



ELKANAH COUNSELLING

www.elkanahcounselling.com.au

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10.00 am – 4.00 pm
Monday – Friday

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Monday – Friday

8.00 am – 12.00 pm
Saturday

Consultations by
appointment only.

After hours: Elkanah
does not operate a
locum service. If you
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SHINING THE LIGHT ON STRENGTHS

Some of us recently attended a conference on “Anxiety & Depression”. What impressed me were the speakers who emphasized strengths rather than weaknesses of the people who come for counselling.

One speaker talked of accepting what is out of our personal control, while committing to do whatever is in our control to improve our quality of life – a bit like tucking the problem under our arm instead of having it in our face, so we can concentrate on the other aspects of our life. In other words we need to emphasise the positives rather than focusing on just the negatives.

People come in for counselling with a presenting “problem” or “problems”. If we only concentrate on the negative symptoms, we can often overlook the silent background structure of our client’s life. It is often from the strengths of these peripheral areas that recovery can occur.

We need “to shine a light” on the client’s silent strengths, positive reactions, enduring relationships, talents, passions, interests and goals and areas of self reliance and independence.

Therefore as counsellors, we need to show our clients how psychology can assist them to develop their full potential and have a meaningful life, rather than postponing living until they are dead!

**Lyn Shand
– Psychologist & Family Therapist**

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- | | | |
|---|-------------------------------------|----------------|
| 2 | Happy Children: Happy Parents | Sylvia Werba |
| 4 | Signs of Trauma in Children | John Andersen |
| 5 | Psychology and Weight Loss Problems | Eddy Kleynhans |

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HAPPY CHILDREN : HAPPY PARENTS OPTIMISTIC PARENTS : OPTIMISTIC CHILDREN

“Children have never been very good at listening to adults, but they have never failed to imitate them.”

James Baldwin

Sylvia B. Werba

Being a parent must surely be one of the most difficult, yet possibly one of the most rewarding jobs in the world. Children – no matter how critical of their upbringing, are listening, watching, learning and being influenced by the actions, reactions and modeling, provided by their parents.

In many families, children identify with their parents, and without being aware of it, can often develop a similar life-style or disposition. If parents tend to look at life positively and optimistically, enjoy relaxed and happy relationships and a satisfying social life, their children have an opportunity to develop similar skills. Above all, it is particularly important in these difficult times, for parents to model and maintain a sense of hope and optimism.

Too often however, depression is modelled in families, as a way of handling stress. This learned reaction to difficult situations has been known to have been passed on from one generation to the next, and is recognized as one of many factors which may ultimately lead to chronic depression, anxiety or sadness.

Children learn to respond to what they are rewarded for, or disciplined for in childhood. Although parents and children should be encouraged to share – and not to repress their emotions and feelings, it is important for children to learn that hopelessness and despair are not the only possible responses - no matter what the circumstance.

Parents who are mostly happy, optimistic, relaxed and confident, have been shown to be more likely to have happy, optimistic, relaxed and confident children. Ensuring a parent's own mental, physical and emotional health, is an investment that will pay dividends to the entire family. - *An ounce of prevention is worth a fortune!*

In these difficult times, it is of crucial importance to keep hope and optimism alive.

Following are a number of suggestions which may help to remind us how important our parenting role is, in raising children who will be equipped to face the future in a positive manner, and maximise life's opportunities.

1. Parents should model optimism – no matter what the problem, there is a way to manage it, or perhaps something we can do.
2. Practice and encourage persistence – Don't give up!
3. Help children to repeatedly experience success – no matter how small.
4. Beware of expressing negative or pessimistic thoughts, or of having negative expectations. (For example, avoid saying something like "I should have known this would happen!" or "Typical!")
5. Model an optimistic way of looking at things when they go wrong in your own life. For example, explain that adverse events are often temporary – e.g. "It takes time to learn to do this well", rather than: "I will never be able to do this" or "I can't....." Situations or causes are specific – not general – e.g. "I can't make a good fruit cake" rather than "I can't cook."
6. Avoid excessive negative exaggerations when things go wrong – such as "Why can't anything go right?"
7. Look for the good that can come out of bad experiences. Help children to see that often disappointments only mean that something better is coming.
8. Model positive self-talk. An "I can do it" attitude is infectious. If you think you can, or you think you can't, you will probably be right. If children think that they cannot do something, and their self-talk keeps telling them this, then they will probably be correct – either way.

9. Teach children to dispute pessimistic views. Help them to see the irrational nature of statements such as "I am hopeless."
10. Keep thoughts positive. Notice and acknowledge when you may slip into fear, doubt and/or negativity. Make a deliberate effort to switch to more positive feelings and thoughts.
11. Make a deliberate effort to eliminate doubt and cynicism. Try "Why not?" or "Let's try" - instead of "It will never work."
12. Understand that pessimism and negativity are learned traits. They can be unlearned and replaced with more constructive alternatives.
13. Be an example of happiness and appreciation. Watch out for tendencies to minimize or apologize for the good in your life, and notice the positives.
14. Share the positive experiences in your day with your children. Encourage them to look for and to share the positive experiences in their day.
15. Demonstrate a commitment to continual personal growth by learning new things and being prepared to change non-constructive patterns in your own behaviour.
16. Develop a strong support network, and encourage children to do the same.
17. Do nice things for yourself from time to time. Understand that practicing self-care is not the same as being selfish. Self-care involves meeting one's own needs. It reduces the chances for a parent to feel resentful or disempowered in their own relationships, and enhances the quality of love and care they can give others.

It is important however, not to minimise sadness or frustration, disappointment or any other feelings.

We must accept that sometimes when we are tired, overworked or unwell, we might think about things heavily. It is important to accept that these feelings exist at a particular time, but that we can help each other to think about them differently, or to find a way to make things a little better.

Model this to your children. They can help you in the same way that you can help them.

Spend time sharing feelings, and encouraging each other. Learn what helps: such as a walk in the park, an ice-cream, a hug, talking it through, etc.

Above all, remember to hang on to the Optimism. It is a powerful tool!

Signs of Trauma in Children

John Andersen

Children experience trauma. It has an impact. Trauma cannot be prevented, but its impact can be minimized. There are two types of trauma. The first type is trauma that results from a single traumatic experience. The second type of trauma is the result of longstanding or ongoing ordeals.

The first step is spotting the signs of trauma in children and recognizing them for what they are. Below is a chart of indicators of possible trauma in children at different ages. The list below is a rough guide. If a child's behaviour changes and the child starts showing the signs indicated in the chart below, this suggests that the child has recently experienced or is experiencing trauma. In which case, the child needs help.

Possible Indicators of Trauma in Children:

Changed Behaviour

- * school truancy or school refusal
- * loss of recently acquired language and vocabulary
- * regression to behaviour of a younger child
- * uncharacteristic aggression
- * loss of interest in activities
- * 'spacey' or distractible behaviour
- * loss of focus, lack of concentration and inattentiveness
- * intense repetitive play that is obvious

Increased Anxiety

- * separation anxiety
- * increased tension, irritability, reactivity, hypervigilance
- * sleep disturbances, nightmares, night terrors
- * specific trauma-related fears
- * obvious anxiety and fearfulness

Changed Affect & Self-Esteem

- * underlying feelings of shame, guilt, humiliation, worthlessness
- * loss of self esteem and self-confidence
- * reduced capacity to feel emotions – may appear 'numb'
- * Withdrawal, depressed affect
- * mood and personality change
- * withdrawal

Physical & Sexual Signs

- * toileting accidents, enuresis, encopresis
- * unexplained bodily aches and pains
- * sexualized play with other children
- * sexualized play or drawing, sexual knowledge
- * genital pain

Childhood trauma can lead to psychological problems in adult life. A number of psychological disorders have been linked to childhood trauma including, borderline personality disorder, sociopathic personality disorder, longstanding depression, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), anxiety disorders, obsessive compulsive disorder, and dissociative disorders. That is quite a list!

There is a multigenerational impact in that those who have been harmed as children through violence, emotional and sexual abuse, are more likely to harm children themselves as adults – whether their own children or other children.

The point is that it is really important that we help children recover from trauma and protect children from ongoing abuse. Failure to do this may have life-long consequences for the child, and result in other people in turn being harmed.

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PSYCHOLOGY AND WEIGHT LOSS PROBLEMS

Eddy Kleynhans

Do you know that:

- 60% of people are overweight?
- Approximately 90% of all dieters regain any weight lost within a year?
- Obesity kills more people than a lifetime of smoking or chronic alcohol consumption?
- 33.33% of people develop cancer?
- 33.33% of people develop cardiovascular disease?

It is a known fact that in the wellness and nutrition literature that if you do lose weight you enjoy the following benefits:

- Increased physical and mental energy
- **ELEVATED MOOD**
- **INCREASED SELF-ESTEEM**
- Reduced blood pressure
- Reduced Cholesterol
- Potential reversal of Type 2 Diabetes.

Psychological factors in weight-loss problems

There are many hormones in our body playing different roles and fulfilling different purposes. Two of those hormones are the stress hormones called adrenaline and cortisol. These two serve an important survival function in life-and-death situations as in the fight or flight dichotomy of survival; however, our body is not designed to accommodate an ongoing release of these two hormones without producing adverse effects.

When we as humans are exposed to ongoing stress over a long period, the ongoing release of adrenaline and cortisol, disrupt our digestive and immune systems which cause a lowering in our energy levels and a susceptibility to illness. At the same time, ongoing release of **adrenaline and cortisol** because of ongoing stress, also **cause unhealthy blood sugar level fluctuations in our blood circulation**, which can produce moodiness, depression, a sense of urgency, irritability, anxiety and general distress.

Another disturbing piece of information is that scientists have now established a link between cortisol and obesity and increased storing of fat in our bodies. It is noted that elevated cortisol levels and ongoing stress cause fat to be deposited in the abdominal area, which health professionals believe to be toxic fat, because it leads to cardiovascular problems such as strokes and heart attacks. Elevated cortisol levels can also lead to poor eating habits. In fact, researchers have found that women who have high levels of cortisol because of elevated stress, have the tendency to snack on high fat or highly refined carbohydrates than women with low cortisol levels, which can lead to unhealthy eating. Just know that when you are tired or stressed,

you select simple carbohydrates such as biscuits, coke drinks, chips, etc, because under stress your body gets its energy from carbohydrates, especially the simple ones.

Another interesting phenomenon is that **cortisol stimulates insulin release**, which is another hormone in our blood and this cause your appetite to increase.

This unhealthy cycle can cause you to increase your weight which can ultimately lead to Type 2 Diabetes and a range of other illnesses. Hence, when we are under stress we should endeavour to chose a healthy diet. However, more importantly, we need to reduce our stress levels, especially in the areas of depression and anxiety. When you chose simple carbohydrates (eg biscuits) as outlined above when you are under stress, you will know that you have selected unhealthy foods. These are the foods that cause you to gain weight.

It is also a known fact, that there is a direct link between chronically high cortisol levels and heart disease, cancer and obesity. By now, it is clear that if we learn skills to lower our stress levels we not only tend to be physically healthier, but more energetic, patient, happy and have passion for life and relationships.

Research also shows us that there is a difference between men and women and their cortisol and stress levels. That is, under stress, women produce much more cortisol than men. This is possibly the most plausible explanation as to why women have more problems with weight loss than men do. When cortisol is raised, we tend only to burn carbohydrates (particularly the simple ones) or sugars for energy instead of a healthy combination of carbohydrate and fat. Moreover, when you cannot burn fat efficiently, it is not only more difficult to lose weight, but you have less energy. Please note that burning fat (especially the good fats) gives you twenty times more energy than burning carbohydrates (especially the simple ones). That is burning fat is like a burning fire log that creates energy over a longer time, whereas simple carbohydrates give you a quick sugar “fix”, after which we feel flat and need more of the foods (simple carbohydrates) that increase our weight.

According to research there is another interesting fact that elevated cortisol levels in women cause them to go for simple carbohydrates and as these burn, a **by-product is produced which is called lactic acid**. Thus if a woman’s body is burning simple carbohydrates rather than fat or perhaps protein, her lactic acid levels increases. Consequently, because of the excess lactic acid build-up, calcium is taken from the bones which help to neutralise these acids. This is probably why 80% of people who have osteoporosis are women.

It is quite evident from the research quoted above, that the key is to reduce our stress levels (psychological problems such as depressed mood and unhealthy anxiety attacks) which will reduce our cortisol (and adrenaline) levels and ultimately help us to maintain a healthy weight and eliminating obesity and some of the other serious illnesses such as stroke and heart disease.

Eddy Kleynhans is a psychologist who helps people with their weight loss problems.

ELKANAH NEWSLETTER

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