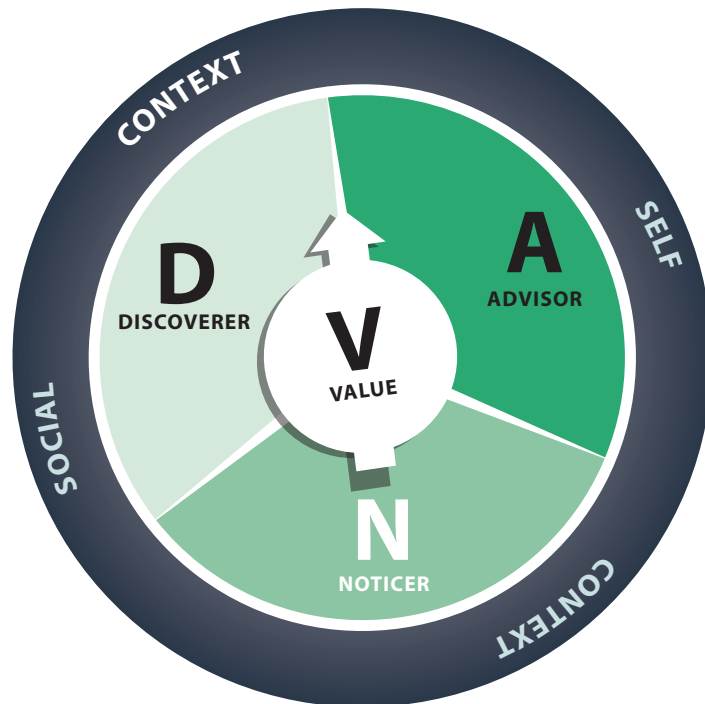


DNA-V



Helping kids and parents thrive

Part 1 - the basics

You have in your hands a model that can help your child grow well. We call the model DNA-V.

Hidden inside DNA-V is the latest scientific knowledge on growth and development for kids, for their whole body and mind. DNA-V is made for kids, based on a developmental awareness of what kids can do and what they need to do to reach their full potential.

DNA-V is a holistic way to help your child learn how to discover their talents, connect with their feelings, use their minds, learn how to be with themselves, and make friends and social connections. The model is designed to work developmentally with kids from 5 or 6 upwards.

This handbook describes the basic skills of D, N, A and V. Part 2, coming soon, will bring you social and self development skills.

Part 1 Contents

1. Noticer
2. Advisor
3. Discoverer
4. Vitality
5. Doing the DNA-V Quickstep

How to use

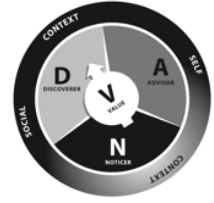
These tip sheets are designed for easy use by parents, teachers and professionals — adult learners. Although the information can stand alone, we have found the best way to understand how to use DNA-V is to show adult learners. It is best to give out one sheet at a time, and allow learners to slowly build their skills. Build skills experientially. Help learners step inside DNA-V and you will be giving them a powerful tool to help their child.

Part 2 - Coming soon

1. Becoming our self
2. Building friendship
3. Handling difficulties with friends
4. Handling problems at home
5. Working in groups

Part 2 will be released in June 2016. Go to www.thrivingadolescent.com and sign up for our newsletter. Never miss a new DNA-v free resource again. No spam, ever!

DNA-v tip sheets for families



Step into the NOTICER space:

Noticers learn to be aware of their body, the signals coming in from the world, and their feelings that come and go. Helping kids to notice gives them opportunities to learn about their body and how it works. They can learn that feelings are messages, some need to be answered, while others can just pass on by.

3 steps to sharpen your child's noticer skills:

1. "Become **aware** of your body by scanning it to see what is happening right now, like you might watch a tree to see if the wind is blowing it. Or like you have stepped inside an awareness scanner. Just notice what is going on in your body right now."



2. "**Name** whatever sensations are in your body right now." (Give examples if needed, e.g. butterflies in tummy, tight face; and wait a little longer than you think you need to.)



3. "See if you can **describe** what feeling goes with these messages from your body" (Help them label their feeling if you need to).

4 things you can do next:

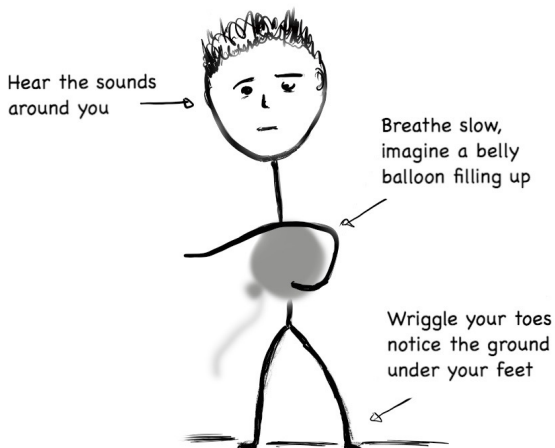
- Praise their **effort**, e.g. "I like the way you stopped to really notice your feeling signals" (Avoid praising the child, i.e. "good boy"). Or,

- Encourage your child to take a slow **breath**.

Or,

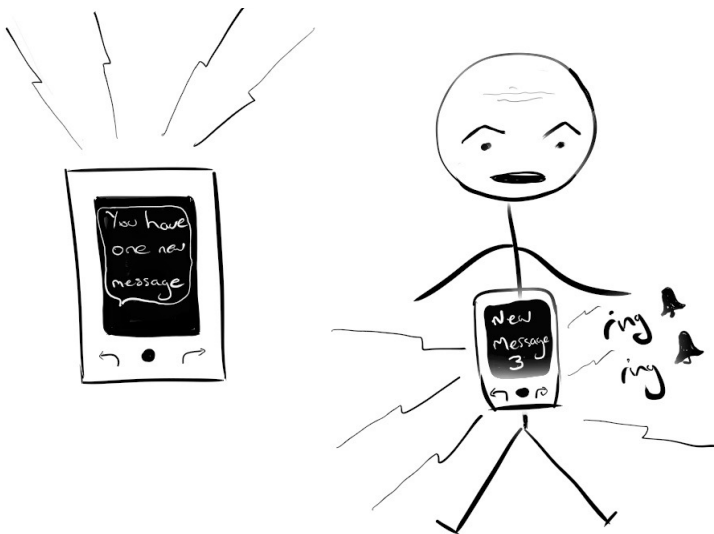
- Show **empathy** and teach them to allow the feeling to be there, "I don't like feeling sad either, let's see if we can just watch what happens to the feeling". Or

- Move to helping, but **only if they ask for it**, or you see a need to. Perhaps say something like, "What do you think we can do about this?"



Emotions are not just “in our heads” —

Emotions are in our whole body, from head to toe. Our brain does not just do things all on its own. Emotions are an exchange between the world, our bodies and our brains.



Just like our phones, our bodies are constantly scanning for signals from the world.

We get signals from our friends and family and use this to understand how to be with people, to tell if we are safe, and to detect if there is danger.

As we grow we learn to label our body sensations with feeling words. This helps us make sense of the signals. If a child is able to label emotions as they arise, s/he will be more successful at relationships, friendships, and academics.

Parents, family and teachers have an important job to help kids learn how to be aware of their body, to name the sensations, and to describe feelings.

The benefit of teaching noticing:



Our bodies are efficient at detecting danger or finding safety in the world. Humans have 3 ways we respond to danger signals*:

- 1st. We seek help from others, and then;
- 2nd. We fight or flee from the danger, and then;
- 3rd. We freeze (helpless)

All mammals respond in this way to danger. That is why attachment, connection and modelling with safe people is so critical. These social connections teach us how to have distress in our bodies and to know what to do with the feelings that can overwhelm us when we are small.

* (Porges, S. (2011). *The polyvagal theory*. New York: W.W. Norton.)

DNA-v tip sheets for families



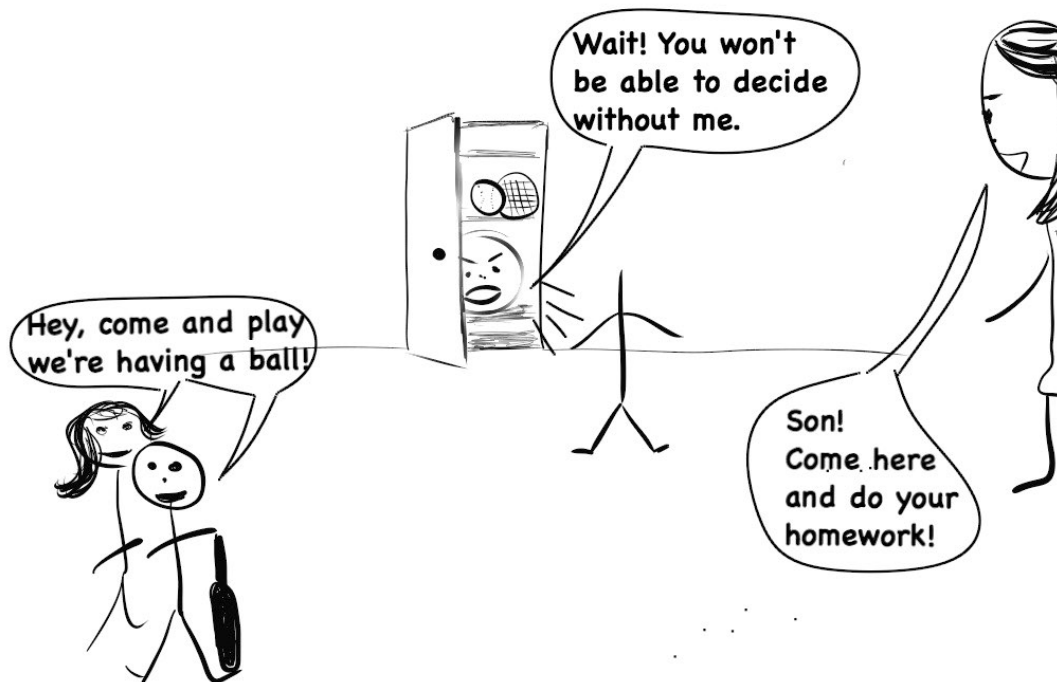
Make friends with your ADVISOR

The advisor is simply a metaphor we use for our inner voice or self-talk.

All of us have an inner voice, or advisor, that is constantly talking to us. It also judges ("Be careful that person might be mean to you"), it predicts ("You'll never be any good at sport"), and it tells you what you should or must do ("You should

always listen to teachers"). It is just a way of talking to ourselves.

With some help, kids can learn to use their advisor in helpful ways. They can listen when it's helpful, and defuse from it when it isn't helpful. Sometimes they will need to test out the advice to find out if it is helpful or unhelpful.



Sam gets tired of having an advisor. He tries plan B.

Things you can say and play

You can help your child hear their advisor by playing games together. The best way to learn is to have fun and playful discussions. You want your child to discover that sometimes the advisor says useful things like "You have to work hard to succeed." Other times it says unhelpful

things like, "You are not good enough. You should just give up." The key point is, we don't need to fight our advisor, this is a normal human tool and we can choose whether the advice is helpful. Below are four examples to play with. It is best to use these slowly rather than all at once:

1. Advisor is a superpower

“Advisor is a word we use for the voice inside our heads – like our thoughts. Would you like to do a little experiment to hear your advisor? Ok, I am going to say something, and you say the first thing that comes to mind.”

“This cup is filled with snot “ (or you can pick any food your child hates).

“Would you like to drink this cup of snot?”

Whatever your child says about the contents, say in response, *“Good, that is what we call your advisor. Your advisor is always trying to judge and figure things out? And see how your advisor made you feel icky, even though there really wasn't any snot in the cup?”*

“Ok, now let's see what your advisor says next. I'll say some words and you complete the sentence”.

“I'm always good at....”

“I'm always bad at....”

Whatever your child says doesn't matter. No need to reassure them here, you are instead just wanting to playfully hear their inner voice.

- **Discuss** why humans might have this inner voice. Try to playfully come up with ideas rather than telling them. You want to end up with an understanding that we use our advisor to help us fix problems, to follow rules, and to warn if there is danger.

Finish with: *“Our advisors are like a human superpower. It is always good to know when to use it, and when to not use it. Even superman does not always want to use his flying superpower. Imagine him trying to fly and eat dinner.”*

Why humans have an advisor:



Our language ability developed for an important purpose. Let's go back to the days when humans first roamed the earth to see how this happened:

Back in the days on the Savannah, speaking helped us communicate to other members of our tribe that there were dangers close by. We could

do this very quickly and efficiently. Language (thinking, speaking, listening) helped us survive, to find food, and to look out for dangers. It also helped us communicate with each other so that our very weak human babies could be cared for and survive. For example, some tribe members could care for babies, while others stood guard or went in search of food.

Even though we don't face lions and tigers today, our minds are still designed to look for danger first. So we often have thoughts about whether something is risky, if people will hurt us, or whether we should hide.

Once we know our advisor's job is to detect danger, we can pause and decide if it is 'right on' today. Or if we are stuck and should step out of our advisor space.

2. Advisors loves rules

“Your Advisor’s ‘job’ is to keep you safe and to look out for danger. For example, if you get told to look both ways when you cross a road, you can remember what you have been told, so whenever you stand at the curb, you know to look carefully. We collect rules from everywhere and sometimes we need to test them to see if they are useful”

- **Discuss:** Play with all sorts of rules they have learned. Notice that some rules are helpful and some are just coming along for the ride..e.g. “*Don’t make the teacher mad.*” (helpful). vs “*You must put you pants on before your top.*” (not very helpful)

3. Advisors can be magical

“Do you know your advisor can also do magic? We can make anything be anything, just by using our advisor? Watch this: Think about standing up, but don’t move out of your chair

(keep child sitting down). Close your eyes, keep your body still, but use your thoughts to see yourself stand up. Ok. Now, lets do this

again, but really stand up. Do you see there is a difference?”

- **Discuss** how thinking of standing up is almost as real as standing up, but it is not the same. See how many other advisor magic things you can create (you are after things that are simulated just inside our minds, and can be replicated in the physical world).

4. Advisor have a dark side

“So, if your Advisor’s job is to keep you safe, and it can make you feel like you have moved, without moving your body, or make you feel sick eating horrible food without even eating it, do you think that maybe your advisor can say tricky things too? Like you might tell yourself bad things are going to happen, or that you always get things wrong, or that you’ll mess up?”

- **Discuss** how your advisor is a superpower for keeping safe. Sometimes we tell ourselves it’s better not to try than to fail. The real test of our advisor is by stepping into the discoverer space and seeing what is in the world of experience (see Discoverer tip sheet).

4 ways to deal with an unhelpful advisor:

1. Remember the advisor’s main job is to protect us, so it is always on the look out for problems.
2. Advisors are not always helpful.
3. Advisors create rules about what ‘is’ or ‘should be’.
4. We often need to check that our advice matches what the world is showing us. To do this, we can step into the noticer or discoverer skill (see Noticer and Discoverer tip sheets).

DNA-v tip sheets for families



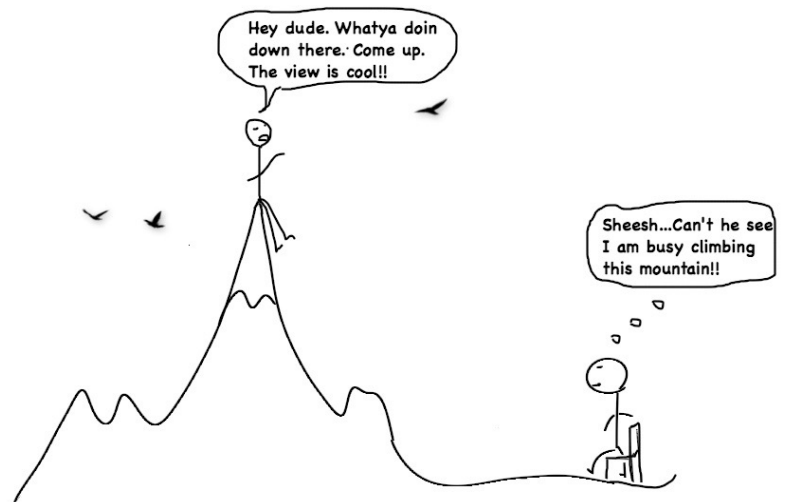
The DISCOVERER helps us try, track and build

Discoverer is a skill we teach children to help them broaden their abilities and make social connections. We use discoverer skills to try new things, to assess how we are going, to find and create values, and to build our strengths.

Helping your child become a discoverer:

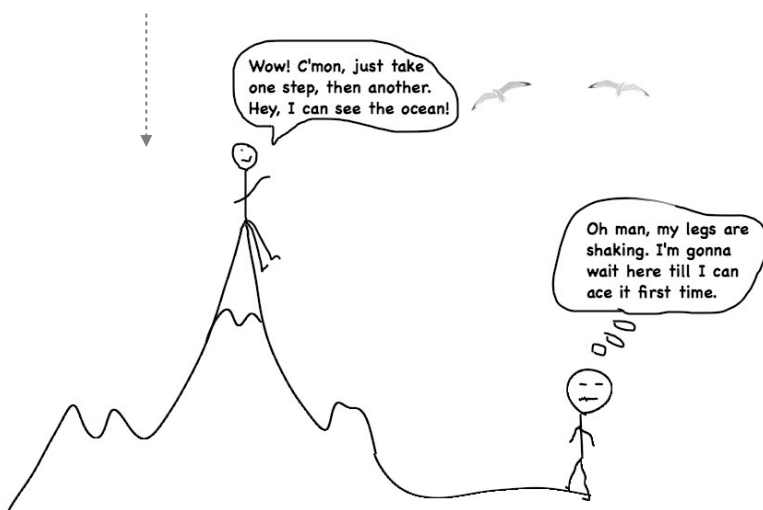
Step 1. What you can say:

“A discoverer skill is a bit like an explorer, student, scientist or even mountain climber. Discoverers explore and test things out.”



Step 2. Talk about A and N

Advisor: *“What do you think would happen if you tried to climb a mountain using just your thoughts?”*



Noticer: *“What do you think would happen if you just tuned into the noticer? If you got stuck there?”*

Step 3. Discuss discovery:

Share with your child about the things you have found out by trying, by being a discoverer yourself; e.g. if you wanted to know what climbing was like, you'd need to put one foot in front of the other and physically climb, then you'd know what it is like.

You might then explore other things your child has had to try. i.e. hitting a ball, riding a bike; anything that takes experience to really try. Remember, we rarely have confidence before we try something. Confidence comes after.

What you can say another day:

Some other ways to talk to your child about their discover skills:

1. *"Our advisor is helpful for what we already know, it can make decisions really fast, and it can help us be really careful" AND "Our discoverer skills help us learn new things so we can test, try and explore".*
2. *"Why don't we test this out and see?"* Remember to praise their effort, and label the behaviour as discoverer.
3. *"Discoverers get to try things. Things they might never have done. What would you like to try here?"*
4. *"What strength do you have that might help you here?"*
5. *"Let's see if we can be curious here?"*
6. *"What do you really care about, let's see if we can learn something about that? "*

Discoverers - try, track, & build:

1. **Try it** - Our thoughts or feelings (advisor and noticer) are not the same as trying out an experience.
2. **Track it** - Our experience helps us decide if our behaviour is on the right track. Ask yourself, *"What happened when I did that?"*.
3. **Build it** - We use curiosity, exploration and testing to build our strengths, create things we care about, and build friendships.

Learning to track our behaviour:



If you were hiking in the mountains, you don't rely just on your map, you also need to look around you to see where you are. You look at the hills and valleys to see if the map is correct. That is what we mean by tracking. It is checking how our behaviour is working in the world; seeing what the natural consequences of our actions are, rather than what our advisor 'thinks' has happened or will happen.

To track we simply follow 4 key steps:

1. **What was the situation?**
2. **What did I do?**
3. **What happened next?**
4. **Did my actions help me get the long term outcome I wanted? Or, did they make things worse.**

Many of us, even adults, need to explore these concepts out loud with others so we can also learn to track.

DNA-v tip sheets for families

VITALITY is living with all your heart:

Our DNA skills are used to help us live well, to learn, and to grow with courage and strength. When we do this, we are living **with** our value OR vitality.



What you can say:

“See the centre of the DNA-v circle, that is a V, it stands for value or vitality. This is just a fancy word for what you care about most, or what is in your heart.

You can even make your own word for this - the voom!!!”

The words you choose and way of speaking will depend on the age of your child. Value is an abstract older person skill. Being able to truly connect current behaviour to long term value takes all of our childhood and teen years to learn. We don't want to pull kids into adult ways. We simply want to help them develop a language for things they love. A foundation for the future.

Play the 6 ways to wellbeing game

You can use the spinning wheel to have fun together and create new ways to play with vitality. You simply spin the wheel and do whatever activity the pointer lands on.

Imagine you land on 'giving'. The task is to give a gift. So you say, *“Lets both do a giving thing right now”. I know, how about we give each other a hug!”*

You can play this alone, with family or with friends but it's much more fun together. You can even make your own wheel for the fridge.

[Click here for a link to a spinning wheel game](#)



Tips for parents to connect behaviour to value:

1. Try to connect your child's behaviour to what they care about most. "I loved the way you worked on your drawing, it's great to see you being creative." Do this so they are encouraged to connect words to their loved activities.
2. Use the 6 ways shown above to help balance your child's leisure and play activities.
3. Finding value is not about pressuring kids to behave or do what adults want; it is about helping them connect with their own heart.
4. Mostly, kids want similar things to adults – love, caring, connection, being heard. They can look different when they try to get it though!

If you are working out a problem, explore what they care about with some discussion or games like:

1. What am I/we doing this for?
2. What are your heart messages?
3. What did you love the most today? What was the hardest thing today?
4. What do you/we care about here?
5. What do you/we love to discover?
6. What kind of person are you/me building on the inside?
7. If you had 3 wishes what would they be? (if they were not about money or buying things but about you)
8. What is this counselling/help for?

DNA-v tip sheets for families



Doing the DNA-V Quickstep

We use our DNA skills to help us build flexible strength. This simply means learning that we can move whenever we feel stuck in one of the DNA-v spaces.

For example, if our advisor is chattering away and we feel stuck with worry thoughts, we might step into our noticer skill.

If we are noticing our feelings and are still unsure of what to do, we can step into our advisor or discover skill. Or if we feel like it would be impulsive to do something, we can step out of discoverer and into noticer or advisor.



You can simply say to a young person:

“Whenever you’re stuck, and what you are trying isn’t working, you can move—you can do the walk of life. Just like if you were stuck in the sand, you’d need to move your hands and feet to get free.’ When you are stuck with one DNA skill, just try another”

What you can say to your child:

1. *“Do you feel stuck?” Is what you are doing making things better? Is it time to try a different D, N or A skill?”*
2. *“When we are stuck in discoverer it’s like we do things impulsively or we might forget to be careful.”*
3. *“When we are stuck in advisor we might forget to try new things. We just do what our thoughts say. For example, if your thoughts say, “You are no good at math”, and listen to that thought and stop doing math, you are stuck in your advisor.”*
4. *“When we are stuck in Noticing, our feelings are like a big wave washing over us and we don’t know what to do. We might feel like we will always feel this way”*
5. *“We wont always know which skill is best, but we can always test out a new DNA skill. If we are stuck step into another skill and try that”.*
6. *Sometimes the only way we know what to do, is to connect with what’s in our heart (see vitality sheet).*

Part 2 - Coming soon

Part 2 will be released in June 2016. Go to www.thrivingadolescent.com and sign up for our newsletter. Never miss a new DNA-v free resource again. No spam, ever!

More reading about DNA-V

For more detailed reading and understanding of DNA-V, go to www.thrivingadolescent.com.

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Hayes, L., & Ciarrochi, J. (2015). The thriving adolescent: Using Acceptance and Commitment Therapy and Positive Psychology to Help Young People Manage Emotions, Achieve Goals, and Build Positive Relationships: Oakland, CA: Context Press.

