

EMOTIONAL WELLNESS MATTERS

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A successful relationship is composed of two individuals – each with a clearly defined sense of her or his own identity. Without our own understanding of self, of who we are, and what makes us unique, it is difficult to engage in the process of an ongoing relationship in a way that functions smoothly and enhances each of the partners. We need a sense of self in order to clearly communicate our needs and desires to our partner. When we have a strong conception of our own identity, we can appreciate and love those qualities in our partner that make him or her a unique person. When two people come together, each with a clear definition of her or his own individuality, the potential for intimacy and commitment can be astounding. The similarities between two people may bring them together, but their differences contribute to the growth, excitement, and mystery of their relationship.

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One feature of a healthy sense of self is the way we understand and work with boundaries. **Personal boundaries are the limits we set in relationships that allow us to protect our selves.** Boundaries come from having a good sense of our own self-worth. They make it possible for us to separate our own thoughts and feelings from those of others and to take responsibility for what we

Fox Valley Institute News Brief



We are proud to announce the recent hire of **Deborah Theus**, and welcome her into the position of Business Manager at Fox Valley Institute. Deborah brings many years of marketing and management experience in mental health. We are excited to have Deborah on board as our newest team member and looking forward to the positive changes she will bring. To contact Deborah, please dial ext. 201 or send e-mails to deborah@fvinstitute.com.

Steve Guziec is the new Clinical Intern at Fox Valley Institute. FVI's *Clinical Intern Program* allows individuals, families, and couples to receive therapy at a reduced rate. Steve is working towards his Master of Science in Clinical Psychology from Benedictine University. Welcome Steve!

Dr. Laura Bokar, LCPC, LMFT presented *The Six Critical Needs of a Successful Relationship* for the first FVI Evening with an Expert seminar on Thursday, April 4th. FVI raised well-over \$400 in donations for Samaritan Interfaith Counseling Center.

Jenna Fash, MS, LCPC, Suzanne Keenon, MA, LCPC, Jennifer Curtin, MS, LPC and our intern **Steve Guziec** visited Streamwood High School on April 11th for a question and answer session with A.P. Psychology classes.

Jennifer Logston, MSW, LCSW visited the Advanced Health classes at Neuqua Valley High School on April 11th to speak to students about careers in the psychology field.



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Many people in contemporary society feel lonely. For all the benefits we derive from living in a highly technological world, with seemingly instant and complete communication with others, we still may find it difficult to discover ways to form intimate relationships. In fact, our high tech society seems to fragment our social connections, to drive us away from other people. For example, e-mail seems to make connecting with other people much easier, but in truth our messages are usually just flashes of ideas – briefly written, briefly read, and instantaneously deleted – and they barely fulfill our desire for more complete relationships based on our inner experiences. In our modern society, we lack ways to see, hear, or touch other people – not in person and not to the extent that humans have in the past. What our high tech world has brought us is an abundance of stress. And stress and intimacy are hardly compatible bedfellows.

To form an intimate connection with another person requires first that we have access to our own personal emotions and ideas. We cannot expect to be intimate with another when we are out of touch with our own internal experiences. Our intimate experiences may involve our emotional, cognitive, social, physical, sexual, and spiritual lives. Two people, each of whom is in touch with his or her own internal experiences, may be able to share an intimate relationship on any one of these levels. True intimacy is one of the ultimate expressions of the human experience. And that may be why we strive so hard to find it.

We must explore and become familiar with our own personal thoughts and feelings before we can share them with someone else.

How Do We Reach Intimacy?

Each person seems to understand the intimate experience in his or her own way. In a sense it takes a journey of personal discovery to learn how to share intimacy with another person. Here are some guidelines that may help to define that journey –

Know Your Self: Get in touch with your own private experiences. In our stressed-out world this is often hard to do because our attention is directed outward much of the time. It helps to sit – doing nothing and being distracted by nothing – and spend time in reflection and introspection. Observe your thoughts and feelings. The brain has pleasure centers – close your eyes and imagine yourself experiencing pleasure. Become familiar with those parts of yourself that are strong and feel whole and integrated. Learn to feel comfortable with the part of yourself that

senses calmness, confidence, and peace. (Some people like to spend a few minutes every night before bed, perhaps with just a candle burning, reflecting on the events of the day. Others prefer to keep a daily journal of their private thoughts and feelings. Some prefer to learn a technique like mindfulness meditation.) Until you know your own private feelings, it is difficult to share them with someone else.

A trustworthy person is one who can honor and respect you for sharing your most intimate experiences.

Communicate With Another Person: Share what you know about yourself with another person who can be trusted. This involves several steps. First, you need a sense of **commitment** to that person. Strangers passing through your life are not the appropriate people with whom to share your deepest feelings. Intimacy has to be reserved for a person who will be there over the long haul – a close friend, a partner, a family member, or, if we're lucky, the soul mate. You also need a feeling of trust. If the other person is not able to appreciate the delicacy of what you are sharing, it is futile to try to achieve intimacy. In the worst case, your words might be held against you later, which can be damaging and may lead to cynicism and distrust. Knowing whom to trust involves acquiring good judgment about other people. Finally, understand that intimacy involves making yourself **vulnerable**. The guarded and defensive person will never find true intimacy. Finding intimacy means taking a risk, opening yourself up, sharing the most personal part of yourself with another person. Can the other person handle it? Can the other person care? If they can, you may no longer be alone.

Intimacy Is Reciprocal: A healthy intimate relationship is one in which both partners know themselves and are able to come together with a sense of equality. Certain relationships are not meant to be reciprocal (the therapist/client relationship, for example, often involves a high level of deeply personal communication, but this is on the part of the client). Perhaps the most intense and lasting levels of intimacy are achieved when both partners are able to share equally with each other. As the listener, you have to be able to honor and respect the openness, vulnerability, and courage of the one who is communicating personal ideas and emotions. Value judgments, criticisms, and advice-giving have no place in inti-

This newsletter is intended to offer general information only and recognizes that individual issues may differ from these broad guidelines. Personal issues should be addressed within a therapeutic context with a professional familiar with the details of the problems. ©2013 Simmonds Publications: 5580 La Jolla Blvd., #306, La Jolla, CA 92037 Website ~ www.emotionalwellness.com

mate communication. The goal is to appreciate and acknowledge the validity of the other person's deepest feelings. If you are aware of your own thoughts and feelings, you may then have the ability to appreciate similar experiences on the part of the other person.

Value judgments, criticisms, and advice-giving have no place in intimate communication.

Keep the Light Alive: Once two people have entered into a deep level of sharing, they usually want to stay there. If there is true equality between the two, they achieve a balance that feels right and they don't want to lose. If, however, one of the partners feels the need to lessen the level of intimacy, the probability of conflict increases. You can avoid misunderstandings by maintaining your commitment and trust during these natural cycles that occur within any relationship. Intimacy takes work and a sense of maturity. To shirk the responsibility of keeping an intimate relationship alive invites a return to isolation.

The intimate relationship is healthy. Intimacy allows us to end loneliness and to share the deepest and most personal parts of ourselves with a trusted partner. As social beings, we respond physically to the experience of intimacy. People who have intimate relationships live longer and healthier lives and they report more personal happiness and satisfaction with the way they live. Intimacy gives us a feeling of comfort, security, and a sense of being loved and accepted. It gives us the freedom and support to stay true to the special qualities that define each one of us as a unique person.

Psychotherapy can allow us to explore our own deepest and most intimate feelings in a safe and accepting setting with a professional trained to understand these inner processes. The psychotherapeutic relationship allows us to learn to stay true to our uniqueness and feel comfortable in sharing our authenticity with another person. We can explore who can be trusted, and who can't, as well as the features of our lives that may have led us to hide ourselves from others. Psychotherapy has the potential to teach us how to break out of isolation and loneliness into a world of love and acceptance. It prepares us to explore an intimate relationship outside of the therapy setting.

The Healthy Benefits of Intimacy

A number of research studies have shown persuasively that people in intimate relationships live longer and happier lives than those who are not.

- For example, we know that people in marriages or other committed relationships live longer than people who are single.
- In one classic study researchers found that 95 percent of people who described their parents as uncaring had diseases by mid-life, while only 29 percent of those who described their parents as caring had mid-life diseases. Having supportive and close relationships with parents in our childhoods leads to healthier relationships in general when we grow up, and it is these healthier adult relationships that are linked to a lower prevalence of heart disease and cancer in mid-life. In other words, one can compensate for a deprived childhood by learning later in life how to sustain supportive relationships.
- In another series of studies, researchers found that people who are socially isolated are *two to five times* more likely to die prematurely than those who have a sense of connection and community.
- A study at the University of Texas looked at patients who had undergone open-heart surgery. Those who had neither ongoing group participation nor were able to derive strength from their religion were more than *seven times* more likely to have died six months after their surgery.
- Women with metastatic breast cancer were assigned to support groups which met once a week for a year. The women in the support groups lived twice as long as those who were not in these groups.
- One study has even found that people with fewer relationships of any kind (e.g., friendship, a partner, family, work, social groups, religious affiliations) were four times as likely to develop a common cold as those who had more relationships.
- Interestingly, research showed that people with pets are healthier than people without them and have to make fewer visits to doctors.

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T H E B A C K P A G E

Healthy and Unhealthy Boundaries in Relationships – Some Examples

Healthy

- Feeling like your own person
- Feeling responsible for your own happiness
- Togetherness and separateness are balanced
- Friendships exist outside of the relationship
- Focuses on the best qualities of both people
- Achieving intimacy without chemicals
- Open, honest and assertive communication
- Commitment to the partner
- Respecting the differences in the partner
- Accepting changes in the relationship
- Asking honestly for what is wanted
- Accepting endings

Unhealthy

- Feeling incomplete without your partner
- Relying on your partner for your happiness
- Too much or too little togetherness
- Inability to establish and maintain friendships with others
- Focuses on the worst qualities of the partners
- Using alcohol/drugs to reduce inhibitions and achieve a false sense of intimacy
- Game-playing, unwillingness to listen, manipulation
- Jealousy, relationship addiction or lack of commitment
- Blaming the partner for his or her own unique qualities
- Feeling that the relationship should always be the same
- Feeling unable to express what is wanted
- Unable to let go