

Food for thought: Too much thinking about food?

**By Dr. Elaine Stoffer, Ph.D Psychologist
(Candidate Register)**

I admit it. I am no domestic goddess. I rarely bake and I'm not even much of a cook. My family eats healthily, but meal times are not a central focus. Family time is just as important to me as it is to any other mom. However, I choose to structure that time around alternate activities such as enjoying nature, playing sports together, and creative endeavors such as painting, drawing and music. Yes, there are many enjoyable activities in life other than eating and preparing food. Yet much of our society is structured around eating. Holidays, casual get togethers, even watching movies and TV: So much of our lives tends to include food as a central focus.

Our love affair with food is of course reflected in the media. Yet we are also continually shown television advertisements that equate weight loss with winning the lottery. Of course, such ads are often followed by ones featuring the Pillsbury Dough Boy! Check-out counters are equally confusing with the latest diet, dessert recipes, and pencil-thin actresses competing for space on the same magazine cover. Yes, our society continually bombards us with confusing messages regarding eating and body image. Imagine, then, how perplexing these messages can be for kids and teens.

As a psychologist, I am painfully aware of the potential consequences of such mixed messages. Eating disorders are debilitating, dangerous and on the rise. And the number one trigger for these disorders is dieting. Plus,

the main concerns for those suffering from eating disorders are a fear of "getting fat" and a negative body image. As a mother, I am dumbfounded and concerned when my nine year old daughter who is reed-thin tells me that she doesn't want to wear her winter coat to school because it makes her look fat. Apparently, "fear of fat" is rampant within our schools as well. So, what can we as parents do to counteract such messages that can put our children at risk for developing a negative body image and disordered eating?



Continued on page 3

Our current newsletter highlights some of the issues and concerns that are regularly addressed by our counselling group. If there are particular areas of interest you would like to see addressed in upcoming issues, please feel free to contact us at our office (454-6166).

Roth Associates is committed to providing sensitive, professional counselling to help resolve personal crises. Drawing on the knowledge and experience of our many counsellors, we create an atmosphere of trust and safety that protects the dignity of our clients and enables them to confront issues previously considered too threatening or overwhelming. Male and female counsellors with a wide range of expertise are available days, evenings, and Saturdays. We know problems can arise requiring immediate attention; we therefore make every attempt to provide our clients with same-day or same-week appointments whenever possible. We also believe fees should not be an additional source of stress for people in distress. Our payment plans are flexible. Some supplemental health insurance policies cover a percentage of the fees for registered psychologists, which may be tax deductible.

Couples Counselling: Creating A Safe Relationship.

By Dr. Virginia L. Walford
Registered Psychologist

"What do any of us want in an intimate relationship?"
Most of us would answer this question with a resounding,
"I need and want an emotionally safe relationship". We need
to feel safe enough to go to one another without fear of
criticism or rejection.



Angry criticism is an attempt to change our partner's behavior and is a protest response to isolation and abandonment by the partner. *Avoidant withdrawal* is an attempt to defuse the situation and manage fears of

rejection. Couples can add to their problems by engaging in both of these types of dysfunctional communication.

Work is done on two levels in couples' therapy:

Intrapsychic: how individuals process their experiences, specifically their emotional responses.

Interpersonal: each person's pattern of interaction.

In other words, there is emotional communication and behavioral communication.

It is easier and emotionally safer for us to deal with our problems on an intellectual level. However, we all need and want to be heard on an emotional level. That is where the intimacy exists. That emotional interaction creates the foundation for a healthy relationship.

The goal of couples' therapy is not to blame each other. Rather it is an exploration into how each partner has contributed to the problem. Couples therapy is a *safe place* to sort out communication and relationship issues.

Identification of the problem is required if a solution is

Continued on page 3



ROTH ASSOCIATES IN PSYCHOLOGY

A COMPREHENSIVE COUNSELLING SERVICE

Couples Counselling *continued*

going to be found. Both partners have to be willing to *own* his/her limitations and be prepared to change. Therapy also focuses on each person's strengths.

The therapy process presents the couple with opportunities to experiment with new ways to be together, so that they can make conscious choices about the kind of relationship they wish to create.

(Susan Johnson, Ed.D. 1996)

The above are suggestions and guidelines only. Please consult a health care professional regarding specific situations.

Food for Thought *continued*

It's probably unrealistic to expect that we can make our children forget about appearance altogether. And despite my own lack of interest in matters culinary, I doubt that society, as a whole is likely to shift its focus away from food anytime soon. Nevertheless, I'd like to think that we parents can have some impact. Some things that I'd like to think of as "no-brainers" still happen all the time, such as making negative comments about our children's weight. Research shows that this kind of comment is particularly damaging for young girls, and especially when it comes from dad. I like to emphasize what our bodies can do rather than what they look like. I also encourage my kids to eat lots of good food so that they can have energy for the things they want to do. Kids also learn by example so it's particularly important to watch what we say and do regarding our own habits. So, in addition to trying my best to act in healthy ways, I'm mindful of what I say when I "slip up", as humans are known to do. When I've let my routine slide from time to time, I say things like "I want to do more things so that I can feel better", as opposed to something along the lines of "Oh god, I feel so fat!".

Another important find regarding eating disorders is that sufferers tend to base their self-esteem primarily on appearance. Again, we parents must battle a veritable tidal wave of messages from the media and other sources, which equate appearance with worth. However, it's crucial that we help our children develop multiple sources of self-worth. Those suffering from eating disorders also tend to be perfectionistic as well, so we also need to send the message that we love our children unconditionally. Not that there's anything wrong with encouraging and rewarding success. But at the end of the day, they need to know that we love them win or lose, and no matter what the "package". Now will my children continue to love me despite my preference for family adventures over baking cookies...?





Our Services

Individual Counselling

With the therapist's guidance and support, the individual learns to better understand personal difficulties which include depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, indecisiveness and a general inability to cope with life's problems and stresses.

Marriage Counselling

Couples who want to stay together and improve their relationship learn skills in the areas of communication, conflict resolution and values clarification.

Family Counselling

Family problems which involve all members are more difficult to resolve. In counselling sessions we foster improved communication and encourage co-operation, tolerance and mutual respect. We frequently deal with conflicts over values, discipline and behaviour.

Child Psychological Services

Today's parents struggle to raise well-adjusted children. We provide developmental guidance and support, and modeling of appropriate parental behaviours. Treatment is available for childhood behavioural problems - e.g. disturbances of sleep and eating or problems arising from stress in the family.

Adolescent Counselling

The adolescent often experiences poor self-image, peer pressure and discomfort over sexual maturation resulting in rebellion against authority, social maladjustment or underachievement at school. The counsellor, as an objective yet compassionate outsider, can offer work with the adolescent when family members cannot.

Grief and Bereavement Counselling

Our culture has shielded and protected us from an inescapable reality of life - the fact that we are mortal. All of us will face and deal with the dying and death of parents, friends, family members and ultimately the finiteness of our lifespan. Many of us are not prepared for the intensity of emotions that flow from this experience. Gentle, compassionate and supportive counselling allows individuals and families to better understand what is happening and to deal with the often conflicting and almost always intense emotionality of this inevitable stage of life.

Sexual Counselling

Because it's difficult to acknowledge or talk about sexual concerns, many individuals and couples unnecessarily suffer anxiety and lack of sexual enjoyment. Concerns we

frequently address include impotency, vaginismus, conflicts over differing sexual desires, individual orientation and same-sex couple counselling.

Stress Management

The client who suffers chronic headaches, anxiety, insomnia or inability to relax is taught specific relaxation techniques designed to provide lasting relief and a greater enjoyment of life.

Alcohol and Drug Abuse Counselling

Skilled counselling and support helps alcohol or drug abusers overcome their debilitating addiction. Greater insight into the underlying reasons for the addiction often serves as a platform for a sense of 'personal power' and happiness.

Forensic Issues

Individual counselling centered around preventing one's involvement in future criminal acts. Interventions may focus on social skills development, problem-solving, emotion management, stress management, relapse prevention strategies, empathy promotion, countering cognitive distortions, pro-social attitude development, substance abuse issues, conflict resolution and other potential contributing factors.

Sport Psychology

Athletes/performers need to strengthen their "mental game" just as they do their physical game. Interventions are available on an individual or group basis to deal with issues such as performance anxiety, confidence, and concentration. By learning thought and attention control skills as well as imagery and relaxation techniques, athletes can perform at their peak level in key situations. Plus, these skills and techniques can benefit other performers, including musicians, actors and dancers. And, when competition becomes too intense and problems develop, such as disordered eating and "burn-out", help is available to pave a path back to wellness.

Psychological Testing

Psychological assessment is most useful when there is concern or some confusion about how someone is behaving, learning or feeling. Having objective measures of these factors can often help with providing a clear direction for treatment or remediation. When general adaptations or modifications are not enough and questions remain unanswered, further investigation into the difficulties may be necessary.