

### FOLKS NEED STROKES

Berne 1971: "A stroke is a unit of recognition".

**Woollams and Brown:** (Transactional Analysis 1978) "A stroke is a unit of attention which provides stimulation to an individual".

Physical stimulation is a basic human need. This is supported by research (Spitz 1945) - it was noted that children deprived of physical stimulation may sink into decline and become prone to death. Berne described this as **stimulus hunger**: As we grow and develop our stimulus hunger develops and is partially transferred to a psychological version which Berne describes as **recognition hunger**.

**Therefore a working definition of a stroke is:** A transaction which provides a person with either recognition or stimulation.

It appears that it matters little whether this recognition or stimulation is positive or negative: For example a child is naughty in order to 'gain attention' rather than be ignored. Therefore it is worth noting that 'attention seeking behaviours' have value for those who are behaving in that way and it is important to give them attention.

### TYPES OF STROKES

- **INTERNAL:** fantasies, self praise, and other forms of self stimulation.
- **EXTERNAL:** strokes from others are important for healthy living.
- **CONDITIONAL:** the stroke is for something - "I like your coat".
- **UNCONDITIONAL:** the stroke is for being you - "I love you" (POSITIVE: "I love you" NEGATIVE: "I hate you".)
- **STROKE VALUE:** "I love you" will carry more energy say 10, whereas "Hi" may only carry say a value of 2.
- **FILTERED STROKES:** "I see you have a new coat" can be changed / filtered to negative or positive strokes with the person saying to himself "He likes / doesn't like my coat" The person maintains his own internal life position by using his filter.

### STROKING PROFILE

The stroking profile helps to measure how a person gives and receives strokes in 4 categories. This can be an effective therapeutic tool as a person can then decide to change any part of his/her stroking profile. E.g. a person may decide to stop discounting positive strokes and to ask for more of them.

∅ GIVING STROKES IS OK

∅ SAYING NO IS OK

∅ TAKING STROKES IS OK

Ø ASKING FOR STROKES IS OK

Using the stroking profile:

1. Rate yourself in each of the categories above as to how often you do these things.
2. Do above for both positive strokes and negative strokes.
3. NB that all transactions are strokes.

Once you have completed this you could then consider how you wish to change and in which direction. The aim is to develop the areas in which you have a low score rather than reducing the areas in which you have a high score.

The stroking profile was first developed by Jim McKenna and was described in the Transactional Analysis Journal, October 1974.

**THE STROKE ECONOMY:** In the book "Scripts People Live" (1974) Claude Steiner a close friend of Berne develops this theme. The stroke economy describes how society has developed a system to control and compete in the giving and receiving of strokes. Steiner wrote a children's story: "The Warm Fuzzy Tale".

In this story he tells how a happy family freely gave warm "fuzzies" until a wicked witch who deceived them by telling them that their warm fuzzies will run out. The family started to hold back from giving warm fuzzies, and as this spreads through their community people's backs start to shrivel up, and people start to die. As the witch wishes to sell her salves and potions she doesn't actually wish people to die, she invents cold pricklies, and plastic fuzzies which keep people alive and unhappy so that they carry on buying her potions and salves from her. However, the children eventually learn that they won't run out of the warm fuzzies, and so start giving them away freely again inviting the adults to join them.

Rating how many strokes you exchange with significant others in your life.

List the people / situations in which you spend most time and rate the exchange of strokes.

What you are checking here is the balance of positive and negative strokes and lead to the following question: "With whom do I want to spend most of my time?"

This is a good exercise for families and teams, also looking for burnout scenarios.