

# DR. JEFFREY KANOV

## Q & A

Dr. **Jeffrey Kanov** is a nationally recognized expert in the field of child psychology, and he devotes two mornings a month to a parent discussion group at The Cushman School.

**Q: Please tell us a little bit about yourself:**

**A:** Well, on a personal note, I presently reside in Coral Gables with my wife Michele, three Persian cats, twelve finches, two caiques and a 14-week-old Pomeranian puppy named Loulou. I have one son, Jason, who resides in Washington State with his wife Jenn and my darling two-year-old granddaughter, Lucy. Jason has pretty much followed in my footsteps professionally as he holds a Ph.D. in Organizational Psychology from the University of Michigan and is an Assistant Professor at Western Washington University in Bellingham. Regarding my educational and professional experiences, I guess you could say that I'm a Florida educated guy with a bachelor's degree from the University of Miami and Master's and Doctoral degrees from the University of Florida with major areas of study in psychology, rehabilitation counseling, and exceptional student education. In fact, while I was working on my doctoral dissertation, I was fortunate to be hired as a School Psychologist by the Dade County Public School System where I worked for several years even after receiving my Ph.D. At that time, my duties included psycho-educational testing of students K-12, teacher

training in classroom management techniques, and the development and implementation of programs designed to meet the needs of gifted students, students with learning disabilities and those who were mentally and emotionally challenged. I also spent some time as a Psychologist on Special Assignment (PSA) doing research designed to evaluate the efficacy of existing programs for exceptional students.

During my time with the Dade School System, I also found time to serve as an adjunct professor at Barry College (it wasn't a "university" then) and Florida International University where I taught evening classes in psychology and the application of behavior modification techniques in the classroom. While these were my first and only formal teaching experiences (which I thoroughly enjoyed), little did I know that the enjoyment of showing groups of young adults how to effec-

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tively influence the behavior of children would stay with me throughout my career and culminate years later

in the work that I'm now doing with Cushman's parents and teachers...but more on that later. When I eventually left the Dade school system, I was already enjoying a small private psychotherapy practice where I saw children, parents, teens, and adults. I also had consulting privileges at two area hospitals in the departments of Internal Medicine and had become certified in Clinical Hypnosis which, as a treatment modality, has been an important part of my practice ever since. I have also been a member of various professional organizations including The American Psychological Association, The Association for the Advancement of Behavior Therapy, The American Society of Clinical Hypnosis and many others.

**Q: Who or what has molded your philosophy as a professional and what daily inspirations keep you forming effective approaches to working with parents and children?**

**A:** That's an interesting question and not one that I haven't asked myself over the years. My philosophy as a professional is really a mirror image of my philosophy as a human being in that I'm a strong believer in the ability of the individual to overcome and move beyond whatever challenges he

or she might encounter. That's why I'm forever looking for ways of empowering those around me...those with whom I work professionally and those with whom I have a personal relationship...to develop effective problem-solving skills leading to a positive sense of self that only feelings of self-reliance and self sufficiency can bring. And that's why I continue to have such a strong affinity for the writings of behavioral psychologist B.F. Skinner, cognitive behavioral therapist and psychiatrist Aaron Beck and hypnotherapist and psychiatrist Milton Erickson whose teachings have been so effective in helping me change the behavior of others (as well as my own) from the inside out and the outside in. Add to that the 1920's writings of metaphysician Florence Scovel Shinn regarding the importance of having positive expectations, the teachings of Jesus, The Buddha and The Lubavitcher Rebbe Menachem Schneerson regarding the importance of having a compassionate heart in everything you do and the collective works of Jerry Seinfeld, Larry David and Jackie Mason regarding the importance of having a sense of hu-

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mor when dealing with life's challenges and you'll begin to understand from whence my daily inspirations come.

**Q: What is it about The Cushman School that keeps you coming back to give your time to our school?**

**A:** As you might imagine, during my professional career, my travels have allowed me to visit many different educational facilities both in and out of state including conventional pub-

lic schools, private schools, parochial schools and clinical and residential schools. During that time, I collaborated with countless educators for a myriad of reasons and I must say that, on the whole, I found those experiences extremely gratifying. In fact, many of them were quite special. When I first heard about The Cushman School, it was many years ago and in conjunction with some of the parents and children with whom I had been working. At that time, what I remember hearing most about Cushman were words like “family” and “nurturing” and “special.” However, it wasn't until I actually visited the campus and had a chance to interact with the administrators, teachers, and staff that those words began to take on meaning. You ask what it is about Cushman School that keeps me coming back and the best way I can answer that is to borrow an old '60's expression...it's “the vibe.” Never in my life have I encountered a more talented, motivated, and dedicated group of educators and staff than those I have met at Cushman nor have I ever met a more concerned, caring, and involved group of parents than the Cushman

moms and dads. Given those conditions, it didn't take me long to realize that I was a “goner”.... I knew I was “in love” and that was that. I first presented the idea of working with Cushman's parents and teachers to **Tracy Ross** during one of our meetings the summer before she was to assume the position of Director of The Laura Cushman Academy. As I had already known Tracy for some time, I felt very comfortable sharing with her that I was winding down my practice and wanted to spend the next

few years doing something that had become very important to me which was to positively influence the lives of children by taking the learnings of my lifetime and passing them on to those who would have the greatest influence in doing so...their parents and their teachers. I'll never forget the mixed look of excitement and disappointment on Tracy's face as she informed me that, while she would love to have me at Cushman, she just didn't have the budget to make it happen.

To which I replied... “Budget...who's talking about a budget...? This is something I want to do as much for me as for you as it not only lets me do what I want to do for children in a school that I adore but also has excellent Karmic consequences.” To which she replied... “Are you serious?” To which I replied... “Absolutely” And of course, the rest is history.

**Q: What message would you want to share about being a parent or raising children?**

**A:** Parents aren't perfect. No one is. Consequently, parents must learn to get out from under their own self-imposed expectations of having to be nothing less than perfect in their parenting endeavors. Sometimes someone I'm working with would tell me... “you're not going to be happy with me because I did something I said I wouldn't do.” To which I'd reply.... “I'm happy with you regardless of your performances. I'm happy with you simply because you exist as a human being. What could be better than that?” So... what I'd encourage parents to do is to unconditionally accept their children as imperfect human beings, set realistic limits that are firm but kind and refuse to be “blown away” if things don't go exactly as desired. There's plenty of time for improvement both in a parent's behavior and the behavior of his or her children, and with a little patience and constructive guidance, great things can happen.

**Q: As Cushman strives to see parents as partners, what would you say is the best way for parents to maintain that relationship with the school?**

**A:** Any effective partnership must be based on high levels of honesty, flexibility, transparency, and trust and the ability of all parties to effectively contain and resolve conflict. Making sure that these principles are always reflected in the behavior of parents and school personnel...along with a large dose of permitting oneself and others to be imperfect without penalty (as just described above)...should go a long way in nurturing successful home/school partnerships.

-Tracy Ross