

# CONNECTING

Healthy Information from the Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center  July/August/September 2011

## GROUP THERAPY: HEALING Through CONNECTION

Whenever someone asks Bob to help with a project, he cannot say “no.” Sally resists taking suggestions from others and seems to hold back from trying something new. Susie always smiles, even when she’s angry or annoyed. What’s wrong with that?

Nothing - in and of itself. Bob sounds like a great neighbor to have around. Sally keeps herself well protected from hurt. Susie’s coworkers have always found her easy to get along with. But, these patterns of relating can cause problems in relationships with others or problems within ourselves. Bob might give up his chance to recharge his batteries when he does chores all weekend at his neighbors’ requests. Sally might find her life lacking meaning and draining her energy. Susie might be upset that other people do not change their behavior, but other people don’t know she disapproves.

### CORRECTIVE INTERACTIONS

One way to begin to address this dissonance in one’s behaviors is in a group setting. These same patterns of relating are often unconsciously recreated in a group therapy setting, which acts as a microcosm of the real world. In fact the microcosm of group therapy is quite helpful in healing individuals. The group members repeat patterns of interaction that often originated in their families; however, in the group the familial conflicts are relieved *correctively*, with a new healing outcome.<sup>1</sup>

### EVIDENCE-BASED

Of course Bob, Sally, and Susie could alleviate many of their difficulties through individual therapy, in which case, group therapy could serve as an important supplement to their work in individual therapy. Or group therapy could stand on its own as an evidence-based treatment. In a survey of the research on individual therapy in comparison to group therapy, researchers found group therapy was equally effective as individual therapy.<sup>2</sup>

*“Recent narrative reviews and meta-analytic studies provide an abundance of empirical evidence that group treatment is better than no treatment at all for many problems and for many populations. Problems that appear particularly responsive to group treatment include depression, eating disorders, the psychological consequences of childhood sexual abuse, and particular medical conditions such as cancer. In most cases group therapy is as effective as individual interventions, and in some cases it is more effective. Insofar as group therapy is more cost efficient, it would seem to be the preferred modality when treatment must be limited.”<sup>3</sup>*



### HOPEFUL AND HELPFUL

In group therapy individuals not only experience corrective healing experiences regarding their patterns of behavior, they also are reinvigorated by an instillation of hope. People enter therapy “with the disquieting thought that they are unique in their wretchedness, that they alone have certain frightening or unacceptable problems, thoughts, impulses, and fantasies.”<sup>4</sup> When group members find that they are not unique, that others share their same concerns, their disquietude lessens and may disappear.

Furthermore, group members often receive and impart helpful educational information. In the act of giving to one another, group members are learning to both receive the healing benefits of others’ altruism and experience the healing that comes from giving to another. Healing old patterns of interaction, instilling hope, and increasing educational knowledge are all about healing disconnection.

### HEALING DISCONNECTION

Group therapy is in fact all about healing disconnection through interactions with the group members and through the facilitation and modeling of the therapist. Humans can and do cope with many difficult emotions by themselves. But from infancy, humans have also used connection with others to cope with difficult emotion. Infants essentially use their caregivers as external regulators of emotions— keeping them from a physiological-emotional state that is too high or too low. A parent soothes a child when the child becomes too agitated (i.e. crying and screaming), and a parent energizes the child when the child seems disengaged. Researchers believe this specific experience of regulation of emotion very likely allows for a child to internalize the ability to soothe themselves.<sup>5</sup>

Like the parent-child relationship, the therapeutic relationship heals clients through this same manner of synchronizing with the affect—with the physiological experience of emotion—of another human.<sup>6</sup> There is compelling evidence that, as we connect and resonate with others, we are interactively regulating our internal physiology of emotion so it does not overwhelm our body’s system and throw us out of equilibrium.<sup>7</sup>

The consequences of not connecting with others are dire. Living with chronic negative affect (i.e., depression, anxiety, anger) has been strongly linked in myriad studies with troubling

health consequences. Chronic anger can lead to increased susceptibility to heart attack and increased rate of repeat heart attack. Depression has been linked with heightened heart disease and with complications recovering from hip fractures. Increased stress and anxiety have been linked to “compromising immune function to the point that it can speed the metastasis of cancer; increasing vulnerability to viral infections; exacerbating plaque formation leading to atherosclerosis, and blood clotting leading to myocardial infarction; accelerating the onset of Type I diabetes and the course of Type II diabetes; and worsening or triggering an asthma attack. Stress can also lead to ulceration of the gastrointestinal tract, triggering symptoms of ulcerative colitis and inflammatory bowel disease,” as well as damage to the brain’s hippocampus and to memory.<sup>8</sup> The consequences of living an emotionally unregulated life are too high.

## SUMMARY

Group therapy aims to address the roadblocks that keep people from connecting. The group imparts resources, information, hope, a sense of belonging, the corrective recapitulation of the primary family group, development of socializing techniques, and modeling of connecting behavior for individuals to safely connect with others. Over time, within the group, members are able to develop the courage to receive and absorb the affective regulation necessary for healing spiritually, psychologically, and biologically.

### Patrick Weeg, M.S.W.

*Patrick Weeg, M.S.W., is a Licensed Master Social Worker and the most recent addition to the Center’s clinical staff. Patrick’s work with clients covers a myriad of issues, from depression and anxiety to stressful life transitions and relationship challenges. Patrick has experience working with trauma survivors, veterans, immigrants, individuals struggling with substance abuse and a variety of addictions, and children who have been victims of abuse. Proficient in Spanish, he provides counseling to Spanish-speaking persons and their families.*

### References

- <sup>1</sup> Irvin Yalom names this repetition of patterns of interaction – “the corrective recapitulation of the primary family group” – as one of eleven “therapeutic factors” that account for the healing through group therapy. Yalom, I. D., and Leszcz, M. (2005). *The Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy*, 5th edition. New York: Basic Books, p. 15.
- <sup>2</sup> Roberts, Burlingame, & Hoag (1998). *Comparative efficacy of individual and group psychotherapy: A meta-analytic perspective. Group Dynamics: Theory, Research, and Practice*, 2, pp.101 – 117.
- <sup>3</sup> Brabender, Smolar, and Fallon (2004). *Essentials of Group Therapy: Essentials of Mental Health Practice*. New Jersey: Wiley & Sons, Inc., p. 181.
- <sup>4</sup> Yalom, 2005, p. 6.
- <sup>5</sup> Schore, A.N. (2003). *Affect Regulation and the Repair of the Self*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc. Schore’s integration of neuroscience with psychoanalytic theory points towards the neurobiological processes of affect regulation. He believes the internalized ability of an infant to regulate affect develops through secure attachment at about 18 months in the orbitofrontal cortex—the “recovery mechanism that efficiently monitors and autoregulates the duration, frequency, and intensity of not only positive but also negative affect states.” (p. 21)
- <sup>6</sup> Schore, 2005, p. 106.
- <sup>7</sup> See Schore, A.N. (2003), Chapter 2: “Minds in the Making: Attachment, the Self-Organizing Brain, and Developmentally-Oriented Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy.”
- <sup>8</sup> Goleman, D. (1994). *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More than IQ*. New York: Bantam Dell, pp. 172-3.

## GROWTH THROUGH CONNECTION: A Group Therapy Experience

The Center is offering the opportunity for a 16-week interpersonal process group:

- Wednesday evenings, October 5, 2011, through January 25, 2012, 5:30-7:00 p.m.
- The cost will be \$50 per 90-minute session for 16 weeks.
- For more information, contact the Center (515/274-4006 or [info@dmpcc.org](mailto:info@dmpcc.org))
- To register, call the Center to set up a preliminary confidential interview.
- Facilitating therapists:  
Debbie Reed, Ed.D., L.M.H.C.,  
and Patrick Weeg, L.M.S.W.



Growth Through Connection is a group therapy experience for 5 – 10 individuals who meet to share their struggles and concerns, with the facilitation of professional therapists. Group therapy is a well-established source of healing and can serve as a great adjunct to the work the group members may already be doing in individual therapy. The power of the process group lies in the opportunity to receive multiple perspectives, support, encouragement and feedback from other individuals in a safe and confidential environment under the skilled direction of the group therapists.

## FORGIVENESS GROUP COUNSELING

### Do you or someone you know struggle with anger, hurt, or holding a grudge?

Individuals who are holding on to these feelings may be able to address these issues through group therapy. People who can recall a time when they were offended or hurt by someone and have not gotten beyond the experience are good candidates for a Forgiveness Group.

### What is the First Step?

The Center is partnering with Iowa State University to conduct group therapy sessions at the Center as part of a forgiveness study at ISU. The first step is to indicate interest in forgiveness group counseling by contacting the study team at ISU. Call (515/294-1898) or email ([info@isugroupstudy.com](mailto:info@isugroupstudy.com)).

If deemed eligible for this study, each individual will be assigned to a weekly meeting time that works with their schedule. Groups meet for 90 minutes once a week for two months. Groups will be held at Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center. There is no cost for participation. For more information, please visit the study’s website: <http://www.isugroupstudy.com>.

## EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

If you are a doctoral or master’s level therapist licensed with the state of Iowa, and if you are interested in a collegial working environment with extensive opportunities for professional development, we’d like to talk with you. Please contact Ellery Duke, Ph.D., Executive Director, 515/274-4006 or [eduke@dmpcc.org](mailto:eduke@dmpcc.org).

## TESTING AND ASSESSMENT SERVICES

The Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center is your resource for a variety of forms of psychological testing. Testing is offered on both an insurance and sliding scale basis. If you would like to schedule an appointment, please contact the Center at 515/274-4006.

For children, we offer cognitive/intelligence assessment, adaptive behavior assessment (including testing for developmental delays), sexual abuse determination, and assessment of personality, thought processing, emotional functioning. We offer testing for specific learning disorders, including reading, math, receptive and expressive language (both written and oral), and nonverbal learning disorders; as well as testing for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. We also offer screening for specific conditions, including, autism spectrum disorders, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, and Selective Mutism, among others. Finally, we offer testing for MR Waivers.

For adults, we offer psychological assessment for career change and vocational counseling, differential diagnosis, international adoptions, bariatric surgery, and clergy candidates. Additionally, this fall we will begin offering intelligence and achievement testing for adults as well as testing for adult Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder.



## PASTORAL CARE SPECIALIST PROGRAM

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

Participants meet once each month to learn about areas critical to effective pastoral care, and to receive support, encouragement, and consultation on their work.

This year's program begins the second Tuesday of September (September 13, 2011) and runs through the second Tuesday of June (June 12, 2012). Participants meet from 8:45 a.m. to noon. Tuition for the program is \$500 for each of the two years.

To obtain a registration form, contact Jeff Means, Ph.D., at 515/274-4006 or [jmeans@dmpcc.org](mailto:jmeans@dmpcc.org).

## YOUR GIFT TO THE CENTER

The Center serves hundreds of individuals and families who are dealing with desperate emotional circumstances on very limited resources. A financial gift to the Center is a meaningful way to lend a helping hand and instill a healing presence in these lives. When individuals are able to take steps toward emotional stability, everyone benefits. Please send a contribution to the Center today. Thank you.

## INTRODUCTION TO PSYCHODYNAMIC PSYCHOTHERAPY – A 10-Week Course

Dates: September 9, 2011 – November 11, 2011  
Time: Fridays, 8:15 - 9:45 a.m.  
Location: Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center  
8553 Urbandale Avenue, Urbandale 50322  
Cost: \$200 plus optional texts CEUs: 15.00 hours  
Instructor: Lisa Streyffeler, Ph.D.  
To Register: Contact the Center ~ 515/274-4006  
or [info@dmpcc.org](mailto:info@dmpcc.org)

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.

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. The course is appropriate for therapists and others interested in an entry-level grounding in psychodynamic thought and practice.



*The Instructor: Lisa Streyffeler, Ph.D., is the Director of Professional Education at Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center. Lisa received her B.A. in psychology and comparative religion from Harvard and her Ph.D. in counseling psychology from the University of Iowa. Lisa is a licensed clinical psychologist and provides counseling to adults with depression, anxiety, relationship issues, trauma, and/or life transitions. 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.*

## CENTER WELCOMES NEW STAFF COUNSELOR

We are very pleased to welcome Patrick Weeg, M.S.W., to the Center staff. Patrick is a licensed master social worker. Patrick holds a B.A. in Spanish and English and a Master of Social Work degree, all from the University of Iowa. Patrick began seeing clients at Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center in 2010 while completing his M.S.W. degree.



Patrick works with children, adolescents, adults, and couples. His work with clients covers a myriad of issues, including: depression and anxiety, stressful life transitions, relationship challenges, and trauma (physical, sexual, emotional, and relational).

Patrick has experience working with trauma survivors, veterans, immigrants, individuals struggling with substance abuse and a variety of addictions, and children who have been victims of abuse. Proficient in Spanish, he provides counseling to both English and Spanish-speaking persons and their families. To schedule an appointment with Patrick, please call the Center 515/274-4006.

# DELVING DEEPER: REFLECTIVE WRITING AS SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

Sponsored by the Institute for the Practice of Ministry at the Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center

**Date:** Thursday, September 29, 2011  
**Time:** 8:30 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.  
**Location:** Plymouth Congregational Church  
4126 Ingersoll Avenue, Des Moines  
**Cost:** \$55 (includes lunch, refreshments, and materials)  
**Presenter:** Mary Kay Shanley  
**To register:** Call (515/274-4006) or email (info@dmpcc.org) the Center  
**Deadline:** Register by Monday, September 26th

This professional enrichment day with well-known author Mary Kay Shanley is open to spiritual care providers in any capacity (clergy, chaplains, spiritual directors, mental health counselors, health care professionals), as well as seekers from any walk of life. This experience will provide time for: mindful preparation for writing, personal reflection, guidance in reflective writing practice, integrating reflective writing into daily life. Often a difficult, painful, or frustrating experience can be transformed by writing about it. By writing we can claim what we have lived and discover what wisdom it holds for our lives.

**OUR APOLOGIES**  
Mary Riche's gift of \$1,000 was inadvertently omitted from the Campaign For Hope And Healing donor list printed in the June 30th Ribbon Cutting program. Our sincere apologies to Mary for this oversight.

Mary Kay Shanley is the author of ten books, including the national best seller, *She Taught Me to Eat Artichokes*. Mary Kay teaches at the University of Iowa's Summer Writing Festival and at the Iowa Correctional Institution for Women. She also co-facilitates *Writing from the Soul* retreats throughout the country.



Visit the Center's website for more information on the Center's counseling services and staff, special events and classes. [www.dmpcc.org](http://www.dmpcc.org)

## CONNECTING

is a publication of the Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center, an independent, not-for-profit organization. Celebrating 39 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.  
Editor: Kathleen Murrin

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