

HAPPY
FAMILY HOLIDAYS!

SOLUTIONS



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Happy Family Holidays! Dealing with stress when family comes home

David Olsen, PhD
Executive Director

The problem with the holidays for many people is the “F-word”...Family! How do we enjoy and savor the holiday season in the midst of the complications of family gatherings? What makes it so stressful? While advertisements and television commercials picture wonderful family scenes full of warmth, love, and good cheer, the reality is often quite different. Family holidays can be confusing!

The holidays bring up many emotions: excitement and joy, as well as grief, anger, frustration and any number of unresolved issues. While there is often wonderful anticipation of being together for the holidays, there is also the potential for those get-togethers to become irritating, or worse. No wonder so many popular holiday movies like *The Family Stone* or *Four Christmases* are both funny and poignant, and sometimes hit too close to home.

While getting ready for the holidays involves shopping, decorating, and meal preparation, it also means getting ready for those predictable family interactions. Consider several potential holiday party crashers: the “button pusher”, unresolved hurts, and the feeling of being a stranger. All of these can make the holidays difficult.

Every family has the **button pusher**. That would be the person who has an ingenious ability to push your (or your relatives’) buttons. They may bring up an extreme political or religious issue and before long you are “hooked” into an argument. Or they know too well about your sensitive subjects and know just the right comment to turn the knife. Within a short time, it is easy to feel like you are fifteen years old. In the movie *Four Christmases*, Vince Vaughn and Reese Witherspoon lie to their families that they do charity work to avoid those familiar painful family interactions. And when they do visit their families, each

painfully have their “buttons pushed” by family members who know exactly how to get them going. While we laughed at the antics of this movie, it also hits close to home. Many struggle with a parent or sibling who knows just how to hit a raw nerve. Suddenly the pleasant holiday meal ends in heartburn.



A second familiar holiday problem is **unresolved hurts**. Some people dread the holidays for this reason. Consider the person who grew up with alcoholism and the drama that would result from too much drinking. They came to dread the holidays, and see them as simply something to get through. These past images are stored deep inside and then

(continued)

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220 N. Ballston Avenue • Scotia, NY 12302 • 518.374.3514

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reactivated during the holidays, often resulting in depression, anxiety, and dread. This gets even more complicated with our culture's presentation of what the holidays should be. Others may not have had to deal with alcoholism or abuse, but may have grown up feeling unloved or invalidated. They often hope that *this time* they will get the gift for which they have always longed: unconditional love, validation, or an apology. But they are usually disappointed, and more hurt than before.

Finally, some have a different problem when they return home: they **feel like strangers**. While "home" is a word that

should bring to mind warmth and security, and the phrase "home for the holidays" should bring to mind wonderful images; that is often far from the case. While there may be little conflict, and things may go smoothly, they are left with an uneasy feeling. They may not feel seen, or understood, and might even feel that their family members would not be the people they would pick as friends. They may feel like they have to work to get through the holidays. Since being seen and known is a profound human need, when it is not experienced with family the result can be painful.

While these three issues are very complicated, holidays can be more meaningful and less painful if you have a plan. There are very few surprises with family. If you can predict what the button pusher will do, you can change the interaction by not taking the bait and offering a more creative solution. In the same way, understanding painful history and how it gets reactivated during the holidays can be helpful in getting



understood or seen, lower your expectations for family visits. Bring your spouse or a close friend home with you so that you have someone that you do feel connected with, even if the rest of the time is awkward.

Holidays, while not easy, are an opportunity for growth even in the midst of difficult family interactions. When we are successful in changing patterns, in shifting interactions and even rebuilding relationships, holidays can take on new meanings. Consider setting clear goals for handling the holidays differently this year, and give yourself the gift of growth!



Current Workshops

Clinical Supervision Study Groups

Theory and case presentations for mental health professionals.

Monthly, Mondays and Wednesdays (call for details)

4:00 - 5:30 pm ~ \$35 per session

Facilitated by: *David Olsen, PhD*

Supervisor's Study Group

Theory and skill development for clinical supervisors.

Monday, November 15 (bi-weekly thereafter)

Noon - 1:30 pm ~ \$35 per session

Facilitated by: *Jenness Clairmont, LCSW, LMFT*

Mindfulness Study Group

Theories of mindfulness and case consultations for mental health professionals.

Monthly beginning in January, 2011

\$25 per session

Facilitated by: *Oona Edmands, LMSW*

Groups are located at: Samaritan Counseling Center, 220 N. Ballston Ave., Scotia, NY 12302. Call 374-3278 to register.

Roundtable Series

As the church begins the 21st Century, emerging generations pose unique challenges. We will look at the generational cycle and how it affects church growth. For clergy members. Meets at the Niskayuna Reformed Church.

Second Friday of the Month beginning Jan. 14, 2011

9:00 - 11:00 am ~ Free!

Facilitated by: *Keli Rugenstein, PhD, LCSW, LMFT*

New Office Location



Our newest office is now open at the First Reformed Church of Schenectady! We are now able to serve clients there on Wednesdays and Thursdays. Currently, Andy Chestnut and Rebecca Draffen-Grande work at this office.

Center Receives Spirit Award

The Samaritan Center of the Capital Region recently received the Salvation Army of Schenectady's 2010 Spirit Award in recognition of 25 years of service promoting the psychological and spiritual health of the Capital Region. Thanks to the Salvation Army for recognizing our work! And a special thanks to all of you who have worked here and supported our mission for the past 25 years!



What's Happening at Samaritan

Jenness Clairmont, LCSW
Training Director & P.R. Coordinator

Veterans Week 2010

The Samaritan Counseling Center of the Capital Region, in partnership with The Sage Colleges and the New York Association for Marriage and Family Therapy was proud to sponsor Veterans Week, November 8 - 12, a weeklong celebration and commemoration of veterans and their families. Throughout this week, an abundance of interactive activities and celebratory events including: local and national speakers, multimedia presentations, community resources, education and employment counseling, and therapeutic, spiritual, and practical approaches for dealing with the complex issues confronting those who have served our country and their families.

Our Executive Director was the keynote speaker on Thursday evening, following a reading of the names. Additionally, two of our staff members presented at an all-day clinical conference focused on the treatment of returning veterans and their families. Oona Edmands presented on mindfulness and the treatment of PTSD and David Olsen presented on the treatment of couples and families. The entire week was a fantastic success and we were thrilled to take part in a wonderful collaboration with Sage and the NYAMFT.

Strengthening Families Initiative with the Schenectady Foundation

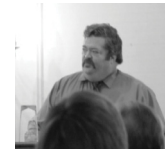
To encourage interagency collaboration and improve effectiveness working with families, more than 60 professionals from Schenectady County schools and service agencies recently participated in our Strengthening Families Workshop presented by David Olsen, PhD. The workshop, held at the Howe Magnet Elementary School on October 28 and 29, was funded by a grant from The Schenectady Foundation through its Strengthening Families program -- a multi-year commitment to providing a continuum of support for families. We are excited to be a Strengthening Families community partner.

Workshop participants represented a multidisciplinary range of professionals: school social workers, guidance counselors, psychologists, nurses, probation officers, mental health counselors, clinical social workers, and marriage/family therapists. Among organizations represented were Schenectady City Schools, Bethesda House, Schenectady County Probation, Department of Social Services, City Mission, Hometown Health, Northeast Parent and Child and The Schenectady Community Action Program. Due to the enthusiastic response to the presentation and group activities, we have started three study groups that will meet monthly to continue this collaboration.

25th Anniversary Celebration

The Samaritan Counseling Center of the Capital Region celebrated its 25th Anniversary with a breakfast held at the Desmond Hotel and Conference Center on Friday, October 8th. Following breakfast, guests were invited to participate in workshop presentations moderated by Samaritan Counseling Staff.

An Advocacy Award was presented to Thomas O'Clair, a Community Outreach Award to Rev. Phyllis Holzhauer, our Community Collaboration Award was given to Patrick McGrath for Mohanasen School District and an award for Community Impact to Mike Saccocio from City Mission. Our sponsors: Bond, Schoenck & King, PLLC, The Samaritan Institute, NYAMFT, Janney Montgomery Scott, 1st National Bank of Scotia, Rusty Anchor Restaurant and Bar, Riverfront Bar and Grill, and Cusack & Co., allowed us to host this spectacular event, which ended with a heartfelt testimonial from a dear client. She helped us to express the true meaning of our work. The turnout was impressive and all had a wonderful time. 🌟



There has never been a better time to help...

Become an Active Samaritan
- please support our 25th Anniversary Fund

Your gift will help change lives! Consider a donation today and help take us through the next twenty-five years!

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Samaritan Services: Individual, Couples, Family Therapy, Educational Workshops, Professional/Organizational Consultation and Supervision.

Office Locations: Scotia, Schenectady, Albany, Loudonville, Delmar, Brunswick, Rensselaer, Clifton Park, Jonesville, Saratoga Springs. Please call the Scotia office at (518) 374-3514 to request an appointment. Financial statements for Samaritan Counseling Center of the Capital Region are available upon request through the New York State Attorney General's office.