



De-Mystifying Counselling

By Val Warner BA MSW RSW

When I graduated with my Masters Degree and found my first job in an Ottawa psychiatric clinic, I admit I was terrified. I was part of a 'team' approach - the others being a psychiatrist, family physician, psychologist, and a nurse. It was bad enough that I felt intimidated by the experience, age, and expertise surrounding me. What made it worse was that I was convinced that every term bandied about - psychotic, neurotic, paranoid, inadequate, etc. etc. - referred to me, too! I acted confident on the outside, but inside I was scared someone would see through me acting and discover the insecure little girl who lurked below the surface.

As time passed, and after getting to know my colleagues better, it slowly dawned on me that all of us - male or female, young or old - were hiding our true selves behind a mature 'know it all' façade. What was hidden? The longing to be liked and understood for who we were underneath with our imperfections and frailties. In fact, this is the very essence of counseling - helping people to like themselves with their own unique flaws. Only then can we be more accepting of other and their idiosyncrasies.

Good counselors see themselves as equal, not superior, to those who come to them for guidance. In my own case it wasn't until I had counseling myself, provided by our clinic director Dr. Erwin Koranyi, that I started making headway in the area of self-acceptance. Unless we face, and overcome, similar struggles it is hard to help others in difficulty.

Parenting provided an amazing learning experience. Until I had my first child I thought it would 'come naturally'. My first hour home with my brand new daughter convinced me it wasn't going to be so easy, and by the time she was 2 years old I was desperately in need of a good parenting course. Not only did I enroll in one. I went on to teach the course in the following years, giving validity to the old expression 'you teach what you want to learn'. I laugh (and shudder) at some of the advice I gave to parents before I had kids of my own and found out it is the best, and definitely the hardest, job in the world!

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Historically our society has preached independence and self-reliance when it comes to family problems, however we can all benefit at times from the help of others. Dentists need dental work themselves just like everyone else, but the right one can still fix your teeth. The same holds true for counselors. Good ones are honest and will admit they never have their lives under perfect control. No one does. But a counselor may, through his/her own personal growth and professional development, be able to help you find more fulfillment in your life by sharing some of their insights.

Val Warner, BA MSW RSW, has her own counseling practice called Walk & Talk Counseling for Women. She helps stressed-out women to get more joy out of life and to improve family harmony. Val also gives presentations to women's groups and can be reached at phone/fax (403) 284-1999 or e-mail her at val@walkandtalkforwomen.com.