

THE PATTERNS OF THE LIFE STYLE
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Summary: LEAP (the LifeCourse Effective Action Program) was created over several years of counseling individuals and couples as a way to acquaint clients with Adler's ideas in order to increase counseling effectiveness by giving clients information about Adler's major ideas. The approach became contained in the *LEAP Notebook*. LEAP is a time-limited, intensive, focused way to help adults explore, understand, and revise ten basic patterns all adults develop to manage childhood problems, patterns which continue into adulthood largely unexamined and unrevised. LEAP is a way for adults to explore these patterns, see what they were created to manage in childhood, see how they are used in adulthood today, and work on revising them so adulthood is based more on adult choices and less on childhood's immature patterns.

The Development of LEAP

A central Adlerian concept is the "life style," one of the largest concepts in all of psychology. It encompasses the individual's entire life from beginning to end, including family background, relationships, personality, as well as basic goals, methods to attain them, and the "guiding lines" that seeking them describe.

Unfortunately, the term "life style" has been generalized to mean something far more superficial, as in Robin Leech's television program of some years ago, "Life Styles of the Rich and Famous." Fortunately Adler himself used "life patterns" as a substitute for "life style," and I have come to substitute the term "LifeCourse Patterns" for "life style."

As a pastoral counselor and psychotherapist in private practice for almost 50 years, I learned the importance of Adler's ideas. As I used them more and more, I arranged them into ten patterns and explained them to clients through brief handouts which eventually became my first Adlerian book, *Changing Course: New Direction on the Journey of Life*.

I found that Adler's ideas "make sense" to people (unlike the esoteric ideas of Jung, or the relative nonsense of Freud). As I guided people in exploring their life patterns using Adler's ideas, I found that counseling went faster and better. That is, clients understood things more easily and therefore could make connections between Adlerian ideas and their own daily lives more quickly. This meant that counseling saved them time and money.

From these efforts I created a systematic way for clients to explore ten specific LifeCourse Patterns in just a dozen hours. I called it the *LifeCourse Effective Action Program* (LEAP) which today is contained in a 300 page 3-ring binder. The program (1) explains ten LifeCourse Patterns in general, (2) how the client created his/her specific patterns to manage childhood, (3) how the adult uses them today (unrevised since childhood) to manage adult situations, and (4) how to revise the patterns to be more effective as an adult and less dependent on childhood's limited viewpoints and experience.

I have found that this approach works very well with individuals and couples, as well as groups, classes, and clergy groups seeking to increase their pastoral counseling effectiveness. It tends not to work well with younger people whose patterns are not yet established.

The *LEAP Notebook* presents each pattern in four stages which also use the LEAP acronym:

LEARNING about the pattern, what it means in general and what it means for the individual.

EXPLORING the pattern as it applies to the individual. Here we see what the person created as a child to deal with childhood's problems and situations.

APPLYING the pattern. Here we look at both how the person used the pattern's contents to manage childhood, but also as how the person uses the pattern's contents today to help with daily living.

PRACTICING ways the pattern is applied in several specific areas of life (work, a relationship, a decision, for example) as well as to a specific, current issue or problem at the present time. This "application to the Practice Task" not only helps the person see how LEAP learnings are applied in a particular situation, but also how they can be applied in other ways throughout the person's lifetime.

The Ten LifeCourse Patterns

The ten LifeCourse Patterns are briefly explained below. The first five are "social patterns" involving the individual in family, parent, sibling, school, and social relationships:

1. Background Patterns: We are each born into a specific family with its unique history, traditions, values, genetics and physical, racial, ethnic, and language predispositions. This forms our unique personal background, and is the basis for much of how we see ourselves in our first years of life. LEAP helps individuals explore and discover the contents of their background patterns in order to see how they influence or limit definitions of self, others, and the world, and how such influences or limits maybe overcome in adulthood so as to get beyond childhood limitations.

2. Beginning Patterns: We are born, we are born into a family, and we are born to and raised by parents. While we are children, our parents provide models for us of certain roles. For example: parents are mother/father, as husband/wife, as male/female, as providers, as adults/grown-ups, as human beings. Again, the individual in LEAP discovers the contents of these patterns and how childhood experiences leads to adult performance of the same roles. Thus, how do my memories of my parents as mother and father lead to patterns I use today with my own children, and how is my present-day parenting limited by how I believe my parents were in their roles, and how can I revise my patterns so my childhood ideas are less limiting today?

3. Basic Patterns: As family and parental influences shape the child's viewpoint, so does the child's placement (numerical and psycho-social) within the sibling group. Here we look at ordinal position (first, second/middle, last, only) and as other factors such as sex, handicaps or illnesses, sibling comparisons by parents, intelligence, special skills or talents, etc. Again, we explore the specific contents of these sibling patterns to see how the person related to peers as a child, and how childhood patterns influence and limit peer relationships today, with an eye to making pattern revisions.

4. Boy/Girl-hood Patterns: This pattern takes into account the myriad of other things that happened to the individual in childhood and youth. These include play and playmates, favorite games, family experiences and activities, favorite stories and fictional characters, as well as dreams and nightmares, a half-dozen specific events (Adlerian Early Recollections), and more. The focus here is not on negatives or tragedies (although death of a pet or person in childhood and possible abuse are covered) but on the complete childhood experience which, today in adulthood, contributed to one's view of self, others, and the world, and one's participation in the human community. As with all patterns, we seek how past may influence or limit the present, and how revisions may be made.

5. Becoming Patterns: This is the last of the five "social" patterns, and involves what one might call the "master goal" of life: how to feel and be a part of others, how to belong, how to participate positively in the human community, and how to see oneself as significant. We begin with, but adapt, Dreikurs' "four goals of mis-behavior" and explore six ways the person tried to belong as a child, and therefore how the person uses the same methods as an adult to achieve the same goal: Affection, Attention, Approval, Control,

The second five Patterns are “individual patterns” because they focus on the individual (rather than on relationships). Even so, we remember Adler’s statement that “all problems are social problems” and that the individual is embedded within the community.

6. Behaving Patterns: Here we look at how the person experiences and responds to reality. We speak of a three-part process as the “Event-Belief-Response” cycle. Thus the person experiences an Event within what Adler called the “perceptual” or “subjective” frame, and creates mental statements about that event, which we call Beliefs. Such beliefs are shaped by several influences, such as one’s personal truth, private logic, etc. Here we follow the view of Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard, that “subjectivity is truth,” and that of Hans Vaihinger (as used by Adler), in noting that what we believe to be true is true for us, so therefore we act as *if* it is the truth. This pattern is treated differently from the others in its focus on the E-B-R process, and how to change one’s responses (thoughts, feelings, actions) by changing one’s beliefs about events.

7. Believing Patterns: This pattern began by exploring Adler’s “three tasks of life.” It expanded to include other issues, and became an exploration of six foundational beliefs which define the person at his or her core: Beliefs about Self, Love, others/community, work, the world, and mystery/limits (which can be taken to include spirituality). Again, LEAP assumes these basic beliefs begin in childhood, specifically from specific events (seen by Adler as “Early Recollections”). Being from childhood when experience and ability are limited, they tend to limit the adult to childhood viewpoints and choices. A classic example is the adult whose religious views and beliefs are limited by what was learned in Sunday School as a child. Again, LEAP provides a setting in which the adult can revise childhood beliefs for more appropriate adult living. In the case of Belief Patterns, more than others, such revision is very difficult, because these Beliefs are so foundational and basic to who the person is as a person.

8. Bewildering Patterns: Here we look at several patterns created in childhood and carried into adulthood. The first is “self-defeating” thoughts, attitudes, or behaviors...ways the individual uses to prevent successful or effective forward movement, or the achievement of stated goals. The second is Private Logic, or how the individual uses excuses, justifications, etc., to support “socially useless behaviors” and forego “socially useful behaviors.” The third is based on Adler’s idea of “fictional finalism” or the “fictional final goal,” which LEAP called the “Mistaken Mission” the adult has in life, based on the child’s solution to what Adler called “The Child’s Problem.” Again, LEAP helps the adult individual look at these “bewildering” patterns for potential revision and, therefore, more honest or effective adult living.

9. Being Patterns: These are definitional patterns created in childhood and carried forth into adulthood. They are “mental portraits” of self (what Adler called the “Ideal Self” or the “Ego Ideal”), and of other people and situations: Ideal Partner; Parent (self as, and parents as); Children; work, job, or career; friend, hobby, etc. The idea here is that the child has bequeathed mental images of perfection which are then used as measures for one’s reality. By definition, reality is always less than the ideal. LEAP helps clients explore how their ideal images get in the way of enjoying reality by setting the bar too high, or by making unfair comparisons. (For example, how much trouble is caused in marriages by one partner comparing the other partner to some perceived ideal mate and finding the real partner wanting!)

10. Becoming Patterns: Here LEAP assumes that children, new in their world and needing to learn quickly how to manage their lives, come up with various ways to do just that. The problem is, children have little to go on, and may tend to find solutions which they then keep rather than revise. “I learned when I was three that I could get my way by throwing a tantrum. I still try to get my way by throwing a tantrum (but it doesn’t seem to work as well as it did then, and my wife/boss/kid doesn’t like it!)” LEAP helps people look at ways they choose and seek goals, make decisions, solve problems, handle a crisis, etc., based on childhood ways and ready for revision as adults.

11. The MAP: LEAP summarizes the ten LifeCourse Patterns in an eleventh, much as an atlas is made up of individual but related maps. So of course we speak of the *Master Action Pattern* (MAP), and explore it as the over-arching LifeCourse Patterns much as we would explore the Adlerian Life Style.

Uses of LEAP with Adults

Regarding Individuals: Individual adults (older than about 21 years) can use LEAP in various ways, including (1) a time-limited counseling that combines patterns discovery with the counseling focus of the "Practice Task"; (2) preparation for longer-term counseling by discovering the contents of ten major life patterns; (3) personal growth or development by exploring the LifeCourse Patterns; (4) use in 12-Step programs, specifically the Fourth Step of AA, NA, OA, etc.

Regarding LEAP with couples for marital preparation, marital counseling, and marital enrichment: The assumption is that each person is an individual with individual patterns. The "couple overlay" involves helping each partner explore LifeCourse patterns as an individual, and then involving them in a discussion about how each partner's pattern works to strengthen or weaken the partnership. Most partners enjoy learning about each other using the LEAP approach because it is detailed and complete as well as almost entirely positive. *In pre-marital counseling*, it helps the prospective partners learn about each other in a setting that allows for discussion of any differences or conflicts. *In marital therapy*, it helps the partners approach the relationship from the perspective of each person's uniqueness, rather than focusing on problems, conflicts, etc. *In marital enrichment*, partners learn about each other by discussing the contents of each partner's patterns, including information they did not know. This helps them to see their relationship as involving two separate personalities, each with depth and uniqueness they can respect and encourage.

Regarding clergy: LEAP can help clergy to deepen and strengthen pastoral ministry in a number of ways. (A special book, *Adlerian Psychology for Clergy*, is available for this use.) Clergy can use LEAP ideas as springboards for sermons, Adlerian concepts in working with boards and committees, and especially Adlerian psychology in their pastoral counseling. LEAP itself can be used by clergy in adult education classes and marital enrichment programs.

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