

Pastoral Care News



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From Relational Depth to Love

by Kaitlyn Steele

Clinical Psychologist and therapist Kaitlyn describes how developing true, loving and therapeutic relationships need not be confined to the counselling room but can be achieved by many of us with fulfilling and rewarding results.

It was over fifty years ago when the American person-centred therapist, Carl Rogers, published his landmark paper, 'The Necessary and Sufficient Conditions of Therapeutic Personality Change'. Rogers (1957) believed that people change and grow when they experience a relationship that is characterised by what have come to be known as the three core conditions – unconditional acceptance, empathy and genuineness.

Some fifty years later, person-centred writers and practitioners such as Mearns and Thorne began to go beyond Rogers' thinking in introducing the concept of relational depth. They maintain that when the core conditions are present at particularly high levels in a relationship, they offer something 'really special' - a relationship of such depth and safety that profound healing and growth become possible.

Relational depth is, as I have experienced it, a level of deep connection and engagement between two people within which moments of particularly heightened and intense inter-connectedness may occur. In such a relationship, each person is able to be fully real and transparent with the other to the extent that both experience and communicate a high level of mutual understanding and valuation.

Thus a deep unconditional acceptance and appreciation of the totality of each other's being is developed.

Research into the experience of relational depth is undoubtedly in its infancy. What is already becoming clear, however, is that those who experience such encounters of relational depth view them as highly significant and therapeutic. Such experiences are highly memorable and are often seen as 'something to hold on to'.

My own experience, both as client and therapist, over the last thirty five years has convinced me that Rogers, Mearns and Thorne are right. What many of us need in order to be able to grow is not primarily another's knowledge, understanding or skills; though all of these may at times be helpful. What we really need is a relationship between two people reaching out to each other as vulnerable human beings, a relationship in which we feel accepted and valued just as we are, a relationship in which we feel safe enough to risk being ourselves.

We need someone to be there with us in our darkness, in our confusion, in our fear and anger, in our despair and in our joy. We need to be met and held as we allow ourselves to experience and express

feelings that may have been locked inside us for too long.

We do not need the other's professional persona; indeed that would simply 'get in the way'. What we need is someone who is prepared to risk something of themselves in the encounter.

First and foremost, however, I believe that what we need is to be loved unconditionally. I believe that as we experience such meetings of relational depth, we are embraced by the kind of love that Christianity knows as agape. This love is capable of transforming another into being, into becoming, as Kierkegaard put it, 'that self which one truly is'.

Kaitlyn Steele is a clinical psychologist and person-centred therapist with thirty years of experience. She is Head of Training at Network Counselling & Training in Bristol and an Associate Lecturer with the University of Gloucestershire. She also has a private practice offering person-centred counselling, training, supervision and spiritual accompaniment. For further information, visit her website at www.kaitlynsteele.co.uk.



Healing the Scars of Sectarian Violence

by Lynn Farr

Belfast born counsellor Lynn relates some of her experiences with those traumatised by the 'Troubles' in Northern Ireland and how she has learnt to explore spirituality in a non-sectarian way.

Northern Ireland is a beautiful country with a people renowned for their hospitality and generosity. Yet they are a people deeply scarred by decades of violence, sectarianism and intimidation.

I grew up in Belfast. "A child of the Troubles," I learnt the rules of survival and to endure the daily searches, road blocks, armoured patrols and emergency evacuations. Although my family did not experience trauma directly, I believe that as a people we all carry the scars of living in a war zone.

Whilst our family normalised our environment, for those who were directly impacted by the troubles safety was paramount. When they felt under threat their response was to flee from the danger or fight. Because it was

obviously not the time to stop and talk about what they were experiencing, feelings were suppressed.

This began to change with the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998. With the threat subsiding, people felt safer, and the effects of trauma suffered in previous decades began to resurface.

I began counselling 20 years ago. As a nurse I had witnessed the physical effects of the violence and now, as a counsellor, I was sitting with people who were trying to come to terms with the psychological pain of what had happened to them. At times it was difficult to separate out imagined threat from what was a real and continuing danger. Yet this knowledge was crucial in deciding how I responded to my clients.

The tendency to normalise everyday experiences often affected my ability to witness to the abnormal situations in the lives of my clients.

One particular lady who had been working through the effects of childhood physical and sexual abuse

vividly described a memory of her mum pushing her baby brother and herself in a pram which had guns and weapons concealed under the blankets and were being transported to a 'safe' house.

I was stunned by this image of innocent children being used as a shield or camouflage, yet this was normality for my client as she grew up.

Counselling during the troubles had a seasonal aspect. The 'marching season' between July and August had a significant impact on communities in Protestant and Catholic interface areas with a noticeable rise in tension and rioting. Clients who were experiencing anxiety or depression often described an increase in severity of symptoms around this time.

One of the most difficult aspects of counselling has been working with the perpetrators of violence. One situation which was particularly difficult in this respect was a man who had been suffering from depression and anxiety.

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During our work together he received the news that he had terminal cancer. As he began to face death, he had a great need to talk about what he had done in his past and to find a way of reconciling this with the man he now was and his growing awareness of the sanctity of life. We found various ways for him to communicate the darkness, pain and secret places in his soul without disclosing detail. He knew that I could never condone what he did yet it was a profound and unique journey of deep mutual trust and respect.

My experience with this client has helped me to see the importance of dialogue and restorative justice.

I have learnt not to talk about faith and religion unless working in an overtly 'Christian' setting. The constraints associated with this have taken me on a journey, which continues today. I am increasingly able to find a language which enables others to explore the spiritual dimension of their lives and to break down barriers between denominations.

I have seen so much change in our ability to help those who have suffered trauma. The knowledge we have about how the brain and body hold traumatic memories now informs our practice. We are much more aware of the need for self-care and the risks of vicarious traumatisation and compassion fatigue. The generational aspects of the trauma suffered by the people of Northern Ireland means that our work will continue long after peace has been completely forged.



Toxic Parents

by Pauline Andrew

**Director of Deep Release and Managing
Director of Barnabas Counselling Training,
Pauline explains how inappropriate parenting
can have a profound effect on our lives as adults.**

A student on a degree course wanted to explore why she struggled so hard to believe in herself despite consistently high grades. "And there's another thing" she told me, "we've started the Personal Development group on the course. We're all meant to be open and honest with each other, and I thought I'd been doing really well until last week. I've been feeling quite depressed lately, and I couldn't pull myself together for the group like I usually do. I felt overwhelmed with fear. I couldn't let them see me looking miserable!"

As we looked more closely at this student's issues, she told me that as a child she would be severely punished if she expressed her unhappiness. She was told that she was an "ungrateful child who had nothing to be miserable about!" She soon learnt to hide her true feelings and put on an image that told the world everything was fine. This had become a deeply ingrained response. But life as a student was slowly wearing away her defences. She could no longer keep up the false front or the happy face.

Another lady had a background of extreme trauma including chronic sexual and physical abuse from her father. After episodes of severe abuse as a child she would often be told that she "had had a nightmare", or she had a "vivid imagination". None of the things she spoke about had happened, she was informed.

The bruises came from "falling over", the infection from "dirty school toilets". And yet, deep inside, she knew these were lies: she had been hurt! It had really happened! She felt so trapped, hurt and frightened, she wanted to die and sometimes made attempts to do so. What was the truth? Was she mad?

Both women had toxic parents. Both of them were lied to. Both of them struggled to accept this and for a long time remained in denial regarding the truth of their past. Each of them found it easier to believe that they were flawed, inadequate and in need of punishment rather than accepting that their primary carers could both hurt them and withhold from them, the loving care that all children need.

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Toxic parents do not have a skull and crossbones symbol on their forehead, warning us not to absorb what they say to us. So how do we know if we had them? One way is to explore our feelings, reactions and relationships with other people as adults. Susan Forward (1989) comments:

"Whether adult children of toxic parents were beaten when little or left alone too much, sexually abused or treated like fools, overprotected or overburdened by guilt, they almost all suffer surprisingly similar symptoms: damaged self-esteem, leading to self-destructive behaviour. In one way or another, they almost all feel worthless, unlovable, and inadequate."

Marsha Linehan (1993) talks about the 'Invalidating Environment' that can cause such harm to a developing child. This occurs when the child's feelings are dismissed or scorned by a toxic parent. A child hearing the words, "there's nothing the matter with you!" when he or she is hurting, upset or angry leads to inner confusion and an inability to understand or express the actual emotions being experienced. This can even lead to a condition called alexithymia, which means the inability to find words for what we are feeling.

When we are small, our attachment needs will usually drive us to stay close to our carers. Even if they treat us badly, we desperately try to make ourselves into a person they will love.

When our carers make us feel insecure, anxious or withdrawn, conflicting feelings ensue that can cause us great inner turmoil as we grow into adults.

Many of us find ourselves continuing to seek approval from others, searching for clues to see if we're acceptable, if we belong. One of the symptoms of toxic parenting is a deep, inner loneliness, which never seems to go away.

It has been said that 'the truth sets us free' but for those who have experienced toxic parenting the truth is at first difficult to bear. Coming out of denial is the first step, finally acknowledging that the people who should have loved and cherished us caused us great damage. Both of the women described have worked hard to overcome the deep hurts of the past, and it has been a painful journey. Personal therapy, good friends and spiritual resources have helped them explore their early years. They have learnt to grieve for what they will never have; discovered that it is Ok to be angry; reclaimed ground that was stolen from them and discovered their true selves.

We cannot change the past, but we ourselves can change. The lady who suffered childhood abuse discovered that there were generations of abusers on both sides of her family, but she has changed the course of her family history. Her children and grandchildren have experienced loving parenting. Some of us need to 'leave home' emotionally. There are even areas in my life where this is still true and my parents died over twenty years ago.

References:

Forward, S. (1989) *Toxic Parents*. Bantam Books: New York
Linehan, M. (1993) *Skills Training Manual for Treating Borderline Personality Disorder*. Guildford Press: New York

Pauline Andrew

Pauline is a Director of Deep Release and Managing Director of Barnabas Counselling Training. She has a private counselling and supervision practice in Essex and has written many booklets on a wide range of issues relevant for both counsellors and clients. Pauline has an MA in Counselling and Psychotherapy, and a Diploma in Supervision, and she teaches widely around the UK on specialist courses for counsellors and psychotherapists. She also teaches Diploma courses in Counselling and Supervision.

www.deeprelease.org.uk
www.barnabastraining.com

Life Coaching

by Richard Hovey

In this article, Life Coach Richard highlights both the differences and similarities between life coaching and counselling and when each is appropriate.

The good athletics coach is someone who can help athletes improve their performance by exceeding, and continuing to exceed their personal best. I love the emotive scene in the film Chariots of Fire where coach Sam Mussabini, having initially refused to coach Harold Abrahams, offers to help him to reduce his time for the hundred-metre sprint. Coaches may not have won many races, but they have the skill of helping others to develop and achieve. The good coach will spot underlying psychological or behavioural issues too. The winning athlete needs to have the right attitude and the right skill.

We're all used to the idea of the Olympic sprinter or football team having a coach. We would think it strange if an athlete who wanted to succeed did not have a coach. But how might people outside the world of sport benefit from having a coach? In the business world companies pay people to coach key staff in their organisation in order to improve their results or to help them "hit the ground running" in a new job. More recently, this type of coaching has been widened and is now available as life coaching.

Life coaching is about coaching the 'whole life' of a person. It may include issues to do with work or career but is not limited to these. If you like definitions, here's one. According to Myles Downey (1999) (life) coaching is

"The art of facilitating the performance, learning, and development of another."

Life Coaching is a confidential non-directive relationship of trust primarily concerned with asking the right questions, rather than giving advice. The coach needs to have skills in building rapport, listening deeply, asking good questions, and helping the client to choose appropriate actions. I often use a model such as GROW - What is the Goal, the Reality now, the Options, and What will you do? It is my experience that if the bulk of the time spent with clients helps them to clarify goals that represent a good investment, solutions often become much clearer.

Although a single coaching session can be transformative, it is usual for coaches and their clients to meet for about one hour every few weeks as the individual works towards a goal. Coaching is about helping

people to develop, or resolve issues, and take appropriate action. Although self-understanding will develop during coaching (particularly if personality tests are used as a tool) the output of a session is to formulate a set of actions that will produce change and results.



What is the difference between coaching and counselling? Having had conversations with counsellors, we have concluded that outcomes are similar. Although there is a lot of overlap of skills (such as listening) the underlying theory and training for life coaching is different from that of counselling. Counsellors offer a bounded, non-directive approach with those who have issues that are often rooted in childhood experiences. On the other hand life coaches are willing to have ongoing relationships with clients to support them with the sort of issues that come up in normal life. They expect to help people to decide what to do and to put that into practice. So life coaching is action-focused and doesn't expect to deal with deep-seated issues. Having said that, some coaches focus on areas that seem to overlap with counselling (for example relationship coaching) and some train in techniques such as Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP) which can overcome behavioural blocks.

People may ask for life coaching because they have a general feeling that they could be getting more out of life, or it may be precipitated by a life event such as redundancy, family death, or mid-life opportunity. (I prefer that phrase to mid-life crisis!) They may be looking to find out more about themselves and what they

might do for example, to:

- Enhance their career
- Increase job satisfaction
- Improve relationships
- Reduce stress
- Move their business forward
- Manage change
- Build self-confidence or resilience

Surveys have shown that people benefit from coaching in areas such as:

- Improved self-awareness
- Better goal-setting
- A more balanced life
- Lower stress levels
- Better quality of life
- Improved self-confidence
- Enhanced communication skills
- Getting things finished
- Improvement in health or fitness
- Better relationships at home or at work
- Increased energy and more fun

Rather than giving general examples, it may be helpful to give some comments of people who have benefited from life coaching.

"Extremely motivating. I have found the programme especially helpful in realising my strengths, achievements and the things that are important to me. It has made me more aware of who I am, what I like about my situation, and where I might go."

"I am particularly struck by your ability to calmly find order in chaos. This has enabled me to start the process of reconstructing a path towards my personal and professional goals."

Life coaching typically costs £50 to £100 per hour, and life coaches often specialise. My work is mainly in the area of business and careers. I coach business leaders and I coach people who want to review their vocation or career, perhaps because they have been made redundant and they cannot walk into a similar job.

If you are interested in recommending coaching to a friend, there is more information on the web sites of my business Finding True North <http://www.findingtruenorth.co.uk> and of the Swindon Coaching Team which I co-founded <http://www.swindoncoachingteam.org.uk> and you can email me at coaching@findingtruenorth.co.uk.



Free Debt Counselling Service through Christians Against Poverty

Discovery Church offers a Debt Counselling Service funded by Christians Against Poverty. Covering Swindon and the surrounding area its head, Geoff Naylor, writes:

"Debt cripples many families and puts a strain on many relationships. For people living on low incomes and struggling to make ends meet, debt repayments can mean that they are unable to afford the basics of life."

Christians Against Poverty (CAP) is an award winning debt-counselling charity with over 160 centres in towns and cities around the UK. CAP is currently helping about 4,300 people get out of debt, handling over £45 million of debt for them.

This service is free to all and gives hands on help and support bringing hope to those working through the often traumatic consequences of debt.

When someone calls CAP on Freephone 0800 328 0006, arrangements are made for a local Debt Coach and a Support Worker to visit the caller's home. CAP headquarters then work out a realistic budget and negotiates affordable payments with each creditor, alleviating unfair interest and other charges in the process. Clients make one weekly or monthly payment into an account that CAP use to pay creditors and to save up for known expenses.

We look after people face-to-face and stay with them, supporting them and their household to the point where they are debt free.

*If you know anyone needing help with debt get them to call **0800 328 0006** or Email **geoffnaylor@capuk.org**. Alternatively, they can visit our website at **www.capuk.org***

CHRISTIANS
AGAINST POVERTY **UK**

The Work Of The Wiltshire Law Centre

Business and Finance Manager Neil Baker writes:

The Wiltshire Law Centre is a Swindon charity that has been providing free legal advice for over 30 years. It is currently funded by the Legal Services Commission to provide free legal advice in Housing Law, Employment Law, Welfare Rights and Debt.

The Debt team has three caseworkers who have significant experience in dealing with a whole range

of debt problems and solutions.

Two of the team are qualified Debt Relief Order Intermediaries, appointed by the Insolvency Service, and are able to offer Debt Relief Orders to qualifying clients.

Recently announced cuts to Legal Aid threaten the long-term future of the Law Centre and will impact on our continuing ability to provide services beyond 2012. However, in conjunction with our umbrella body (the Law Centres Federation) and other national advice organisations we are fighting the proposed cuts.

In the meantime it is business as usual at the Law Centre and we have appointments available at short notice.

Contact the Wiltshire Law Centre on **01793 486926** or email us at **info@wiltslawcentre.co.uk**

Training

Congratulations

At the end of June this year fourteen students finished the one year Level 3 Certificate in Integrative Counselling. They were a very vibrant, enthusiastic and committed group of students, who were a delight to teach and it was my privilege to get to know them. Nine of the students applied and were accepted as Willows Trainee Counsellors and will start counselling in the New Year.

Congratulations to everyone for all your hard work and dedication. Credit also goes to the trainers, especially Anna and Haoli, for the high level of teaching and support to the students.



Congratulations are also due to the thirteen students who completed the Level 2 Introduction to Pastoral Counselling Course in July and thanks to Ros and Haoli for the sound teaching that they delivered on this course.

Avril Fray
Training Manager

For more information on our courses, please contact Avril Fray, Training Manager at Willows:

training@willowscounselling.org.uk

We look forward to holding the following courses in the coming year 2011- 2012:

- Level 2 Introduction to Pastoral Counselling – Spring 2012
- Level 3 Certificate in Integrative Counselling – September 2012
- Level 4 Diploma in Therapeutic Counselling – September 2012

The following Saturday training days will take place at The Harnhill Centre, Cirencester:

- 12th November – “When therapy goes wrong” Anne Kearns
- 11th February – “NeuroLinguistic Programming, Day 1” Dr Stephen Brooke
- 10th March – “NeuroLinguistic Programming, Day 2” Dr Stephen Brooke
- 12th May – “Sandplay Therapy” Chris and Sue Monckton-Rickett
- 9th June – “Family Systems Theory” Susan Tollington

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

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