

Philip, a gifted child with ADHD

Judith Safford

This article is about Philip, a young client whose parents sought my help as a Tri-Energetics counsellor. It is not a case study in the usual sense, because it presents both my own experiences with Philip and those of his mother and father, who worked closely with me during their child's therapy and in the writing of this piece. To protect this family's privacy, names and certain details have been changed.

Introducing Philip

At 7 years of age Philip was evaluated by psychologists and found to be gifted and affected by attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Shortly after this, his parents brought him to me with the aim of helping him master life better. During our first meetings his mother described his life thus far.

Philip's first years

Philip's mother told me that her pregnancy with him had been normal, but during birth the umbilical chord was wrapped around his neck, which caused his heart rate to fall briefly. (ADHD may be triggered by a lack of oxygen during early development, especially during pregnancy or birth. For more information see, for example, <http://www.adhd.org.nz/cause1.html>.) Otherwise his birth was without complications. As a baby and a toddler his ability to occupy himself for long periods of time was striking. He was easily excited, but responded well to calming massage or singing and was generally contented. He learnt the mother tongues of his parents (German and English) at an early age, and could speak equally fluently in both languages shortly after his second birthday. He was also very talented with construction toys and doing puzzles. He liked looking at books, particularly about dinosaurs, and learnt many of their Latin names. His motor skills were fairly normal: although he never crawled, but shuffled sideways like a crab, he learnt to walk at 14 months. He enjoyed playing with others, particularly slightly older children.

A sister Stephanie was born when he was 22 months old. He liked the baby, although was not terribly interested in her until she was about 1 year old.

Philip's mother reported that his early childhood (3–5 years of age) was uneventful. He developed a strong interest in numbers, sizes and the dimensions in his environment. He played long fantasy games with his dinosaurs and other toys. He was, however, shy with other children. He seldom took the initiative to find playmates and flatly refused to attend the local playgroup. Nevertheless, his creativity in inventing games with other children meant that he was a popular and sought-after playmate in the neighbourhood. Despite being one of the youngest in his peer group, when invited to join in play he often took over the role of leader.

His parents were struck by a certain lack of physical control and awareness. He was 4 before he was toilet trained during the day. He ate very messily and was clumsy at the table. He did not want to learn to ride a bicycle or scooter, but chose to run along the street next to his biking peers.

At the age of 5¼ he started pre-school classes at a local school. In the first months he had to be accompanied every morning and was very frightened of leaving the family. When he overcame his shyness he enjoyed pre-school very much.

When Philip had just turned 6, and immediately before he started school, his parents took a break from work and the whole family travelled extensively. Despite being robbed at gunpoint shortly into their journey, Philip's mother described the time as "a marvellous holiday together". She said that Philip seemed to process the trauma well, and strongly supported the idea that they continue their travels, rather than go home. He was very interested in the animal and bird life he saw. He studied classification books intensely and became extremely good at spotting and identifying birds. His tendency to talk about his experiences non-stop for hours on end was amusing, but sometimes tiring for his parents. During this holiday they observed for the first time that in situations that did not provide novelty or a

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strong stimulus, Philip would become argumentative, oppositional, defiant and aggressive.

Troubles at school

Philip started school at the age of 6¼. He learnt to read very quickly and excelled in all subjects during the first months. However, in stark contrast to his school performance he lacked confidence in himself. Nervousness, for instance about learning a new letter of the alphabet, resulted in loss of appetite and difficulties in sleeping. Given that Philip could read fluently, this behaviour seemed surprising.

In the second half of the year, Philip's behaviour at school deteriorated. He disturbed classes by impulsively speaking out of turn. He showed hyperactive behaviour such as running around the classroom and constantly fidgeting at his desk. He was unable to respect agreements and keep to the classroom rules. He played the clown. His schoolwork became careless, his handwriting deteriorated and he made errors in both spelling and maths.

During his second year at school Philip's behaviour further worsened and he was seriously disturbing the class. Furthermore, he developed nervous habits such as sucking and biting on his clothes and emitting strange whistling noises during class work. After 4 months in the second grade, Philip's teacher asked his parents to get him assessed by a psychologist. As part of this assessment Philip, now 7 years 10 months, took the HAWIK-III IQ test (a German adaptation of the WISC-III, the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children). The results, to which I will return below, showed a child with a total IQ score in the gifted range, but a noticeable asymmetry in scores on the verbal and performance elements of the test. The psychologist suspected that Philip also had ADHD, although the tests carried out in the assessment were not detailed enough to establish this with certainty.

Fighting back at home

Philip's mother described his behaviour at home as always energetic and demanding. However, when he was contented he was interested, charming and entertaining, with a fine sense of humour and appreciation of the absurd. He could be very gentle, for instance with smaller children and animals. He was generous and sensitive and had a strong sense of justice. Subjects such as poverty, or children who were excluded or disadvantaged, concerned him from a very early age.

Philip's oppositional and obstreperous behaviour when things did not go his way, which the family first noticed during their holiday in the spring of the

previous year, continued to increase. However, his parents had little experience of other children of his age and they saw nothing out of the ordinary in either the positive or the negative aspects of his behaviour.

During the summer before he entered second grade at school, the 7-year-old Philip became increasingly aggressive, frequently losing control of his behaviour. He began to bully and attack his younger sister. He became impatient, losing control if something did not go as he wished. He was forgetful and seemed unable to concentrate and carry a task through.

Daily routines such as dressing and eating were a major source of conflict. He refused to wear most of his clothes "because they tickled". In particular, he hated wearing socks and shoes "because they bit his feet". As a result he took them off at every opportunity and got chilblains in winter. Washing or brushing his hair and cutting his finger nails led to hysterical scenes in which he described feeling attacked by "electric shocks", particularly in his fingers. His regular breakfast cereal might suddenly be violently rejected with the explanation that milk was disgusting. When dressing and eating breakfast Philip had to be prompted and guided constantly, because he was distracted so easily. Thus, the early-morning routine of getting Philip to school became a trauma that the family dreaded.

Changes in the daily routine were often even more difficult. Even when these were communicated long in advance, a trip into town or a visit to friends was met with protest and obstruction, tears and physical refusal to cooperate. Philip's general tolerance level became very low. If he experienced frustration he often reacted with verbal or physical violence. Much of his aggression was directed at himself. He hit himself and damaged his possessions, in particular toys. On one occasion he broke a favourite computer game with a hammer. He generally made an effort to behave at school, but when he got home he would let his frustration out by picking fights with his parents or sister or shutting himself in his room and attempting to hurt himself or valued possessions.

Things came to a head a week after Philip's first psychological assessment. On a winter walk with his family Philip ran to a high precipice above a river ravine and threatened to jump off. After the event his mother asked him why he wanted to kill himself. He replied, "Because I'm a repulsive arse-hole and life is boring anyway."¹ It was this action that prompted his parents to come to me to seek help for their son.

1. Philip speaks mostly in German. His mother reported that his exact words were "Weil ich ein abscheuliches Arschloch bin und das Leben ist so wie so langweilig".

Philip's difficulties from my perspective

The thing that struck me most forcibly when I looked at the psychologist's report of her four-hour assessment of Philip was the boy's results on the HAWIK-III IQ test (Box 1), coupled with the suggestion that he had ADHD. His mother had already described her son's physical clumsiness, and in the HAWIK-III was evidence of relative weakness in motor skills typical of ADHD. I suspected that Philip's difficulties resulted from his particular combination of abilities.

Box 1 Philip's scores on the HAWIK-III IQ test

The HAWIK-III separately tests verbal and performance IQ, and combines the scores to give a total IQ score. For Philip these scores were:

Test component	Score	Rating
Verbal IQ	144	99.8%
Performance IQ	117	87%
Perceptual Organization	119	
Freedom from Distraction	124	
Processing Speed	114	
Verbal Comprehension	146	
Total IQ	134	

The characteristics of children who have both a high IQ and ADHD and the problems they may encounter are discussed in more detail in my article "Giftedness and ADHD".

Philip's widely varying scores on the components of the HAWIK-III IQ test reveal an immediate potential for frustration and psychological difficulties. The HAWIK-III test is broadly divided into a verbal part, which assesses verbal comprehension, and a performance part, which measures the ability to organize visual material, such as non-verbal reasoning skill, vision images and thinking ability to process visual perception. As can be seen from Box 1, Philip's score was extremely high on the verbal part of the test, but significantly lower on the performance part. Even though his scores on the components of the performance IQ test (organizational skills, attentiveness, working speed and verbal comprehension) were above average, the test results showed that Philip was not able to translate his high intellectual powers into comparable observable performance.

Baum *et al* (1991, p. 5) define a 'gifted learning-disabled child' as one who "demonstrate(s) a substantial discrepancy between performance and

ability". Webb *et al* (2004) suggest that a difference of 10 IQ points between verbal and performance abilities results in psychological difficulties. Philip's performance IQ measured 27 points lower than his verbal IQ.

A difference between performance and verbal components of the IQ test is often caused by ADHD (Simchen, 2005). Another element of Philip's assessment was a concentration and attention task on a computer – one of the tests used in the identification of ADHD. Philip made strange noises during this and shouted out when he made mistakes. He gazed around the room, moved constantly on his chair, jumped up and down, and at one point even lay down on the floor. However, to the tester's surprise, the results were quite reasonable. The psychologist postulated that the child might be able to compensate for his attention difficulties with his high intelligence.

From the psychologist's report and what Philip's parents had told me, it seemed clear that the boy was extremely hyperactive and displayed weakness in his motor skills typical of ADHD. Whatever the cause of his problems, it is intuitively obvious that a child who cannot translate and communicate his intellectual ability into performance is likely to experience frustration and suffer accordingly.

Tri-Energetics and standard approaches to giftedness and ADHD

Tri-Energetics (Moore, 1989, 2001) is a practical approach to life that uses simple tools such as reflecting on whether an individual's needs, wants and intentions are being fulfilled. It adopts the accepted wisdom and methods of mainstream psychological teachings, and also makes recommendations concerning physical and spiritual well-being. These elements are not new in themselves, but they are combined in a novel holistic framework. Tri-Energetics imposes no dogmatic rules on exactly how to do things. It would be compatible with standard approaches to Philip's difficulties, provided these did not conflict with the aims and practical application of the Tri-Energetics approach.

The advantage of Tri-Energetics is that it emphasizes the importance of a frame of mind, or an approach to doing things: "Know what you need, say what you want, have clear intentions" (Moore, 1989). Furthermore it shows that body, mind and spirit all require equal attention for integral well-being. The usefulness of Tri-Energetics is that it will provide a unifying context to the whole approach to Philip's difficulties, and a benchmark by which to measure the success of single elements of his therapy programme.

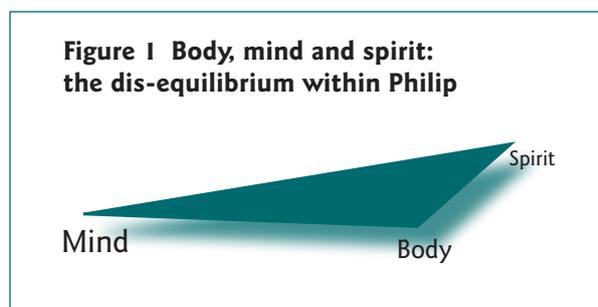
I explain Tri-Energetics in more detail in an article "The role of Tri-Energetics in parenting".

An inherent imbalance of body, mind and spirit

Giftedness is often defined as asynchronous development (Silverman, 2000: pp. 3–4; Webb *et al*, 2004: p. 120). The intellectual capacities of an adolescent or even an adult are trapped in the body of a child, whose physical development and cognitive abilities in social or emotional areas may be the norm for their age, or even lagging behind. Oversensitivities, particularly emotional, may express themselves in anxiety and stress, which will impede spiritual balance.

ADHD also contains elements of asynchronous development. Motor skills are usually poor (Aust-Claus *et al*, 1999: p. 136). Intellectual potential may be reduced by problems of inattention and impulsivity. The general symptoms of ADHD, but particularly hyperactivity, create high levels of stress, which prevents the child from coming to rest and finding moments of peace and stillness. Individuals with ADHD, particular highly intelligent and sensitive children, are acutely aware of their difficulties and often have very low self-esteem. Thus, their spiritual needs of peace, dignity and self-respect are not being fulfilled.

In the terms of Tri-Energetics, Philip's giftedness and ADHD resulted in an imbalance between body, mind and spirit. What should be an equilateral triangle of influences had lost its symmetry (Figure 1).



In my work with Philip I found that the abilities and achievements of his mind were very strong. Philip was a very intellectually oriented person, who quickly and often withdrew into books and solitary games, particularly if he did not feel at ease. He did not find it easy to 'let go', to be with people and have fun. He had a poor connection with his body, and weak motor skills. As a result, he was very cautious and afraid to try out physical exercises such as bike riding or climbing trees.

Philip's emotional and spiritual needs seemed often to be poorly understood and thus neglected. His high sensitivity made these needs more acute. His

suicide threat was a clear signal that he was terribly unhappy, a "repulsive arse-hole" living a "boring" life. Philip told me he often felt that he did not belong and that he was different. He was sometimes worried that he had few friends, and he was teased at school. He was acutely aware of his neurological difficulties and pained, for instance, by his inability to control his behaviour at school and thus avoid negative feedback and punishment.

The recognition of special needs and wants

The expression of feelings – needs and wants – is surely the most vital line of communication between people. I felt that it would be much easier to help Philip if his awareness of his own needs and wants could be increased and he could develop the self-confidence to express them.

Tri-Energetics emphasizes that it is not only the parents who are responsible for fulfilling their child's needs and wants. Children can and should start to learn at an early age to recognize their own needs and wants and to formulate them in the expectation that their parents will acknowledge and honour this articulation, even if not every wish can and should be fulfilled.

Working with Philip and his parents, I outlined a programme of therapy that concentrated on the needs of the boy's body, mind and spirit.

Body

Philip's body needed movement, flexibility and physical contact with others. To achieve a better equilibrium between body, mind and spirit, Philip needed to strengthen his motor skills, which were relatively weak as a result of his neurological difficulties. Physical exercise would help him get a better feeling for his body, and thus for his integral self. Philip also had a strong need for bodily contact with his parents: to have them hold and protect him physically when he lost all control, to ground him when he was upset, to show him love and affection, to help him relax, and to release stress.

Mind

The boy's mind needed intellectual stimulation and learning experiences that were fun and challenging. In an ideal world, learning experiences, particularly at school, would be tailored to each child's strengths and weaknesses. Philip's condition and his psychological assessment profile showed that he was particularly gifted in conceptual and abstract thought. His talents lay in creative, integrative ideas. At his school, however,

the children were taught first to master sequential tasks and learn isolated facts by heart, before they moved on to holistic skills requiring creativity, logic, artistry, research and initiative. Thus, Philip's needs in regular school were not being given enough weight.

Spirit

The needs of the body and mind of children like Philip have been widely discussed in the literature (e.g. the chapters on giftedness in Silverman, 2000). However, it is on the soul or spirit that Tri-Energetics places particular emphasis.

Research on gifted children shows that, because of their high intelligence, interaction with them often focuses on intellectual areas. Emotional interaction, which I believe to be the critical factor in the development of gifted children (Freeman, 2000a: p. 582), is often neglected. Because of their high sensitivity, gifted children are emotionally very receptive to atmosphere, double meanings, insinuations, prejudice and awkwardness. They can lose themselves in self-analysis, self-criticism and negative emotions (Mendaglio, 2002; Webb *et al*, 2004: p. 137f). Inner conflict is a pre-condition for personal growth through 'positive disintegration' (Box 2). By supporting Philip in his emotions and through his inner conflicts, I hoped that he and his parents would see and get to know the signs of growth. This would help him to avoid 'negative disintegration' and to foster 'positive disintegration' – personal development through crisis. Teaching Philip to feel and express his needs and wants would give him the skills and courage for the process of positive disintegration.

Despite his difficult behaviour, Philip needed to feel valued and loved. He needed to feel more self-confidence and self-esteem. He needed praise for his efforts to behave well, to try new things and to otherwise improve his situation. He needed to feel that life is not "boring", not just intellectually interesting, but is also instilled with meaning and – of course – fun.

Curiosity, tolerance and flexibility

Tri-Energetics emphasises the power of curiosity, tolerance and flexibility of behaviour in finding out an individual's needs, wants and intentions. Gifted, highly sensitive children are – like all children – naturally very curious. This natural curiosity may be curbed by the hyperactivity associated with ADHD and its resulting stress. From an early age, and particularly at night, Philip found it difficult to relax – to 'stop the film'. He described constantly anticipating problems, considering options, planning the future and wanting to change the world. When the inner stimuli became too

Box 2 Dabrowski's theory of positive disintegration

Why does a high IQ not guarantee happiness or success, at least in intellectual fields? Kazimierz Dabrowski, a Polish psychiatrist and psychologist, has proposed a comprehensive theory of personal development containing provocative concepts that shed light on the affective (emotional) characteristics of gifted people (Dabrowski, 1964). Dabrowski's theory, which has been widely adopted in the study of giftedness, extends the discussion of intelligence beyond intellectual abilities to include emotional, social and moral aspects.

Dabrowski's theory of positive disintegration is a stage theory of personal development in the tradition of Piaget's (1924, 1932) theory of cognitive development or Erikson's (1950) theory of life span. An individual can proceed through five stages of personal growth. At the lowest level the individual is egocentric, has no capacity for empathy and self-examination and lacks self-responsibility. Dabrowski argues that only a tiny proportion, perhaps people such as the Dalai Lama, Ghandi and Mother Theresa, reach the highest level (values and ideals have been integrated into the individual's living and being, and life is lived according to the highest principles of loving and compassion).

Dabrowski believes personal growth to result from a series of psychological disintegrations and re-integrations, which are initiated by crises. Development – advancement – occurs through 'positive disintegration'. In a person with high developmental potential, even the normal events of life lead to intense experiences and frequent crises. These crises can be positive if they challenge existing psychological structures such as belief systems or behaviours and motivate the individual to explore and perform at new levels of ability that emphasize increasing morality, ethics, aesthetics and spirituality. Crises that bring no new insight and no development Dabrowski calls negative disintegration.

great, he would shut down and try to close himself off from the environment. Through Tri-Energetics I hoped to re-open his perceptions by teaching his parents to use anti-stress methods such as massage, music and experiences of nature to help him to rediscover peace.

Philip's highly developed sensitivity concerning injustice, not only at a local level in the town where he lived, but also in the world, made him very receptive to the concept of tolerance. He understood tolerance

in the sense of 'live and let live' at an early age, but often he could not practise it.

Flexibility was a real challenge for Philip. As do many children with ADHD, he found it very difficult to handle novelty or change plans or ideas. He rarely wanted to go on day trips and outings, and if persuaded, chose only places that he already knew. His parents described his inflexibility as a real burden on family life, because they enjoyed spontaneity and going out and doing new things.

Resolving Philip's difficulties

Using standard approaches to support Philip

Philip's parents and I agreed that they should adopt elements of standard approaches to support their child, using the theories of Tri-Energetics as the unifying criterion. We used Tri-Energetics as a benchmark against which to evaluate potential techniques and therapies:

- Would the chosen method help to achieve balance between body, mind and soul?
- Would it help Philip and his parents to find out better what he needed and wanted?
- Would the method interfere with practice of the spiritual values that Tri-Energetics advocates: peace, dignity, compassion and kindness?

Behavioural management

Philip's parents read literature on techniques of behavioural management and tried to involve the whole family in their implementation. Box 3 shows Philip's mother's description of two such actions.

Neurological training

Tri-Energetics teaches that a flexible body will help the mind and spirit to act in flexible ways too. On first meeting Philip I therefore suggested to his parents that aspects of HANDLE therapy might help him (Box 4). Philip was assessed by a HANDLE therapist, who found no intellectual impairment, but identified some striking neurological difficulties that are typical of ADHD. Philip started a neurological training programme of physical exercises aimed directly at improving his motor skills and his feeling for his body in space.

Environmental changes

We saw two key areas in which environmental factors could be changed. Philip's parents worked to improve the atmosphere at home. As often happens, the

Box 3 Family involvement

"The whole family – Philip, his sister, my husband and I – sat together one afternoon, discussed what we needed from each other and then defined target behaviours for each of us. We wrote these on a piece of paper and hung it up in the kitchen, where we ate."

Target behaviour for the whole family

PHILIP

1. Always keep promises
2. Look after my things
3. 'Time out' before a big fight starts with Stephanie

STEPHANIE

1. Help with housework
2. Get up cheerfully and be friendly to Mum and Dad
3. Use nice words when speaking to Mum and Dad and Philip

MUM AND DAD

1. Mum will say "yes" instead of "ah ha", and Dad say will "oh dear!" instead of cursing
2. Be more patient
3. Be more peaceful
4. Enforce clear rules

"We also developed a chart called 'Jobs for Philip', with a points system for good behaviour. Philip filled this in daily. At the end of the week the points could be traded for extra Gameboy or computer time, or a toy, cinema trip or similar treat."

difficulties with Philip had put a strain on his parents' relationship and led to added conflicts between them. They started counselling for couples and found that they could resolve these problems. Both parents worked outside the home. His father in particular

Box 4 HANDLE therapy

HANDLE therapy is based on the theory that human development depends on the dynamic interaction of systems within the individual that provide reservoirs and conduits for learning. It offers a medication-free alternative for treating neurodevelopmental disorders such as ADHD. Incorporating techniques from many disciplines, it includes principles and perspectives from medicine, rehabilitation, psychology, education and nutrition (<http://www.handle.org>).

worked long hours and often at weekends. He made a real effort to be at home more for his children and to support his wife more in domestic affairs.

The parents also considered Philip's school environment. There are many ways of encouraging a child's curiosity and I had recommended that Philip's parents read Freeman's (2000b) views on schooling and teaching methods. They felt that their son would do better in a school that was adapted to his high intellectual abilities and that emphasized creative learning, but the boy was vehemently against the idea. They next suggested to him that he might be happier advancing a grade (from the 2nd to the 3rd), because this would relieve the intellectual boredom that he was experiencing. At first he was strongly opposed to this idea too, but he did agree to try it. Initially the move was a success: he enjoyed the more demanding material and appeared to be accepted by his classmates. Unfortunately, within a few months Philip had mastered the new material and over the next year he often came returned from school very distressed: he was bored and did not see the point of doing tasks that he felt that he had already mastered.

On the recommendation of the Verein zur Förderung besonders begabter Kinder (fbk; <http://www.fbk-bern.ch>), a local support organization for gifted children, Philip's parents gained permission from the school authorities to take the boy (then 8½ years old) out of school for one morning a week to receive private tuition. They arranged for Philip receive 2 hours of natural science teaching and 2 hours of English lessons. His tutor adapted the material to meet the boy's intellectual needs and gave him the positive, enjoyable learning experience that he was missing at regular school.

After 6 months of individual tuition, Philip gained a place on a special enrichment programme for gifted children one morning a week, organized by the fbk. In the first term a professor of mathematics taught the children 'MatheMagie', a combination of mathematics and conjuring tricks based on mathematical laws. In the second term Philip went to chess classes. He enjoyed the programme enormously and his behaviour at regular school stabilized, although he was still often bored and frustrated.

Medication

Despite the fact that Philip was happier at school after moving from 2nd to 3rd grade, his behaviour was still disturbing in class. He himself seemed unaware of the extent of his impulsiveness, hyperactivity and inability to keep to the rules. Afraid that this behaviour might lead to rejection by his older classmates, Philip's parents finally decided to give medication a try. They took the 8-year-old boy to

a paediatrician who specialized in ADHD. After several months of experimenting to find the right medication and dose, Philip was prescribed the stimulant methylphenidate (more commonly known by the trade name Ritalin).

Although his schoolteachers did not know that this treatment had begun, they reported an improvement in his behaviour from the first day of medication. The difference that methylphenidate made was undeniable. Philip was more accessible to the other approaches that his parents and I wanted to use, and to the people around him. His mother described the importance of the medication to her and her husband: "It helped us to finally really grasp that he could not help the way he behaved; he deserved understanding and not punishment".

Nutrition

The paediatrician also investigated Philip's nutrition. The child tested negative for abnormal sugar levels, and the family's healthy diet made it unlikely that food additives were a problem. Philip's parents observed that his mood deteriorated dramatically when he was hungry, so they made efforts to serve meals on time and at regular intervals. They also gave Philip and his sister a full English breakfast fry-up if they wanted it. This gave Philip a high-protein start to the day and cheered him up when the prospect of school sometimes depressed him.

Improving the balance of body, mind and spirit

The triangle of body, mind and spirit gave a framework within which to form practical methods for approaching Philip's difficulties. It made his parents and, ultimately, Philip himself more aware that a day spent cultivating only the mind was not going to end well. Philip's body and spirit also needed daily attention.

Philip's parents ensured that he got a positive experience of physical exercise every day. If he was too depressed or unsure of himself to go out to play with friends, they provided some sort of physical release for him: perhaps wild games and play-fights at home, or a trip to the swimming pool.

They found reaching the emotional and spiritual side of Philip more difficult. The hyperactivity of ADHD floods the system with stimuli. The affected person cannot relax and thus inner peace is impossible.

Therapy through music

Tri-Energetics teaches that music and role-playing can help to change attitudes by re-training old behavioural patterns. As music was very important

to Philip's parents, I suggested that they help their son find access to it. I was convinced that if music could reach him, it might touch him at a spiritual and emotional level, something he was missing in his very intellectual approach to life.

Although he disliked it, Philip was a talented recorder player at school. In the summer holidays Philip, then 9 years old, agreed (to his mother's great surprise) to participate in a week-long music workshop. His sister was also enrolled, and his mother volunteered to assist the teaching team. The children created a musical: they sang, acted, did acrobatics and danced and played instruments; they made their own instruments, their costumes, the set design and stage decorations. They performed the musical on the last day in front of about 100 parents and friends.

Philip's mother described the experience as a turning point for her son:

"Philip loved it and he really opened up. He was not especially talented, but he was one of the crowd. During the week he dyed his hair bright orange. He started trying new things out, particular riding his bike more adventurously, which resulted in repeated dramatic falls and badly grazed knees. He sang the songs to himself at home for weeks afterwards and began to take an interest in listening to music."

The value of ritual

Many spiritual actions are embodied in rituals, but as children grow up the bedtime story or soothing lullaby are often abandoned as childish. I suggested that Philip's mother reintroduce rituals as an implicit expression of spirituality adapted to children. They established unconditional rituals that Philip could ask for, such as watching a DVD of his choice together in the evenings, a quiet talk at bedtime about the events of the day or a massage before going to sleep. I also asked them to set rituals with conditions – behavioural rules – that Philip had to meet. This gave Philip the opportunity to take clear responsibility for his behaviour.

One particularly successful ritual was used when Philip's stress levels rose beyond control and his behaviour became intolerable. He would be told that his behaviour was unacceptable and offered the choice of a 'time out' period of about 10 minutes alone in his room to cool down, or sitting cuddled on his mother's lap and being stroked until he had gained control of himself. As this choice became familiar and ritualized, Philip easily found the calm to decide which option he needed most, and his choice inevitably brought him back in control and at peace with himself.

Teaching Philip to feel and express his needs and wants

Using lists to focus wants

It was important that Philip learnt to recognize his needs and wants. In our sessions I began to ask him directly what he needed and wanted, and I encouraged his parents to do likewise. His mother made a sustained effort to encourage Philip to express himself and to think about his needs and wants in every situation. However, at critical times, particularly when Philip had to accept novelty or consider new options in life, their discussions often got stuck in panic and negativity. They required more structure. I knew that Philip liked making lists and systematically analysing preferences, so if a difficult decision needed to be discussed I suggested that Philip and his mother make and share lists of the pros and cons of the situation. His mother used this technique when discussing the possible change of school and the taking of methylphenidate (Box 5). Often the visualization of the discussion would calm Philip and enable him to see what he really wanted. To remain credible, it was essential his parents respect his decisions, even if they did not agree.

Box 5 Expressing wants in decision-making

The 'wants' lists below were drawn up by Philip and his mother in their discussion of whether the boy should take methylphenidate.

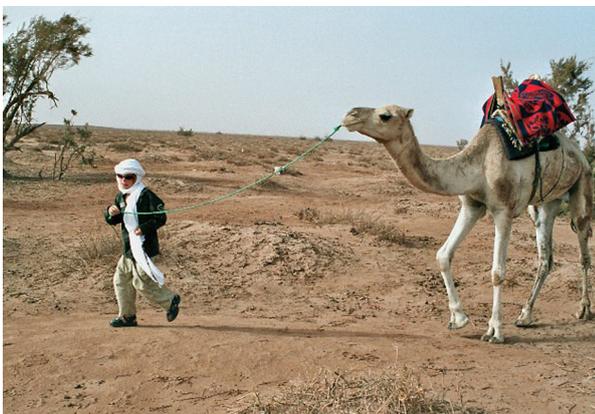
<i>Philip</i>	<i>Philip's mother</i>
1. Lego temple	1. Lego temple for Philip
2. Peace	2. Peace
3. No big pills	3. No troubles for Philip at school
4. I shouldn't destroy my Lego	4. Best help for Philip (on no. 3)
5. The same as no. 3 on Mum's list	5. No stress in the morning (because of pills)

Animals in teaching and therapy

Animals are used in many different forms of therapeutic work with children. With adults they have even been used in management training courses to improve leadership communication skills (*Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 14 September 2005, p. 68). Like most children, Philip loved animals. Just before his 8th birthday, his parents bought him two baby rabbits

as pets. They put the task of caring for them explicitly into a Tri-Energetics framework of attending to the rabbits' needs and wants. Philip understood well that these animals were dependent on humans for their well-being and, with time, he became their very reliable and responsible keeper. He spent a lot of time reading books about rabbit care and observed them carefully. He made them a playground from bark and branches, and fetched them dandelions and other delicacies from the meadows. Looking after the rabbits he learnt a lot about their needs and wants. Philip's parents and I hoped that this new awareness would enable him to identify his own needs and wants more easily.

Another opportunity for Philip to interact with animals came during a trekking holiday the following year. Each member of the family had a camel to ride and carry their things. Philip's mother found it very striking how difficult it was for Philip to decide what he wanted and to communicate this to his camel. She described him as indecisive, unclear and inconsequential. His camel accordingly did more or less what it wanted. In the end, he gave up trying to ride the camel, and walked in the desert, leading it on a rope. His younger sister, who was 7, was apparently much more successful and could control her camel well.



Nurturing curiosity, tolerance and flexibility

Curiosity

When Philip's inner motor would not stop and he had shut himself off from the world, the method that worked best to help him open up and be receptive to his environment – to become curious again – was physical stroking and massage. He loved it, and it had a very calming effect on him, particularly in the

evening before going to bed. His mother adopted the habit of massaging him regularly in the evenings. If he had great difficulties relaxing she would also do an anti-stress exercise with him that involved tensing up and letting go. These techniques usually enabled him to go to sleep very quickly.

Tolerance

Given Philip's keen participation in the concert performed during the music workshop, I was keen to see whether role-play, another activity recommended in Tri-Energetics, might help him to change his behavioural patterns and teach him to be more tolerant. His parents were happy to try this. They found it fun to use this more direct method, particularly as Philip and his mother both enjoyed role-playing and acting. (Philip confided that he wished to become an actor – or an inventor – when he grew up.) Putting yourself into someone else's shoes is a good way to change your perspective of things and learn tolerance of others (Box 6).

Box 6 A role-play game

One of the games that Philip and his family played was to exchange roles at meal times. His mother and father would be the children; Philip and his sister would take over the role of parents. The adults found it both amusing and instructive to see their behaviour mirrored by their children. More important, this was an effective and loving way of showing Philip how his behaviour looked to another person.

Flexibility

Philip was initially not accessible to the specific forms of physical release that Tri-Energetics suggests to improve the flexibility of the body. Yoga was out of the question for him. In release exercises such as pillow-hitting and screaming, which his younger sister used to very positive effect, he cultivated his anger and frustration, rather than releasing it. However, I did not consider this to be a problem. He was an active child, who increasingly enjoyed sports and movement, and his parents were aware of the importance of physical activity.

Family life was affected more by Philip's mental inflexibility: his fear of novelty and change. Ironically, once involved, Philip nearly always enjoyed new

experiences. I believed that if Philip could be introduced to novelty without a major crisis and then had a good experience, he would gradually come to accept change more easily. His parents had already found that a clear daily structure and the timely announcement of changes or special events were essential to his well-being. Sometimes when Philip bluntly refused to try something new (such as the fbk enrichment programme for gifted children), his parents decided what they thought would be best for him: teaching children to know what they need and say what they want is not the same as giving them complete responsibility for all decisions related to their upbringing. Usually, however, they sought sensitive ways of inducing their son to experience new things. The art was to win his consent or at least to persuade him to try something new.

Assessment of the results

Philip's development after diagnosis

Philip's behaviour had changed significantly in the two years that I had known him. However, the changes came only very slowly. His parents perceived little progress at the beginning, perhaps because Philip's behaviour was still so very demanding on family life. As his spirits improved following the suicide threat that brought his family to me, his moodiness and temperamental side became more prominent. His mood could change very quickly: one minute he could be aggressive and destructive, almost the next – if a 'time out' or other behavioural measure had worked – he could be charming again, regretting and even apologizing for his acts

His behaviour at school fluctuated. It was not really good, but it had greatly improved. He still received punishments for forgetting things and impulsive behaviour such as calling out answers out of turn, but he was no longer a major disturbance in the class.

A second set of HANDLE tests, administered 12 months after the first, documented the first measurable change. They showed a real improvement in Philip's motor skills, which indicated that his neurological difficulties had been greatly reduced.

However, as mentioned above, the most noticeable change, where Philip became markedly more self-confident, happy, adventurous, involved, compassionate and, of course, flexible, tolerant and curious happened during the second summer of his therapy.

In addition to his remarkable participation in the Music Workshop, there were other subtle changes. One striking experience happened shortly before it, at a party given by family friends. Philip usually

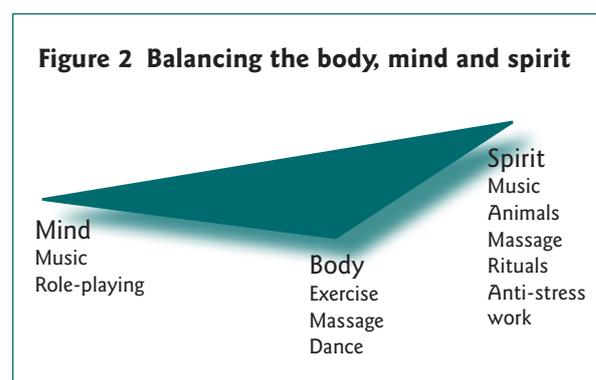
sat in a corner at such events and played Chinese puzzles or chess against himself, and was bored. On this occasion he found a partner called John and the two boys rocked and fooled around for hours. Even at midnight Philip did not want to go home. John's mother had never experienced her son like this either.

Something was changing. In the next sections I will examine these changes and explore their underlying causes, in particular the influence of Tri-Energetics.

Where Tri-Energetics helped

Tri-Energetics is a practical tool, a simple – but not necessarily easy – method to get to very basic human concerns by looking at needs, wants (and intentions). Concentrating on needs and wants with Philip was very instructive for his parents and me, because it focused us on the essentials. At the same time our experiences with him made us acutely aware that it was very difficult for Philip to feel and express what he really needed and wanted. This was one of his major problems (and an area that still requires intense work).

The emphasis on body, mind and spirit was also invaluable, because Philip's difficulties both as a gifted child and a child with ADHD were related to imbalances between these three poles. Tri-Energetics gave us a model for examining where the imbalances were and, for each area, it suggested how the disequilibrium could be reduced. Figure 2 summarizes the methods that we used to strengthen the functions of body, mind and spirit.



Because Tri-Energetics emphasizes spiritual values, it also reminds us of what they mean. Kindness, peace, dignity, tolerance, freedom and respect are the keys to live by to find spirituality. If a child is to prosper spiritually, these values must be acknowledged and lived. During on meeting Philip's mother said to me

“Reminding myself of this made it easier to find kindness and compassion in my heart, even when Philip’s actual behaviour was very demanding on me. On a day-to-day basis it became easier to be kinder and more tolerant towards him because, as Tri-Energetics teaches, with practice these ways become self-reinforcing and easier over time”.

Evaluation of the results

How can the transformation observed in Philip be evaluated? How much did Tri-Energetics help initiate the changes? How can we isolate the different effects? Philip’s parents and I chose a whole cocktail of approaches. In addition Philip can and surely does develop independently of us, in ways we do not immediately know, let alone control.

In Table 1 I have attempted to systemize what happened. I have categorized the changes we observed into the three areas – body, mind and spirit – and listed what I believe to be the most important causes of change in each. If I consider that the application Tri-Energetics had a significant influence

on the change, I have placed a tick in the third column. Some changes are listed more than once, because they affected more than one area (e.g. mind and spirit), or had several causes (e.g. improved behaviour at school). Overall, I believe that Tri-Energetics played an essential role in most of the changes.

A holistic approach such as Tri-Energetics is susceptible to the criticism that the positive results cannot be attributed to it with certainty, because every effect is multi-causal, and cause and effect are hard to separate. This is certainly true of Philip’s development and it is reflected in Table 1. For example, it is impossible to isolate the influence of methylphenidate, HANDLE therapy and Tri-Energetics on the improvement in Philip’s motor skills. Improved motor skills enabled Philip to participate more in peer activities (bike-riding) and improved his self-esteem. Participating more in the group further reinforced the boy’s self-confidence. Thus a dynamic process could develop that reinforced itself through the positive experiences that Philip was able to have.

However, I do not believe that the difficulty in isolating cause and effect in invalidates Tri-Energetics as a

Table 1 How Philip changed and why

<i>Observed change</i>	<i>Most important causes</i>	<i>Did TE help?</i>
Body (physical changes)		
Rides his bike more	Improved physical control and consciousness	✓
Asks for massage	Improved physical awareness	✓
Improved coordination and feeling for body in space	Methylphenidate and HANDLE therapy	(✓)
Mind (improvement in intellectual well-being)		
Improved concentration and self-control	Methylphenidate (and perhaps HANDLE therapy); support from parents	
Behaviour improves at school	Teachers support him and he jumps a grade (acceleration)	
Behaviour improves at school	fbk enrichment programme	
Behaviour improves at school	Supervision by parents and behavioural chart	(✓)
Asks for books and support with homework	Recognizes needs and wants	✓
Appreciates music	Wants to copy his friends	
Expresses dreams, makes plans	Has more self-esteem and recognizes his talents and wants	✓
Spirit (improvements in well-being, openness and curiosity)		
Appreciates music	Increased perception of the power of music	✓
Dyes his hair red	Raised self-esteem and confidence	✓
Asks for massage	Recognized need for calming	✓
Improved self-control (emotions and behaviour)	Methylphenidate and greater acceptance of self	✓
Accepts novelty better	More confidence and flexibility	✓
More at peace with himself	Greater acceptance of self (recognizes wants and needs)	✓
Explores his environment	More confidence and curiosity	✓
Joins the group more	Raised self-esteem and confidence	✓
Improved relationship with father	Father more present in family life and more aware of difficulties	
Improved relationship with mother	Mother learns new personal skills from TE counsellor	✓
Improved atmosphere at home	Parents resolve conflicts in couples counselling	
Asks for company, to play a game or other recreation	Recognizes needs and wants	✓
Expresses dreams, makes plans	More at ease with himself and confident about the future	✓

very useful supportive tool in parenting. The effect, for instance, of methylphenidate may be more immediate and definable, but it cannot address the integral whole of Philip's person, as Tri-Energetics can.

I was interested to find out how someone not personally involved in Philip's therapy saw its results. In Box 6 Philip's child-minder gives her perspective on his development.

Box 6 The perspective of Philip's child-minder

"Philip was always a shy child. He needed the protection of a safe place. His desire for knowledge and his rapid grasp of things was striking. But he was cautious. New things made him feel insecure, which is why he usually rejected them. But he was basically happy in his world and saw no need to change. Later he was afraid of starting kindergarten and school. Shortly after starting school he began to withdraw. He learnt to read very quickly, but his behaviour at school rubbed people up the wrong way, which made him feel unsure of himself. He withdrew more and more into the world of books and comics. He was troubled. He'd never had many ideas for playing outside. Now he had none.

This spring [after 14 month's of therapy] Philip began to change. Now [in November] he has rediscovered his self-esteem; he risks leaving his intellectual sphere. His fear of contact with the unknown has decreased. This has given his life a radically new freedom. He now enjoys exploring the expanse of the farm with the adjoining woods. He tests his powers, and sometimes takes the lead in group games and introduces fun ideas. He tries out new things in creative, sporting and musical fields. Philip now radiates happiness and a zest for life."

It is also important to mention how Philip perceived his development. He attributed his well-being above all to methylphenidate and to moving up a grade in school. However, he no longer takes methylphenidate in the school holidays, so this explanation is not entirely plausible. His well-being in the holidays he ascribed to "no school" – meaning no stress of forgetting things, getting up early in the morning and doing homework. He was generally reluctant to consider any aspects where personal change might be involved. However, he did state that "this" – meaning the skills in Tri-Energetic techniques that his mother had learnt from me – had much improved her behaviour towards him and the family's daily life.

The improvements in the home atmosphere were surely very important for Philip's well-being. I asked Philip's father for his feelings on this specific aspect, and he wrote the account that appears on page 13, in Box 7.

Difficulties and limitations in the Tri-Energetics approach

Teaching Tri-Energetics to children

My experience with Philip and his family shows that Tri-Energetics can be used to good effect in parenting. The only difficulty with the theory of Tri-Energetics that his parents said they experienced was distinguishing between needs (must haves) and wants (nice to haves). Even the needs defined in the Convention of the Rights of the Child (www.unicef.org/crc/crc.htm) are open to interpretation and controversy. Needs vary over time. The need for physical nourishment may decrease with age. The need for varied social contact increases. To a certain extent needs also vary between people. Philip needs a lot of physical contact. Another child may need less. The difference between needs and wants is not always easy to define.

Children need support to learn about their own needs and wants. However in a dialogue they are not generally able to consider the needs or wants of the other person in the way that an adult can. Thus, parents must consider both their own needs and wants and those of their children. A balance must be struck, which requires sensitivity and, inevitably, some degree of sacrifice from both parties.

There are also some limitations in the use of Tri-Energetics with children because it was primarily conceived for adults, who have better developed cognitive skills. One of the precepts of Tri-Energetics is that individuals should have 'clear intentions'. This is certainly essential for parents communicating with children. However, at least in the case of Philip, it did not seem appropriate to work with the concept of clear intentions in the sense of future planning, because he was not yet able to think in those terms. Managing the present was challenge enough.

Children's emphasis on the present also raises practical problems in the expression of needs and wants. Most parents have been confronted with a child that clearly states that he (or she) knows what is good for him, and that is an afternoon spent playing computer games with a large bag of jelly babies. Tri-Energetics teaches that if you say what you want, you will probably get it. But not always. Children have to learn this too.

Box 7 The views of Philip's father on Tri-Energetics

"It's so simple, it's so difficult – and it works! OK, I know a little bit what TE is. I've had some training in Tri-Energetics, but still I'm a TE 'cripple', and can't always apply it successfully. And I am gifted, with the emotional difficulties described by Dabrowski. And I am a man. A good mixture to deal with a gifted, emotionally unstable ADHD boy, my son Philip!

Imagine the following scene, on a Saturday morning around the breakfast table. I'm tired from a hard week at work and look forward to a family weekend. My wife and I want to make a little outing into town in the afternoon (without planning and discussing it with Philip at least one week in advance).

Me "Hey, listen kids, this afternoon we'll make a nice little excursion into town, for some shopping and a visit to the Natural History Museum."

Philip (shouting excitedly) "WHAT? But I want to play here and going to this museum is SHIT anyway. You can't do that, I will not come!!"

Me "Listen, Philip, you played at home all last weekend and this week, and we don't go to town often and you always liked the Mu..."

Philip (shouting even louder and faster) "NO! NO! I hate town and these Saturdays are shit and..."

Me (slightly louder) "Philip, no, look now...!"

Philip (more excited, louder) "It's all shit, I hate it and you can't make me go, I will not come!"

Me "Philip! Shut up now and let me finish talking! If you continue like this you will get 5 minus points [on his behavioural chart] and you can forget playing Gameboy for three days!"

Philip "OK, why not! I hate that Gameboy anyway, and I can give myself the minus points myself." (He jumps up for a pen, runs to the fridge where the list hangs and starts scratching wildly over it)

Me "Philip, stop this!"

Philip "No, I won't stop and I'm going to break the Gameboy as well!! (He gets the Gameboy and wants to smash it to the floor)

Me (I jump up to Philip, grab him and snatch the Gameboy out of his hands) "Philip, do you hear me? This is..."

Philip "NO! LET ME GO!"

Me "Up to your room now!!" (I push Philip upstairs, he is fighting, hitting, shouting)

Philip (pushed into his room, shouting at the very top of his voice). "I will destroy ALL my Legos, ALL of them!" (starts kicking his complicated – and much loved – Lego constructions)

Me (I grab him again) "Stop this, Philip! You won't break these Legos! Come down now, and stop shouting like a madman!"

Philip "NO!! You asshole!"

Philip's shouting is combined with wild crying. I'm trembling with frustration and anger. I want to hit him. It needs much time and energy for us both to calm down and find peace again, before we can leave for town – and ... Philip enjoyed the Museum very much!

Wind back the tape, and set my wife at my place. At Philip's first words ("WHAT? But I want to play here...") she would have reacted differently. She would have recognized that the speed of the announcement was too fast for Philip. She would not have taken the immediate outbreak of Philip emotions personally (what an ungrateful son!). She would have asked him about his ideas to play at home – this would calm him down a little bit – and then she would have taken Philip into her arms, held him tightly and lovingly, and started a conversation about his needs and wants. If this had not helped, she would have proposed a 'time out' in his room – not as a punishment as I did it, but as a support to help him calm down. Normally he would have accepted this, gone to his room, read or listened to some music, and after 20 minutes he would have changed back to a lovely boy.

Or, another possibility: my wife would have stopped the whole discussion and said, "OK, let's leave this, would you like something to eat?" After being fed and having talked about other things, Philip would probably have been open to consider a change of programme.

So what happened? I think my approach was linear. I proposed something, Philip reacted aggressively, I reacted back, and so on. An escalation along a linear path. I needed a quiet family day with happy children – so why did I push in a direction where exactly this was at risk? I wanted to do something together with all – so why did I act to the contrary? My intention was to get Philip to agree joyfully – but why did I propose the plan without considering his needs and wants?

My wife's approach followed the ideas of TE: "What are my needs, wants, and intentions, what are Philip's, and how can I structure the dialogue so that both of us get what we need? How can I get what I want without neglecting Philip's needs?" And, above all, she left Philip space to think about and clearly formulate his needs and wants, and checked whether these could also be fitted into the day's programme.

It's so simple to use TE with children: they need our help to discover their own needs and wants, *et voilà!* It helped me tremendously to watch my wife with Philip. But it's difficult to stick to it in situations like the above...

Finally, spirituality is an 'adult' concept that requires an abstract mode of thinking which children have to develop. I did not find it possible or credible to meditate or perform adult spiritual activities with Philip. The idea of spirituality must be modified to a level that a child can appreciate. This is perhaps not even a problem specific to children: it will also apply to working with many adults. The aim of my application of Tri-Energetics with Philip was to create fertile ground for later spirituality. This meant helping Philip to acquire the spiritual values discussed above, and building up his own personal values such as self-esteem.

With creativity and the flexibility, tolerance and curiosity, which Tri-Energetics emphasizes, these limitations to working with children can certainly be overcome. Tri-Energetics has been usefully applied in work with a number of children. For example, a counsellor who teaches children with ADHD at a special needs school in Southern Germany has achieved very promising results by integrating Tri-Energetics into his teaching (Heischkamp, 2005).

Learning processes in the dynamics of the family

The account that appears in Box 7, written by Philip's father, reveals a practical difficulty that is probably common to any parenting approach. Parents do not have to have exactly the same style, but it will be more effective if their methods do not contradict or exclude each other. Tri-Energetics is a style of communicating, and to work efficiently it requires that the whole family adapt to it. If there is only one 'enforcer', then uneven dynamics in communication may develop in which, for instance, one person becomes the 'bad guy'. Tri-Energetics will work better in a family if both parents are familiar with and convinced by it.

In the same vein, it is not possible to teach Tri-Energetics without practising it oneself. This may entail changes in work, recreational or spiritual habits that are difficult to enact if the environment, such as the domestic situation, is not conducive to change. To teach the concepts of Tri-Energetics to Philip, his mother had to reduce her working hours to spend more recreational time with him (and his sister), which meant that her husband had to take over more household chores.

Prospects for the future

"We are in greater danger of emotional mediocrity than of intellectual mediocrity – and this rampant lack of sensitivity is life-threatening to our planet."

(Linda Kreger Silvermann, 2007)

The above quotation sums up the main reason why I consider Tri-Energetics to be so suited to gifted children.

The emphasis in supporting such individuals is usually on intellectual aspects. However, as Dabrowski (1964) showed, the primary need of gifted children is often emotional support and Tri-Energetics, with its unusual emphasis on spiritual needs, is an excellent tool for assessing and supporting the aspects of a child's well-being that need attention.

The improvement in Philip's well-being in the 2 years since I worked with him and his family was impressive. However, he continues to experience constant ups and downs. At the moment, his mother tells me, he finds most subjects in school excruciatingly boring. This puts him in a permanent state of stress, which makes him physically clumsy and upsets him greatly. But the situation will change and in six months time the dominant theme will probably be something else. With the help of Tri-Energetics he and his parents will find ways to cope with the challenges that lie ahead, be they in school or at home. Some solutions will come from the simple focus on needs and wants. Others may adopt methods directly associated with Tri-Energetics itself, such as the meditative practice of Mantra singing.

Philip will surely remain a sensitive, moody, creative, highly intelligent and demanding person. But his parents, who love him, would not really want him any other way.

When asked her wish for her son, Philip's mother replied "My wish for Philip is that of most parents. I want him to be a decent human being: a person with compassion, commitment and caring, a person who finds their role in society, and their role in life". At the moment I consider that he clearly has the capacity to become such a person, and that if he continues to learn to recognize his needs and wants and to engage with his environment with flexibility, tolerance and curiosity then he's right on track. Tri-Energetics is a good tool to support him on this path.

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