

Cyber-Bullying

Being cyber-bullied can have an extremely negative impact on people's psychological and physical health. Even the definitions of this recent form of bullying sound frightening. Wikipedia defines cyber-bullying as the use of the internet and related technologies to harm other people in a deliberate, repeated and hostile manner.

The target of cyber-bullying can be a child, teen, adult or a specific group. The goal of cyber-bullying is to hurt, embarrass, gang up on, intimidate, isolate or frighten. Electronic aggression can be through chat rooms, instant messaging, emails or texts. The content may consist of rumours, gossip, false statements, threats or photographs.

Sometimes when we are hurt, we dismiss our feelings. We tell ourselves that we are being too sensitive. That is a misleading message. We can trust our feelings. They are telling us something important about ourselves. If someone is sending messages through the internet that hurt or frighten you, you are being cyber-bullied! If this happens to you, immediately STOP! BLOCK! TELL!

STOP! Stop reading as soon as you realize that the message is hurtful and someone is trying to make you a victim of cyber-bullying. Shut the computer down or walk away from it. Take a few minutes to calm down. Take deep breaths and decide what to do next. Do not answer or get into an on-line discussion or argument. If you respond, you are giving the bully a reaction and you may risk becoming a cyber-bully yourself.

BLOCK! Every electronic message can eventually be traced back to the sender; therefore, block that user out. Protect your passwords for e-mail, ICQ*, MSN*, IM* or other chat sessions. Limit your communications to those on your buddy list. Report problems to your internet service provider or website moderator.

TELL! You don't have to face this alone. Tell someone who will be able to help you. Show that person what has happened even though the message is

embarrassing, humiliating or untrue. Delete all messages from the cyber-bully. Don't let fears about future retaliation prevent you from doing the right thing.

This is a criminal offence covered by the same laws that apply to traditional face-to-face bullying. A young person may worry that her parents will try to protect her by removing her cell-phone or computer. This is a worry that can be worked through as she learns other ways to protect herself.

Whatever has been written about you, make efforts to dismiss it from your mind. Do not take it to heart and do not dwell on it. Do not let the unkind words keep running through your mind.

Whatever these cruel messages may be saying about you, they are saying a great deal more about the individual sending them. Whenever people lash out, they are doing so because of their thoughts, history, attitudes, hurt feelings, fears and insecurities. Make an effort to ignore these messages.

If cyber-bullying has exposed something that you wanted to keep secret, the best way to fight back is to focus on finding ways to get through the crisis rather than focusing on the bully's words. Remember, you are still the same person you were before the hurtful messages were sent. The words can't change anything unless you allow it.

There can be many harmful psychological, physical and social effects from cyber-bullying. Being cyber-bullied can undermine an individual's self-esteem, confidence and sense of security. Emotional responses may include hurt, anger, stress, anxiety, depression, confusion, hurt and trauma. It can lead to suicidal thoughts. It may affect a student's grades and attendance record or an employee's work performance and attendance. It can marginalize individuals or groups and fuel prejudice. It can lead to social isolation with avoidance of friends, colleagues and activities.

If psychological effects are not dealt with, cyber-bullying can affect a person for a life-time. It will affect self-image and beliefs about trust and personal safety; it will color how other people and

life are viewed and, therefore, affect an individual's decisions and choices. To be cyber-bullied is painful. Sometimes people make poor choices about how to deal with that pain. They may socially isolate themselves; become bullies; or turn to drugs or alcohol to dull the pain. In some cases, the effects can be so traumatizing that professional help is needed to deal with it.

Understand that being cyber-bullied is not your fault. You are not to blame or to be responsible for what is happening. So trust your feelings and instincts, STOP! BLOCK! TELL!

- *ICQ - Instant messaging computer program
- *MSN - A collection of Microsoft Network's interactive internet sites
- *IM - Instant Messenger



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The Key to Marital Success

What two attitudes are necessary to create and maintain a successful marriage? Both spouses must be open to growth and they must make their marriage the top priority.

Many couples are surprised to learn that they have the opportunity to grow and mature within a marriage. It seems to me that your spouse assumes the power which your parents used to have. In other words each spouse now becomes the most influential person in their partner's life.

Growth in marriage can be very powerful in that old wounds can be healed. For instance, if a parent is neglectful or abusive, wounding

occurs in their son. When this youngster grows to adulthood and marries, the old wounds can sometimes get in the way of forming a strong bond with his wife. However, by following a few ground rules related to communication and collaboration, this individual can learn to interact with his spouse in ways which are far improved over what he learned in interactions with his parents. Because of this growth, wounds from the past can be healed in the present.

Dr. Daniel Siegel, in his research on brain development, has said that the human brain can rewire itself through a process called neuroplasticity. When an individual communicates well with a special person in

their life -hopefully their spouse fills this role- and this communication involves focus and emotion, the brain will rewire itself. In other words, we will then be able to cope more effectively with challenging situations as they occur.

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Change Your Thinking

According to Eckhart Tolle, "80 to 90 percent of most people's thinking is not only repetitive and useless, but because of its dysfunctional and often negative nature, much of it is harmful."

As we mature, we develop tendencies of thinking based on a complex interaction of our biology and accumulated experiences. Thought patterns become engrained and impact our interpretation and perception of our reality. How we interpret and perceive new information will ultimately impact how we feel. Our life is what our thoughts make of it.

Some evolutionary psychologists boldly state that we are prone to be unhappy because our evolved minds are like Velcro for bad thoughts. For instance, the oldest part of our brain is constantly scanning our environment for

things that can potentially harm us. Every day, negative events are over-reported in the media, while a good number of our popular television shows, movies, and songs on the radio often depict violence, hatred and death. The fields of Psychology and Psychiatry that were initially established to assist with our mental health have a tendency to focus/ overemphasize pathologies, deficits and disorders, and do not focus enough on strengths, resources and resilience.

The good news is: we can change the way we think! Based on the science of quantum mechanics/ physics we now know that how we focus our attention will physically alter the

brain. Our mind uses the brain to create itself. Our thinking and behavior are usually not passively determined by our brains; rather we are active mediators of change. So based on how we willfully focus our attention we will change our brains! The neural-plasticity of our brains enables us to develop new ways of thinking while old less desired patterns of thinking will become less prominent. The more you think a certain way, the stronger those neural pathways will become, through a process called myelinogenesis. Over time, states will become traits, and



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EMDR for Kids: An Effective Tool Used for Child Therapy

EMDR is an acronym for "Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing". Since 1987, EMDR has been an effective treatment for a variety of psychological issues such as anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, fears, phobias and trauma. EMDR treatment can be used with adults and children.

EMDR treatment is based on the use of "bilateral stimulation" of the brain. This happens when we stimulate either side of the body (tapping on knees or hands, moving the eyes back and forth) which in turn stimulates both sides of the brain. When this stimulation is done while the client focuses on negative images, feelings or sensations, the body and brain reduce these negative or "looping" beliefs and thoughts. When the negative sensations, feelings or beliefs have lessened, or been desensitized, we are then able to better to create new positive memories and ways of coping

EMDR is an effective therapeutic tool in working with children. Compared to the amount of memory an adult has stored over a lifetime, children have significantly less. This fact often allows the therapist to process negative information - thoughts, feelings and experiences - quickly and efficiently with a child. Also, children's attention spans are less, so they often cannot sit and focus for long. EMDR is a fast and effective way of moving a child through trauma or fears. Used simultaneously with proven methods such as cognitive and play therapy, EMDR is an effective tool for children.

EMDR allows you to practice future behaviors that the child would like to have happen but has difficulty accomplishing. For example, some children find it difficult and scary to fall asleep on their own, without their parents or someone else in the room. After processing their anxiety and negative thoughts with EMDR, we can take this a step further and complete a "training run" in their minds of what a typical night free of anxiety may look like, before they actually try it out. This approach significantly increases a child's confidence in their abilities and

gives them courage to try the new behavior, because they've rehearsed it in their minds, and had it strengthened by EMDR.

Some typical problems seen in children that EMDR effectively addresses are: 1) fears (of the dark, separation from parents, animals etc.); 2) trauma (physical, emotional and sexual abuse, accidents, witnessing of crimes); 3) easing the intensity of transition in separation and divorce, and 4) low self esteem and confidence issues.

Consider the example of Sarah, age 6, who witnessed a car accident. She was driving with her grandmother when out of the blue a large truck came towards them swerving across the centre line. The truck narrowly missed hitting them, but did crash into the car driving next to them. Sarah watched in horror as all of this occurred.

After the accident, Sarah was visibly shaken. This reaction is something we would expect. What her parents did not expect was that Sarah refused to go to school, insisted that someone be with her at all times and would not easily get into the car to go anywhere. Her anxiety seemed heightened in many different areas in her life and went on for 3 months. No amount of talking, cuddling or encouragement seemed to help Sarah feel comfortable and safe. Her once happy, relaxed demeanor was tense, worried and frightened.

Sarah's parents decided to bring her to see a counsellor in order for her anxiety symptoms to be lessened and for the parents to learn ways to help Sarah to calm down and move past the accident memories. The counsellor recommended the use of EMDR with Sarah as well as using other cognitive and expressive interventions. At the beginning of therapy EMDR was used to help Sarah create a calmness in her body by helping her go to a safe place in her mind. This was a place that Sarah could go at anytime - at school, in the car or lying in bed - which helped ease some of the anxiety she was experiencing. EMDR was also used initially to build up Sarah's confidence

in her own power and the sense of safety of the world around her. In the language of EMDR this technique is called a resource installation. A resource installation helps children get in touch with those times that they have felt in control, felt able to regulate their own emotions, had fun and felt or experienced a feeling of self-confidence. Both of these interventions had a positive effect on Sarah.

In order to address the awful memories that Sarah consistently relived in her body, the counsellor used EMDR to help Sarah work through those traumatic memories. Using techniques that loosen repetitive thoughts that act like they are frozen in the brain, the counsellor helped Sarah feel more separate from her memories. This is the desensitization phase. Having more distance from the traumatic memories enabled Sarah to think more helpful and healthy thoughts when remembering the accident. For instance, when she first came into therapy her thoughts were "I am not safe" and "I almost died". After EMDR Sarah's thoughts are "I survived and am healthy" and "I have people in my life that keep me safe".

By the end of therapy, Sarah was enjoying school, would go to sleep on her own and walk around her house by herself again. At times, she felt slightly anxious if the car she was in was going at a fast speed, but she benefitted from reminders from her family that she was safe and she could use her calming techniques. Most of all, Sarah was smiling again and had the carefree style that was present before the accident. That's the part she liked best!

We are pleased...

.....to welcome to our practice: Dr. Marjie Limbos, child psychologist; Chris Boyd R.C.C. (adolescents and adults); and Erika Bardal R.C.C. (children). They join our fourteen other therapists in providing a wide range of counselling services to all.

The Key to Marital Success (continued from front cover)

Growth occurs through the marital relationship.

Making marriage the top priority is the second attitude which will keep the relationship solid and alive. A marriage is like a living organism and it needs to be nurtured on a regular basis. If a couple becomes distracted with raising children or making money, they may "forget" that they are married. This can cause them to take their marriage for granted and to drift apart. When their children eventually leave the nest a marital crisis may ensue.

Bob and Beth were very dedicated to their two sons. They attended their hockey practice and games and supported other activities as well. These two parents split the duties, taking turns cheering on each of their active teens. Because of the schedules, it was rare for Bob and Beth to catch a game at the same time. This active parenting pattern continued over the years until their

youngest left home to attend university in the east. Soon after his departure, Beth and Bob experienced a crisis: they had drifted so far apart they now felt estranged from each other. This realization came only after both sons had moved away from home. In their attempts to be good parents, they had not made their marriage a priority and this marital disconnect was the consequence.

Making marriage a priority means finding the time each day to connect and support one another. Setting aside a daily "talk time" which includes back and forth sharing about the emotional impact of the day, as well as family related decision making, will go a long way to keeping a marital relationship refreshed and healthy. Couples who make time to have a cup of tea and chat with each other, without their children

present, learn to appreciate each other's differences and see them as a sign of balance. They also learn how to work with the differences to create collaborative solutions without falling into power struggles. Their goal is to find a workable solution while honouring the points of view of the person they love.

These daily talks provide the opportunity for mutual exchanges which will decrease stress, if done properly. Communicating effectively means focusing on each other and listening to what *the day has done* to each other, not what *each spouse has done* that day. Dr. Siegel stresses the crucial importance of empathy in facilitating growth and helping to relax and bond the couple to each other. Daily empathic conversations help to make marriage the priority it needs to be in order to survive and thrive and in order to facilitate growth in each spouse.

Change Your Thinking (continued from front cover)

we will become happier as a result.

There are several proven methods to assist in changing our thinking. One such technique is mindfulness meditation. Most mindfulness practices begin by developing focus and directing our attention to our senses.... to observe all information, both inner and outer, very calmly and closely.

Our mind uses the brain to create itself.

....Focus on your breathing, focus on the feeling of your feet making contact with the ground, focus on the sounds of waves, etc. Each time you notice your thoughts creeping back into awareness, gently bring your attention back to the moment-to-moment sensory experience....

Mindfulness helps people focus on the moment instead of being fixated on the past or concerned about the future. This is a skill and it will take time to develop, so don't be discouraged if you are only able to focus your attention for a few seconds. Over time this will become easier.

The benefits of mindfulness medita-

tion are extraordinary. This and similar techniques help develop the prefrontal cortex in the brain which is linked to body regulation, attuned communication, emotional balance, fear extinction, response flexibility, insight, empathy and morality. People who regularly practice mindfulness report having fewer feelings of anxiety and depression, and report feeling more calm or tranquil. The research is so positive that several existing psychotherapeutic approaches are incorporating mindfulness techniques into their practices. There are hundreds of variations of mindfulness practices, so it is important to find one that you enjoy and will want to utilize often. Ultimately, it's your engagement and effort that make all the difference.

References:

Mindsight by Daniel Siegel
Power of Now by Eckhart Tolle
Quantum Physics in Neuroscience and Psychology by Jeffrey Schwartz, Henry Strapp and Mario Beauregard
East Meets West: Creating New Wisdom Tradition by Ronald Siegel

Workshops

Living Through Grief

Monday, April 23rd

St. John the Apostle Parish,
Vancouver

Marriage Can Be Great

Wednesday, April 25th

St. Patrick's Parish,
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