

CONNECTING

Healthy Information from the Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center  January/February 2006

Autism: Being There

Jack stood at the back of the small isolation room rocking from foot to foot. His head bobbed and weaved as he muttered repetitious phrases that sounded like an angry audiotope on a continuous loop. I peered through a window in the door and caught snatches of his talk: "...why are you doing this?...you are in so much trouble...if you don't stop..." Jack was sixteen years old and almost six feet tall. He did not understand emotional expression or language very well. He frequently misinterpreted interactions with others which led to extreme agitation. Jack lunged at people and bellowed in an angry voice when he was scared or didn't understand what was happening. The reactions of those around him when he did this would frighten him more and he would be removed to the isolation room to calm down.

I discovered that I could help Jack calm down by counting with him or by playing a clapping game. One day I helped Jack calm down in my office with a clapping game, and soon Jack was laughing again. I turned away to do something at my desk and Jack asked, "Grace, why are you sad?" No one else in my world had noticed that I carried sadness that day. That was Jack.

That is autism.

Autism is a neurodevelopmental disorder that currently affects approximately one child in 200. Autism is the more generic name for a broad spectrum of pervasive developmental disorders that are characterized by disturbances in social interaction skills, communication skills, and sensory and cognitive processing. Other terms associated with the broad spectrum include: Pervasive Developmental Disorder-Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS), Asperger Syndrome, and Autism Spectrum Disorder. Technically, each of these terms has specific diagnostic criteria. However, they all encompass abnormalities, ranging from mild to severe, in each of the three characteristic categories: social interaction, communication, and sensory and cognitive processing.

Social Interaction

Individuals with autism may be described as "off in their own little world," or as "loners," or as desiring of relationship but unable to initiate or maintain interactions to a level sufficient to develop such. Impairments in social interaction skills are typically expressed as:

- failure to develop or difficulty developing age-appropriate peer relationships,
- impaired use of nonverbal behaviors to regulate interactions,
- lack of spontaneous interest in sharing experiences with others, and
- lack of social or emotional reciprocity.

Communication

Impairments in communication skills usually involve a delay in the development of spoken language or marked impairment in the ability to initiate or sustain conversation with others. Language usage can range from no language and extreme difficulty using any form of communication to children whose use of language earns the moniker of "little professor." Language may be comprised of phrases or sentences repeated from videos or radio jingles and used either in context or simply repeated over and over. Interpretation can be quite literal and conversation skills may be lacking. Conversational style may seem quite one-sided and lack completeness of thought or background information.

Sensory and Cognitive Processing

Individuals with autism typically receive information through their senses differently than do their neurotypical peers. This results in difficulties interpreting, integrating, and responding to their environments. How children with autism express their particular sensory difficulties ranges from fascination with spinning things to obsessions with trains. One child will have extreme reactions to ordinary loud noises in the environment (such as a vacuum cleaner) while another child will appear to have a severe hearing loss when there is no actual hearing problem. Their difficulties receiving and responding to environmental stimuli also result in mood disturbances and extreme emotional reactions. Their cognitive processing is usually marked by some degree of inflexibility or difficulty dealing with changes in routines or plans. Frequently, they have issues with motor clumsiness and fine motor skill development.

Treatment

More and more professionals are becoming proficient in the diagnosis and treatment of Autism Spectrum Disorders. Clinical psychologists who work with children are typically well versed in child development and trained in a variety of assessment techniques that can be utilized with children from infancy to early childhood and older. Once a diagnosis is made, the clinician will recommend a variety of interventions to address specific behavioral manifestations of Autism Spectrum Disorders. For example,

- Speech and language therapy is usually in order.
- Frequently, an evaluation by an occupational therapist who has specific training in the area of sensory integration is recommended.
- Current research is very hopeful with regard to the benefits of biomedical intervention, including dietary changes and the use of supplements. Resources for exploration and implementation of biomedical interventions can be provided by the clinician.

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- Parents are also given a variety of resource materials, including website information, that allow connections with other parents and access to the latest research.
- Finally, follow-up sessions are usually scheduled at C.O.O.L. to assist parents with behavioral interventions and emotional support at home.

Jack is now 32 years old. He lives in a neighborhood group home with three roommates. He still has a great deal of difficulty interpreting social interactions and reacting appropriately. However, the people who work with Jack have created an environment that meets his needs. Consequently, he is rarely aggressive or threatening and he is surrounded by people who understand how to help Jack calm down when he becomes agitated. Jack works part time in a sheltered workshop. He does his own laundry, plays ping pong at the local YMCA on Saturdays, and shops at the neighborhood grocery store. He likes to go fishing at Waterworks Park.

Jack introduced me to autism and I am forever grateful. Since Jack, I have known hundreds of individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder and their families. I have spent years of therapeutic training and practice growing this initial gift of firsthand knowledge of autism into what I share with my clients at the Center. Children who come to C.O.O.L. cover the range of the spectrum from very severe autism to very mild PDD-NOS, and from very young children to young adults. I feel lucky to be of service and gladly join the journey to being there for them.

Grace Percival, M.A.

Grace Percival is a licensed pediatric psychologist. She holds a master of arts degree in behavior analysis from Drake University. Grace provides counseling at C.O.O.L. to children of all ages. She has a special interest in treating children with developmental disabilities and chronic illness.

Recommended Reading:

Attwood, Tony. *Asperger's Syndrome: A Guide for Parents and Professionals*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 1998.

McCandless, Jaquelyn. *Children with Starving Brains: A Medical Treatment Guide for Autism Spectrum Disorder, 2nd Ed.* Putney, VT: Bramble Books, 2003.

Seroussi, Karyn. *Unraveling the Mystery of Autism and Pervasive Development Disorder: A Mother's Story of Research & Recovery*. NY: Broadway Books, 2000.

Siegel, Bryna. *The World of the Autistic Child: Understanding and Treating Autistic Spectrum Disorders*. NY: University Oxford Press, 1996.

I built a bridge

written by "Jim," an adult with high-functioning autism

**I built a bridge
out of nowhere, across nothingness
and wondered if there would be something on the other side.
I built a bridge
out of fog, across darkness
and hoped that there would be light on the other side.
I built a bridge
out of despair, across oblivion
and knew that there would be hope on the other side.
I built a bridge
out of helplessness, across chaos
and trusted that there would be strength on the other side.
I built a bridge
out of hell, across terror
and it was a good bridge, a strong bridge, a beautiful bridge;
It was a bridge I built myself,
with only my hands for tools, my obstinacy for supports, my faith for
spans, and my blood for rivets.
I built a bridge and crossed it,
but there was no one to meet me on the other side.**

Editor's note: Except there was someone there to meet him ~ Grace at C.O.O.L.

C.O.O.L. Corner

Children Overcoming the Obstacles of Life

What individuals with autism would ask of us:

- ★ Please don't underestimate my abilities.
- ★ Please approach me quietly and softly.
- ★ Please let me know what's going to happen when changes come along.
- ★ Please respect my routines.
- ★ Please don't assume that I have no feelings just because I cannot show them easily.
- ★ Please don't interpret my outbursts as being angry. In truth, I'm usually scared.
- ★ Please understand that I have great difficulty putting myself in your shoes, and this doesn't mean I don't care.

New Child Psychologist at C.O.O.L.

Douglas Aupperle, Ph. D.



C.O.O.L. is totally excited to be welcoming **Doug Aupperle, Ph.D.**, to the Center's new offices at 2929 Westown Pkwy., in West Des Moines. Doug began seeing clients at C.O.O.L. the first week of December. Doug received his B.A. in Psychology from Creighton University in Omaha, and his M.A. and Ph.D. in Clinical Child Psychology from DePaul University in Chicago. Doug comes to

the Center from Orchard Place Child Guidance Center where he has been a staff psychologist for the past 11 years. Doug will be seeing children of all ages. He is especially interested in the areas of family therapy, child sexual abuse, attention disorders, and stress and coping in children.

Women Helping Women Annual Luncheon Friday, March 10, 2006

Speaker: Barbara Robinette Moss
Author, *Change Me into Zeus's Daughter*, the brilliant memoir about growing up poor and undaunted in the South, and *fierce Worth Anything At All?*

Topic: *Worth Anything At All?*

Date: Friday, March 10, 2006

Time: 11:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.

Location: Hotel Fort Des Moines, Grand Ballroom
10th and Walnut, Des Moines



Contact the Center, (515) 274-4006, to make your reservation.

Since 1999, the Center has sponsored an annual luncheon to raise awareness of our work with women struggling with the challenges of life on limited resources and to generate funds to help subsidize counseling for low-income women and girls. This year's featured speaker draws upon her own bottom-line struggle with whether she was "Worth Anything At All?"

Interactional Group Counseling Theory and Practice

A ten-week course

Dates: March 3 – May 26, 2006
Time: Fridays, 8:15 – 10:45 a.m.
Location: Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center
2929 Westown Pkwy., Suite 110,
West Des Moines
Cost: \$300 plus required text
Registration deadline: January 25, 2006
Instructor: Debbie Reed, Ed.D., L.M.H.C.
CEUs: *This course provides 30.00 hours towards the continuing education requirements of the Iowa Board of Social Work Examiners and the Iowa Board of Behavioral Science Examiners.*



This course is designed to introduce participants to the theory and principles of group counseling and group leadership as advocated by Irvin Yalom, M.D., and Gerald Corey, Ed.D. Participants will learn the skills and responsibilities of leading a counseling group through its various stages, while accomplishing healthier interactive styles among the group members.

Call the Center to register (274-4006). Visit the Center's website for more information (www.dmpcc.org). There will be a pre-course meeting of participants January 26th (and again on Feb. 2nd, if needed) to learn about the screening procedure/preparation of all potential group members and to orient participants to the process of proposal writing for marketing counseling groups.

Debbie Reed Ed.D., L.M.H.C., earned her doctoral degree in counselor education from Drake University. Debbie's group counseling experience includes work with survivors of incest/sexual abuse and with cancer survivors.

Temporarily We're ^ Moved



The Center has moved! On November 21st, the Center began seeing clients at its new location, **2929 Westown Parkway, Suite 110, in West Des Moines**, just east of Valley West Mall, on the north side of Westown Parkway. The move was **necessitated** by the sale of the building that had housed us for over 20 years. The move is temporary because the new location, while very professional and in a beautiful setting, is very limited in its ability to accommodate our entire staff and clients. The **sublease** on this space is for a period of 3 1/2 years, giving the Center time to conduct a capital campaign and build the appropriate space. Our phone number remains the same ~ 515-274-4006.

In the spirit of Advent, the season during which we are settling in, we have hopeful expectations for the coming of new possibilities from this unexpected turn of events. "What seems a hindrance becomes a way; what seems an obstacle becomes a door; what seems a misfit becomes a cornerstone."

~ Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Out of Solitude*

Susan Houts, M.S.W., Joins the Center Staff



We are very pleased to be welcoming **Susan Houts, M.S.W.**, to the Center staff. Susan is a licensed master social worker. She received her B.S. and M.S.W. from the University of Iowa. She also received a post-graduate certificate

from the Chicago Training Collaborative in clinical practice with lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) individuals and their families. For the past two years, Susan has seen clients at the Center and at Behavioral Health Resources while completing the program in pastoral counseling and psychotherapy at the Center. Susan began seeing clients at the Center on a full-time basis in December. She is interested in working with adults on such issues as anxiety, depression, childhood abuse, trauma, sexual identity, and relationship concerns. Susan is a member of the National Association of Social Workers.

Anodea Judith, Ph.D., Visit to Des Moines a resounding success

Nearly 250 attended the November 16th evening presentation by Anodea Judith, Ph.D., on **Chakras and Healing ~ Getting to the Core**. Anodea walked the audience through a glimpse of chakra evolution paralleling childhood development.

Pictured below are 18 of the 22 participants in the **Mind-Body Integration ~ Advanced Techniques and Clinical Applications** three-day workshop facilitated by **Anodea Judith, Ph.D.** (front row center). Most participants would echo the words of the one who described the experience of working with Anodea, "...appreciating the grace, intelligence, and empathy of a gifted therapist."



Affiliated with the Samaritan Institute

The board of the Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center recently made the decision to affiliate with the Samaritan Institute of Denver, CO. The Samaritan Institute functions as a trade association for faith-based counseling centers, providing administrative, consultative, educational, and organizational services to its 99 affiliated centers. Thanks to an organizational effectiveness grant from the Greater Des Moines Community Foundation, the Center was able to avail itself of the Institute's services for over a year now, receiving organizational consultation and exploring the potential benefits to membership. Ellery Duke, the Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center's executive director, has found the Leadership Consultation Groups sponsored by the Institute to be particularly beneficial. These are gatherings of the executive directors of ten similar counseling centers in the Samaritan system for the purpose of professional development and growth. In Ellery's words, "The Center looks to its affiliation with the Samaritan Institute as a source of continuing collegial connection and organizational consultation and support."

Annual Meeting Announcement

The Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center's Annual Meeting will take place on Thursday, February 9, 2006. The event will be held at the Waveland Golf Course Club House, 6:30 p.m. reception, 7:00 p.m. dinner and meeting. The program will feature Larry Sonner, D.Min., as the guest speaker. Dr. Sonner is the retired director of the Office of Pastoral Care and Counseling for the Iowa Conference of the United Methodist Church. If you are interested in attending, please contact the Center, (515) 274-4006 or info@dmpcc.org.

Let Us Hear from You!

- ~ If you would like your name removed from our mailing list, please contact the Center.
- ~ If you would prefer to receive your newsletter by e-mail, please contact the Center.
- ~ If you have comments or suggestions about the newsletter, please direct these to Kathleen Murrin at the Center, (515) 274-4006, info@dmpcc.org, or 2929 Westown Pkwy., Ste. 110, West Des Moines, IA 50266.

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is a publication of the Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center, an independent, interfaith, not-for-profit organization. For over 30 years, the Center has been providing counseling and educational services to adults, families, adolescents, and children for the purpose of enhancing emotional, spiritual, and relationship health. The Center has satellite offices in West Des Moines, Altoona, Ankeny, and Urbandale.
Editor: Kathleen Murrin

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