

## Summerhill 10 Principles:

### 1. Neill maintains a firm faith in the [goodness of the child](#).

Neill believes that the average child is not born a cripple, a coward, or a soulless automaton, but has full potentialities to love life and to be interested in life. Summerhill emphasizes that children do not need teaching as much as they need love and understanding. They need approval and freedom to be naturally good. "It is the genuinely strong and loving parent who has the most power to give children freedom to be good" (Neill, 1960).

As with the humanistic perspective, Neill stressed that the parent and/or educator of a child must ask three important questions when *teaching* the child.

1. Have I shown real approval of my/the child in a genuine manner? [congruence]
2. Have I shown trust in him or her, even though I may disagree with his or her thoughts or actions? [[unconditional positive regard](#)]
3. Have I shown sincere understanding? [accurate empathic understanding]

Thus, if a parent and/or educator adopts the belief that each and every child is born with the capacity to be good, then parents and educators will foster a learning environment. As Neill (1960) states, "Children do not so much love as they want to be loved. To every child, adult approval means love; whereas disapproval means hate...Hence I say that the first essential in any school is the chance of social approval." The long and short of it is that, if you believe that each child is innately good, then you must approve of the child as he or she is. An educator or parent needs to realize that the child is inherently good in his or her own image, not in yours.

### 2. The [aim of education](#) - in fact the aim of life- is to work joyfully and to find happiness.

Neill proposes a rather ironic perspective on the aims of education, which he argues should be synonymous with the aim of life. He states that you cannot train nor teach an individual to have a strong will. However, if an individual is educated in freedom, then he or she will become more conscious of him or herself. Freedom, unquestionably, in Neill's opinion, affords children the opportunity to thoroughly study their unconscious realm, and to bring the unconscious into the conscious.

"That is why most Summerhill children have few doubts about life. They know what they want. And I guess they will get it, too" (Neill, 1960).

When posed the following question pertaining to happiness:

Why do you say so much about the necessity of a child's being happy? Is anybody happy?

Neill's response was:

"Not an easy question to answer because words confuse. Of course none of us is happy all the time; we have toothaches, unfortunate love affairs, boring work. If the word happiness means anything, it means an inner feeling of well-being, a sense of balance, a feeling of being contented with life. These can only exist when one feels free

Free children have open, fearless faces; disciplined children look cowed, miserable, fearful.

Happiness might be defined as the state of having minimal repression. The happy family lives in a home where love abides; the unhappy family, in a tense home. [This holds true for the child within a school system, whereby the classroom and/or entire school serves as the home, the educators functions as the parents/guardians, and the other children represent the siblings.]

I place happiness first because I place growth first...Happiness means being fully interested in life, responding to life not just with one's brain but with one's whole personality...Thus, [bestowing happiness](#) is essential." In short, Neill would argue that happiness is the only way to learning. If a person is truly happy, he or she will experience holistic learning.

### 3. [Education must be both intellectual and emotional](#)

In the realm of education, Neill (1960) argues that intellectual development is not enough. Education must be both intellectual and emotional. In modern society, Neill perceived an increasing separation between intellect and feeling [this is similar to Rogers experiential, meaningful learning style – see [What is Learning?](#) below for more details].

Neill (1960) believed that the experiences of humans presently are primarily experiences of thought rather than an immediate, perpetual grasp of what they really feel in their hearts, see in their eyes, hear with their ears, or touch with their hands and feet. The experiential component is lost in today's educational system. "In fact, this separation between intellect and feeling has led modern man to a near schizoid state of mind in which he has become almost incapable of experiencing anything except in thought" (Neill, 1960).

### **What is Learning**

*"If the purpose of teaching is to promote learning, then we need to ask what we mean by that term. Here I become passionate. I want to talk about learning. But not the lifeless, sterile, futile, quickly forgotten stuff that is crammed into the mind of the poor helpless individual tied into his or her seat by ironclad bonds of conformity!" - Carl Rogers*

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Rogers (1983) views learning as an insatiable curiosity that can be divided into two general types, along a continuum of meaning. These two types of learning are NONSENSE SYLLABLE LEARNING and MEANINGFUL, EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING.

**1. Nonsense syllable learning:** This type of learning simply entails rote memorization of facts and information. Rogers sees this as a difficult task, as learners are not truly learning, they are merely memorizing "stuff" for a test. Therefore, stuff learned from this type of learning is often forgotten quickly. Furthermore, students often fail to see the larger picture when they are required to simply learn facts. Subsequently, the information is perceived as meaningless. "Thus, education becomes a futile attempt to learn material that has no personal meaning. Such learning involves mind only. It is learning that takes place from the neck up. It does not involve feelings or personal meanings; it has no relevance for the whole person" (Rogers, 1983).

**2. Meaningful, experiential learning:** Although this may be a rather egregious example, Rogers (1983) uses the example of a toddler touching a warm radiator to illustrate the essence of this learning type. That is, when the toddler touches the warm radiator, he or she learns for him or herself the true meaning of the word "hot." As a result, he or she has learned a future caution in regard to all similar radiators; and has absorbed these learnings in a meaningful and experiential manner such that they will not be forgotten anytime soon.

In short, Rogers (1983) emphasized that learning required this experiential component. Rogers argued that in order to truly learn, an individual must engage in whole-person learning. Traditionally, learning has only focused on the cognitive dimension of learning, or left-brain learning. Thus, Rogers believed that in order to really learn, a person must utilize the right-brain as well. In the words of Carl Rogers (1983), "Significant learning combines the logical [left-brain activity, LBA] and the intuitive [right-brain activity, RBA], the intellect [LBA] and the feelings [RBA], the concept [LBA] and the experience [RBA], the idea [LBA] and the meaning [RBA]. When we learn in that way, we are whole, utilizing all our masculine and feminine capacities."

4. [Education must be geared to the psychic needs and capacities of the child.](#)

5. [Discipline](#), dogmatically imposed, and punishment create fear; and fear creates hostility.

6. [Freedom does not mean license.](#) Neill stresses that respect for the individual must be mutual.

Neill stressed the importance of this principle because he firmly believed that mutual respect must be embedded in all students, and individuals for that matter. "A teacher does not use force against a child, nor has a child the right to use force against a teacher. A child may not intrude upon an adult just

because he or she is a child, nor may a child use pressure in the many ways in which a child can" (Neill, 1960).

He argued that there has to be a delicate balance in any relationship –whether it be the child-parent or student-teacher relationship.

Mutuality is at the root of any successful educational system. Without input from the top-down and the bottom-up, it appears that Neill believes that true learning cannot take place. As Neill wrote in his book, *Summerhill*(1960):

"I once read about a school in America that was built by pupils themselves. I used to think that this was the ideal way. It isn't. If children built their own school, you can be sure that some gentleman with a breezy, benevolent authority was standing by, lustily shouting encouragement. When such authority is not present, children simply do not build schools...The reason we here in Summerhill keep getting such good reports about the industrious performance of our pupils on responsible jobs is that these boys and girls have lived out their self-centered fantasy stage in Summerhill. As young adults they are able to face the realities of life without any unconscious longing for the play of childhood."

7. [Honesty and true sincerity](#) is required of each and every teacher.

8. [Healthy human development](#) makes it necessary that a child eventually cut the primary ties which connect him with his father and mother, or with later substitutes in society, and that he or she become truly independent.

9. [Guilt feelings](#) primarily have the function of binding the child to authority.

10. Summerhill does NOT offer [religious education](#). This however, does not mean that Summerhill is not concerned with what might be loosely called the basic humanistic values.