

Meet Dr. Dan Short

Written by Sarah Love

Dan Short is recognized internationally for his work in short-term therapy and in Ericksonian hypnosis. While he is devoted to a private practice, right here in Scottsdale, he writes and teaches to skillful audiences around the globe. He also is a volunteer and supervisor for graduate interns and a part of faculty for conferences and hosts therapists around the world. He is considered a serious scholar on the subject of Erickson's work, which gives him the credit as a dependable therapist and counselor in the Valley. He is collaborating with Tiffany Richards to start the ME, the Mental & Martial Enrichment Program, for kids with ADHD beginning on January 23, 2012.

The collaboration between the dojo and Dr. Short came out of discussion about students who after training in martial arts also became more successful as students at school. These children had an increase in their grades. And their behavior became less impulsive, as they developed greater self-control. It was at this time that Dr. Short recognized unique opportunities that martial arts training afforded to children with AD/HD.



Arizona Foothills Magazine: What practical experiences made you want to become a therapist/counselor?

Dr. Dan Short: I have always enjoyed problem solving. Since my teen years, I have been very curious about how people work. I began studying to become a therapist and that allowed me to indulge myself in these interests.

AFM: What's the most challenging aspect of your job?

DS: I do not like to see suffering and I especially dislike failure. So the fact that I cannot cure every person that comes through my office door is an unhappy thought for me. While it is true that my successes far outweigh my failures, I still get a little depressed when I must admit my inability to help resolve a problem. (This is most likely to occur when the client lacks the will to change. For instance, the husband who treats his wife badly and does not want to change, but still goes to therapy just so he can prove to her that therapy was a complete waste of time. As soon as I realize that progress is contradictory to the client's actual will, I end my work with that person.)

AFM: Knowing that your patient's outlooks on certain elements are in your hands, is that ever challenging?

DS: My approach to therapy is based on what is called the 'collaborative model.' That means that progress in therapy is a mutual effort and shared responsibility. I do not tell people how to live their lives. I do not tell them what therapy goals they should have. Rather, the clients are responsible for telling me what direction they wish to go and I accept responsibility for helping them get there. I am happy to help my clients learn how to better trust their own instincts (to find their wise inner-guide). I do not make decisions for people, which carry life-long consequences, such as whom to marry, whether or not to divorce, where to move, or what career to pursue.

AFM: Did you have another career goal before your pursuit of being a therapist? Why did it change?

DS: I did not think about my career goals until college, and it was then that I decided to become a psychologist.

AFM: You help patients overcome and grow from situations they've experienced or are going through, but do you learn or benefit also? If so, how?

DS: I learn from every single person I meet. I try to listen to myself as I talk to others. I consider whether or not what I am saying applies to my life or my family. Also, I am constantly seeking information from my clients, what they have learned about themselves, about others and about life. The things I learn are fascinating. Some occasions, I am inspired by what my clients are able to do. It is wrong to think that a person is either completely 'put together' (and therefore needs no therapy) or a 'complete mess' (and therefore incompetent in most areas of living). This instance is rarely the case. People are much more complex than that.

AFM: What legacy do you want to leave behind and be known for?

DS: I work very hard to be skillful in my professional practice and to do the right thing when confronted with challenging situations. My clients, and other people who have come to know me, often describe me as being a kind man who has been helpful during a time of need. If I have done enough good to make a difference for some, and those individuals want to pass that goodness along to others (either as a caring parent, a close friend, or as a devoted spouse), then that would be what I consider a worthy legacy.

AFM: In your opinion, what makes a good counselor or therapist?

DS: We know from outcome research that success in therapy does not depend on years of education or the type of technique used in therapy. Rather, the probability of success increases when there is evidence of a strong alliance between client and therapist, a comfortable bond based on trust and mutual regard. Therefore, one must be good at forming relationships. I think it is also important for the therapist to be emotionally healthy, highly responsible, and earnestly interested in the lives of others.

AFM: What hardships did you have to overcome in the pursuit of your career?

DS: I choose to pursue a doctoral degree in psychology. This objective was personally meaningful. I wanted to know I could succeed at this level of education, even though it was very stressful and took a while to fully complete.

AFM: What advice do you have for people to stay positive and healthy?

DS: There is no better predictor for health, happiness and longevity than the successful formation of close, supportive relationships. While genetics can create a predisposition toward illness or longevity, over the course of one's life, there is no other single factor that so greatly impacts emotional and physical wellbeing as the people we hold close to us. Therefore, abusive or chronically negative relationships should not be tolerated or endured. Every person has the right to seek out positive, emotionally-supportive relationships. We have the right to step away from people who are treating us with disrespect or constantly draining us of our resources. It is difficult for small children to get away from hostile parents, however, adult children can and should set boundaries with anyone in the family who is not respecting their right to love themselves and/or feel good about their future. While it can feel good to buy a new car or live in a fancy home, nothing will produce as much meaning in a person's life as the care and protection of other people whom we have decided to love.

AFM: At the end of the day, how does it make you feel that you've made an impact on someone's life?

DS: This is the best part of my job. I feel privileged to learn of people's deepest hopes and dreams and then watch, from a front row seat, as they begin to do what they have waited a lifetime to achieve. This produces a special type of joy. It is in sharing this joy that I find some of my greatest satisfaction.

AFM: What prompted you to start this ADHD program and how do you think it will help these kids?

The collaboration between the dojo and I came out of discussion about students who after training in martial arts also became more successful as students at school. These children had an increase in their grades and their behavior became less impulsive, as they developed greater self-control. It was at this time that I recognized unique opportunities that martial arts training afforded to children with AD/HD. This disorder of the brain can cause great difficulty for children not only in the classroom but also on the play ground and at home. Problems with concentration, impulse control and hyperactivity can put a serious strain on their social relationships. As a result, the children find themselves constantly in trouble with their parents, frequently rejected by their peers, and receive failing marks from their teachers. The effect on the self-esteem and overall emotional well being is devastating. The parents see this suffering and want to help their child but are uncertain of what to do. Most parents understand the danger of drugs and do not want their child to become dependent on stimulant medication, yet they do not know what else to do. These children need more than symptom suppression. They need help with brain growth. Unfortunately, the drugs that are currently prescribed are not curative. Following that realization, I began working with Tiffany and Sensei Poage to develop a training program designed to meet the developmental needs of these children's brains. Each exercise has been crafted to increase the child's capacity for concentration, impulse control, emotional self-regulation, and executive control with a greater awareness of long-term consequences. Under my direction, we have begun to collect the type of data that will allow us to make research based statements about what this type of training is doing for our students.

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