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Resource Newsletter of

**DENIS
BOYD &
associates**
PSYCHOLOGISTS AND COUNSELLORS

202 - 1046 Austin Avenue,
Coquitlam, BC, V3K 3P3
Telephone: 604-931-7211
Facsimile: 604-931-7288

The Legacy of Divorce

As psychologists and counsellors we see numerous examples of wretched, demeaning, abusive, and unfaithful marriages. We are keenly aware of the loneliness and suffering of many adults and of their serious efforts to improve their lives before and after divorce. The decision to separate or divorce is often one of the most difficult decisions a couple will ever have to make in their lifetime. Most worry about what will happen to their children and how to best help them. Alternatively, what will be the price for the adults and the children if they decide to remain in an unhappy marriage.



Rick Hancock, Psy.D.
Registered Psychologist

Demographers report that 40 percent of all married adults in the 1990s have already been divorced. In addition, a quarter of adults under the age of forty-four are children of divorce. This means that close to a million children a year in the U.S and about 100,000 thousand a year in Canada have seen their parents divorce. This has major consequences for the individuals affected and for our society as a whole.

In 2000, Judith Wallerstein and her co-authors and researchers completed a 25-year landmark study that chronicles the lives of children from both divorced and intact families. This is the longest close-up study of divorce ever conducted. They detail how adult children of divorce view life differently from their peers raised in intact homes. The results of the study were surprising for the authors and provide valuable insight for parents, counsellors, and law-makers.

There is no research that can say that divorce is universally detrimental to children. It is true, however, that divorce often leads to a partial or complete collapse in an adult's ability to parent for months and sometimes years after the break up. Caught up in

rebuilding their own lives, well-meaning mothers and fathers become preoccupied with a thousand and one concerns which can blind them to the needs of their children.

Wallerstein addresses two faulty beliefs that have become the foundation for our current attitudes toward divorce. The first holds that "if the parents are happier the children will be happier, too." Children in post divorce families do not, on the whole, look happy, healthier, or better adjusted even if one or both parents are happier. National studies show that children from divorced and remarried families are more aggressive toward their parents and teachers. They experience more depression, have more learning difficulties, and suffer from more problems with peers than children from intact families. In general, there is earlier sexual activity, more children born out of wedlock, less marriage and more divorce.

A second myth is that the separation is a

*...maybe more effort
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a floundering marriage.*

temporary crisis and that children will quickly adjust to the new order "as long as the parents don't fight", at least in front of the children. Wallerstein learned from adult children of divorce that their parents' anger at the time of the breakup is not what matters most. Unless there was violence, abuse, or unremitting high conflict, they have dim memories of what transpired during the supposedly critical period. It's feeling sad, lonely, and angry during childhood. It's traveling on airplanes alone when you're seven or long trips by car or ferry to visit your parent. It's having no choice about how to spend your weekends or vacations. It's adjust-

ing to stepparents and stepsiblings, second marriages and second divorces, and often a series of live-in lovers. It's experiencing further losses as people they have come to love and trust come and go.

What surprised even Wallerstein was that the major impact of divorce does not occur during childhood or adolescence. Rather it rises in adulthood when these children come to choose a life mate and build a new family. The absence of a good marital image influences their search for love, intimacy, and commitment. The resultant anxiety leads many into making bad choices in relationships, giving up hastily when problems arise, or avoiding relationships altogether. Some fear abandonment or have a lack of trust in the faithfulness of their partner. It's like a part of them is waiting for disaster to strike, especially if they are happy.

Should parents stay together at all cost? Of course not. But maybe more effort should be made to rescue a floundering marriage. Maybe there are better ways to parent our children after the divorce. Maybe we all need to be more aware that, as resilient as children may be, we have little understanding of the child's view of their new world. Dare to read books like the one mentioned here, seek counselling before any final decisions are made, and don't take for granted that all is well in your child's world ■

Ref: Wallerstein, J, Lewis, J., & Blakeslee, S. (2000). The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce. New York: Hyperion

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Is Your Child Anorexic?

You notice that your 14 year-old daughter only "nibbles" at family dinners because she "ate earlier with friends." She now exercises intensely, claiming that the extra 1-2 hours of running each day will get her in shape for her soccer games. You also think that you hear her vomiting in the bathroom. You tell yourself she couldn't have an eating disorder. After all, she is too young for something as serious as that...

Actually, contrary to what many believe, Anorexia Nervosa may begin at age 13 or 14 (or even earlier) and can continue into adolescence and adulthood. This eating disorder cuts across all social classes and affects mostly females, although a small percentage (5-10 percent) of eating disorder patients are males.

To be diagnosed with Anorexia, an individual has to restrict their body weight to less than 85% of what would be expected for their age and height, show a significant fear of gaining weight or becoming fat (despite being underweight), show disturbances in perception of their weight/shape or in the severity of the problem, and have missed at least three consecutive menstrual periods. The restricting type of anorexia involves fasting, extreme dieting, or excessive exercise to maintain a low body weight.

This eating disorder cuts across all social classes and affects mostly females...

The binge eating/purge type is characterized by binge-eating and/or purging (e.g. engaging in self-induced vomiting or using laxatives, diuretics and/or enemas.)

Anorexics typically have significant body image concerns and view themselves as fat, even at exceptionally low weights. They may become intensely focused on certain body parts (e.g., legs, buttocks, arms) that they view as too large. Even at

dangerously low weights, they may see others (who are not anorexic) as thinner than themselves. In the anorexic's pursuit of thinness, daily weight loss is viewed as a "victory." If daily weight loss does not continue, the anorexic worries that she will become obese. Consequently, anorexics may weigh themselves many times each day, not realizing that normal fluctuations in water retention will affect each weighing. The intense focus on dieting and calorie counting may lead the anorexic to cook her own food.



*Deborah Kors, Ph.D.,
Registered Psychologist*

Anorexics are often self-critical, have high expectations of themselves, and work to excel in many activities (e.g., school, sports, dance). Many anorexics claim that their excessive focus on food and weight provides a sense of control over their lives and allows them to avoid uncomfortable emotions. They often state that their exceptionally low weight makes them feel "special," where they can be noticed and stand apart from their peers. This makes it very difficult for most anorexics to want to seek treatment or "give up" their disorder. In fact, they may try to hide their disorder by wearing loose fitting clothing.

At the same time, many anorexics feel overwhelmed and controlled by their food and exercise regimes, and by their constant thoughts about food and weight. They may also experience a loss of friendships with those who do not develop an eating disorder.

There are significant medical complications that can result if this disorder remains untreated. These complications include physical weakness, dehydration, electrolyte disturbances (associated with purging), gastrointestinal disturbances, anemia, cognitive impairments, cardiovascular problems, arrested growth and sexual development, stress fractures, and osteoporosis, among others.

However, even without all the signs of anorexia, an individual may nevertheless have an eating disorder of some type or may be in the process of developing one. Therefore, if your child shows any significant

changes in weight, eating habits, exercise routine, or in how she views her shape and weight, it is essential to seek help immediately. If the weight loss is severe or there are significant medical concerns, an inpatient stay in a hospital may be warranted. Outpatient treatment with one's family doctor and dietician (which should always follow a hospital stay) would focus on restoring weight and normalizing eating patterns. Family therapy may also be a useful treatment component to help address relevant family issues. Individual therapy with a psychologist or therapist would be critical to help address the anorexic's distortions about shape and weight, as well as the issues that led to the eating disorder in the first place. With appropriate professional treatment, many with anorexia can be helped to feel better about themselves and lead happier and healthier lives ■

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WORKSHOP

Smoking Cessation Program

presented by
David Aboussafy, Ph.D.,
Registered Psychologist

For more information about individual or group sessions, please contact
Denis E. Boyd & Associates Inc.
Phone: 604-931-7211

The Narcissist: Looking for Love

I once invited my friend, Mary-Beth to attend a show with me. She was an aspiring singer and I thought she would enjoy this particular production. Unfortunately, I was delayed a few minutes picking her up and was dismayed when she left an extremely angry and volatile message on my cell phone. I apologized for being late but thought it prudent to ignore her attack. As the evening progressed she shocked me with the loud, grandiose, and critical comments she made to acquaintances and towards the show we were seeing. She seemed intent on making herself the focus of attention.

Mary-Beth is a narcissist. This is a personality disorder characterized by a heightened sense of self-importance and grandiose feelings of uniqueness. Mary-Beth makes it appear that everything in the world is about her: her needs, her worries, her schedule, her feelings. She engages in a lot of self-dramatizing behavior, and claims her average achievements are exceptional.

People like Mary-Beth want their own way and are frequently ambitious to achieve fame and fortune. They handle criticism

poorly and have an inflated sense of entitlement. They can be very draining as they require excessive admiration. Lacking empathy they tend to exploit others. "Can you drive me to the airport at three in the morning?" They are like leaky buckets that never seem to be filled. Not surprisingly, their relationships are fragile.



*Simon Hearn, Ph.D.,
Registered Psychologist*

Narcissists are extremely insecure. They envy the love, care, and validation that others seemed to have received as children. Their parents may have been nurturing but the process ended prematurely for some

She seemed intent on making herself the focus of attention.

reason. So the Mary-Beths of the world constantly try to regain the missing pieces of adoration and validation. We are all proud at times and like to show our peacock feathers but narcissists who are feeling inwardly empty and unloved need to have praise just

to feel halfway decent. They try to be larger than life. Unfortunately, narcissists rarely achieve the kind of attention they want for long. They are seen as sad, friendless, and shallow. They may be intriguing to watch but are rarely liked.

The narcissistic person is usually fascinated by even-more-narcissistic people, and will identify themselves with the great names of our world. "My doctor is the best in North America". Envy and disdain are common feelings. Mick Jagger once said that Madonna was a "teaspoon of talent in an ocean of ambition". Was this envy, disdain, or both from one possible narcissist to another?

In therapy, narcissistic patients must renounce their narcissism to make progress. Many are too vulnerable to allow for this. As individuals, however, we can make a difference. In interacting with a narcissistic person, it is important to be as compassionate as you are able. They deserve respect and kindness like anyone else. You don't have to agree to every request or take abuse but you likely won't be abused if they sense that you are respectful and on their side. So let the Mary-Beths speak about themselves while maintaining a low-key friendly courtesy. And feel free to enjoy the drama without getting caught up in it ■

WORKSHOPS

What is a Great Marriage?

How to revitalize your relationship

presented by

Denis Boyd, M.A.

(Registered Psychologist)

Monday, October 17, 2005

7:00 to 10:00 PM

Limited Enrollment

Cost: \$25.00/person, \$40.00/couple

(Handouts included)

S.T.E.P. Teen Parenting

(Systematic Training for Effective Parenting)

presented by

Don Lasell, M.A.

(Registered Clinical Counsellor)

Wednesday, October 12 to November 23, 2005

(Every Wednesday for seven weeks)

7:00 to 9:30 PM

Cost: \$120.00/person, \$150.00/couple

(Parent manual included)

Location: 202-1046 Austin Avenue, Coquitlam, B.C.

Please register by calling 604-931-7211

Retirement...Lucky Me!

For those who have asked me prior to retiring, and since, "So, what are you going to do? Won't you be bored?", and for those contemplating retiring or coaching others about this time of life, I thought that you might like to know how I managed to live through my Friday May 13, 2005! If you aren't interested, that's OK and I won't worry about that either.

These are some of the highlights, and I won't include details about eating my fruit, vegetables, and drinking water, but that did happen, too, as usual.

- Awake and up at 6 AM, remembering it's Friday the 13th and then thanking God that I was going to have a good Friday golfing in the cloudy sunshine.
- Feeling a bit strange and like I'd lost something. Weighed myself for a change and found that it was a loss of 4 pounds without "trying" from the last time I weighed in! What's going on...or off, I asked myself. Never mind, enjoy it.
- Being greeted by our dog for her breakfast, and having an enjoyable one myself.
- Being greeted by my Loving but Sleepy Wife and wished well for the day.
- Replying to my good friend's offer to purchase a supply of apples at low cost.
- Having a smooth, 50 minute drive to a golf course in Vancouver despite rush hour.
- Enjoying listening to the morning humour on the radio in our new truck.
- Being greeted by the other, recently met men in my regular Friday foursome as part of a Senior Men's club, and paying only \$35 to play at Senior's rates.
- Playing 18 holes, laughing and complaining, and walking non-stop without sitting for the whole game, being able to complete the round in 4 hours, 10 minutes without waiting.
- Finally, after 4 rounds scoring over 100, scoring 44 + 51 = 95 and only losing 2 new golf balls instead of the 6 lost last time!
- Losing only \$3, the maximum possible loss, and distributing it equally to the



Farrell Hannah, M.A.
Retiree

other 3 men.

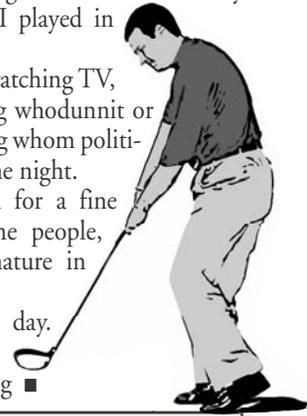
- Being welcomed after the 9th hole by another good friend who had introduced me to this golfing group, and being encouraged yet again by him, despite my erratic scores.
- Socializing and laughing with the guys over a weekly hot dog with raw onions.
 - Watching the rain start to drizzle outside after we completed our round.
 - Returning home before the real rush hour, safely and with a "good tired" feeling.
- Being welcomed by my Loving and Awake Wife with hugs, kisses, and congratulations for breaking 100 at last, and scoring only 30 strokes higher than my age. There is hope.
 - Going on a ½ hour fast walk to the park with Doberman dog.
- Meeting our cheery Son at the Skytrain and fetching a few groceries together, reflecting about some of the day, and laughing about the ongoing activities in the stores and on the roads.
- Briefly greeting our cheery Daughter-in-law and our boisterous younger-of-the-two- Granddaughters, and some of the children at Daughter-in-law's home daycare business.
- Chatting and raising a toast with Loving Wife of Nearly 44 years (that would be in marital years together, not her age nor mine anymore) before having one of our favourite dinners for two at home.
- Doing the dishes together, never having had a mechanical dishwasher and not planning to.
- Replying to and sending emails to friends.
- Succumbing finally to the urge to go and get a Friday the 13th (Any Excuse Will Do) Ice-cream Cake for us to celebrate the day and prepare for sweet dreams or indigestion.
- Waving to a Friday the 13th black cat in the neighbourhood on my return with the cake.
- Completing an on-line crossword puzzle (part of my mental alertness and word

usage anti-rusting program), and doing it in my personal best time.

- Actually solving the one and only Solitaire game I played in the evening.
- Falling asleep watching TV, not really caring whodunnit or who was bashing whom politically late into the night.
- Thanking God for a fine day and for the people, animals, and nature in my life.

So, that was my day.
Lucky me.

And thanks for asking ■



DENIS BOYD & associates

PSYCHOLOGISTS AND COUNSELLORS

Denis E. Boyd & Associates Inc.

202-1046 Austin Avenue,
Coquitlam, B.C. V3K 3P3

Tel.: 604-931-7211 Fax: 604-931-7288

Email: denboco @ denisboyd.com

Web Site: www.denisboyd.com

Denis Boyd, M.A., R. Psych. * - 00399

Tena Colton, Psy. D., R.C.C. **

Rick Hancock, Psy.D., R. Psych. - 01494

Farrell Hannah, M.A. Retired

Nancy Michel, M.A., R. Psych. - 00477

Joan Schultz, M.Ed., Clin. M.A. Cert., R.C.C.

Intern

Trevor Walsh, M.A. Cand.

Affiliated Therapists

David Aboussafy, Ph.D., R. Psych.-01475

Jean-Claude Bazinet, M.A., R.C.C.

Lorraine Crump, M.A., R.C.C., C.C.C.

Simon Hearn, Ph.D., R. Psych. - 01194

Deborah Kors, Ph.D., R. Psych. - 01465

Don Lasell, M.A., R.C.C.

Jean Toth, Ph.D., R. Psych. - 01081

Note: * R. Psych. (Registered Psychologist)

** R.C.C. (Registered Clinical Counsellor)