



# Just What Is Sanity Circus?

Maybe you have heard of Sanity Circus, or maybe you have joined this "circus" some time during the 28 years it has traveled from school to school in Seattle. Thousands of parents and teachers *have* gone to Sanity Circus at dozens of Seattle schools (and, more recently, at nonprofit agencies). One Green Lake parent said, "This is the best thing that has ever happened to me or my family!" Another parent called it "the most practical, respectful, human approach that I've heard of yet!"

Just what *is* Sanity Circus? It's a six-week traveling course for parents (and teachers and caregivers, too) who want more respectful, cooperative, and, yes, more joyful relationships with children. Its foundation is the psychology of Alfred Adler, M.D. Sanity Circus is sponsored by the Puget Sound Adlerian Society (PSAS) and is co-sponsored and hosted by local school PTAs and other nonprofits. The School-Board-recommended Positive Discipline program for educators, now being implemented at several Seattle schools, is also Adlerian based.

PTAs or school administrators in the greater Seattle area are welcome to inquire about co-sponsoring and hosting Sanity Circus. The Horizons Foundation has provided funding for many years, but 2009-2010 is a required year off. However, PSAS can assist potential co-sponsors in applying for funding. To explore co-sponsorship, please call us at 206-527-2566 or e-mail us at [psas@att.net](mailto:psas@att.net). Instructors are available to teach in English in the traditional six-week, nine-hour lecture format, or in English or Spanish in the seven-week, 14-hour experiential format.

Many parenting courses (such as STEP and Positive Discipline) are based on Adlerian Psychology. Alfred Adler had an optimistic concept of human nature, believing that mutually respectful relationships are essential for individual and community well-being, and that the skills and attitudes for such relationships are teachable and learnable. Adlerian Psychology holds that we all need *a sense of belonging and significance* to be healthy in mind and body and for communities to be peaceful and productive.

Before the second world war, at 32 child guidance centers at schools and elsewhere in Vienna, Adler helped parents and teachers learn to encourage this sense of belonging in their families and students--until the Austrian Fascists shut the centers down. Adler then continued his teaching in the United States and elsewhere. His student and colleague Rudolf Dreikurs, M.D., also left Vienna and helped spread Adlerian concepts in the US and around the world. Bob Bradbury, the first Sanity Circus presenter (now retired), was a student of Dreikurs in Chicago. Since 1998, Stephanie Cross has been presenting the six-week lecture version of Sanity Circus. Presenters Jody McVittie, M.D. (a Sanity Circus graduate) and Sahara Pirie use the seven-week Positive Discipline experiential format. Anita Morales teaches Sanity Circus in Spanish.

Stephanie, Jody, Sahara, and Anita give lively presentations on parenting styles, the goals of misbehavior, encouragement, communication, family meetings, and the difference between discipline and punishment. Their evaluations *glow!*

Family meetings are the heart of Adlerian parenting. Family meetings provide a process for encouraging family members, planning family fun, choosing chores, and finding solutions to such difficulties as bedtime hassles or undone chores. A similar class meeting process helps students learn and regularly practice the same skills of cooperation and problem-solving. Family meetings and class meetings are excellent preparation for participating in a democratic community—at home, at school, at work, in marriage, in friendship, and as a citizen.

During each lecture series, books and other materials from the PSAS library and bookstore are available to borrow or purchase. The book *Positive Discipline*, by Jane Nelsen, is recommended reading. A condensed version of *Bob Bradbury's Sanity Circus*, and a full version of *Sanity Circus with Stephanie Cross*, are available on DVD.

Children and youth without a good sense of belonging and significance are at risk for drug and alcohol use, gang activity, and depression, violence, and suicide. Recent research is showing that in adult life, they experience many more serious physical and mental illnesses. Sanity Circus can help—and then some. One parent wrote years later, "It changed our lives!"

The Puget Sound Adlerian Society is a nonprofit educational organization offering support to people who are interested in learning the skills and attitudes of mutual respect. Our mission is to nurture dignity for all by encouraging democratic relationships and a sense of belonging. We offer various continuing education opportunities for parents and parenting instructors, educators, and mental-health professionals. We also publish an online quarterly, *The Parenting Calendar*, a listing of parenting courses and support groups sponsored by

many agencies in the central Puget Sound area. PSAS is an affiliate of the North American Society of Adlerian Psychology. Please see our Web site, [www.pasadler.org](http://www.pasadler.org), call us at 206-527-2566, or e-mail us at [psas@att.net](mailto:psas@att.net).