

A mother who begins this stratagem early characteristically lashes her children with such remarks as:

- a. 'You are making me ill and driving me to an early grave.'
- b. 'My headache is because of the meanness and disobedience of you and your brother.'

Of course, as the student will be aware, all modern mothers make small manoeuvres of this kind once in a while when struggling to raise children. These occasional lapses do little harm, but the daily impact of a hard stratagem of this type gradually corrupts the home and causes increasing damage to both the children and the mother.

For Example:

The children are plagued with hostility and guilt feelings, both unconscious and conscious towards the mother who has distorted their lives. They have been pounded for years with the idea that mother's health and perhaps even her life depend on how they behave towards her; and when they dare to doubt the truth of this concept they are flooded with anxiousness and guilt.



FACT FILE: The end to this stratagem is often played out between a peevish, invalided, aged mother and guilt-ridden, depressed, middle-aged children who have not been afforded the opportunity to grow emotionally and identify with the adult within.



TUTOR TALK: The student should be aware, however, that this stratagem does not always have to end so grimly. Therapists can break up this stratagem, at least for the children, by helping them to gain some insight into it. The beginning of the end of a mother's stratagem may come when the therapist says, 'Look, your mother's problems have a big emotional overlay, and, moreover, she is using these symptoms to keep you all chained to her apron strings and to dominate you. This is making you miserable and getting her into the rut of a medical invalid. Change your position. Detach from all this and do both yourself and her a favour.'

Previously, we specified that, by definition, manoeuvres and stratagems are unhealthy interpersonal operations. Desirably a mother or a father should give the child love and acceptance and also not execute any manoeuvres or stratagems with him. However, to ignore a child completely, giving him neither love and acceptance nor manoeuvres and stratagems, is even more devastating.

The most destructive stratagem a parent can play with a child we might term as “Non-involvement.” In this stratagem the parent refuses to become involved with the child; becomes a non-parent and treats him or her as a non-child. The child is not treated with:

- a. hostility
- b. anxiousness
- c. possessiveness
- d. domination - or love and acceptance

The parent arranges life so that the child’s basic needs are met by other people, and she continues her own activities with a bland indifference to the child.



FACT FILE: Complete emotional rejection of a child can be more devastating than ruthless hostility; unhealthy interaction with a difficult mother is sometimes better than no interaction at all.

Every family creates its own “balance” to achieve some sort of stability. As long as the family members interact in certain familiar and predictable ways, this equilibrium is not upset. The very word “balance” implies serenity and order. But in a family structure where one or both parents are constantly involved in manoeuvres and stratagems in order to maintain control over their children (or one another), maintaining balance is like a precarious high-wire act. All the manoeuvres and stratagems that we have discussed so far serve to maintain this precarious family balance. In fact, some parents often fight any perceived loss of equilibrium by **increasing chaos**.

For Example:

If a mother can create enough uproar in the family, a son’s guilt will drag him back to settle things down. The son will do anything to restore the balance in the family even is he has to surrender control over his own life. (The Child within succumbs to the requirements and wishes of the Parent to the exclusion of what the Adult feels is right.)

In a relatively well-functioning family, parents tend to cope with life pressures by working out problems through:

1. openly communicating
2. exploring options
3. not being afraid to seek outside help if they need it

Consequently, children use their parents as role-models and integrate the same patterns into their life script.

The category of parent we have been discussing to date, and one who consistently employs manoeuvres and stratagems to control the family, react to threats to their balance by “acting out” their fears and frustrations, with little thought for the consequences to their children. Their coping mechanisms are rigid and familiar to them.

Among the most common, the student will find:

1. Denial

Denial is often the first coping mechanism to which parents resort to regain or maintain equilibrium. Denial has two faces -

- a. “nothing is wrong”
- b. “something was wrong but it will not happen again”

Denial -	-	minimises	
	-	miscounts	
	-	rationalises	
	-	jokes away	
	-	relabels	- destructive behaviour by a parent.



TUTOR TALK: “Relabelling” - a form of denial - takes a problem and hides it behind euphemisms. An alcoholic thus becomes a “social drinker”; a batterer is a “strict disciplinarian.”

2. Projection

Projection also has two faces -

- a. parents accuse the child of the very inadequacies they suffer from
- b. parents blame the child for the behaviours that result in their inadequacies

For Example:

An inadequate father who cannot hold down a job will accuse his son of being lazy and worthless; an alcoholic mother will blame her daughter for causing all the unhappiness that drives her to drink.



TUTOR TALK: It is not unusual for parents in their use of manoeuvres and stratagems to use both kinds of projection to avoid taking responsibility for their own behaviour and their own deficiencies. They need to find a scapegoat, and it is often the most vulnerable child in the family.

3. Sabotage

In a family with a severely manipulative parent (crazy, drunk, ill or violent), other family members will assume the roles of rescuers and caretakers. This creates a comfortable balance between -

- a. weak/strong
- b. bad/good
- c. sick/healthy

If the manipulative and controlling parent starts to get better or enters a therapeutic programme, this can severely threaten the family balance. The rest of the family (especially the other parent) may unconsciously find ways to sabotage the recovering parent's progress so that everyone can return to his or her familiar role.



TUTOR TALK: This can also apply if a troubled child starts to improve. Manipulative and controlling parents will sometimes pull their child out of therapy when the child shows signs of becoming healthier and identifying more with his Adult and less with his Child or Parent.

4. Triangling

In a "game-playing" family, one parent will often enlist the child as a confidant or ally against the other parent. Children become part of an unhealthy triangle (where they can never learn to identify properly with Adult, Parent or Child) in which they are pulled apart by the pressure to choose sides.

For Example:

When the mother says, "I am miserable with your father," or the father says, "Your mother will not sleep with me anymore," then the child becomes an emotional dumping ground, allowing the parents to relieve themselves of some of their discomfort without having to face the source of their problems.

5. Keeping secrets

Every child keeps secrets; but secrets help “game-playing” parents cope by turning their families into private little clubs to which no outsiders are admitted. This stratagem provides a bond to knit the family together, especially when the family balance is threatened.

For Example:

The child who hides abuse by telling her teacher that she fell down the stairs is protecting the family club from outside interference.



TUTOR TALK: When the student looks at parents who employ manoeuvres and stratagems from the perspective of the family system - their beliefs, their rules, and the child’s adherence to those rules - then a lot of self-destructive behaviour comes into focus. The student then comes closer to understanding the powerful forces that drive so much of parental behaviour and ultimately the child’s (the clients.)

Understanding is the beginning of change. It opens new options and choices. But seeing things differently is not enough for the client. True freedom can only come from their **doing** things differently.



TIME FOR TEA: Before we commence our discussion on how this might be achieved. Lets have a tea break, as you have earned it!

DIAGNOSIS



FACT FILE: There are a very large number of behaviour patterns available to the human being. Anthropologists have compiled long lists of attitudes. Pasimologists estimate that some seven hundred thousand distinct elementary gestures can be produced by different muscular combinations. There are enough variations in timbre, pitch, intensity, and range of vocalisation to occupy the attention of whole schools of students and teachers.

The problems of vocabulary are so complex that they are divided into different disciplines; and these are only four of the categories out of the almost innumerable types of indicators available to the therapist.