

CONNECTING

Healthy Information from the Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center  July/August 2007

COUNSELING in an AGE of SOUND BITES

How is it that change takes so long to achieve?

One of the first questions a new client often asks a therapist is "How long can I expect therapy to take?" It's a realistic question to ask, and one that deserves an honest response. Clients must commit a tremendous amount of time and resources to a successful therapy experience, and a realistic appraisal of the likely length of time therapy will take can be helpful in planning.

The difficulty in answering this question comes from the gap between the length of time a therapist knows it will take for real change to occur, and the cultural myths that lead people to believe that change is not really that difficult and should come relatively quickly. My customary response to this question goes something like this: *"There are too many uncontrollable variables involved for me to say precisely how long therapy will take. What I can say is that my experience suggests that lasting change will take a minimum of six months to one year to achieve."* Because I sense that this response catches most people off guard, I then add, *"This sounds like a lot of time, but it really is not. If you think about it, even if you come once a week for one year of therapy, that only amounts to fifty-two hours, and many people work more than that in just one week. It is really not a lot of time; it is just that the time spent is spread over a number of weeks."*

Most of the time, this makes sense to people. At some level within themselves they recognize that the problems and concerns that brought them in for counseling took a long time to develop and will, therefore, take some time to resolve. But why is it that if motivation is high, the problem well-defined, and the therapist well-trained, therapy still takes so long?

I have always wondered why people don't ask, *"Why does it take a child so long to grow up?"* or *"Why does it often take thirty days or more for a seed to grow into a beautiful flower?"* At some level, each of us knows that growth and change unfolds in a natural process that takes time and cannot be hastened along by impatience on our parts.

Living on a small acreage, I am increasingly impressed by Mother Nature's unpredictable time schedule. Without trying to make the complex sound simple, I want to suggest that the counseling process is much like the transition that occurs from seed to flower. A seed must be planted in fertile soil. It must then be watered in just the right amounts so as not to dry out on the one hand, or rot on the other. Once germination begins, the first thing a planted seed does is send out a tap root to anchor it to the soil and establish a conduit for the

added nutrients the young plant will need in order to grow. Moving from darkness to light, the young new and tightly clenched leaves must push through the surface of the earth before expanding to absorb the energy offered by the sun.

While first sustained by the small amount of food stored within the seed itself, that supply is limited. As germination proceeds, there is increasing dependence on the external resources of the earth and sun. If all goes well, the young seedling becomes well-anchored in place, continues to send out roots wide and deep into the soil to collect the water and minerals it needs for growth, and the leaves unfold and broaden to collect more and more energy from the sun. Only after all this is in place, do the flower buds begin to show themselves and eventually burst forth in the glory of vibrant colors. All the while, weeds that would sap much needed food from the soil and block out the life-sustaining rays from the sun must be constantly cleared away.



For the counseling process to succeed there has to be a safe and secure base from which to work. The confidentiality and empathy offered by the counselor and his/her office setting provide this foundation. It is within this space that a strong therapeutic alliance can form that will anchor the client and therapist in a mutual commitment to growth and change. This alliance takes time to form and the willingness on the part of both therapist and client to do the periodic repair work necessary to keep it strong and resilient.

The home, work, and school environments outside the counseling office provide the wider source of nutrients needed for growth to occur. For many of our clients, these sources of fertile ground are lacking - the basic nutrients of emotional warmth and comfort are absent. For some, their home environments lack a basic understanding of what growth requires, while still others are met with outright hostility by those upon whom they emotionally depend.

It takes a tremendous amount of energy and sheer courage to break through the dry and parched earth of old habits, tragic losses, and lapses of foresight into the sustaining light of day. This is a fact easily overlooked by observers insensitive to the difficulties others face, or by those who have made substantial changes in their own lives, but have since forgotten how difficult those changes were to make. And yet for those of us who sit with clients week after week, the sustained effort with which they struggle to find the light they need to keep going is truly a miracle to behold.

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For those lucky ones, the sunlight that beckons the unfolding of their unique potential comes in the form of love and enthusiasm expressed by important support people within their network of family and friends. For some, it comes in the form of faith in a power greater than themselves. Others find it in nature. And for still others, its source remains a mystery even to themselves.

All along this arduous journey there are weeds to pull. Losses must be grieved; patterns of living that no longer work must be shed; relationships must sometimes be changed; sources of unhealthy dependence must be let go of; and those who crowd in leaving no room to grow must be thinned out.

None of this life-changing growth is easy. None of it comes without great cost. Sacrifices are made along the way. But in the end, flowers bloom in places once barren and seemingly devoid of life.



To many of us, the Center logo represents the beginning and end of such a process of change. Focusing on the empty spaces contained within it, one can see what appears to be a large and sturdy root firmly anchored in the vast space beneath it. Focusing on the shaded areas, one can make out what appears to be a bud opening to the heavens above. Together they form an inseparable unity and the miraculous transformation that therapy can facilitate. What is not depicted is the terribly hard work such a transition requires. It is, simply, the hard work of therapy that makes it take so long.

People, like flowers, bloom in their own time. And, oh, what a beautiful sight!

J. Jeffrey Means, M.Div., Ph.D.

*J. Jeffrey Means is Director of Professional Education at Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center and Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of Behavioral Medicine at Des Moines University. He is a licensed clinical psychologist, pastoral counselor, and marriage and family therapist. He holds a master of divinity degree from Christian Theological Seminary and a doctoral degree in pastoral counseling and psychotherapy from Northwestern University. In addition to his clinical practice at the Center, Dr. Means has interests in teaching, writing, supervision, professional formation, and clinical case consultation. He is the author of *Trauma & Evil: Healing the Wounded Soul*, published by Fortress Press, 2000.*

Suggested Reading:

Peck, M. Scott. The Road Less Traveled, 25th Anniversary Edition : A New Psychology of Love, Traditional Values and Spiritual Growth. NY: Touchstone, 1983/2003.

Wheatley, Margaret J. and Kellner-Rogers, Myron. a simpler way. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 1996.

C.O.O.L. Corner

Children Overcoming the Obstacles of Life

How Does Our Children-Garden Grow?



...with the sun of love and affection that comes up everyday and kisses the child awake and shines freely all day long.



...with the water of time to be with, to give of ourselves, to delight in the child's natural curiosity and creativity.



...with the fertile soil of creative materials, few electronics, fresh air, and healthy food.

Young Adults Socializing

On Tuesday evenings at 6:30 p.m., Grace Percival, counselor at Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center, is hosting a social gathering for young adults, ages 18-29, with Autism Spectrum Disorders. The group will be meeting throughout the summer at Grounds for Celebration in Beaverdale, 2645 Beaver Avenue, for an hour or so of cards and games.

All young adults are invited to join in.

Our young adults with autism do not easily form social relationships because the initiating of social activity is difficult. However, like any young person, they long to be in relationship with people their own age. This social opportunities group is an attempt to provide a time when young people can gather to laugh and share their lives through cards and board games. Participation is not limited to individuals with autism. The only requirement is that one must be younger than 30 years of age and at least 18 years old. A desire to have fun is also recommended.

For more information, please contact Grace at the Center (274-4006).

INTRODUCTION to PSYCHODYNAMIC PSYCHOTHERAPY

Dates:	September 14, 2007 - December 7, 2007 <i>(Class will not meet 10/12, 11/9, or 11/22)</i>
Time:	Fridays, 8:15 - 9:45 a.m. for ten weeks
Location:	Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center 2929 Westown Parkway, Suite 110, West Des Moines
Cost:	\$200
CEUs:	<i>This course provides 15.00 hours towards the continuing education requirements of the Iowa Board of Social Work Examiners and the Iowa Board of Behavioral Science Examiners.</i>
Registration Deadline:	September 4, 2007 <i>To register, call (515) 274-4006 or e-mail info@dmpcc.org.</i>
Instructor:	Lisa Streyffeler, Ph.D.

Psychodynamic psychotherapy is an approach to therapy that views human beings as complex organisms motivated by unconscious as well as conscious forces. Psychological symptoms are seen as having meaning, and the search for understanding in the context of a caring relationship is central to healing. Understanding the meaning of their psychological pain and having the support to try living in new ways can then help individuals to find the freedom to live healthier, more satisfying lives.

The course will cover the basic concepts in psychodynamic work, including therapeutic stance, factors involved in psychological healing, establishing a working alliance, and transference and countertransference. The focus will be more on the practicalities of conducting psychodynamic psychotherapy than on theory. Presentations, readings, and class discussion will form the basis of the course. The course is appropriate for therapists and others interested in an entry-level grounding in psychodynamic thought and practice.



Lisa L. Streyffeler, Ph.D., is a licensed psychologist at the Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center. In addition to her interest in psychodynamic psychotherapy, she has interests in maternal mental health during the prenatal and postpartum periods, the intersection of theology and personality, and professional development.

MANifest: A Gathering of Men

Sharing the Masculine Journey

MANifest is a program for men facilitated by male counselors, built around weekend retreats and Saturday workshops. MANifest is for men of all ages and from every walk of life. Lowell Houts, D.Min., and Mike Sears, Ed.D., facilitate all MANifest programs.

MANifest Weekend

Dates	September 28 - 30, 2007
Time	Fall weekend retreat: checkin Friday 5:00-7:00 p.m.; concludes Sunday noon
Location	2412 St. Charles Road (retreat center southeast of Winterset)
Cost	\$175, Includes lodging and 5 meals (\$150 on/before Sept. 14)
Facilitators	Lowell Houts, D.Min., and Mike Sears, Ed.D.
Pre-register	Call Lowell Houts or Mike Sears at (515) 274-4006 to pre-register at least one week prior to the weekend. Retreats are limited to 12 participants to provide optimal interaction. Register early.

Men may talk easily about work, sports, and politics, but there are few opportunities for men to talk about their journey as a man. MANifest weekends provide this opportunity. The weekend gives men extended time to take a look inside themselves and to bridge the emotional disconnect that so often happens in the traditional rearing of most men in this society. The weekend is a time to get past the "no fear," "no sadness," "emphasize toughness," "reinforce anger" messages and values so many men carry around with them. The emotional lives of men need to be explored, acknowledged, and celebrated by men, both individually and collectively. Retreats are held in a rustic, outdoor setting. The weekend is open to any interested man.

Pastoral Care Specialist Program - 2007-08

The Pastoral Care Specialist Program is a competency-enhancing two-year program designed for the professional development and renewal of pastors, chaplains, and lay persons involved in ministries of pastoral care. It provides an enriching blend of psychology and theology, as well as theory and practice, while encouraging the sharing of learned lessons.

Participants meet monthly to learn about areas critical to effective pastoral care, and to receive support, encouragement, and consultation on their work. Participants can solidify what they already do well and integrate new knowledge and skills into their ministries. Seminar topics vary each year.

The program begins the second Tuesday of September (September 11, 2007) and runs through the second Tuesday of June (June 10, 2008). Participants meet from 8:45 a.m. to 12:00 noon. Tuition for the program is \$500 for each of the two years. Registration is limited. The deadline for registrations is September 1, 2007.

For additional information or to register, contact J. Jeffrey Means, Ph.D., Director of Professional Education, at the Center (515-274-4006), or check the Center's website, www.dmpcc.org/classes/classes.html.

Pastoral Care Specialists Spring 2007 Graduates



Successfully completing the two-year Pastoral Care Specialist Program in June 2007:

- Diane Christopher**, Intentional Interim Pastor; Centerville First United Methodist Church
- Diane Mitchell**, Intentional Interim Pastor; Walker United Methodist Church
- Bob Nervig**, Volunteer Chaplain, Broadlawns Medical Center
- Michael Omundson**, Pastor, Bondurant Christian Church

Testimonials from Pastoral Care Specialist Program graduates ~

~ "I appreciated all the input, discussion, reflection. The program had excellent leadership and quality presenters."

~ "I especially valued the relaxed, non-threatening, and professional delivery of each class, always presented by experienced practitioners. The variety and depth of information was useful to the seasoned ministry professional as well as the beginner. The bonding of our class clearly demonstrated the effectiveness of the two-year program. Plus it was fun!"

The IRA Charitable Rollover Provision!

The tax year 2007 presents one more opportunity to take advantage of the new IRA Charitable Rollover provision! This provision allows taxpayers to donate up to \$100,000 annually from their IRAs to a charitable cause, without having to count it as income. Donors do not get a tax deduction for the gift, but the money is excluded from taxable income when computing taxes, so the tax benefit can still be significant to the donor.

Here are the requirements for these "qualified charitable distributions:"

- * IRA holder must be age 70½ or older.
- * Distributions must be made directly to public charities, not to donor-advised funds or support organizations.
- * Distributions may only be made from traditional IRAs and Roth IRAs.

If you are older than 70½ and have an IRA, you are required to take a minimum distribution from that IRA. Instead of taking the required distribution as income in 2007, you could rollover your distribution to the Center and not have to count it as income on your tax return. If you have excess funds in your IRA that you know you will not need in retirement, this is an excellent opportunity to be generous and forgo the taxes on distributions up to \$100,000 for 2007. Do check with your tax advisor and then think about a charitable gift to the Center this year. Your rollover gift could help hundreds of individuals and families afford counseling. THANK YOU!

Leaving Your Legacy

The ability to sustain the nurturing nature of the Center's work into the future is in your hands. Your planned gift to the Center's FOUNDATION will ensure that the time and compassion required for real healing and growth will be available to future generations of our community. Call Kathleen Murrin at the Center for more information on establishing your legacy through a bequest or other planned gift to the Center.

Some go first, and others come long afterward.
 God blesses both and all in the line,
 And replaces what has been consumed,
 And provides for those who work the soil of helpfulness...

*Jelaluddin Rumi
 13th century Persia*

www.dmpcc.org

Visit the Center's website for more information on the Center's counseling services and staff, special events and classes.

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