



SOLUTIONS

A quarterly publication offering Help and Hope for Your Mind and Spirit

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Summer 2006

Group Therapy Opportunities

Clergy Spouse Support Group

Dates and Times based on need
Blooming Grove Church, Rensselaer
Cost is \$55 per session

Who does the pastor's spouse tell? The clergy person's spouse is usually the end of the line for the concerns of the church - there is no one left to share with. This group provides an opportunity for clergy spouses to join together in recognition of their unique place in the ministry and provide an outlet for each other.

Contact Keli Rugenstein, PhD, LCSW
(518) 374-3278 x441

Depression Group

Ongoing
Third Reformed Church, Albany
Cost is \$55 per session, plus book

Psycho-education about issues surrounding clinical depression, strategies for coping, and the development of peer relationships within a supportive and confidential environment. The Depression Workbook will be utilized. Members will be expected to purchase the book from the group facilitators

This group requires pre-screening.
Contact Justin Reimenschneider, MSW
(518) 374-3278 x406

Why Do We Love *The Sopranos*?

David C. Olsen, PhD
Executive Director


The Sopranos is one of those shows that we shouldn't like. Over-the-top violence, blatant sexuality, ethnic stereotypes, and the list goes on. It's not exactly the most politically correct show. Yet some of us will not know what to do with Sunday nights at 9 P.M., now that the season finale has come and gone.

Why do we love *The Sopranos*, and in particular its leading mobster, Tony? Most of us are not Mafia bosses. We do not have offices in the Bada Bing. Nor do we share Tony's proclivity toward violence. On the other hand, like Tony, most of us struggle with the demons from our family of origin, try to do our best for our current families, feel pressured by taking care of an older generation (hopefully, not Uncle Junior), and sometimes feel overwhelmed by the job of taking care of business.

In a way, Tony is all of us. Not exactly good, but not all bad. Hopeful and depressed all at once. Generous, yet selfish. Narcissistic, yet giving. Going down a path of destruction, yet hoping for redemption. Wanting to be a good marital partner, yet letting our own selfishness constantly get in the way. Wanting the best for our kids, yet sometimes being a completely insensitive parent. For example, while trying to talk to his daughter, Meadow, about her boyfriend problems, he eventually says something about her "living in sin," abruptly ending the conversation as she leaves in tears.

Tony captures the essence of being human, and so we love him and hate him all at once. We are not clear how to feel about him. We want him to be loyal to his wife, but smile at his exploits at the Bada Bing. We resonate with his pain in therapy with Dr. Melfi and hope for a "cure," or at least some integration. We resonate with his stress at managing a family business, and relate to his mixed feelings toward family members. We can't help but see the parallels in our own life.

As for me, I am naively cheering for Tony to find redemption. I hope for a therapeutic breakthrough – or for a deeper spirituality to emerge – or for his marriage to make it. We will have to wait for the final season to find out if our hopes for Tony can be realized.

In the meantime, we can hope for ourselves. Using whatever form of psychotherapy or spirituality or introspection we choose, we hope for deeper understanding into ourselves, for some integration of all our contradictory parts, for help in healing our own demons, for deep intimacy in our relationships, for helpful ways of dealing with our family-of-origin members. In the end, we also long for our children to make it, and to find deep meaning and joy in their lives. As *The Sopranos* series comes to a close, we celebrate our humanity and its indefatigable hope for light in the midst of everyday chaos. 

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visit our website! www.samaritancounselingcenter.org

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Samaritan Counseling Center has a **Silent Samaritan Fund** that subsidizes counseling fees for uninsured and under-insured clients. This fund is made possible through generous donations from local communities, businesses and church congregations. However, Silent Samaritan Fund clients' needs always exceed our available funds. With managed care companies continuing to slash their reimbursements to professionals and the number of authorized sessions, donations to the Silent Samaritan Fund are more important than ever.

Please take a moment to make a one-time or ongoing contribution to the Silent Samaritan Fund by mailing it to Samaritan Counseling Center of the Capital Region, 220 North Ballston Avenue, Scotia, New York 12302. You can also make your donation online at www.samaritancounselingcenter.org Print a donation coupon or make a donation online via secure email.

You can designate your donation toward one of our specialized therapy programs: **Project PASS** helps adolescents at risk of failing school. **Project Recovery** supports people with histories of sexual trauma. Our exciting new project, **The Relationship Institute** supports the needs of couples, families, co-workers and other types of relationships.

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Consultation Corner

Psychotherapy vs. Counseling

Keli Rugenstein, PhD

Julie first came to my office because she needed help getting through her second divorce. As she spoke about her second husband, she kept asking how she could end up in a relationship with someone who was so much like her first. As she looked back at some of her other relationships, she noticed that those men also had characteristics similar to the men she had married. Like so many people who have experienced similarly frustrating patterns, she was finding it easy to see all men as the same. After she was able to step back from her hurt, she began to ask questions about herself, such as why was she attracted to men 'like that' and why wasn't she able to see what they were like before she committed to them? As she continued in psychotherapy, she came to understand what she was drawn to in those men. She also learned which of her own subtle behaviors attracted men 'like that' to her.

Eventually, Julie became aware of aspects of her behavior that sent the wrong signals. She learned what her triggers were, and how to master them and take control of herself when she was in the beginning stages of a relationship. She also discovered what it was about certain men that had compelled her to engage in doomed relationships. Ultimately, Julie was able to meet someone and remain in a committed relationship that was healthy and fulfilling.

Julie's work on her unhealthy patterns created changes that were life-altering. She did this through a process called psychotherapy. Had she decided to go to counseling instead, she might have had a very different experience. She may have taken one or more assessments to find out what her personality type was, or what she needed for compatibility. Her conversations with her counselor might resemble a strategy session in which she would have examined all of her options. They may have looked at where she was going to meet people, what her hobbies were, or

what she did in her free time, and used this information to brainstorm ways to find men who were 'different' from those in her past. In other words, she may have made some life style changes. Unfortunately, no matter what these changes were, it is likely that she would have eventually found the same type of person to become involved with.

Counseling certainly has its place. It is very beneficial for people looking to make short-term changes in their external circumstances. It aims toward practical solutions to everyday problems. People who are looking at making simple changes in their job or career could certainly be helped this way. People who are considering adoption or a major elective surgery may benefit from counseling. Lifelong changes that fundamentally re-wire a person's habitual patterns, and enable them to take control of their lives and avoid repeating past mistakes, on the other hand, are the result of psychotherapy. 🌐

Moving Into Depth: Lessons from Tony Soprano

David C. Olsen, PhD
Executive Director

“Life is difficult.” So began the best-seller *The Road Less Traveled* by M. Scott Peck, M.D. In the midst of the problems of life, deciding that it is time to turn for help is an important step. But knowing what type of help to get can be very confusing. There is an increasingly vast array of different types of therapies available to choose from, each having its own claim about what it provides. Knowing what you need is not always easy, and the abundance of choices can make the problem even more complex. It can be helpful to know more about these different treatments when choosing what type of help to pursue.



image © HBO

People are frequently confused about the difference between counseling and psychotherapy. These two terms are often used interchangeably, and it is not always clear what is meant by each. To illustrate the difference, let's take the example of Tony Soprano from the popular HBO series. Part of the allure of the show is that Tony shares much of his story in his therapy with Dr. Melfi after having a panic attack. Tony is hoping for concrete solutions to the complicated problems he is encountering in mid-life. He wants answers and practical advice. Instead Dr. Melfi helps him to explore the “depth” of his life, including looking at his family of origin, trauma, existential concerns, “family business” pressures, sexuality, and even his spirituality. Clearly, there are no simple answers or pieces of advice that will take care of all these concerns. Rather, Dr. Melfi offers the safety and space of a therapeutic relationship that allows Tony to move into his own depth. The result is

that Tony begins to develop insight into his patterns of thought and action.

Psychotherapy and counseling are different in a number of important ways. The most obvious difference is that counseling tends to be very goal-oriented and technique-based. It aims to find concrete answers to problems in a time-limited way. For some problems, this process can be exactly what is needed. Depth-oriented psychotherapy, on the other hand, attempts to move more into the complexity of the human condition. Moving away from advice, or homework, or even clear goals, it instead fosters exploration of human depth.

Psychotherapy is not always comfortable, because within it, one may come face to face with one's shadow (the part of us we would prefer not to look at). In psychotherapy, we look at the mixed motivations with which we do life, and, at times, we touch into thoughts and feelings we might rather not be in touch with. It offers complexity not simplicity, and insight rather than short-term solutions. An ancient example would be *Saint Augustine's Confessions*, a rich autobiographical work that is steeped in depth and personal honesty. In his confessions, Augustine attempts to understand the deeper motivations of his own experience. This is the essence of psychotherapy.

This type of therapy moves away from simple techniques and the latest theories, and offers the safety of a therapeutic relationship, in which there is space to explore the “depths” of our experience. Why would a person want this? Consider a simple and obvious example. One out of

every two marriages fail. But the odds of remarriage working are even less. In fact every time a person remarries, the odds of the marriage working decrease. Why? How do people marry the same type of abusive or alcoholic person several times? Depth-oriented psychotherapy can help a person work through these unconscious patterns that manifest so painfully in our lives. A person who finds themselves repeating mistakes in relationships could perhaps be trying to rework old childhood experiences, or unconsciously seeking a type of redemption for an early wound or transgression.

Depth-oriented psychotherapy helps people understand both conscious and unconscious motivations for their decisions. It assumes nothing is as simple as it seems. Within this safe, therapeutic relationship, a sacred space is created where we can be our most authentic selves. To borrow from Martin Buber, therapy is an “I-thou” experience that allows for the emergence of healing and openness.

Psychotherapy requires courage. It is the “road less traveled” in our quick-fix culture. But its rewards are significant. Greater self understanding, self awareness, and self acceptance, and an ability to find deeper levels of intimacy in relationship are just a few of its benefits. The capacity to build conscious partnerships, rather than playing out our repetitive unconscious patterns, can be a lifetime achievement. Finally, depth psychology offers the space for us to grapple with the deeper existential concerns of life and thus can be a vehicle for greater spiritual growth as well. 🙏

Summer Reading Suggestions

The Road Less Traveled: A New Psychology of Love, Traditional Values and Spiritual Growth by M. Scott Peck

The Kite Runner by Khaled Hosseini

When Nietzsche Wept: A Novel of Obsession by Irvin D. Yalom

Father Joe: The Man Who Saved My Soul by Tony Hendra

The Messiah of Morris Avenue: A Novel by Tony Hendra



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