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SAMARITAN
NEWSLETTER

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All media designed, written, and edited by real people.

Samaritan
Center of Puget Sound

When we were founded as Presbyterian Counseling Service in 1960, our work was described as pastoral counseling. Today, reflecting on our holistic focus on the mind, body, and spirit of those who come to us, we speak of mental health counseling that attends to spiritual integration, or our client's meaning-making.

The importance of relationships in our work can be seen in two primary ways. With our clients, we seek to understand their concerns within the context of their relationships. This commitment includes our current expansion of support for the well-being of families. Our staff, which includes state-licensed social workers, marriage and family therapists, mental health counselors, and psychologists, is engaged in ongoing training together, meets regularly in clinical consultation groups, and participates in a group that addresses our individual spiritual formation. We understand that the work we do is sacred and is best provided in the context of colleagues who strive to embody compassion, humility, and dedication to continually advancing their clinical competence.

Because of our historical commitment to making our services affordable, we continue to accept commercial insurance, even though it falls far short of reasonable reimbursement, only paying 66% of the cost of a counseling session. We also adjust fees for our low-income clients. We rely on the generosity of our host churches and donors to close the gap.

While most of our clients are accessing our services virtually (teletherapy), an increasing number of people are seeking in-person care. Currently, we have seven churches that provide office space in Bellevue, Bremerton, Poulsbo, Shoreline, and Spokane in addition to our Green Lake/Seattle facility. We are developing a host church relationship in Pierce County or farther south.

In 2026-27 we intend to develop a Family Wellness Program which will focus on seminars for families adjunctive to possible family counseling. The model we are engaging invites the participation of family members 8 years and older.

Should you have questions about our work, please contact me. And if you are interested in helping in some way, please be in touch.

Beverley Shrumm,
Executive Director

Three Questions

For Uncertain Parents

By Isaiah Lin, MA, PsyD

"I just don't know what to do!" It's not an uncommon phrase to hear in therapy, particularly when I talk to parents. However, their uncertainty makes sense to me. Parents today seem to face an unending list of potential concerns for their child and, perhaps, an unending number of frustrations about their child, too. What makes it even more challenging is the fact they have very little actual control over the thoughts, feelings, and actions of this other person despite their high feelings of responsibility and concern. Does this sound familiar? Do you or someone you know resonate with this experience? If so, let me offer you three questions to ponder as food for thought.

1. How defined are your boundaries?

The topic of setting rules and boundaries for your child can trigger many worries and negative personal experiences for parents. Some may fear that weak boundaries will keep their children from learning discipline, respect, and concern for others. Others fear that harsh boundaries will cause their children to be anxious, depressed, or resentful. There is some truth to these concerns. In her seminal work comparing different parenting styles, Diana Baumrind found that authoritarian parenting, which had a high level of demand but low sense of support, led children to feel greater anxiety, lower social competence, and a diminished view of themselves. Similarly, a permissive parenting style, one marked with high warmth but low responsibility, also led to less happiness and greater difficulties facing challenges in relationships and life. Baumrind finds that it is not one or the other that is important, but rather that successful parenting requires both. She calls this style authoritative parenting, parenting that is high in both warmth and demand, and notes a correlation between this style with positive outcomes such as higher relational, emotional, and personal flourishing, and a greater sense of resiliency.

In this context, boundaries serve the purpose of setting expectations and safety. Think of a swim meet. Buoys, lanes, and walls are in place for the competitors to understand which direction to go, where the final goal is, and create trust that a rouge swimmer won't crash into them. All of this allows the swimmer to focus on the race itself. Similarly, when expectations are clear and not used aggressively, researchers find that children tend to be less anxious and have greater curiosity and freedom. This might feel paradoxical, boundaries creating freedom, yet a project in 2006 found that children playing in fenced playgrounds felt safer and less anxious than kids in open playgrounds, which led to greater use of the full play area. Parental restrictions act in the same way. Even the process of testing boundaries can build a greater sense of trust and safety. After all, you only really know if the guardrails at the Grand Canyon can hold your weight after pushing on them. So, as important as it is to ask yourself what your boundaries are for your children, but perhaps even more important is the question, how clear are your boundaries?

2. What is your shark music?
Next time you watch a movie, take a moment to notice how much the soundtrack affects how you feel during a scene. For instance, imagine a calm and peaceful beach. Perfectly manicured sand, beach chair under a large umbrella, a cool drink, and the sound of seagulls and the lapping of waves. Now, to that scene, add the theme of the movie *Jaws*. It changes the whole feeling, doesn't it? This is what the Circle of Security Parenting Model refers to when they talk about "shark music," normal feelings, situations, or interactions that feel dangerous or scary to an individual as if adding the *Jaws* theme to a relaxing day at the beach. This phenomenon happens because past experiences have imbued extra meaning on otherwise normal feeling states. Imagine little Sally who can't get sad because it will upset her mother, or young Kevin who has to win because his father will be disappointed with him if he doesn't. As time goes on, they develop feelings of shame, anxiety, or anger, and subsequent experiences of sadness or failure develop into shark music.

Now fast forward to when Sally and Kevin have become parents. What happens when Sally's daughter comes home crying from school or Kevin's son doesn't really try that hard in basketball? The soundtrack starts playing once more. As old shark music plays unchecked in parents two things are communicated to the child. First, the message of danger is passed on and the child loses the opportunity to learn how to navigate their own thoughts and feelings. They begin to hear the shark music as well. After all, how can they possibly withstand something even their parents can't? Second, they feel shame and abandonment. If when I express sadness or only light-heartedness, my parent can no longer tolerate me, what does that mean about me? As you might have realized, this is exactly what happened to Sally and Kevin when they were children, so the cycle continues on to the next generation. As you think about your own life, is there a song that needs to be turned down so that you can be present with others?

3. How do you show your love?
For 99.9% of you it is safe to assume that you love your kiddo. You love them a lot. So, to borrow lyrics from the Disney movie *Enchanted*, "How does she know that you love her [or him]?" According to John Gottman, they will know with a ratio of 5:1. More specifically, Gottman found that a ratio of five positive interactions for every one negative interaction led to healthier, happier, and more loving relationships. This "magic ratio," as he called it, was initially found in the context of married couples, but subsequent studies have found that this ratio also applies to parents and children. Researchers from the University of Kansas (Hart & Risley, 1995) even found that increases in vocabulary and IQ in children age three were most strongly associated with relationships where the parents offered five encouragements to one criticism. As simple as it sounds, encouragement and positive interactions with your children can be one of the most effective ways of showing love and care. Yet it's worth mentioning because it isn't the reality in many parent-child relationships. A study in 2010 (Armstrong & Field) found that the typical ratio tends to be 1:1. However they also found parents were able to become more encouraging with intentionality. So, if you were counting your own interactions and thought, "yikes," don't worry, start now.

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Three Questions

For Uncertain Parents

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Conclusion

Let me offer two final thoughts. First, you may have noticed that all three questions were directed at the parent and not the child. This is because, like I mentioned before, parents really have no control over the inner workings of their children. Like a farmer whose work is to optimize the conditions for the seedings, parenting can be viewed as creating the best conditions and structures for our children to flourish in. The actual growth of plant or child is out of their, and our, hands. As such, it can be more helpful to focus on what we have control over. Just as much, many of the biggest questions parents hold have less or nothing to do with finding a successful solution and more to do with having enough trust in the relationship, either to figure things out together, or as a place of safety and comfort.

This leads to the second thought. Authentic reaction and change comes from authentic connection. Setting boundaries, recognizing emotions, and expressing encouragement only have long-term meaning if couched within the context of a safe, close, and loving relationship; the actions are an outflowing of the relationship itself. It can be so easy to tunnel vision on the problems, tasks, and worries of parenthood that we lose sight of how much greater it is to just be and enjoy connection with our children.

My hope is that these questions will not be prescriptive but diagnostic, an encouragement for introspection rather than a list of things to do. As we grow in our capacity as parents and as people, the joy and satisfaction of parenting and having a relationship with your kid also multiplies. So, keep on going! You're working hard! Keep at it! You're not alone! You've got this!

Sources

Armstrong, A. B., & Field, C. E. (2012). Altering Positive/Negative Interaction Ratios of Mothers and Young Children. Child & Family Behavior Therapy, 34(3), 231–242. https://doi.org/10.1080/07317107.2012.707094

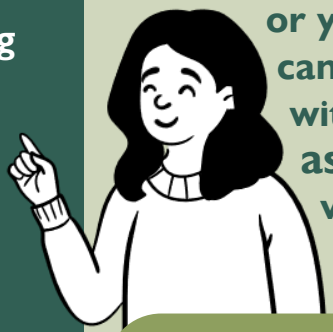
Hart, B., & Risley, T. R. (1995). Meaningful differences in the everyday experience of young American children. Paul H. Brookes Publishing.

Community Learning

Our therapists are available for speaking engagements and adult education classes at your church or local library.

Potential Topics:

- Childhood Development
- Communication
- Divorce
- Family Wellness
- Life Transitions & Aging
- Parenting
- Remarriage



You, your church leadership, or your librarian can connect with us and ask questions via the email address below:

contact@samaritanps.org

The Military Family
Thoughts on Counseling

The following article is based on my experience supporting military families in which the father was most often the active-duty member.

In the opening line of his acclaimed novel *Anna Karenina*, Leo Tolstoy wrote, "All happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way." With more than two decades of providing counseling services to military members and their families—across service branches and several continents—I can say with confidence that Tolstoy's observation applies equally and perhaps uniquely to the US military family.

Among the many opportunities I've encountered working with military families is that of counseling men in the world of men, servicemen whose first loyalty is presumed to be to the military itself. Military men rarely seek out counseling—proportionately less so as ranks rise—and when they do it's usually because they have access to either their own vulnerable parts or to the insistent parts of an unhappy spouse, or are simply, fearfully desperate. It stands to reason that any system whose priorities require a staunch denial of death and vulnerability would naturally hold professional counseling in dubious regard. The military—by definition—operates in terms of systems, not individuals. This is often framed as a form of patriotism: "It is for me to do or die, not to ask the reasons why." The US military services are divided into a men's system and a women's system, with children generally included in the women's system. The family combines these two systems but compared to the civilian world it has a distinctly subsidiary role within the military system. Military families quickly taught me that they do not come into counseling to learn how to become a civilian family but to learn how to become a stable family unit within the realities of the military system.

While the men's system is often characterized by the "right stuff"—a not-so-subtle blend of bravery, competence, and horsepower—the women's system is more subtle, complex, and connective, never forgetting or undermining the military credo that it is not theirs to ask why. It's been my impression that children in the military are generally preferred to remain in the background. This might be due to their awareness—often boldly announced—that the "emperor's clothes" of power, authority, and prominence make up a kind of collective fantasy. As a result, children in the military system are usually the first ones to express family symptomology.

In contrast to the many individually oriented therapies, family therapy approaches have allowed me to align myself with the priorities of the military system itself; specifically of strengthening the family organization, increasing the *esprit de corps*, and clarifying the hierarchy, roles, and rank structure that defines the family both within and outside the military context. By placing emphasis on these priorities instead of on the psychological vulnerabilities of individual family members, family therapy offers a respectful and effective way to join, support, and promote the welfare of the military family.

By Scott Lundberg, MS, MFT

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Thank you for being an essential part of bringing our mission to life!

The Samaritan Community

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alphabetized by last name

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Counseling Locations

We offer both in-person and secure virtual therapy options. Our in-person locations are listed below.

Seattle-Main Office
564 NE Ravenna Blvd.
Seattle, WA 98115
Phone: (206) 527-2266

Bellevue
Bellevue Presbyterian Church
St. Andrew's Lutheran Church

New! Bellingham
First Presbyterian Church of Bellingham

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Poulsbo First Lutheran Church

Spokane
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New Therapist Heather Macdonald

Dr. Macdonald has been a licensed Clinical Psychologist since 2010. She offers both adult individual psychotherapy and psychological assessment. She also holds a PSYPACT license and can offer telehealth in approved states and offers in-person appointments on the Kitsap peninsula. She sees adults facing a wide variety of life challenges, including anxiety, depression, trauma, ADHD, and relationship problems. She also works with people struggling with chronic illnesses or other long-term conditions. Rooted in the integration of mind, body, and spirit, the therapeutic alliance is used to explore how physical illness impacts identity, self-worth, and inner world.

Dr. Macdonald teaches part-time at Seattle University in the MAP program, has worked at the Danielsen Institute at Boston University, and taught psychology at Lesley University in Cambridge, MA. She completed her MA degree in Existential Phenomenological Psychology at Seattle University, and her doctorate in clinical psychology at Pacific University. She also has her MS in Clinical Psychopharmacology from New Mexico State University, and she is a medical psychologist in the state of Illinois.

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- Multiple in-person locations in King, Kitsap, Spokane and Whatcom Counties
- A variety of state-licensed psychotherapists
- Parenting and family workshops
- Professional trainings