

A Better Drug Treatment Focus

As an addictions counsellor I have often wondered why many addicts attend one or more treatment centers yet most will continue to relapse. And we have to wonder why the success rates for full recovery only vary from 5 to 14 percent. Most treatment centers adhere to the widely accepted disease model of addiction and offer programs ranging from 28 to 90 days duration. We need to figure out what to do to be more successful at helping individuals overcome their lives of misery and addiction.



Rick Hancock, Psy.D.
Registered Psychologist

The answer might lie in a unique program being offered to addicts in far off Italy. San Patrignano, a United Nations accredited non-governmental therapeutic community, was established in 1979 by Vincenzo Muccioli in Rimini, Italy and is committed to the education and rehabilitation of young marginalized persons with drug addictions and related problems. The community is generally home to about 1,300 men and women and over the past 30 years has provided rehabilitation for over 20,000 individuals.

In the words of its founder, *"Among the problems that affect the drug addict, drug use is the least relevant. The core of the problem is not drugs, nor the abstinence crisis: it is the human being with his fears and the black holes that threaten to suck him in. That is why I do not like to say nor hear that ours is a community for drug addicts. Ours is a community for living, where you can restart after years spent as a social outcast. Ours, if we really need a definition, is a community against social marginalization."* Vincenzo Muccioli

This program is a refreshing approach to the treatment of drug addiction and the San Patrignano commitment is towards building a better society with the guidance provided by the community and its many volunteers and collaborators. The San Patrignano model of treatment steers clear of pathologizing the addiction and does not foster the disease model of addiction. Nor does this model incorporate a 12 step program; it has no rigid therapeutic steps or even a defined timeline. The program is

individually tailored to reflect the needs and characteristics of the participants and does not make any ideological or social discrimination when admitting residents (San Patrignano, 2013).

The two cornerstones of San Patrignano are education and rehabilitation. The rehabilitation is a long-term program that is individually tailored to suit the needs of each individual, who will stay an average of 3 to 4 years. Newly admitted individuals are assigned a tutor and mentor who would support them and monitor their progress. As these individuals grow into the program and are integrated into the San Patrignano community, they are entrusted with the responsibility of tutoring new residents. After the first year of residency, families may join their loved one. As a result, the community is home to roughly 70 children and there are numerous family units to accommodate these children and their families. There is also a school to enable the children to continue with their education.

Education and vocational training is a decisive factor in helping people re-integrate into the job market and re-build their self-esteem. Individuals can choose from over 50 vocational workshops that provide training in such endeavors as health care, farming, baking, carpentry, graphic design, printing, woodworking and furniture making, meal preparation, horse training, wine making, etc. In fact, the funds required to run the community are provided in part from the sale of goods and services produced by the community, as well as from private donations and contributions. There is no government funding nor are individuals and their families asked to help finance the operation. Evidently, the focus is not simply on stabilization, but an entire lifestyle change.

The statistics that are provided offer a glimpse into the remarkable effectiveness of this therapeutic community. Studies undertaken by various universities report a full recovery rate of over 72 percent. This begs the question of why there aren't more of these communities throughout the world. The short answer

is because of the high cost of running such a facility and our reliance on a medical model that continues to treat addiction as a disease rather than a series of environmental and lifestyle issues. San Patrignano simply focuses on community involvement and lifestyle training and views drug use as merely a symptom. But take heart, help may be close at hand with the opening a few years ago of the Baldy Hughes Therapeutic Community just outside of Prince George B.C. This facility is modelled on San Patrignano and may offer a local option for the marginalized addicts in our community.

Ref: <http://www.sanpatrignano.org/en>

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When Loved Ones are Hurting

Kathy's friend Laurie breaks down in deep sobs while sharing that her favorite aunt has recently passed away. Kathy looks at her friend, "speechless" and "paralyzed," not knowing what to say or do. In this moment, Kathy wants so much to "make it better," but fears that anything she says will be the "wrong" thing and will make Laurie feel worse.



Deborah Kors, Ph.D.
Registered Psychologist

Maria's husband Zollie relays that his brother has decided to permanently "cut him off," after years of trying to rebuild their relationship. Zollie sits sullenly at the dinner table, while Maria acts encouraging and says "well at least you still have me and the kids." Zollie is left feeling that Maria clearly does not

understand the hurt he feels from his brother's rejection.

What's similar in these situations? Both Laurie and Zollie are experiencing emotional pain. More specifically, Laurie is feeling sad at the loss of her aunt and Zollie is feeling sad and hurt regarding his brother ending their relationship. And both Kathy and Maria are struggling with how best to respond.

These scenarios are fairly common when dealing with someone we are close to who is in emotional pain. Although it can often be very difficult for others to even let us know when they are in pain (because of how vulnerable it can feel to share and show sadness/tears), it can be equally difficult to

know how to respond when someone does. There is often a fear of saying the wrong thing which paralyzes us from saying anything at all. Ironically, this might worsen the situation, in that the person in distress may translate our silences as a sense of not caring. Other times, we may "problem solve" and provide a "solution" to help "fix" the problem. An example would be Kathy

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Benefits of a Mindful Brain

Has anybody ever told you to stop and smell the roses? And have you? If you have, you may have noticed some changes in the moment. Your heart rate lowers, you breathe deeper, you are able to smell the sweetness radiating from the flower. Your vision is absorbed in the vibrant colors. You may even reach out and touch the silky smooth petal. In this moment, your mind stops. Your to-do list seems to slip away and your worries leave with it. In this moment, you are mindful. You are present in the here-and-now by paying attention to the experience of the moment with acceptance and without judgement.

Mindfulness has been around for thousands of years and practiced by people across the planet. It wasn't until recently, well within the past 20 years or so, that we have been able to develop

research techniques to study mindfulness. Through neuroscience research we are now able to say that through the intentional focus of attention, we can actually change the structures in our brains. And with those changes comes great benefits such as emotional regulation, job satisfaction, reducing anxiety and depression, increasing resiliency, and even assisting couples build a secure relationship.

The practice of mindfulness is the training of the brain to focus awareness and strengthen conscious awareness. By becoming mindfully aware, we are able to step back and see our situation in a larger

perspective, from a larger field of awareness. We can then begin to see different possibilities for responding to our situation rather than falling into old reactive patterns.

One of the most practiced mindfulness techniques is breathing. It may sound simple, but it can be very challenging. Find a spot to sit and let yourself relax. Try to focus on your breathing deeply in and out. If it helps, place your hand on your belly to feel your breathing. Your



Brooke Lewis, M.A.
Registered Clinical Counsellor

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Proactive Preteen Parenting

As a parent of four children who range in age from elementary to early teen years, I rarely feel like I am meeting every parenting challenge with great success. No other thing I do challenges me to the extent that parenting does. Despite the books I've read, classes I've taken (and taught!), nothing has prepared me for its surprises and new experiences. No other occupation can so intertwine the daily drudgeries necessary for care taking with the complete unexpectedness and delight of four small portions of humanity, interacting in mischievous and sometimes delightful ways with each other.



Joan M. Schultz
Registered Psychologist

So then, why am I writing this article, after just this week experiencing socks being flushed down the toilet, being ambushed by Nerf gun warfare and hearing new heights of literary fantasy put to use in description of sibling brains?

Part of the reason that I risk giving suggestions to other parents is that I have observed some things that do work — not just in our family, but in many others also. With four children on the threshold of their teen years, I am more sensitive to what can be done now that may help them through this potentially difficult time.

Just what is it that makes these years so “potentially difficult”? I believe it is the combination of peer devaluation along with a teenager’s emerging independence from his/her own parents and greater reliance on outside opinions. Devaluation from peers can be expected, especially if the child does not perfectly meet up to our society’s standards of beauty, brains or athletic ability. Our child’s ability to handle the devaluation may depend to a great extent, on what resources and relationships we provide to them in their preteen years.

These are a few strategies, when thoughtfully implemented in our homes, that build a solid foundation for our children as they metamorphasize from child to adult:

1. Examine your family values and how they are communicated in your home. Recognize that the values in our

society with their emphasis on beauty, athletics or moneymaking abilities are not what bring true happiness. Teach your children that quality of life depends more on internal qualities demonstrated through acts of kindness, truthfulness, courage, responsibility, fidelity, self discipline and justice, to name a few.

2. Teach your children a “No Knock Policy”. Children in the home are not allowed to put themselves down, or others down. Verbally reward a young child for using positive descriptions and set the example yourself of using five positive comments for every correction you give them.

3. Encourage your preteen to follow through on an interest, to develop competence in something they enjoy or show ability in. This will help hold your teen’s self esteem in place when they feel discouraged about themselves. Competence is something that cannot be taken away. Point out the areas they do well in, to get them started.

4. Communicate regularly and individually, with each child. If possible, plan a special “date” with each child on a regular basis. Let your child know you are vitally interested in their interests by asking them questions and listening to their responses. This is the “fast track” to building better relationships with them.

5. If one child is presenting with problematic behavior, deal with him privately. Don’t allow other siblings or yourself as a parent to label any one child as “the problem”, but rather say, “We have a problem here with this situation, how can we deal with it?” Then make a plan with the child to deal with it proactively. We might start by saying, “This just isn’t like you...”

6. Family meetings are a preemptive way to resolve crises before they begin. The meetings can happen at a set time, or around the supper table one night a week. This is a good time to note “what’s working well” in the family, as well as providing an opportunity to discuss concerns before

they create crises. For example, if you note an increasing trend in name calling, you can discuss the impact of negative comments and how they detrimentally affect the whole family. Remember to always finish the meeting with encouragement.

7. Encourage healthy friendships with your child’s peers. Get involved as “the mom” or “the dad” that the kids like. Despite the mess and disorganization, let it be your home that the kids want to come to after school. Know where your kids are and what they are doing, always. Expect accountability for their whereabouts with phone calls or notes. I remember one teenager complaining to her friend about her mom always having to know where she was — the other’s response was, “At least your mom cares about you.” Our kids protest these things at times, and sometimes as parents, we have to give our kids the right things to protest about!

8. Finally, adjust your expectations to realistic ones. I know I am not a perfect parent - and my children are not going to be perfect either. One of the things I can expect during this time of “hormonal fluctuation” is that my preteens will be irritable occasionally, out of sorts, and looking for an argument. In fact, they sort of sound like me before I’ve had my morning coffee! What they need from us is a steadiness — a stability in direction, values and unconditional love for them.

Oh yes - and maybe they need me to have my morning coffee before I interact with them too early!

This article originally appeared in our PsychHealth newsletter, Fall 1998 issue

Books

**Marriage Can Be Great! ...
no really**
by Denis Boyd

**Parenting Teens Without
Power & Strings**
by Rick Hancock

When Loved Ones are Hurting (continued from front cover)

suggesting that Laurie distract herself to get away from her grief. A further tactic is to become overly optimistic, as Maria does by encouraging her husband to “look on the bright side.”

There is often a fear of saying the wrong thing which paralyzes us from saying anything at all.

Although problem solving and remaining optimistic can be helpful at times, these strategies may not be what is initially needed. These strategies may leave the other person feeling that you don't realize the depth of their pain and that you view their pain as a “quick fix,” rather than recognizing the time needed for them to heal. Consequently, this may leave the other feeling minimized and more alone in their situation, which can ironically (and inadvertently) add to their pain.

So, what can be most helpful to the other person when they show emotional

pain? Actually, showing a sense of empathy can be incredibly supportive. When we show empathy, we are envisioning what it would be like to be in that person's shoes (even if we are not) and giving the person a shared sense of “being with them” as they are going through this painful experience. This does not mean “taking on” their pain or being responsible for what they are going through. Nor does it mean that we are pitying them or feeling sorry for them. Rather, it conveys that “we are with them in our heart” as they are going through their difficult time and that we see their pain as important and valid. Examples of empathic statements might be “I get how difficult this loss must be” or “I understand how much this must hurt.” This, in turn, gives the person a deep sense feeling understood and that they are no longer completely alone in their pain. Although this does not “solve” the painful issue, it can be very healing and soothing for another human being to know that their pain is being taken seriously; additionally, the experience of feeling less alone in one's situation can be healing in itself.

So, why is it difficult to truly “emotionally be there” for another person?

First of all, we may feel “helpless” when we see others in pain, desperately wanting to help them feel by offering a quick solution or uplifting response. Additionally, during childhood, many of us learned to “ignore,” “solve,” or “be positive” with our own vulnerable feelings; therefore, it can be foreign to know how to respond to others any differently than how we respond to our own pain. We may want to “move away” from our friend's pain, as it stirs up difficult and unresolved about our own previous hurts and losses.

However, there are substantial benefits when we are able to be emotionally there for another person. We not only provide a “healing” for the other person, but it can give us a good feeling to know that we are truly helping someone close to us. Overall, “being there” can lead to a much deeper sense of connection and closeness in the relationship, which ultimately may lead to the development of deeper, richer, and more long lasting relationships in one's life.

Benefits of a Mindful Brain (continued from front cover)

mind may wander, and that's ok. Just notice the wandering and return your attention to your breathing. Try to focus on your breathing for 1 minute. There are many other mindfulness practices you can do on your own with a self-help CD or you can attend a mindfulness practice group.

When you slow down to smell the roses, you may learn a thing or two about yourself. I attended a conference on mindfulness where hundreds of helping professionals participated in mindfulness practices. One such practice involved eating a raisin mindfully. We looked at the raisin, felt it in our fingers, smelled it, put it in our mouth and rolled it around, and slowly chewed it. It was the longest raisin eating experience I have ever had. At the end of the practice, our facilitator asked for feedback from the group on what we noticed. One

fellow raised his hand and said, “I've been eating raisins my whole life and I just realized I don't like raisins!”. Sometimes in life we spend our days rushing; mindfulness helps us stop and just be.



Workshops

by Brooke Lewis,
Registered Clinical Counsellor

Mindfulness Practice Class

Come join for an hour of mindfulness practice to help reduce stress, build resiliency and boost wellness.

Monday, January 27, 2014
Monday, February 24, 2014
Monday, March 24, 2014

Time: 7:30 - 8:30pm
Cost: \$15.00/class

Please call 604-931-7211 to pre-register