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For more information contact:

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301-620-8700 ext. 5

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## THERAPIST SPOTLIGHT

### Dr. Jeeyoung Ahn, Psy.D.

Psychology Associate at *Vital Sources*



#### Why was this your career choice?

I always enjoyed being in the presence of kids, young or old. I've also had a heart for underprivileged children and families who are suffering emotionally and physically. Being in this field provided an opportunity for me to be with children and families and also be a part of their lives/struggles.

#### What are the biggest struggles you see people having to face?

Understanding and owning brokenness. Whether it is the parents or the children, I think a lot of us struggle to be in the "good enough" place in our lives and often have a hard time embracing our brokenness. In this process I think we often forget that it's through the brokenness that we connect with God and experience His grace and healing.

#### If you could tell our readers anything, what would it be?

Many emotional and behavioral problems that your children present with maybe a reflection of unsatisfied and/or problematic dynamics in the family structure. When seeking professional help for your children, keep in mind that the best and most effective remedy is re-examining the overall family dynamics as well as the caregiver's wellbeing.

#### What is something that most people do not know about you and probably would not guess?

Haha... That I would have been a photographer if not a psychologist.

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 VITAL SOURCES  
NEWSLETTER

Winter 2009

## Celebrating Your Child's Natural Born Temperament: A New Perspective on Child Psychotherapy

by Dr. Jeeyoung Ahn, PsyD.

Many distraught parents come knocking on my door. Along with them come the little ones; some too anxious, some too hyper, some too aggressive, some too angry, some too withdrawn, some too sad, some too many temper tantrums, and some too unruly and disrespectful. It is not uncommon for parents who seek treatment for their children's emotional and behavioral problems to struggle with a sense of failure and guilt as parents, as well as fear and concern that their child is a candidate for the so-called "messed up kid who needs professional help." As a professional working with children, adolescents, and families, I would like to present a more fundamental but novel perspective of understanding the emotional/behavioral problems children go through, and the role of child psychotherapy in helping parents and families address these issues. Actually, the theory of this approach comes out of discussions with my colleague, Dr. R. Allen Lish.

#### Your Child's Natural Temperament

I frequently see how a mismatch in the child's temperament and its

environment lead to pathological labeling and diagnosis.

Temperament, as we're using it here, is your child's inborn disposition. Your child's temperament is his/her characteristic way of responding and reacting to events and his or her environment. Research in this area identifies nine basic temperament traits; activity, distractibility, adaptability, approach/withdrawal, intensity, regularity/rhythm, sensory sensitivity, mood, and persistence. The variance of how a child exhibits these traits determines the child's temperament.

Although temperament is inborn, a child's experiences and environment also have a significant impact. "Goodness of fit" refers to a parenting approach that accounts for individual differences in your child's temperament. Effective



parenting is not one-size-fits-all. Your parenting style has “goodness of fit” when your expectations and demands match your child’s temperament. “Goodness of fit” will help you respond appropriately to your child’s unique temperament traits. It is important to be flexible and adjust your response to meet your child’s temperament.

and objectively process their own temperament and personal reactions to their children’s demands and needs. This is where the “therapy” part comes in. I like to construe the child therapy room as a room of “discovery,” a starting line to learn more about your child as well as a yourself using a more objective lens.



I rather consider child therapy to be a place where we help parents normalize their child’s behavior and assist them to appreciate and celebrate their child’s natural born temperament.

Children do not come to therapy to be labeled, diagnosed, and prescribed medication. (Although there are clinically significant cases where medication is a crucial component of the intervention process.) I rather consider child therapy to be a place where we help parents normalize their child’s behavior and assist them to appreciate and celebrate their child’s natural born temperament.

It’s a process of first learning that “it’s okay your child is bit active,” “it’s okay that she is a bit shy,” and “it’s okay that he initially doesn’t know how to modulate his anger.” Then therapy helps parents learn ways to redirect and reward each child according to who they are. Therapy works to help parents empathize with and empower their children and at the same time teach them skills to cope with their own brokenness.

If you’re having difficulties in parenting, know that there is help. We can work together to help you and your child understand each other better.

You will also find that there will be a higher probability for conflict if your own temperament varies greatly from your child’s. If you are impatient, you may have a hard time holding back when your very persistent child insists on taking her time to complete a task. If you are outgoing in social situations, you may be displeased when your shy or withdrawn child does not approach your friends in a bold manner. Thus it is recommended: do not try to change your child’s temperament, show respect for your child’s uniqueness, and avoid comparing your child to another child.

#### Purpose of Therapy

However, if it were as easy as it sounds, life would be a fairy tale. But when parents are bombarded with daily living hassles, financial difficulties, work, marriage, and demands of their other children, it can be quite challenging to sit

## For Pastors & Other Leaders Positive Psychology

by James Roembke, Psy.D.

Our winter newsletter focuses on understanding and celebrating our children’s natural temperaments. With the onset and development of personality measures we look to deepening our understanding of the nuances of individual differences and the measurement of such. Within the last two decades psychology research has increasingly focused on an area of study called “positive psychology.” Positive psychology researches areas of inquiry such as strengths and virtues that enable individuals, families and communities to thrive. Whereas the focus of traditional psychology has been on pathology or brokenness, positive psychology focuses on health and ability.

As leaders in our homes, businesses and churches, we have significant opportunities to apply the wisdom gleaned from the field of positive psychology. Positive psychology measures such as “The Highlands Ability Battery,” Strength Finders, NEO Personality assessment and others all provide ways of deepening our understanding of people, relationships, families, teams, even entire organizations.

As a member of a team here at Vital Sources I’ve had the opportunity to experience the

benefits of coming to deeper, more intimate knowledge of the members of our team. Not only am I able to lead more effectively but I’m convinced that it also offers me the opportunity to respect and honor the individuals on our team in ways that I wouldn’t otherwise know to do. This investment in our team has not only increased our personal and team satisfactions but has also enabled us to function more capably in our work. We’ve given each other the chance to know and be known. I believe I can speak for everyone on our team when I say, “We’re all richer for it.”

Although making this kind of investment in people, families and team is costly, we have a growing confidence in the benefits. If you are experiencing challenges in your family, or team, you might consider investing in a team assessment. If you are functioning well, that’s an even more fertile time to invest in your “team.”

God bless you as you seek to be faithful to the calling He has placed on our lives.



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**VITAL SOURCES**

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**SERVICES**

#### Therapy Services

- Adults
- Families
- Couples
- Teens
- Children

#### Assessment Services

- Academic Struggles
- Attention and hyperactivity difficulties
- Social and emotional difficulties
- Parenting and family issues

#### Speaking Services

Members of our staff are available (often on a volunteer basis) to speak to groups on topics related to emotional, relational and spiritual issues. We can work with you to customize a talk to suit your needs.

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