



ELKANAH COUNSELLING

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Consultations by
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After hours: Elkanah
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Boost for Mental Health Funding

You may have noticed in the news that there will be a considerable injection of funds from the Commonwealth Government for mental health services. The Australian Psychological Society has summarised these areas as follows:

- increased primary care and clinical services in the community, including new team work arrangements for psychiatrists, GP's, psychologists and mental health nurses;
- new respite services and provision of extra personal helpers for people with mental illness, their families and carers;
- more telephone counselling and web based services to increase availability of information and support;
- funding to help parents and school communities identify and respond to children at risk of mental illness; and
- improved services for mentally ill people also fighting a drug or alcohol addiction.

Although it may be some time until the funding is available this is a very welcome addition of resources into the mental health system. Elkanah is well placed to take part in the team work arrangements with GPs.

Stay tuned for updates on these initiatives!

Lyn Shand

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Alcohol is a Drug Too!

Barbara Royce.

A **drug**, is a substance which when taken, affects the structure or functioning of a living organism,¹ or (in people), affects the way we feel, think, or behave.

In Australian conversation today, the term “alcohol and drugs” is not uncommon. The term suggests that alcohol is one thing and drugs are something different. Let’s be clear. Alcohol **is** a drug. It is **the** major drug. Alcohol is the most commonly used, misused and abused drug in Australia. Almost 90% of adult Australians have used alcohol at some stage of their lives and more than 80% of adult Australians drink alcohol regularly.²

Alcohol is a **psychoactive** (mood altering) drug. We use it to relax, celebrate and have fun and it is used in many social settings. Alcohol is enjoyable when used safely, but when misused, alcohol can cause a variety of problems. Three out of five Australians drink alcohol at least once a week and in 1991, Australians were the second highest consumers of alcohol in the English-speaking world.³ In 1997, 3,700 Australians died due to the effects of alcohol.⁴

How alcohol gets into your body.

Alcohol is absorbed into the bloodstream via the stomach and small intestine. The rate at which alcohol gets into the bloodstream will depend on whether there is any food in the stomach or small intestine. With no food in the stomach, alcohol enters the bloodstream quicker than with food. As a result, there is a greater risk of becoming intoxicated or drunk if alcohol is consumed on an empty stomach. All alcohol will enter the bloodstream, where it is distributed around the body by the water molecules in the blood.

How alcohol leaves your body.

The body metabolises, (breaks down) alcohol slowly. Over 90% of alcohol is eliminated from the body through the liver, with breath, sweat and urine each accounting for about 3% of processing. In an adult male, the liver will take around an hour to process 10 grams of alcohol, which is the amount of alcohol a **standard drink** contains. In an adult female, it can take up to 90 minutes to process the same amount.

Nothing will speed up how quickly a person processes alcohol. Black coffee, showering, exercising, vomiting, fresh air or sleeping may make someone feel better, but none of these activities will speed up alcohol processing. Remember, if a large amount of alcohol is consumed, a high Blood Alcohol Content (**BAC**) may still exist the next day, even though someone may feel all right. It is important to recognise that alcohol in the bloodstream will affect the ability to function well.

Standard drinks

Different types of alcoholic drinks contain different amounts of pure alcohol. For example, light beer contains around 3% alcohol and 97% water, whereas bourbon contains around 40% alcohol and 60% water. A **standard drink** is one which contains **10 grams of pure alcohol**. Each of the following is approximately equal to one standard drink:

Low alcohol beer – 375-ml. one can or stubbie.

Heavy beer – 285-ml. one pot or middie.

Fortified wine (port, muscat, tokay, madeira) – 60-ml. one 2oz glass.

Mixed drinks – one 30-ml nip of spirits **or** liqueur plus mixer.

Spirits or liqueurs – one 30-ml nip of either.

Be aware that many glasses will hold more than a standard drink. Many large wine glasses can hold three or more standard drinks if filled, and the mixed spirit drink served at home could be much more than one standard drink. In a glass with broad base, one 30-ml nip of spirit or liqueur will barely cover the surface. Some home made cocktails can contain five or six standard drinks. All containers of alcohol sold in Australia have the number of standard drinks they contain printed on them.

Blood Alcohol Content – BAC

Blood alcohol content (BAC) describes the amount of alcohol in your bloodstream. As your liver processes alcohol, your BAC level will drop, unless you consume more alcohol. The more alcohol that is consumed, the higher the BAC will be, but two people drinking the same amount of alcohol, can have different BAC readings.

Factors that affect your BAC

- Body size

A person with a small body size will have a higher BAC than someone with a larger body size because the alcohol is concentrated in a smaller body mass.

- Body Fat

People with more than average amounts of body fat will have a higher BAC than those with less body fat because alcohol is not absorbed into fatty tissue and as a result is concentrated in a smaller body mass.

- Empty Stomach

When drinking with food in the stomach, BAC will generally be lower because food in the stomach will slow down how quickly alcohol gets into the bloodstream. If alcohol enters the bloodstream at a slower rate, the liver will start processing it at a lower level of concentration.

- Being female

On average, a female who consumes the same amount of alcohol over the same amount of time as a male will almost always have a higher BAC and will almost always take longer to process the same amount of alcohol.

- Fitness, weight, individual metabolism

Level of fitness, weight and just how the liver processes alcohol are also factors that affect BAC. Because there are so many variables that affect BAC, counting how many standard drinks are consumed will only give a rough guide to the BAC.

Remember, alcohol is a drug that can be used safely and enjoyed, but if misused or abused can result in immediate, long term or permanent harm.

If you are concerned about someone's use of alcohol or any other drug, you can contact your state or territory Alcohol & Other Drug Information service (ADIS) for information, advice, referrals, support or counselling.

A list of central contact points for each state or territory's 24 hour Alcohol & Other Drug Service is available on request.

¹ Oxford Concise Colour Medical Dictionary, 2nd edition, Oxford University Press, 1998.

² 1995 & 1998 National Drug Strategy Household Surveys, AIHW 1999 Drug use in Australia and it's Impact. www.aihw.gov.au. Canberra

³ 1995 & 1998 National Drug Strategy Household Surveys, AIHW 1999 Drug use in Australia and it's Impact. www.aihw.gov.au. Canberra.

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This is general information only and should not, in any way, be construed by the reader either as comprehensive or as a substitute for specific professional advice.

Letting Go

John Andersen.

Life involves letting go as well as holding on. A challenge we all face is knowing when to let go and when to hold on. What commonly brings people into counselling is holding onto things they need to let go of, and letting go of things they should hold on to. The specific issues vary considerably; the underlying theme remains the same.

In an interview George Lucas responded to the question, “Why did Anakin turn into Darth Vader?” this way :

“He turns into Darth Vader because he gets attached to things. He *can't* let go of his mother. He *can't* let go of his girlfriend. He *can't* let go of things. You are on the path to the dark side, because you fear you're going to lose things.”

Whenever we suffer a loss in life, we are faced with the task of letting go. We experience all sorts of losses. We lose opportunities, we lose loved ones, we lose money, we lose things, dreams die, hopes end up in disappointment, things just do not turn out the way we hoped. These all involve losses. They demand that we let go.

Letting go can be very hard and painful when what we lose is dear to us. Other things are relatively easy to let go of. It's the tough ones I want to talk about, the ones people grieve over, the ones that leave people reeling and emotionally hurt, the ones that bring people into therapy. An unwillingness or inability to let go and move on can give rise to ongoing psychological distress that may manifest itself as depression, anxiety or anger. Common psychological problems. This means that often the task of therapy is not just treating the 'illness' or the 'problem', but helping the client let go.

What does letting go involve? It involves a number of steps, which I have summarized in the acronym GRAPH. When we are faced with the demand to let go, first we need to Grieve, then to choose how we will Respond, then Accept what has happened, then to end the Protest, and finally to choose to Hope.

Grieve. Our emotional response to loss is grief. Many losses cause little grief. Some losses give rise to more grief than we can bear. Sometimes, we do not want to face the grief. It is too painful. We refuse to face it. So we bury it. We shove it under the carpet. We refuse to even go there. We deny it or repress it. As a result, the grief lies buried but unprocessed. It is still there. But it will show up in disguised indirect ways, whether anger, apathy or depression. So an important part of letting go is acknowledging the grief, facing the loss, and working it through. We need to grieve. An effective way of facing and working through grief is talking to someone, whether a good friend or a counsellor.

Respond. It is not just what happens to us that matters; it is also how we respond to it. In every circumstance we face, how we choose to respond to it makes a big difference in what impact it ends up having in our life. Responding involves taking a position with reference to that situation or event. For example, a friend of mine was offered two different jobs this morning. She had to

choose which job she would accept; she had to choose how she would respond, and her response would make a big difference. So it is with losses. We can respond in different ways. We can choose to play the victim. We can choose to be indifferent. We can choose to deny the loss, and pretend it is not here. We can choose to accept it. We can choose to magnify the loss, or we can choose to minimise its impact. And how we choose to respond makes a huge difference to the impact that loss has on our life. I alone am responsible for how I choose to respond. Sometimes the way we choose to respond can be unhelpful. It can add to the damage and impact of the loss. It can add to our grief and pain. One aspect of letting go is choosing a response that will help us recover, taking a position that enables us to let go and move on. It has to do with choice, responsible choice.

Accept. The single greatest element in emotional pain is the protesting refusal to accept what *is*, but what we do not want. Often we cannot change things, we cannot undo what has happened. Yet we initially reject it, we protest, we want it to go away, to be *undone*. It is only after we come to a place of acceptance, that we are able to find a positive creative response that opens up the way to change and growth.

End the Protest. Along with accepting what is, we need to end the protest. Protest can be hard to give up, especially if we truly have a case, that what has happened really *is* wrong, should never have happened, and is unquestionably unfair. But protest cannot undo things. Protest generally communicates our refusal to accept what is. We often hold onto protest out of a belief that to cease the protest is to condone the uncondonable. Protest, often remains unheeded, and serves only to keep the protester stuck, to keep the protester from resolving things in a way that enables he or she to move on. The proof of genuine acceptance of what has happened is to end the protest.

Yet, we may believe we have ended the protest, when in fact we haven't. Often we may end the open protest. We may recognise protest is futile, it won't change anything. Yet we are unable to completely let it go. As a result protest may continue in a disguised indirect manner. Disguised protest can take many forms, a subtle refusal to be cheerful, a sadness, withdrawal from things, a refusal to speak or be friends with certain people, adopting an opposing attitude or point of view. Disguised protest can be very subtle, an attitude, a way of feeling, a change in behaviour. I have found the best test to determine whether I have genuinely ended the protest is to ask, "What would I be doing and feeling right now, if what I am unhappy about never happened?" This question assumes that my present circumstances remain exactly the same. It helps me to identify how I would be responding right now if there was no element of protest. And my challenge then is to adopt that as my attitude.

Hope. Finally, it is important that we adopt a stance of hope for the future. This is especially important when we find ourselves in a place between what we have lost, and entering into something that replaces it. I call this a between place a "place of waiting". It is a place where we have to live with the gap left by what has been lost, a gap that has not yet been filled by something to replace it. This place of waiting is a place where I need to let go of the loss, and let it be my past, my history, and choose to live in the present without protest. And then in hope wait for the realisation of what will come. You see, protest is generally oriented towards the past; hope is oriented towards the future. Yet hope exists in that place of waiting, where we have not yet laid hold of what we are hoping for.

The place of waiting is a place of transition, of processing and resolving the losses we have suffered, so we can be freely enter into what we hope for, without carrying the baggage of the past. This means that freedom to live in the present requires the courage to let go of losses that now belong in the past. This is important work to accomplish. One function of counselling is to help clients accomplish this work when they are unable to do it on their own.

HOW IS YOUR STRESS MANAGEMENT?

Lyn Shand.

What is Stress?

We need stress to adapt to our environment. Some of the stressors we encounter can be good. Others have a bad effect on us. If the stress response is favourable and results in physical, psychological, or mental improvements, it is good stress.

An individual may experience a stress response that is accompanied by anxiety or worry that is excessive, or where the stress level is too high or too low (e.g. boredom). These will result in distress and have a negative effect on us.

The term stress is used to describe the effect of any event or experience that interferes with your physical, or mental well-being. Our responses come from a primitive 'fight or flight response', which helped our ancestors survive. However when this normal response to stress becomes excessive or prolonged, the body or mind is no longer able to cope efficiently and a number of stress-related physical or emotional symptoms may develop.

The Stress Triangle

Stress itself come in many forms. As a psychologist and family therapist, I see people where a) **physiological** stress is the main problem. This includes stress from hormone imbalance, poor diet, lack of exercise, trauma, illness and drugs (including smoking and excess use of alcohol or prescription drugs). For other clients, the main stress is from b) **relationship difficulties** such as couples issues including divorce or separation or **psychological** stress. Such psychological stress may be from unresolved issues from childhood or from negative self-talk, or due to bottled up emotions such as anger, guilt, frustration, fear or anxiety. Lack of assertiveness and poor self-esteem can be a cause of psychological stress too. The third group include those who have c)

work/leisure stress. These may experience having work they hate or are not challenged enough by what they do. They may be working too much with little time for leisure or they may not be working when they would like to be. It can also cover areas such as retrenchment or retirement adjustment as well as financial problems.

Of course what one feels as stressful varies from one individual to another. When we see clients, it is important to look at their issues holistically, as each of the above corners of the stress triangle can have an effect on the other corners. For example, in some cases, hormonal imbalance may be causing relationship problems or difficulties at work. Alternatively, relationship or work stresses may be triggering illnesses or hormonal imbalance.

Symptoms of Stress

The most common symptoms of stress are: -

feelings of nervousness, panic attacks, irritability, lack of concentration, sleeping difficulties, headaches, muscle pains, palpitations, indigestion, joint pains, diarrhoea or constipation, depression or anxiety, sexual problems, skin irritations.

Adrenal glands are put on over-drive and so can affect both your physical and mental health.

Self-Imposed Stress

When you worry, it adds physical and emotional stress to your life. Worrying needlessly is a negative way to spend time. You can limit this to a set period of time each day and then let it go. Managing the source of your stress is far more productive. Negative self-talk is a habit you can break, although

seeing a psychologist can assist in this process. The method used by psychologists to help this is known as cognitive behavioural therapy (I call it learning to change the “tape” in your head). Most negative self-talk starts in childhood or in our families but you can learn to reverse this bad habit. If your head is always full of negative messages, you will have a negative outlook on life. Keeping that negative talk in check is important for your health and well-being. It is also important for

good relationships with partners and your children, and at work.

What are the Solutions?

Professor Rapee, author of *Managing Stress – a Lifestyle Approach*, argues that the benefits of seeing a psychologist can be more effective than drug therapy. The effects of drugs don’t last, whereas research shows that the good effects of the psychological approach are still positive after 12 months.

Some other suggestions for you to try for yourself are: -

- ❖ Get to know yourself – your feelings, values, goals and abilities
- ❖ Manage your time, set limits on yourself and others
- ❖ Become a better communicator/ be more assertive/ manage conflict
- ❖ Get enough exercise – something you enjoy – walking, gardening, dancing, sport
- ❖ Eat healthy food and maintain a reasonable weight
- ❖ Express emotions appropriately – don’t bottle up feelings or blurt them out
- ❖ Remember, we all need support and friendship and a place to belong so keep in touch with your friends or join a group
- ❖ Develop a healthy self-esteem
- ❖ Use positive self-talk
- ❖ Have recreational activities or hobbies you enjoy
- ❖ Have some quiet time too – watch a sunset, meditate, have a massage, read a book or listen to music
- ❖ Avoid the use of tranquillisers, alcohol or sleeping pills to relieve feeling of anxiety or depression if possible
- ❖ Get professional help if you feel stuck with any of these issues.
- ❖ Have an action plan

Remember, balancing your stress triangle is dynamic – it’s always changing. So just as you think everything is going smoothly, circumstances in your life will change and you will need to readjust the triangle yet again. Get professional help if necessary.

Lyn Shand, psychologist, family therapist & mediator.

ELKANAH NEWSLETTER

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- You wish to advise us of a change in your mailing details
- You have feedback or suggestions for the newsletter
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Comments:

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