

The Myth of a Ruined Life continued from cover page

have a life partner but something always goes wrong with her relationships; none endure.

She believes her parents don't understand her and are not emotionally supportive. Although she wanted to change, she remained psychologically paralyzed, believing that nothing would work no matter what she tried to do.

Currently, she is working hard in counselling. She has written many letters that she didn't send but in which she poured out her pain, frustration, anger and fears. These letters were 'addressed' to her parents and ten-year old Jill. Now she is beginning to realize that when she lives the 'Myth of the Ruined Life' she is allowing

the ten-year old Jill to run her life. She is learning stress-reducing techniques. Her depression is lifting and her outlook is more hopeful. She is learning how to build on her strengths and appreciate her accomplishments. She has joined an athletic activities club and is making new friends. She is listening to inspirational tapes and reading motivational books. She is reaching out to others and has joined a self-help group.

Jill is becoming more connected to her emotions and therefore beginning to connect with others in a meaningful way. In short, she is learning to live the 'good life' rather than the 'Myth of the Ruined Life'.

Vancouver Riots: The Hidden Victims

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sudden, powerful recall of a past trauma that is so intense that the person "relives" the experience, unable to fully recognize it as a memory and not something that is happening in "real time". That is why it is so disturbing. A flashback catapults you to the moment of a traumatic event complete with the fear and other sensations that were felt at that time.

What was especially distressing for the clients noted above was how the flashbacks came about so intensely and so suddenly, and in the moment, not knowing why all of this was happening. For some of these clients it was the first flashback they had in months. And for those clients who live with flashbacks on a more regular basis the current flashbacks became more vivid and alive. These clients weren't just scared, they were terrified. They felt out of control and at the mercy of their experience. And as the flashbacks occurred, they were unable to access the part of themselves responsible for reassurance, protection and grounding.

For clients who endured horrific events as children, their past and present can sometimes merge. In the days following the riots, these clients weren't just experiencing a merging of past and present, but instead, found themselves thrown back into their past in a manner that was so confusingly unexpected. The intense feelings and body sensations were so frightening because the feel-

ings/sensations were not related to present reality and many times seem to come from nowhere. Five of the eight clients noted above actually told their therapist they believed they were going crazy.

In the weeks that followed the riots it became incredibly valuable for these clients to understand what the triggers had been and to recognize how important it is to share, discuss, and debrief with their therapist. It finally made sense to them. It gave them relief in knowing that they weren't crazy and that their flashbacks weren't all that unexpected and surprising given the overall unrest in the city that Wednesday night. It allowed them to regain a sense of sanity and control. It allowed them to come back to the present.

Many of us may be shocked or angered or simply take for granted the violence and images that are projected through the media. But many individuals with traumatic histories live their daily lives sensitive to the happenings throughout society. These individuals can have horrific memories resurface without warning and, in effect, become re-traumatized by current events. There are many trauma survivors in our society and they become the "hidden victims" of events like the Vancouver Riots.

Upcoming Workshops

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Understanding Your Teen Series
Teen Depression -
November 21, 2011 - Coquitlam

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The Myth of a Ruined Life

Sometimes events from the past prevent people from being happy. They believe that their lives are ruined and can't be fixed. Often they feel lonely, unappreciated, anxious and hurt expecting only sorrow, misery and bad luck. They live with the expectation of failure, accidents, put-downs and rejection.

When she was ten years old, Jill's life was ripped apart when her parents separated. She was moved from her big house in a familiar community with many friends to a low-rent housing project in a new town and an unfamiliar neighborhood. Her father and friends were left behind.

At that time, it seemed as if her life

was ruined and she concluded that it could never be good again. She was angry and her anger eventually became a block to becoming happy and successful.

At some level, her lack of happiness and success are a way to get even with her parents for not figuring out how to get along. She believes, "Somebody has to pay for ruining my life. You can't treat kids like that and expect them to turn out okay."

If she stops being angry with her parents, she lets them off the hook and they won't understand how much she has suffered because of them. At twenty-something, she is still living the 'Myth of the Ruined Life.' It has become a self-fulfilling prophecy. She is a successful young

professional, but claims that she is stressed with overwork and bored by the lack of challenge in her job. She is socially isolated and although she would like to make friends, she lacks the self-confidence to do so. She would like to

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Vancouver Riots: The Hidden Victims

On Wednesday, June 15, 2011 the Vancouver Canucks lost Game Seven of the Stanley Cup Finals to their rivals, the Boston Bruins. It was an emotional hockey series and the Vancouver Canucks were favoured to win the Cup. Irresponsible hooligans used this opportunity to go on a rampage; screaming and yelling, smashing windows, setting fires, looting, drinking, and fighting. News of the riots flashed around the world. It was an embarrassing incident for the City of Vancouver.

After the incident I spoke with a colleague and she told me that the day after the riots she saw eight clients and all but one appeared to be going through some sort of crisis. They were either highly agitated or very depressed. One was suicidal and had to be admitted to the hospital. All of them were strangely "off" in some manner and none could pinpoint

why. What was common about these clients was that each experienced major trauma or abuse in their younger years.

In the days following, other therapists related similar stories of people with traumatic histories being triggered by the violent images from the riots. This was heightened by the generally unsafe and frightening feeling that prevailed throughout the city for days after. Many individuals with traumatic histories were having flashbacks directly related to the riots; flashing back to people dancing and chanting around huge fires (ritual abuse) much like images of "fans" cheering as cars were overturned and set on fire. Or flashing back to being beaten as a child; similar to the



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television images of people fighting and lying on the ground being kicked and punched. Or flashbacks to parents yelling and screaming and throwing things at each other; much the same as the many scenes of people yelling and hurling of objects during the mayhem. Or flashbacks to drunk and unpredictable caregivers; similar to scenes of the drunken out-of-control rioters.

Flashbacks are memories of past traumas that pop into one's awareness without any conscious attempt to retrieve this memory. The individual can have a

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Understanding Misbehaviour

It was mid-September, the beginning of only the third week of school. The early autumn sun shone warm and lazy outside a small suburban rancher, as if reluctant to let go of the relaxed days of summer. The maple trees lining the street displayed broad orange and gold leaves painting an almost surreal picture of peace and serenity. Inside the rancher however, the atmosphere was anything but serene.

"Chelsea, will you please hurry, we are going to be late for school!"

Sue, a working young mom with a vivacious five year old daughter, was feeling frustrated and annoyed. Usually proactive, calm and well organized, Sue was feeling frazzled, while her daughter, on the other hand, appeared cool and unruffled completely oblivious to any apparent need for haste.

"Chelsea, let's go!" Sue shouted from the front door.

Slowly putting her shoes on, and then meticulously tying each of the multi-coloured laces of her new Dora the Explorer runners, Chelsea seemed to be moving in slow motion.

"Chelsea!" Sue repeated loudly once more.

Resisting the urge to forcefully drag Chelsea through the doorway toward the car, Sue was unable to hold back her tears.

"Chelsea, why are you doing this"?

Most of us who are parents can, at one time or another, relate to Sue's frustration and feelings of annoyance. Chelsea's behaviour is a power struggle and conveys the message "you can't make me".

Dr. Rudolph Dreikurs (1897-1972), an American psychiatrist and educator, theorized that children pursue four main goals when misbehaving: attention seeking, power, revenge and display of inadequacy. Each of these goals is rooted in feelings of discouragement and is based on mistaken beliefs of what is necessary to achieve significance.

Each of the four types of misbehaviour tends to illicit a corresponding emotional response in the parent which is a clue to the child's pursued goal. The

attention seeking child wants attention on demand. This usually generates a feeling of annoyance in the parent who is likely being interrupted by the child's bid for



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attention. The child's pursuit of power generally generates a feeling of anger as the parent's authority is being challenged. The child, who pursues a goal of revenge, often after having lost a power struggle, tends to generate a feeling of hurt in the parent - it is as though the child wants the parent to feel the same level of pain he or she feels. The child who pursues a goal of display of inadequacy, also called learned helplessness, wants the parent to lower or remove expectations. He or she does this

by trying to convince the parent that they are not capable of doing what is expected. This goal often generates a feeling of hopelessness.

Remembering that misbehaviour is purposeful and rooted in discouragement is the key to effectively responding to it. The parent's reaction to the child's behaviour will serve to either reinforce the use of the goal, (i.e. the misbehaviour continues because it worked) or will begin to render it ineffective (the misbehaviour diminishes because it is not working).

Our two main tools as parents in managing our children's misbehaviour are the use of encouragement and consequences. In a sense, encouragement is the carrot, while consequences are the stick. The use of encouragement and consequences are different from the use of praise, rewards and punishment. While praise and rewards tend to focus on accomplishment, encouragement focuses on effort. Praise is a reward given to someone who has achieved something of value to the one who praises, while encouragement is a gift which focuses on what is of value to the one who makes the effort. Praise can create a sense of dependency on the one who praises by conveying the message to the receiver "you require my approval to be acceptable". Encouragement is different. It focuses on the value of the person making the effort, not what is

actually accomplished. It conveys the message "you can do it, keep at it", "you are worthwhile".

Consequences and punishment are also different from each other - they are the result of choices, good or bad. Consequences are related to the child's behaviour and provide feedback - teaching us what is a good or bad decision based on the result we get. Punishment is different. It tends to focus more on the character of the one who has made the offence, conveying the message "you are bad". It instills pain and fear and may not be related to the misdeed at all. Punishment is often more for the punisher who has been hurt and feels the right to hurt back, than it is for the one receiving the punishment. By using consequences instead of punishment, the parent conveys the message: *"I love you and believe in you, I just don't like the choice you have made"*. *"Let's clear the slate and try again tomorrow."* It allows the parent to

Our two main tools as parents in managing our children's misbehaviour are the use of encouragement and consequences.

respond to his or her child calmly and respectfully without anger. It expresses love for the child and confidence that the child can make better decisions in the future. This positive expectation itself is encouraging and helps to improve the likelihood that the child will cooperate in the future.

In the case of Chelsea, Sue can provide feedback and offer a choice:

"Chelsea, if we don't leave now you will be late for school and I will be late for work. If I am late for work, I will have to make up the time after work and therefore will not be able to bring you to your Brownies meeting tonight."

At a later time, Sue can work on building her relationship with Chelsea by spending more time with her, when it is not being demanded, and continue to offer Chelsea choices, and where possible and appropriate, include her in other decision making that affects Chelsea. Sue can also make an extra effort to notice and specifically comment on positive

Questions that Arise When a Loved One Dies

Why is it taking so long for me to feel better?

You may be asking this question of yourself after only a short time following the death of a loved one. Grief feels crazy at times and you want it to be over with so that you can feel normal again. However, it can take many months or sometimes years (after a violent and tragic death) to return to "normal" and even then, normal will be different than it was.

Roller coasting emotions, foggy thinking and poor memory will take time to ease up. Accept the turmoil, allow it to come and go and this will lead to an eventual lessening of the symptoms of grief.

What can I do to make it better?

Change your attitude about the grief: allow it to be part of your life instead of fighting it. Many people feel their grief pain and, not knowing how normal it is, will become fearful which leads to more intense grief symptoms. Give yourself permission to experience the varied feelings of grief which will ease their intensity over time. Knowing that your memory is going to be poor, that concentration will be hampered, or that low energy levels come with the territory helps to lighten things up a little. Grief expresses itself in a variety of ways.

You mean I'm not going crazy?

Grief is paradoxical and often confusing. In simple terms it is a complicated journey.

When grief feels out of control and "crazy", it is normal. In contrast, when you are in control, not feeling much distress and thinking you are doing remarkably well you may be sitting on a time bomb. Yes, there are times when grief seems uneventful and this could mean that the lost relationship wasn't very meaningful, but not necessarily. If it was a special and close relationship, there will most certainly be turmoil and pain; if not now, later and intensely.

Putting it simply: when grief is bad, it's good and when it's good, it's bad.

What do you mean by unhealthy grief?

There are four kinds of unhealthy grief. The first can be described as "absent" or denied. A person hides their grief out of embarrassment or in an attempt to protect other loved ones. The grief surfaces a year or more after the loss rather than immediately.

The second type of unhealthy grief is "prolonged grief" which means that a lot of time has passed and the intensity of the grief pain isn't lessening and may even be getting worse. Sometimes this

is normal i.e. when the relationship was longstanding and very committed or when the loss was a murder or suicide. Other times it may mean that the bereaved

When grief is bad, it's good and when it's good, it's bad.

person has "unfinished business" with the deceased and can't or won't let go.

Type three is "delayed grief" where the mourner is too busy to grieve and only feels their upset when they slow down or are no longer distracted.

Type four is the "exaggerated" form where one or two strong emotions are experienced and few others. Remember, all emotions are normal in grief so this usually means the others are being held back for some reason.

What can I do to get better or back to normal?

Allow some time to pass and don't fall into the trap of trying to "rush" your grief. This can be easier said than done. Secondly, as mentioned above, allow the turmoil to happen naturally and don't fight it. Thirdly, try to get some exercise: long walks are perfect. Fourthly write about your experience (including a letter to the person who died).

Finally and probably most helpful of all: talk about your experience (again and again with feeling) to a good friend.



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Understanding Misbehaviour continued from previous page

behaviours which demonstrate cooperation on Chelsea's part, -i.e.:

"Chelsea, it's great to see you getting your stuff together the night before, it really shows me how responsible you are becoming".

By bringing attention to and commenting on positive behaviours, Sue increases the likelihood that Chelsea will choose to continue these positive behaviours in the future, instead of having to resort to misbehaviour to get attention on demand. What is also important to remember is that as parents, we too can become discouraged. Raising respectful and responsible children is a lot of work. Recognizing our

own level of discouragement is perhaps the first place for us to start in dealing with our children's misbehaviour. Our own actions, words and attitudes send a message which our children often pick up on. If we convey the message, either in words or non-verbal communication, that we do not really believe that they will cooperate, they usually don't, - i.e. we get what we expect. By having a positive expectation on the other hand, we send the encouraging message that we believe in our children and the good choices and behaviours of which they are capable. While a positive expectation is not a guarantee that our children will

cooperate, having such an attitude helps to increase the chance that they will.

Encouraging our children, noticing their efforts, using consequences and having a positive expectation for cooperation, all help to guide our children toward more positive and cooperative behaviour while also helping to reduce the feelings of stress and frustration we can feel in parenting them.

For more information on the principles of effective parenting, refer to STEP (Systematic Training for Effective Parenting) The Parent's Handbook Don Dinkmeyer, Sr., Gary McKay, Don Dinkmeyer, Jr.