance. Shoes and how we wear them are a common denominator among all the mothers and daughters and really among women. There is a phrase: show me the shoes you wear and I can tell you what you are planning on doing. They now talk about how they can begin to identify when someone is wearing their shoes on the “wrong foot”.

There are many shoe dynamics that our Affirmation Groups are going to use. But this first dynamic gets right to the foot of the problem we all have different stances and really we might be using the wrong foot or the correct foot wrong, in our relationships and the only way to know is to reflect on their stance and their relationships. This is symbolized by the dancing, and reflection.



In the social unit we created the idea of Affirmation Groups. This is not self help groups they are groups where each person affirms the other in a way that helps them gain confidence and begin to see their own lives more positively. Any shoulds are left outside the room, we are not telling each other what we should or should not do. We are listening and identifying positive virtues, values and actions. Part of an Affirmation Group includes naming the positive virtues that each mother or daughter exhibits in their lives. Each person shares. We use dynamics with sticky notes or labels so that the mothers and daughters always walk away with some type of object with the virtues pasted on them so they can have them in their homes and continue the affirmation at home with their families and just for themselves to remember the positive affirmations identified for them by others.

The social team that works in this area has to do a values clarification first, because we discovered that most people's vocabulary does not include many positive affirmations. We have to build a vocabulary of positive words, virtues, values together. The staff have been amazed how small the positive vocabulary is in comparison with the negative and preaching vocabulary and how difficult it is to change to an affirmation vocabulary. Starting these sessions slowly without pressure because Magic Shoes is planned as a permanent part of Familias Especiales. It is really an adventure in learning and living a more positive affirmed life, not only for the mothers and daughter but for staff. It is changing cycles of violence into cycles of affirmation and growth.

