CAMPAIGN FOR HOPE AND HEALING
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YEAR END GIVING

The holidays can be difficult emotionally for many people. Issues of depression, anxiety, grief, anger, marital or family conflict, and parenting concerns are often magnified during the holidays. The continuing stress in the economy will make this holiday season and the usual emotional issues especially tough on folks who have very few resources at hand.

Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center is a publication of the Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center, an independent, not-for-profit organization. Celebrating 38 years of service to adults, families, adolescents, and children for the purpose of enhancing emotional, spiritual, and relationship health. The Center has satellite offices in Ankeny, Lamoni, Leon, Mt. Ayr and Osceola.

Contact Jeanne at the Center.

Life is short and we do not have much time to gladden the hearts of those who walk this way with us. So be swift to show love. Make hearts to be kind. Henri Frederic Amiel 1821-1881

Used Office and Conference Room

Furniture available soon.

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FORGIVENESS: A Journey Towards Healing

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Rupture-Repair

Ideally, the process of rupture-repair will take place soon after the “offense” has occurred. The individual who was hurtful recognizes the pain inflicted, apologizes, and commits to changing his or her behavior to avoid such a repetition in the future. Such timely repair will serve to reestablish trust and safety within the relationship. Forgiveness is extended to the “offender” and hope for a continued positive relationship is reignited. However, if there have been more egregious interpersonal injustices, such as the deep betrayal of trust through infidelity, repetitive violations of the other’s boundaries, or repeated acts of deception, the rupture-repair process breaks down. In these instances, disruptions do not result in “repair,” but in “despair.” The damage done to the injured person’s mind, body, and spirit may be too great. Powerful feelings of hurt, resentment, and the need for revenge begin to create emotional shackles that eventually keep the harmed individual from living life constructively and freely.

How does one free oneself from the enslavement of such strong emotions? Through forgiveness. Forgiveness unlocks the self-destructive shackles that bind one through resentment and revenge to the offending situation or person. Unshackled, one can then free one’s energy for the pursuit of positive activities and constructive living.

Forgiveness is a Mind, Body, Spirit Approach to Healing

Research studies have demonstrated that holding on to anger and hatred can be harmful to a person’s physical well being. Negative thinking can affect one’s immune and cardiovascular systems. Negative thoughts elevate blood pressure. The energy a person uses to fight and hate others over a prolonged period can create hormonal changes that are linked to cardiovascular disease and, possibly, to impaired neurological function and memory.3

The process of forgiveness is extremely effective in quelling the kind of anger that debilitating the wounded or injured person. Research studies on forgiveness have demonstrated numerous benefits, including a lessening of depressive symptoms, diminished anxiety, increased hope, improved self-esteem, and a decreased preoccupation with the offender. In addition, other benefits include improved stability of mood, less impulsive behaviors, and improved ability to control angry feelings with less overreaction or misdirection of anger, improved marital and family relationships, and decreased obsessive thinking.4

What is Forgiveness?

One formal definition of forgiveness is the following: “People, upon rationally determining that they have been unfairly treated, forgive when they willfully abandon resentment and related responses (to which they have a right), and endeavor to respond to the wrongdoing based on the moral principle of beneficence, which may include compassion, unconditional worth, generosity, and moral love (to which the wrongdoer, by nature of the harmful act or acts has no right).”5

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Forgiveness: A Journey Towards Healing

Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center

2920 Western Parkway, Suite 110 West Des Moines, Iowa 50266

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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Forgiveness is not a finished act, but a process. Forgiveness is not an immediate act, but the outcome of considerable emotional work. Forgiveness is a journey.1

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The Journey of Forgiveness

The journey of forgiveness involves dynamics that happen inside the person who has been hurt. Starting from an unjustly inflicted offense, the person can journey to forgiveness by a process that develops over time and involves cognitive, emotive, and behavioral work.1 This work forms the basis for grieving and healing on the way to forgiveness. In cases of deep interpersonal injuries such as sexual abuse by a trusted family member or relative, infidelity with a spouse or significant other, and other harmful violations of trust, having a trusted guide or therapist on the journey may be essential.

The uncovering stage

Individuals who have chosen counseling for help in managing and processing their pain and resentment will find themselves initially involved in an uncovering stage of the forgiveness process. Within this stage, painful negative emotions such as anger, shame, and vulnerability are experienced. Clients are helped to gain awareness of how much emotional energy they experience harboring hatred and revengeful thoughts towards the offender. They also learn the extent to which they continually brood over the events that are in the past. They gain insight into the fact that their worldview of a “just world” may be permanently and adversely changed by the offense they have suffered. Feeling compassion towards the offender and the mitigating circumstances that contributed to the injustice perpetrated, which leads to the emergence of empathy and the development of compassion.

Developing empathy or “walking in the shoes” of the offender is difficult as it acknowledges the offender, too, has been hurt in his/her life. Feeling compassion towards the offender and accepting the pain of the offense requires sacrificing some psychological defenses and allowing vulnerability to reappear. As empathy and compassion emerge, clients begin to experience an internal emotional release from their anger and resentment and pain.

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Cost: $200 plus optional texts
CEUs: 15.00 hours

Instructor: Lisa Strefflier, Ph.D.

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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 a central aspect of healing is the search for understanding that meaning in the context of a caring therapeutic relationship. Understanding the meaning of psychological pain and having the support to try living in new ways can help individuals live healthier, more satisfying lives.

The course will cover the basic concepts in psychological work, including therapeutic stance, factors involved in psychological healing, establishing a working alliance, and transference and countertransference. The focus will be on the practicalities of conducting psychodynamic psychotherapy than on theory.

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The decision stage

As the process continues, clients enter into a decision stage in which they conclude that the old strategies (resentment, revenge) used to resolve their suffering are not working. They make a commitment to work towards forgiveness. The commitment to be willing to forgive at this juncture, is a decision, a cognitive act. It can occur even if clients are still angry or resentful. All this stage asks of clients is that their goal is to make a conscious commitment not to act on their resentment.

The working stage

Once the commitment to work on forgiveness is made, clients enter into the working stage of the forgiveness process. This stage requires clients to engage in the hard work of reframing, i.e., rethinking a situation or seeing it with a fresh perspective. Clients are also helped to understand the life context of the offender and the mitigating circumstances that contributed to the injustice perpetrated, which leads to the emergence of empathy and the development of compassion.

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Koenig, S. G., & Kilpatrick, D. G. (1995). Coping Skills for First Time Event Survivors: A Manual for Treating Anger and Revictimization. American Psychological Association: Washington, D.C. (C) 2000. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

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