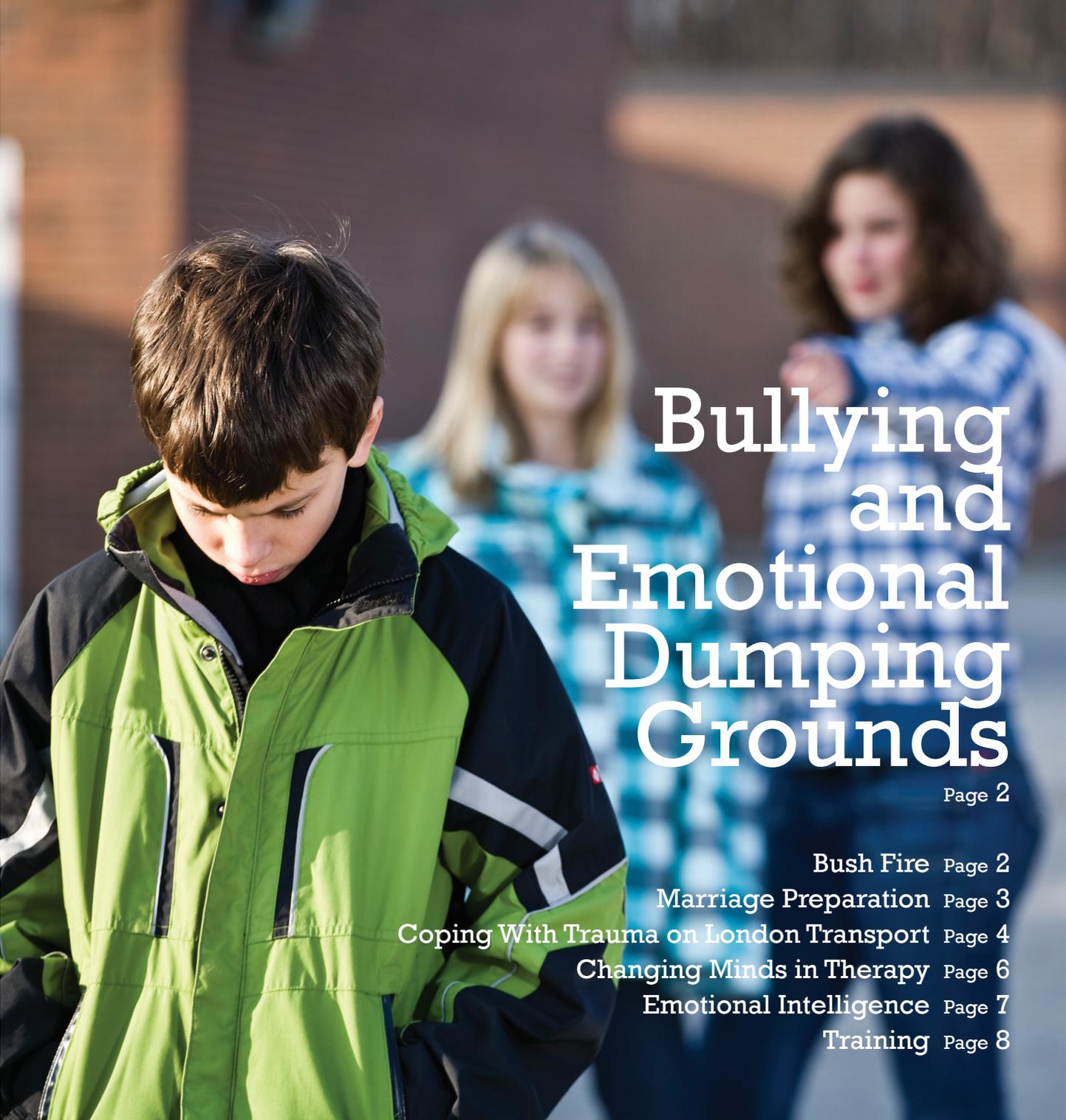


# Pastoral Care News



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# Bullying and Emotional Dumping Grounds

by Colette Langridge

**Willows Counsellor and mother of four Colette advocates the need for changes in our attitude, approach and action towards bullying in order that our children can be part of a more secure and caring society**

What is bullying? It is the physical, verbal or emotional projection of fears and insecurities, things that become too much to contain; a game of self-avoidance. All of these result in the persecutor enacting feelings that are 'too hot to handle' on to innocent victims.

Victims often draw upon defensive character strategies to survive. Just as a hedgehog folds in tight and puts out prickles; so do humans when we are under attack. Both bully and victim become locked into a 'battle of defence'. This behaviour makes the situation even more complex. Outside helpers without an in-depth understanding of bullying can easily add 'fuel to the fire' by inadvertently drawing upon their own insecurities or judgements. The bullying situation quickly becomes one of 'check mate'.

'Every generation blames the one before, and all of their frustration come beating on your door, we all talk a different language talking in defence'. These lyrics from a song by Mike and the Mechanics illustrate how much the essence of an issue like bullying can be captured in music. There is something about human nature that seems to focus on looking for blame, avoidance and cycles of maladjustments throughout generations. In his letter to the Colossians Paul writes 'It is so easy for any of us carry out such projection and claim that we are in search of peace.' (Col.3: v12 -14)

All too often we can easily disconnect from our feelings and emotions, either because we are unaware of what they truly represent or because we have never had the opportunity to express our pain; Feelings become suppressed into the body and can either 'leak out' in the form of physical pain or 'cry out'

in the form of emotional projection; the latter often directed at another person. Bullies are usually unaware of the impact their behaviour has on others; thus gaining themselves an unhelpful label or reputation through their capacity to throw victims into turmoil.

## Bush Fire

*It started as a spark  
Grew quickly into fire  
One minute we are friends  
The next I see a liar?*

*It takes two to tell a lie  
One to lie and one to listen  
The burning embers now ablaze  
The bush flames really glisten*

*Everyone who gets close  
Stands a chance of being burned  
All because your behaviour  
Is now a way that's being learnt*

*The entire class ignited  
The trust no longer hot  
A place that once reflected peace  
Now torn apart by rot*

*Outside of the classroom  
Parent's jaws begin to beat  
They all draw upon their  
inner child  
Throwing fuel upon the heat*

*Communication starts  
to crumble  
No rescue team in place  
You may try dialling 999  
But they will arrive too late*

*The lack of a skilled helper  
Or time to work it out  
Every time you ask for help  
Your characters now under doubt!  
So if you've travelled on this  
path before  
You'll know you're on your own  
The fire crew sprayed water  
Where they needed to pour foam*

*Now the blaze is burning  
Will rescue teams ever learn?  
Is it any wonder we don't ask  
for help?  
It's easier to burn*

What would it be like if only we could learn to create a balance between secure boundaries and develop relationships

through genuine understanding? Sadly however we tend to take the route of control and vociferous response, thus creating carriers instead of allowing people to simply be heard. More attentive listening would surely be much more valuable. We are told to 'listen to our children' but how many of us have been exposed to real listening as children? It has been said that 'children need a good listening to and not a good talking to.' I wonder how long we have to keep trying out ASBO's and other expensive controlling methods before we wake up and realise that we have two ears and one mouth for a very good reason.

It is time we looked very seriously at Attachment Theory. Over fifty years ago Sir John Bowlby recognised some very logical observations of nurturing human behaviour. I believe that our education system needs to update its current anti-bullying methods by learning to integrate good listening skills and attachment knowledge. We have the capacity to develop an attachment friendly and nurturing environment that will benefit our children far more than we are delivering at present. The seeds of a secure base for our children are currently being crushed by certain policies and unhelpful boundaries that prevent professionals from reaching the hearts of our children and connecting with their insecurities. At present, our society seems anxious and avoidant rather than consistent and secure.

### Active listening requires skill since it develops normal listening into understanding

Rather than simply generating all too familiar 'set' responses, active listening draws on a person centred approach focussing on the child's agenda. In my view, such an approach would secure a generation of children who feel safer and without fear of judgement, thus promoting good behaviour and a sense of justice.

The work of Childline has proved that our children are crying out for genuine understanding. In their determination to support our children they have developed a meditation training programme for

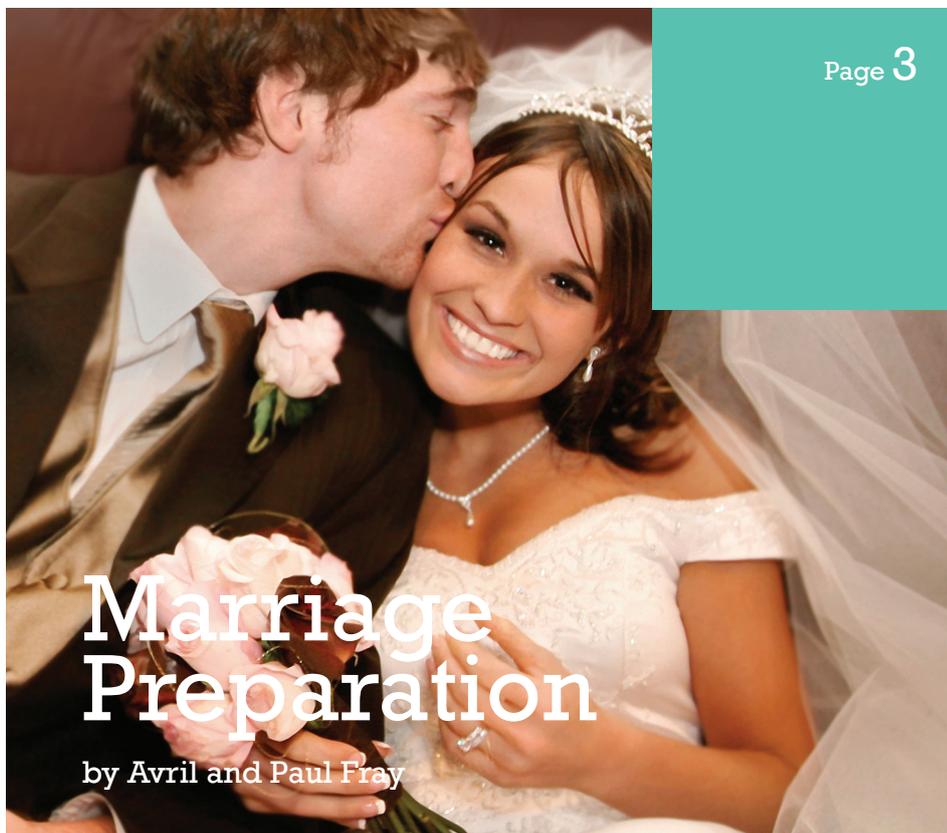
primary schools, providing children and teachers with listening skills that can repair ruptures in early relationships, help avoid further breakdowns in communication and replace insecurity with confidence.

Bullies don't need blame or to be labelled, they need a secure base to understand their emotional responses. Victims deserve the freedom and happiness to live their lives safely without being subject to prolonged pain inflicted upon them by others. NSPCC calls for us to 'let no cry go unheard', but we still do. All too often we fail to respond appropriately to this devastating cycle of bullying behaviour that goes on in every school, community and even the workplace. When bullying takes place, its impact can send shock waves through the entire family, strong enough to stir up dormant insecurities in other family members. Such insecurities can become unhelpful through for example, colluding with the bully's behaviour or making the victim anxious.

I think that it's time we reviewed how we perceive bullying and be much more realistic about how big this problem is. As a society we need to make a sincere and non-judgemental difference to achieving more productive, secure and successful outcomes to bullying issues. A society that lives according to the principle advocated by Jesus in Matthew's gospel

**“At that point Peter got up the nerve to ask ‘Master, how many times do I forgive a brother or sister who hurts me? Seven?’ Jesus replied ‘Seven! Hardly! Try seventy times seven!’”**

*(Matthew 18, v 21-22 The Message)*



**Avril and Paul who are members of St Sampsons Church, Cricklade discuss the content and value of marriage preparation as couples contemplate making their wedding vows to each other and before God.**

For the past ten years Preparation Courses have been taking place within our church. The course is run three times a year on two Friday evenings and it is anticipated that all couples marrying in our church will attend. We endeavour to put couples at ease on the first evening and during each session there is a great deal of sharing, not only with each other but with others in the group. We also have fun together and there is generally a relaxed atmosphere.

The idea of the evenings is to offer couples the opportunity to explore possible misunderstandings that may lie ahead for them within their marriage, to look at how each partner's ideas differ and how to improve understanding of each other. We stress that everything spoken during each evening is confidential.

The format of the evenings is general 'teaching' questionnaires, group work, discussions, listening to a tape and watching a DVD. Each couple has a folder with handouts to complete. These relate to the different topics

covered during the sessions and everyone answers the questions on their own, as the subject is introduced. Once the questions are completed, everyone discusses their answers with their partner. This gives each one an opportunity to talk about any differences the questions have brought to light.

#### **The issues we cover are:**

- Why get married in church?
- What the church has to offer
- Hopes for their future together
- Their social life
- What influence their parents may have on their expectations of married life
- How their relationship with their parents and in-laws impact on their marriage
- Roles within the marriage and how or why they might change
- Children
- Practical ways of dealing with conflict
- Money matters
- Communication

During the two evenings we emphasise the importance of good communication and how to really listen to one another.

As leaders, we perform a playlet that shows how easy it is for couples to get into a situation when they become preoccupied, do not fully listen and misunderstand what their partner is trying to say.

*(Continued on page 5)*



# Coping with Trauma on London Transport

by Tony Buckley

**Tony Buckley works as a manager for the Counselling and Trauma Service as part of the Occupational Health Service for Transport for London. These services are available to an employee population of 27,000 who run the Tube and bus networks in London. The wider occupational health department includes medical services, physiotherapy and a drug and alcohol service.**

Our department is made up of a team of ten Counselling trauma practitioners who offer both group work and one to one counselling service. Similar to any workplace counselling service we cater for a wide range of generic issues such as stress, anxiety and depression.

We have over time however come to specialise more in psychological trauma treatment in response to the kinds of issues which can arise

within the transport industry sector. The range of psychological trauma cases which our department might see over time includes individuals affected by accidents, or by suicide attempts and assaults by members of the public.

We also deal with 'near miss' experiences where train drivers perceive somebody to be in danger on or near the line. Even when there is no accident the driver can nonetheless be affected by the same autonomic nervous symptoms as though it had been a potential fatality. Occasionally, a drunk or abusive member of the public can attack with verbal or physical aggression when a ticketing query or irregularity occurs at a gate line.

All of the above types of issues can easily activate the autonomic nervous system, the natural emergency stress reaction which is commonly known as the fight, flight, freeze response. Typical symptoms here include loss of concentration, sleep disturbance, digestion difficulties, flashbacks,

depression, hyper vigilance, anxiety, irritability and withdrawal and avoidance behaviour.

Our department runs a Trauma Support Group programme. This provides training and supervision for employee volunteers to be available to deliver psychological first aid and practical support to individuals in the immediate aftermath of a psychologically traumatic experience. Research shows this kind of informal early support significantly improves recovery outcomes.

The team of practitioners come from a wide range of therapeutic orientation/backgrounds which includes all the major approaches, Gestalt, Psychodynamic, Humanistic, Existential etc. In addition they all possess particular psychological trauma qualifications which include Sensorimotor Psychotherapy, Cognitive Behaviour Therapy and Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing. They share in common a three stage approach to treatment and recovery.

This entails interventions which at first resource and stabilize the person and helps in working towards symptom reduction. Next the work develops to safely address actual traumatic memories including somatic reactions. The final stage is to support integration on all levels including resilience for getting on with life as normal. Often practitioners will bring an employee out to the site of the trauma for some carefully calibrated exposure work, a significant stage in recovery. Trauma treatment usually takes place over a period of five or six meetings on average and is usually very effective in preventing long term complications such as post traumatic stress disorder. The workplace benefits also, because early support and good treatment programmes helps reduce long term sickness absence and performance issues.

The terrorism events of 7th July 2005 were not only a shocking attack on London and the entire nation, but for this company, were a direct targeting of our own transport system. In addition to the public a large number of staff were significantly impacted by these events. Many of these individuals were involved in the immediate emergency response to rescue the public and treat the injured.

**Many worked tirelessly round the clock undertaking any tasks deemed necessary**

**to alleviate distress, to look after victims and their relatives and to support the emergency services.**

The company activated major incident plans in response and our own department played a significant role with our own critical incident plan.

The department's plan entails being available immediately to provide advice, guidance, emotional first aid and psycho-education to explain and normalise reactions people are likely to experience. Further on in time our role becomes one to provide counselling and trauma treatment should people begin to have ongoing difficulties. The majority of the individuals affected accessed available support. They were either self, or manager referred to our psychological trauma service and successfully treated over time.

One part of our role at a time of psychological trauma is to remind people of their ordinary resources in each other and the network of relationships around them. The family feel of group support in a station or depot has been truly healing for people in overcoming traumatic experience.

A surprising aspect from our collective learning from these events is that the people who are closest to the trauma are not always the most affected in the longer term.

**People who are able to respond and take some action in the face of danger can show quicker recovery than individuals whose circumstances leave them feeling helpless.**

The current psychological trauma literature seems to substantiate this point. We are left with a great sense of pride in our frontline uniformed staff and how they mobilise heroically in the face of such challenge.

Our department in turn takes a great pride in psychologically supporting these same people who on a daily basis guide millions of travellers through the transport network of a great city.



### **Marriage Preparation**

*(Continued from page 3)*

We also look at scenarios that highlight situations where misunderstandings have arisen and discuss how disharmony could have been avoided. We also examine how such situations can be rectified without further conflict.

We feel that a Marriage Preparation course is not complete without reference to Sex and we show part of a DVD "Sixty Minutes Marriage" which looks at the five myths about sex. In Rob Parson's inimitable way he handles this serious subject with sensitivity and humour. Couples are given a handout "Up close and personal" which we

encourage them to look at together away from the course.

We are aware that nowadays many of the couples are already living together and may even have children. Some couples may have been married before. We acknowledge these situations and endeavour to accommodate where different couples are within their relationships.

One of the reasons for running Marriage Preparation is to make couples aware that they may not always 'feel in love'. Their feelings for each other may change over the years, but this does not mean that they don't love each other. Life may become tough, but we hope that some of what has been learnt about themselves and

their partner during the two evenings will help them through any difficult times. Our positive aims are to help couples to hold on to the love, commitment and values such as trust and acceptance that they hold dear. We hope that we demonstrate the accepting face of a Christian church that will always be there to help and support them in the future.

We stress that marriage is a wonderful institution. Our prayer is that all the couples we have the privilege of meeting in marriage preparation will have a long and happy life together.

Further information is available at [www.stsampsonscricklade.org](http://www.stsampsonscricklade.org)



# Changing Minds in Therapy

by Margaret Wilkinson

**In this article, Margaret draws on her book 'Changing Minds in Therapy - Emotion, Attachment, Trauma and Neurobiology' to explain how neuroscience can make a difference in helping those who come for counselling.**

Research into the neurobiology of emotion, trauma and attachment is changing our understanding of how relationships are made and can be transformed.

## Why love matters in early relationships

We are coming to realise that the infant self is formed by its earliest relationship with another self. How does this happen? In good enough circumstances a mother 'reads' her baby's experiences of distress, pleasure, hunger or satisfaction with the help of mirror neurons in her brain. These enable her to understand how her baby is feeling. Through her sounds and smiles or looks of concern she mirrors to her baby's mood. Mirror neurons in the baby's brain begin to grow and develop in response to those that are active in the mother. Through this earliest and very special relationship the baby comes to know him or her self. Sometimes however a mother is unable to match her mood to that of her baby in this special way. This is either because her own experience of mothering was so poor that she isn't able to do it, or because her own distress, anxiety, anger or terror overwhelms her.

## Patterns in the mind

Patterns in the mind develop out of this earliest experience.

**The mother's feelings directly determine the earliest feelings of her baby, gradually building the patterns in the baby's developing mind that this new human being will use in future relational experiences.**

As an adult will he or she expect to be understood and engaged with successfully? Will early unresolved distress result in he or she remaining uncertain or unsure whether to reach out to others in friendship or to react defensively, even aggressively? These patterns in the mind become deeply ingrained as they become part of the implicit memory store, lodged in the early developing right hemisphere, unavailable to the conscious memory.

## Changing minds in therapy

Clients who come for counselling are often hoping to change the quality of their relationships. Such clients may arrive in the consulting-room with their 'old self' present, their childhood patterns being still very much alive in their implicit memory. Although inaccessible, these patterns in the mind, formed from early traumatic experiences, profoundly affect the way they are able to live their lives alongside others as adults. However the amazing plasticity of the brain

permits the constant development of new neural pathways, indeed that is exactly how all learning takes place. Modification of neural pathways occur when the brain experiences something different to that which previous experience had led it to expect.

**These different experiences lead us to understand that a trustworthy, reliable relationship with another, sustained over time, can transform a person's capacity to relate successfully to others establishing what I have come to call the 'learned secure' relationship.**

*On June 11th 2011, Margaret will be leading a seminar entitled 'Changing Minds in Therapy: Emotion, Attachment, Trauma, and Neurobiology' at the Harnhill Centre, Cirencester. Further details are available from Willows. Further insights from contemporary neurobiology and attachment theory will be discussed in order that the effects of trauma on the emotional, intellectual and imaginative life of the individual can be better understood. Bringing meaningful change in those who have experienced early relational trauma together with an exploration of how therapeutic change occurs in the brain will also form part of Margaret's agenda. Margaret's book is published by Norton as part of their Neurobiology series.*

**Book reference** - Changing Minds in Therapy – Emotion, Attachment, Trauma and Neurobiology by Margaret Wilkinson, ISBN 0393705617

# Emotional Intelligence

by Geoff Wheeler

**Willows counsellor Geoff discusses the nature and importance of emotional intelligence and some of the ways it can be improved**

I have to admit that I am a big fan of Eastenders. I regularly tune in to witness how the residents of Albert Square continually get it so wrong when it comes to relationships, impulsive behaviour, emotional outbursts and poor decision-making. Like most soaps, the appeal of Eastenders largely relies on its characters exhibiting what I believe to be low emotional intelligence. But what is emotional intelligence and why is it important?

The idea of emotional intelligence is found in the words of the philosopher Aristotle, who wrote of anger.

**'Anyone can become angry – that is easy. But to be angry with the right person, to the right degree, at the right time, for the right purpose and in the right way – this is not easy'**

I believe that the above principle can be applied to all emotions.

All of us can experience a wide range of emotions triggered by events, people and life experiences. However,

it is the way we manage and express such emotions that determines both the quality of our relationships and the way we feel about ourselves. Emotional intelligence is not so much a case of our head ruling our heart but more a case of our head providing a balancing effect when our heart is in danger of becoming out of control.

The neurological basis of emotional intelligence involves the interaction between two distinct parts of the brain. During normal everyday functioning, we use our senses to pick up and, where necessary, act upon information received from others and the world around us. Should the incoming information cause us to respond emotionally, (e.g. a harsh criticism or a threat) a part of the brain known as the amygdala is activated (and I'm talking microseconds here) and like a 'smoke-alarm' triggers a less thought through response i.e. fight, flight, freeze, submit, attach. Thus, an instant 'knee jerk' and uncontrolled response to someone's curt remark represents a reaction of the amygdala over the more thorough processing capability of the neo-cortex, which offers a considered response which determines a more 'thought through' way to respond to incoming information.

As would probably be expected, the roots of emotional intelligence are to be found in our childhood where four broad

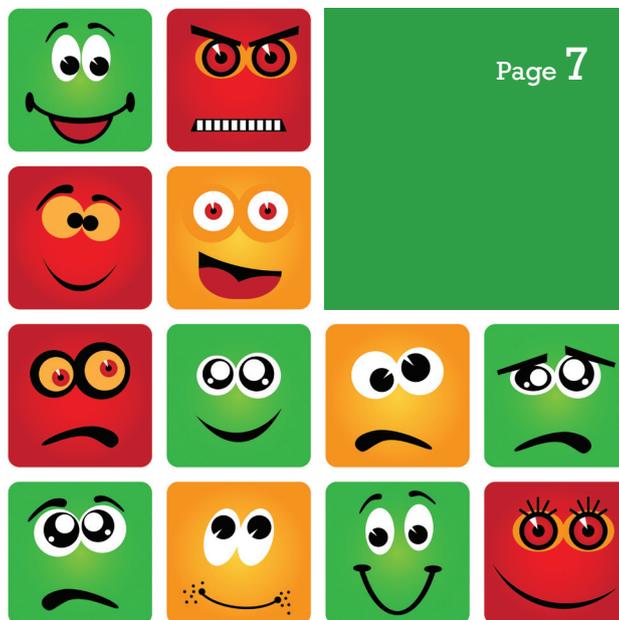
parenting approaches tend to emerge.

Firstly, there are parents who ignore their children's emotions altogether. Thus the child is forced to internalise his or her feelings resulting in an adult where fulfilling relationships are difficult due to a lack of experience in expressing emotions appropriately. Such adults often come across as cold and distant.

Secondly, there are parents who show no respect for their children's emotions epitomised by expressions such as 'If you don't stop crying you'll get a smack!' and 'I know you're sad that Granny has died but I've got to organise the funeral' As adults such children have learnt that there is no point in showing or expressing emotions because their emotions don't matter.

Thirdly, there are parents who allow their children to fully express their feelings without any kind of restraint. Thus, if Johnny hits someone and you do not discipline him or if the child throws a tantrum in a supermarket, you simply buy the toy that will placate the situation. When they become adults they may carry on these learnt responses and commit acts of violence to get what they want and they have no brake on their emotions because their parents did not apply one.

*(Continued on page 8)*



## Emotional Intelligence

(continued from page 7)

Finally, there are parents who are able to help their children balance emotional expression and constraint. They teach their children that it is acceptable to show emotion at the right time and in the right way whilst creating an environment that allows alternative outlets for emotional expression. As adults they are able to regulate different emotional states and are therefore able to exhibit a high degree of emotional intelligence.

### So how can emotional intelligence be improved?

There is no single method of achieving this, but in his book

*Emotional Intelligence*, Daniel Goleman suggests that focussing on certain areas can have a positive effect. These include:

**Working in schools** – fostering an environment based on co-operation and negotiation rather than confrontation will help children to make more use of the neo-cortex and to think about how to achieve optimum long-term mutually beneficial relationships.

**Impulse Control** – this six-stage thinking process that can be practiced by anyone involves

- Thinking before acting
- Stating the issue and associated feelings
- Setting a positive goal
- Thinking of several solutions
- Thinking about the consequences of each solution
- Implementing the best plan

**Emotional Re-Learning** – this involves recalling childhood experiences and trying to remember and express those feelings that were either unheard

or uncontrollable at the time thus allowing access to the more rational and objective neo-cortex.

**Creative Techniques** – for those who are unable to easily access or articulate their emotions, the use of images, colours and even toys help to engage the amygdala and create a more equal balance between intellectualisation and passion.

In her book *Towards Emotional Literacy*, Susie Orbach introduces the idea of 'registering, recognising and querying our immediate emotional responses.' For me, this represents an excellent summary of what emotional intelligence is all about. So the next time you are watching *Eastenders* try and spot the characters with overactive amygdalas – probably most of them.

### Further Reading

Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence*, Bloomsbury Publishing plc, London 1996

Susie Orbach, *Towards Emotional Literacy*, Virago Press, London 2001

## Training

We shall be running the following courses during the year:

### Level 2 Introduction to Pastoral Counselling Course

4th October 2011

### Level 3 Certificate in Integrative Counselling

7th September 2011

### Continued Professional Development training evenings for

**counsellors** - 7.00 pm until 9.30 pm at The Willows Centre.

- **16th May** – Closures and endings
- **15th June** – Assessing new clients and their needs – Report and letter writing – Contact with other agencies
- **6th July** – Exploring ethical dilemmas

### Saturday Training days at The Harnhill Centre, Cirencester

- **11th June** – Changing minds in therapy: emotion, attachment, trauma and neurobiology,

Margaret Wilkinson

- **9th July** – Spiritual dimension in Person Centred counselling, Canon Stuart Taylor
- **12th November** – When therapy goes wrong, Anne Kearns

For more information on any of the above courses, please contact: Avril Fray, Training Manager at Willows.

Email:

[training@willowscounselling.org.uk](mailto:training@willowscounselling.org.uk)

## How To Contact Us

You can telephone us on **01793 426650**, Monday to Friday, 9.30am to 4.30pm. At other times you can leave a message on our answerphone.

You can write to us at Willows Counselling Service, Willows Centre, 11 Prospect Place, Old Town, Swindon, SN1 3LQ.

Or email us at [willows@willowscounselling.org.uk](mailto:willows@willowscounselling.org.uk)

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