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The Growing Up Fairy and Sneaky Poo/Wee

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No doubt, young people, say by 5 or 6 years of age, have become very aware of SP or SW as they have been dogged by one of both of them probably since they developed retrievable memories. And SP has undoubtedly dogged parents far more than their children, even though the poo is in his/her pants, not theirs. As we all know, we take pains to deliver the poo to sewage plants and other sanitary measures in order to dispel the risk of infectious diseases such as typhoid fever, etc. Perhaps more than anything else, this risk has contributed to us considering faeces to be malodorous and generally offensive or threatening to our well-being. Not surprisingly under these cultural circumstances, a young person's rapid toilet training is a matter of some concern for everyone. Perhaps the odd thing is that often the young people are the least concerned of all those who are concerned eg. parents, siblings, grandparents, aunts and uncles, family friends, school teaches/principals, health professionals, and the general public.

As everyone goes about attempting to assist the young person and if the Problem isn't resolved very quickly, what can inadvertently result is a set of very antagonistic relationships eg. parents, especially mothers, feel required, given the 'seriousness' of the Problem, to 'put pressure' on the young person in the hope, often vain, that s/he put pressure on themselves; the young person, to spare himself/herself disappointment at his/her failure to rapidly produce 'cleanness/dryness', often comes to believe his/her parents' pressure is their Problem, rather than Sneaky Poo/Wee. As a result, they resist their Problem the only way they can see how: firstly, denying the Problem is a problem, secondly going further to hide the consequences of it and thirdly, to become habituated to it to the extent that what bothers others-malodours and the hazard of contagion- has little or no effect on them. It can become even more than merely tolerated; it can become insignificant. However, what the young person cannot render insignificant is parental concern, worry, chastisements, rebukes, rewards and of course punishments. Once again, the young person may take what s/he thinks is the only route s/he believes available to her/him- tuning out usually indicated by the young person, whenever the Problem is referred to and no matter how, putting their fingers in their ears or turning away from the conversation and 'inhabiting' a space of their own where they are unavailable to adult attempts to converse with them. Here I would suspect that the more sensitive or concerned the young person is about the 'charged' feelings of his/her parents, the more likely s/he is to leave the conversational field either overtly by blocking their ears or covertly by what parents, with utter frustration, can refer to as "spacing out" or "going in to a world of their own." Consequently, they more or less absent themselves from their parent's well-meaning remonstrations or wise counsel.

How can we engage a young person in a way of thinking that allows for very different options for everyone to take novel actions in order for the young person 'to put pressure on themselves to put pressure on the Problem'? And to do so in a manner that evades the parent's so far thwarted urging the young person to 'put pressure on themselves' at the same time as the young person acts in ways to relieve any 'pressure on him/herself' that s/he experiences as coming from his/her parents?

'The Growing Up Fairy meets Sneaky Poo approach' is an attempt to do so whereby the parents appear to 'set themselves to one side' and leave the matter up to the young person in separate dialogues with Sneaky Poo and it's kindly adversary The Growing Up Fairy. Of course these dialogues are mediated by the guile and the delight of the parents who now experience themselves as being vicariously heard. Here the parents' desperation which has often lead to deadly seriousness can be rehabilitated and replaced with mischief making, something that has often been lost in the long struggles over their child's bowel/bladder control. And when the young person can recall their mischief-making, we might say the young person is now playing on 'his/her home ground' with the traditional advantage that home ground gives and the Problem is now 'playing away' with the disadvantage of that. We now enter the domain of tricks/counter-tricks/pranks and pranksters and above all else, the desire to grow up and a young person's anathema of being grown down by the Problem.

In Billy's case, he had some awareness that Sneaky Poo had in his opinion effectively 'grown him down' to the level of a 1 year old infant and my guess is that he was either unhappy or perhaps despairing about that state of affairs. His disheartenment might have arisen from his sense that he was unable to do very much about that fact that his poo sneaks out despite his fervent desire that this shouldn't happen.

### Introducing the Young Person to the Growing Up Fairy

It is highly unlikely that Billy had ever heard of the Growing Up Fairy, although he may have heard of the Tooth Fairy or fairies in general from the children's literature. Such fairies are generally regarded as child-friendly and child-supportive. Such fairies probably had no previous association with his parents. Why? Such fairies pretty much exist in 'wonderland' if I can borrow from the 'counter-world' created by Lewis Carroll in which Alice enters by travelling down the rabbit hole or passing through the looking glass' to 'wonderland'.

Billy had already made the acquaintance of Sneaky Poo/Sneaky Wee and had some idea of the problem as characterized by his mothers, Shelleys' descriptions. Out of desperation when all the professional counsel she had received had no effect whatsoever and his pre-school had banned Billy, she had scoured the Internet and chanced upon a reference to Sneaky Poo and

bought a copy of Terry Heins and Karen Ritchie's adaptation of Michael White's paper: Pseudo-encopresis, etc) entitled: Beating Sneaky Poo: Ideas for Faecal Soiling. With the enthusiastic support of Billy's father, Jim, they zealously set about introducing this 'programme' and had considerable short-term success. But perhaps what was even more significant than the reduction of soiling/wetting incidents was that as Shelly put it: "I got my son back. And I diminished the mother guilt by 98% and the 2% that remains is really no bother to me!" Still, she remained in a quandary as how to proceed and in this search she found me on Internet and we started a correspondence. As it turned out, although Shelley was English and the family was resident there, Billy's father was a Kiwi and they were intending to repatriate themselves in 4 month's time back to Auckland where I live. We agreed to get going as Shelley was hoping Billy might become clean/dry by the time they returned 'home' to New Zealand.

Even though Billy had made the acquaintance of Sneaky Poo/Sneaky Wee, I suggested that he might find that as we matched what the malevolent trickster, Sneaky Poo/Sneaky Wee has 'in mind' for Billy and the very benevolent intentions of The Growing Up Fairy, he might form even more profound relationships with each of them, especially given their adversarial relationship with one another and their vying for his allegiance to their respective causes eg. the Growing Up Fairy lending him a hand to grow himself up in contrast to SP/SW's malevolent plans to grown him down.

Who is the Growing up fairy?

The benevolent Growing Up Fairy circulates around the world on the lookout for young people who, for whatever reason either due to misfortune, misadventure, mayhem or the challenges of illness or disability, are not as grown up as they might be and could benefit from being lent a 'helping hand'. Whenever the Growing Up Fairy is either informed of or chances upon a young child who is being 'grow down' by a Problem of whatever sort so that people, who are uninformed about the Problem and how it is 'operating' on the young person's growing up, might have come to the conclusion that this young person is just plain 'under grown, the Growing Up Fairy knows it has it's work cut out for it.' This occupational class of Growing Up Fairy is closely related to the much better known Tooth Fairy who has the happy task of repairing any pain, discomfort or sense of loss when a young person either loses one of their milk teeth either by chance or extraction. Perhaps the Tooth Fairy is better known because it is so regularly called in to action between the ages of seven and around eleven or twelve when twenty milk teeth are being shed and replaced. A recent survey in Harpers magazine reported that the average payment per milk tooth in 2010 was \$3.00(US) dropping to \$2.60 in 2011, perhaps reflecting the economic times.

Here is a sample introduction of the Growing Up Fairy.

*From the Growing Up Fairy (I am related to*

*the Tooth Fairy if you didn't know that already):*

*You and I have never met before. So let me tell you who I am. I am the Growing Up Fairy who goes around to young people when Problems grow them down and make them seem younger than their age. It is my job to hurry your growing up so you can catch yourself up and be your age. And sometimes kids your age like growing up so much they get even older than their age. Sometimes when you grow up in a hurry like this, you also get wiser. I am warning you just in case you don't want to be wise beyond your years. If so, let me know and I will make sure you don't get wise beyond your years.*

*In thinking about this Problem that has been bothering you, I really liked the idea you told everyone at the meeting the other day with David Epston. In all my years helping kids grow up when Problems have undergrown them, I know a good idea when I hear it. And that idea of yours sure sounds like a good one to me. If it doesn't work as well as you think it should, write me a letter with your Mum and Dad and they will post it to me. I have provided them with my postal address. I can't tell you my address as you might tell all your friends who want to grow up fast. Look, I have got all the work I can handle at the moment. Problems sure can undergrow some kids and to be honest, I don't think that is fair. Do you? One thing I am sure about is that I am always busy.*

*I will be keeping an eye over you to help you. That is my job and I will do my very best but sometimes I can be absent-minded or get called away.*

*Your friend,  
the Growing Up Fairy.*

I expect Billy being 5, even though he was regarded as having an intellectual

age of between 6 and 7, could not read adequately to be in correspondences of any kind with either the Problem or his good shepherd, the Growing Up Fairy without parental mediation eg the parents have to read any communications either from the Problem or the Growing Up Fairy to him or arrange for proxies to take the roles of either the Problem or the Growing Up Fairy. This meant we had to get up to some hi jinks to engage Billy's interest. Shelley, Jim and I discussed over email the idea of pranks/pranksters and "prankees"(on on whom a prank has been played).

I proposed they start recruiting some friends or family to 'play act' the malevolent trickster, Sneaky Poo and another to take up the role of the benevolent, kindly Growing Up Fairy. We discussed at length what might be required of them. First of all, they would have to have some sympathy for Billy and his parents and secondly have some idea of what the significance of their roles were. Shelley came up with the idea of providing them with some reading or cut and paste some of our correspondence sufficient to explain their roles in a dramatic enactment of Billy's dilemma- either to grow up or down; either to be out-witted by Sneaky Poo and head downwards in his growing up. Or seek the counsel and shepherding of the Growing Up Fairy to out-wit Sneaky Poo and have a 'grow back' but in doing so perhaps even grow ahead of his age towards his intellectual age of between 6 and 7. No matter, it was very predictable that the Sneaky Poo Problem and Billy's retirement at times in to a 'world of his own' may have meant that he has lost out on some of those learning opportunities that come through the give and take of everyday life. What made me suggest this was many gratifying experiences of parents frequently reporting their young people to have experienced soon after escaping such growing down Problems very rapid 'growing up' bursts without them having done anything they could think of to have fostered them. These 'growing up bursts' seemed to come about almost like mushrooms appearing overnight after a period of heavy rains and humid temperatures. And secondly, candidates to assume such roles should be well known for their 'mischief making', their capacity for dramatic presentations, outrageous and good humour or the delight they take in telling a compelling story.

I suggest that once a likely candidate agreed to assume either the role of Sneaky Poo or the Growing Up Fairy, it is up to us to regularly provide them with their lines which the parents would regularly email them as they saw fit. The other possibility was for the parents to submit a few lines at a time and then have them record them on their answer phone so that these messages could be retrieved by Billy or speak to him directly over the phone. I proposed that the first dialogue should take place with the Growing Up Fairy. I hoped to find a way that this might be a private conversation between Billy and the Growing Up Fairy. Here was a scenario I provided. "The phone rings and either of you answer it. You talk for awhile and Billy will overhear you saying something of this sort: 'Who is this? You want to speak to my son, Billy? You are the Growing Up Fairy? You want to speak with my boy. Will

you look after him and be a good friend of his? Okay, I will go and get him". Overhearing this conversation, I expect Billy's interest would very likely be piqued. And I imagined he had very good associations of talking to kindly grandparents, wonderful aunts and uncles and excited cousins over the telephone before then. Jim came from an extremely close family of 6 siblings in New Zealand.

Here the Growing Up Fairy will introduce him/herself reasonably succinctly. And then like the always in a hurry manner of the Mad Hatter in Alice in Wonderland:

'I've got to go. I've got an urgent job. There is a boy who a Problem is growing down and he is on the other phone. I have got to lend him a hand. But I want you to know, Billy, that I like you a lot. I have been watching you and I see my old enemy, Sneaky Poo, is tricking you and growing you down. I don't like that about Sneaky Poo. That's why I want to lend you a hand. By the way, your mum and dad told me you had so many wonderfulnesses. So I know you are a wonderful kid who wants to be a good kid grown up to his age. Look, I wish I could talk longer but I just got to go. I will ring you back in a few day's time when I am not so busy helping kids grow back to their age".

Now, not having met Billy in person, I couldn't predict his response but he would be a very unusual boy if this did not arouse his curiosity as to who in the world the Growing Up Fairy was. Given that I suspected Billy would want to talk to his parents about this in order to seek more information from them, I suggested they deny all knowledge of this Growing Up Fairy, except to say:

"I have never met a Growing Up Fairy but my mum and dad told me that I just grew up without any problems. So I guess I never needed a Growing Up Fairy. I am pretty sure I heard of them when I was a little girl your age from a girl friend but when I think about it now, I can't really remember what she told me. What did the Growing Up Fairy say to you? We couldn't hear what it was saying".

From hereon, Shelley and Jim were informed they were going to have to play it by ear. But in general, I suggested they may wish to indicate to Billy that they were very interested in Growing Up Fairies in general and if Billy insisted, they would ask their family and friends if they had any memories or stories about growing up fairies. If it turns out they do, they were to propose to Billy that he phone say his aunties in New Zealand to learn what they knew about growing up fairies. Had they or their girl friends ever been lent a helping hand by a growing up fairy when they were his age. Up Fairies. Once again, I put forward that they might have to coach his aunts what this all about and as to what stories they might tell. I did propose that for the time being to have them avoid any 'sneaky poo' stories. I tried to lend them a hand:

"Shelley and Jim, just think to yourself of all the ways children Billy's age grow up. And think of a story how such a child might have required the Growing Up

Fairy to lend them a hand. If Billy is too shy, ask him if he would like you to ring up say Nicola on his behalf. Then see if you can coach him on to the phone eg. 'Billy, Nicola says she doesn't want to tell this to me; she only wants to tell it to you! She says I am grown up and too old'.

I advised them no matter how they went about the specifics of this 'introduction' to the Growing Up Fairy, it should obviously be embroidered with intrigue, fascination and have you all more or less 'pass through the looking glass' to the other side which we might refer to as a 'counter-world' in which Growing Up Fairies can accompany and shepherd young undergrown young people to get their own back against Sneaky problems, which of course Sneaky Poo would rank highest world wide in these terms.

I told them to expect sooner or later that a dialogue would be established between The Growing Up Fairy and Billy. However, in the early stages of this conversation, Sneaky Poo would be relegated to the sidelines. Instead, the Growing Up Fairy would spend a great deal of time teaming up with Billy by getting to know him through Billy's 'wonderfulnesses' which he would have observed from watching over him in the various sites of Billy's life eg. school, home, playgrounds, at grandparents, etc.

Here was my proposal for the parents to discern some of Billy's wonderfulnesses'.

"Here's how you might think up these wonderfulnesses. Jim, could you interview Shelley with a pen and pad by your side to write down the 'wonderfulnesses'. Ask Shelley: what do you consider are the most wonderful and heart warming things Billy does that, if Sneaky Poo knew full well about them, would make the Problem think twice about continuing to try to grow Billy down? Next line of enquiry is: 'Shelley, can you tell me a story about what you refer to as(in this instance) his 'imagination'? Next line of inquiry: "Who do you think he gets his 'imagination' most from? Anybody in your family or mine or both? Then reverse this and Shelley you take notes and interview Jim. It might be good to provide the source of the 'wonderfulness' for the Growing Up Fairy. So in the future, the Growing Up Fairy can say: "I heard you Dad tell your Mum(your Mum tell your Dad) about this wonderfulness....etc".

"For the next five phone calls from the Growing Up Fairy, perhaps every second or third day, have the Growing Up Fairy say something like this: "Billy, look sorry for not ringing you but I am so busy helping good kids grow up and back to their age. But look, I have heard about a wonderfulness of yours. I think your mum calls it 'Billy's imagination'. Do you know what that is? Well, I don't blame you because it is a pretty big word for a five year old. So I asked her to tell me a story about you and your wonderful imagination. Do you want to hear it? Okay, are you listening carefully? Can you hear me? Is my voice loud enough? Ready. Here goes. Well, last week when you were.....(make sure the length of the story is about right for Billy's comprehension and

attention-span, even if I suspect his attention-span will be at its full span to hear a wonderfulness story about himself. At the end of the story, the Growing Up Fairy asks Billy: "Hey, Billy! Do you want me to lend you a hand to out-trick my old enemy, Sneaky Poo?" When Billy says yes, once again, the Growing Up Fairy receives another urgent call and in the same Mad Hatter-ish fashion, the Growing Up Fairy shouts: "Got to go! I've got an urgent job to lend a hand with a seven year old boy who is a good kid but got grown down by a Problem. I will ring you as soon as I have time. But don't worry, this seven year old boy is playing a trick on Sneaky Poo so maybe when he wins, he will also lend you a hand. Don't worry, Billy! You can count on me even if I am very busy helping young kids grow up. After all, that is why I am called the Growing Up Fairy and not the Tooth Fairy".

"Here it is most important to 'time' the phoned conversations so that Billy's intrigue is sustained so that he is really anticipating the next phone call. If he seeks to have the conversation that he is having with the Growing Up Fairy with you, admit that you really don't know much because you never had a Growing Up Fairy lend you a hand when you were his age. "I wish I knew more about Growing Up Fairies because your Growing Up Fairy sounds really interesting. But he never asks to speak with me. I guess that's because I am already grown up and I'm your mum. Jim is grown up too and he's your dad. I guess the Growing Up Fairy only wants to be your friend and lend you a hand and isn't interested in people our age. Can you ask the Growing Up Fairy next time you are talking to him(her) if there is anything like a Doing the Dishes Fairy who would come around here when we are all asleep and do all the dishes?"

"Hopefully over the next few weeks, Billy will become preoccupied with the phone calls of the 'Growing Up Fairy'. Gradually, once you see their is an allegiance is starting between Billy and his unseen ally, write some lines for your Growing Up Fairy that starts linking Billy's wonderfulnesses with Sneaky Poo. Here is a sampler: Growing Up Fairy over the phone to Billy.

"You know how you can teach your younger brother how to do stuff that is hard for a three year old to do. What do you think about teaching Sneaky Poo a lesson about you? Sneaky Poo thinks he can tell you to grow down and you will just do it. Do you think you and I should put our heads together and teach Sneaky Poo you are a very smart kid. You know I am a Growing Up Fairy so I can lend you a hand but I can't do it for you. Why? Because if I did, you would never grow up. I would grow up but you know, I am pretty old and I don't want to get any older. But I know when I was four, I couldn't wait to be five. And when I got to five, I couldn't wait to get to be six"

“Regarding phoning, you will have to work out if it is better to have the Growing Up Fairy speak directly to Billy; or for the Growing Up Fairy to leave messages on your voice mail. “Hey Billy, there is a message on the voice mail from the Growing Up Fairy for you.” Observe Billy’s responses at such times and see which seems to work best, although you may also consider mixing direct calls and voice mail. Perhaps you might use the latter for the more intriguing messages. If he is bemused, you might ask him if you can have permission to play it out loud so everyone can hear what the Growing Up Fairy is saying or asking. However if he prefers to keep his conversations private, that’s fine too, although in saying that, feel free to express your interest in what’s going on”.