



# LifeWork Counseling

LIFEWORX CONNECT VOLUME 1 ISSUE 2

APRIL 2012

## Don Olund, LCPC

Don Olund is a Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor and the owner of LifeWork Counseling. A Relational Communication Specialist, he helps couples and families build respectful, happy relationships by transforming unhealthy patterns into positive connections.

In addition to his clinical practice, Don is gaining attention as a writer and public speaker. He is currently writing a book on bringing respect back in relationships, which will be available soon. He is a frequent speaker in churches, retreats and workshops while serving as a lecturer on the faculty of the Graduate School at Governors State University.



## RETRO-LOVE

Notice the infatuation with the sixties theme? From clothing fads, TV shows and movies, to iTunes re-mastered works of the Beatles, Pink Floyd, and other artists of the counter-cultural revolution it appears people seek a “nostalgia fix” these days. It makes me want to say “groovy man”. Some of what we see is simply a marketing ploy to the baby-boomer generation who are now entering retirement years and have money to spend. However, for many of us who grew up in or around that era, a part of us longs to shed ourselves of the burden of our responsibilities and embrace the “peace, love, and harmony” of our free-spirit past.

I detect a similar longing in couples who feel overwhelmed by the pressure of the

responsibilities they shoulder on a daily basis. Couples juggling the tasks of managing a home, raising children, and the demands of their careers, find little time left for each other. Consequently, most of their interactions focus on the “tasks” of family life which can make their marriage function more like a business partnership than soul mates. It leaves many wondering if they can get the feeling back they had when they were young, fun-loving, and free.

Often, In my work with couples, finding “retro-love” is one of the goals we address. I define “retro-love” as the experience of adventure, pleasure, friendship, and romance couples shared when they fell in love. We are not trying to recreate the “first high” of love, for this is a myth. However, it is possible for couples to create new experiences of fun, freedom, and intimacy in their relationship while still juggling the responsibilities of adult life. So, how does this happen? Here are three simple ideas to consider.

The first step couples do is “re-prioritize” their relationship. Instead of being last on the list (which means never), couples move up as near to the top as possible. Included in this mental shift is viewing time and money spent on the relationship as an “investment” not an “expense” with dividends that benefit everyone in the family including the kids. Happy parents fight less!

The second step couples follow is finding “pockets of time” and “planned time” to spend together. Pockets of time can happen any time during the day from five minutes to an hour where the couple can connect without interruption of kids, tasks, or media devices. Sitting on the deck with a cup of java, a walk around the block, or whatever-- I think you get the meaning. Planned time is a date night or other activity couples schedule to go out for mutual enjoyment. I find that couples who add new adventures rather than old routines, capture the essence of what it was like when they first dated. Planned time can include weekenders without kids. I know of a couple who annually book a couple of nights downtown Chicago. Here they enjoy great restaurants, shows, and the many attractions the city offers.



The third step in “retro-love” is removing the “role hats” and donning the “freedom hats”. Of course I am speaking metaphorically, but the point is in order to get the most of the time together, couples have to be clear on what they want to experience. This is not a time to talk about your roles and tasks. Instead, the time can be spent playing, relaxing, bicycling, or taking dance lessons. Talking can be dreaming about your future, things you want to accomplish, places you want to visit, or what you value as a couple. In short, it is about connecting, knowing each other, and sharing life together.

Retro-love is really not that complicated when you think about it. People make time to do things they enjoy. Yet, a laid out plan does not guarantee execution. Some couples still resist spending time together because they have pent up resentment toward each other. Tired of fighting, they avoid couple time for fear it will turn into another argument. Deep down they may still love each other but they struggle showing it because of the unresolved hurt.

If your relationship is suffering due to the time and energy you devote to the roles and responsibilities you manage then take some action. Try the three-step approach to retro-love. For those who are stuck due to a stockpile of unresolved conflicts and resentment I recommend couples counseling. A few sessions can help you learn how repair hurt and manage conflict so that it doesn't remain a barrier to companionship and intimacy.



As a relational communication specialist, I assist couples in shifting negative patterns to positive connections. Having the tools and rules of engagement can help you fight less and connect more. Feel free to email me or call our office for an appointment.

## Bethany Genenbacher, MSW, LCSW, CADC

Bethany received a Bachelor's degree in social work at Quincy University in Quincy, IL in 1995 and my Master's degree from Aurora University in 2004.

She has conducted training for the Fox Valley Crisis Line since 2003 and has also given presentations with various organizations regarding substance use and abuse. In addition, she conducts training on Dialectal Behavioral Therapy (DBT).

Recently she was elected as State President of the Illinois Chapter of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention.



# Skunk Spray

5:15 Monday Morning, let the dog out

5:20 Monday Morning, let the dog in

5:21 Monday Morning realize that the dog has been sprayed by a skunk and has been running around the house, making the house; kids and everything else smell horrible.

Then I realized, I have to go to work. And now I smell somewhat skunk-like also.

Not the way to start the workweek.

So, I went to work. That's what had to be done. And, yes, I smelled a bit.

I had to make a decision, ignore my smell or acknowledge it and embrace it. I could not change the situation and realized, dogs get sprayed by skunks and I had to deal with it. So, I decided to tell my clients what happened when they came in and something happened during therapy that day that I want to share.

Dr. Brene Brown says the following:

*“Authenticity is a daily practice. Choosing authenticity means cultivating the courage to be emotionally honest, to set boundaries, and to allow ourselves to be vulnerable; exercising the compassion that comes from knowing that we are all made of strength and struggle and connected to each other through a loving and resilient human spirit; nurturing the connection and sense of belonging that can only happen when we let go of what we are suppose to be and embrace who we are.*

*Authenticity demands wholehearted living and loving—even when it's hard, even when we're wrestling with shame and fear of not being enough, and especially when the joy is so intense that we're afraid to let ourselves feel it.*

*Mindfully practicing authenticity during our most soul searching struggling is how we invite grace, joy and gratitude in our lives.”*

I was able to see that by being vulnerable the connections with my clients grew. They were able to open up even more about their struggles.



Then I began to think about relationships in general. Relationships require us to be vulnerable. By being vulnerable, we allow those in our lives to know us on a deeper level. Being vulnerable means that we have to lean into discomfort, sharing what we don't want to share despite being embarrassed or ashamed. It means trusting those of us that love us to know the good, the bad and the ugly and in return they are able to share their good, bad and ugly stuff. Both end up loving and caring for each other more because they know the other in a more personal, more human level. This is what deep relationships are founded on. This is what keeps them real and honest.

However, being vulnerable can be scary. What if you are rejected and ridiculed? What if it doesn't work out the way we want it to? Then you are even more vulnerable. But, part of being in a relationship--friendships, marriages, families--means that you might be hurt or those around you might not react to what you are telling them the way you want them to.

So, what do you do? Realize what you like about you. Embrace who you are. Develop a strong sense that this is who I am, I like me, I hope you like me to, but I am going to be me and this is who I am. Once you believe in you, wanting to be completely honest about who and what you are becomes easier. You take the chance and through these chances, you develop deeper connections with others.

Take a chance to let those that love you, love all of you.

I realized that by smelling like a skunk and acknowledging it, I was not rejected, embarrassed, but instead I was embraced and given considerable empathy. It changed relationships that day. I took a chance.

And a little ps- tomato juice DOES NOT work. Vinegar and four baths later are the way to go, but I am not expert on skunk spray.





## Laura Sauerberg, MA, LPC

As a licensed professional counselor, Laura helps individuals, couples, and families of all ages navigate through the emotional challenges, relational issues, and daily complexities of 21st century life.

Laura has been at LifeWork Counseling in Oak Brook, IL for the past two years. She earned her master's degree in Community Counseling in June 2011 and is beginning her career as a full-time practitioner.

Her particular focus is on the emotional and relational challenges of her peers- the Millennial generation. With an experiential understanding of their cultural personality, value system, and methods of interaction, she assists clients with communication issues, life choices, and emotional self-management.



## A 20-something's Survival Guide to High School

It wasn't so long ago that I was in high school (I haven't even had my ten year reunion yet!) and I hear from my young clients that it is still a difficult time both personally and socially.

They are supposed to be "the best years of your life", but I have never found a person who believes this to be so. How we look, what we say, and how we perform in school and sports never seems to be scrutinized to the same degree as it is in those 4 years.

So, the question remains: Can anyone get out of high school with his or her self-esteem fully intact? I believe it is possible, but there are many things that need to be kept in perspective along the way:

- 1) Your “popularity” does not determine how successful you will be, or how attractive you are. The criteria for being popular in high school often doesn’t fit what makes us appealing in the adult world, and it does not define your place in the world. You are an individual who has numerous gifts and skills that don’t always show in adolescence.
- 2) Making a mistake will not determine your future. While getting in trouble, or getting an F is never a positive experience, be careful to avoid viewing it as a catastrophe. Fear of never recovering can be a slippery slope, and learning from a mistake or two (or three) is the correct step after a blunder. Take the positive lesson from each experience, set goals, and keep moving forward!
- 3) There is a much bigger world out there for you! Although our world can feel like it is ending when we fail a test or our best friend stabs us in the back, you have your whole life ahead of you. There are thousands of people and experiences waiting for you after high school, and the negative events can’t scare you from opening up once you pass the threshold into the real world!
- 4) You are still growing and changing. Although many people look like adults in high school, they are far from who they will be as a fully developed adult. Whether you don’t like how you look or you aren’t comfortable with how you are in social situations, the following years of college or work are sure to show you that you are worthy of feeling sociable and attractive.
- 5) Ask for help if you need it. Things such as falling behind in school or becoming depressed can be overwhelming when you feel alone and unsure of what to do. Talk to your parents or a trusted adult about what is going on with you, and you can work together toward a solution. Tutoring and counseling can be two solutions to knocking a problem out before it takes over!



So remember that high school is only 4 years, and once you are done, there is a whole world waiting for you to explore and learn! Keep your experiences and difficulties in perspective so you can live your life to the fullest as an adult. Always talk with those you trust, and look for the positive in who YOU are. I assure you there is plenty that makes you the wonderful person you are!



## Annie Dolan, LPC

Annie Dolan is a Licensed Professional Counselor specializing in Couples and Family Counseling at LifeWork Counseling. She began her clinical career here as a clinical intern in 2009 while I was pursuing my Master's Degree in Marriage and Family Counseling from Governors State University in University Park, IL.

Prior to that she worked in the corporate sector in sales and marketing before finding my true calling as a counselor. She received a Bachelor's Degree from DePauw University in Greencastle, IN with a major in Communications in 2002.

She is a member of the American Counseling Association as well as the American Association of Marriage and Family Therapists.



## Honoring the "Do" in "I Do"

Lately, in my work with couples, I've come to notice that one of the biggest issues my clients are facing is that they no longer do things together or for each other. They've come to the point that happens after many years of being together and raising a family that the focus gets shifted anywhere but on the relationship. We spend so much of our time on our careers, and our children that our relationship tends to come in close to last.

In order for us to have a healthy relationship we need to tend to it.

99 Percent of the couples we see come in saying that we need to “talk” more, to “communicate” better. Honestly, what they need to do is stop talking and start doing!

Our words become meaningless if there is no action to back them up. You can tell your spouse “I love you” a million times but if you don’t show them how you love them they won’t know. Healthy relationships aren’t built on just words, they are built on life experiences; what we do together, what we do for each other, and for ourselves. Start doing things again!

10 easy ways to reconnect throughout your week:

- 1) Send a quick text message telling your partner that you are thinking about them and that you love them. “Hey hun, hope your day is going well. Love you!” It goes a long way.
- 2) Kiss your partner before leaving every morning and greet your partner when they come home.
- 3) Eat at least 1 meal a day together sitting down with no TV on. Breakfast, lunch, or dinner. I’m a huge proponent of family meals. Use this time to reconnect. Ask each other questions. Be silly.
- 4) Make each other feel special. Look back to when you were dating each other, what did you do? Start incorporating those activities back into your relationship.
- 5) Sleep in the same bed. No excuses!
- 6) Give your partner an unexpected gift. It doesn’t have to be expensive.
- 7) Make time for sex.
- 8) Kiss and hug often
- 9) Exercise together. An evening walk, a jog, a bike ride
- 10) Take a class or join a local amateur sports league together.



## Scott H. DeValk Psy.D., LCSW

Dr. De Valk has endeavored in the field of community and mental health for the last 29 years. He received his BA in Psychology from St. Xavier University in 1977, his M.S.W. from George Williams College (Aurora University) in 1981, and his Psy. D. from the Adler School of Professional Psychology in 2005. He has a license in clinical social work, is a nationally board certified diplomate, and is certified as an addictions counselor.

Dr. De Valk's professional focus is on managing the length and frequency of counseling in relation to diagnosis and global assessment of functioning. This continuing interest stems from his dissertation that examined the correlation between these factors.



## Engaging Children In Counseling

When I began my doctoral internship, I was introduced to treating childhood disorders. I had worked in a variety of settings, under several conditions, but engaging children in treatment was a new challenge. I had to obtain the wisdom of others and remember my childhood as reference points.

I was blessed with two very loving parents. My mother played games with my sister and I when dad worked late hours. She had a beautiful voice, having been a professional singer before marriage. She often sang with us. I treasured those moments. She talked about her childhood and life experiences. I was very connected to her sensitivity and calming.

My father provided great security as well. We built structures with my Lincoln Logs and Erector Set. We glued together countless model airplanes and cars. We drew buildings, people, planes, scenery, and houses. We took long walks, played catch together for years, and most of all, he talked to me about his childhood and life. He, like mom, offered me wisdom about friends, enemies, feelings, God, and many facts about people and science. Dad seemed prescient about the impending behavior of people. Also, both he and Mom tried to teach me about how to stop annoying my sister or driving them crazy. They had only limited success in these areas! As a grown man today, their thoughts and words are part of my soul. Often times, at the cemetery, or other places of reflection, I look to the sky in emotionally accented gratitude.

I have been blessed to be a father of two girls who have matured into wonderful women. I give credit to God and my bride for who they have become. From the gifts of my own childhood, I was able to be close to the girls from birth. I embraced their world and logic at different points of development. Often times I say that children were created to raise their parents! Indeed, I have learned much through their thoughts, experiences, and emotions. Frequently, I have asked myself, "How does the world look through the eyes of my children?"

What I once thought to be a difficult task, working with children has become a place of comfort. Education and training, recollection of childhood experiences, and being a father, have been cornerstones for engaging children in counseling.

Before a meet a child for counseling, I obtain an idea of what a child is like upon the referral of the parents. They are the experts of their own children. Most often, parents have a sound understanding of what the world looks like through their child's eyes. I share with parents how to bridge, or prepare, their child for coming to therapy. I advise them to use the concept of a "tutor" for solving problems, developing control, changing behaviors, or managing emotions.

When I work with children, we draw or build with blocks, creating symbols of a relationship, and the targeted problem for change. Visual symbolism, developing notebooks from 'tutoring', or creating props for reminders are powerful as a foundation for behavioral change. I give them as much control over a foreign context as possible, and make assumptions about what they are experiencing. The 'magic thought' or "The change that you would make if you had all the power in the world" is often times introduced to identify the child's perspective of the problem. Simplicity, comfort, and straight forwardness are what children frequently respond to. I let children know that their parents will be part of counseling, since I "tutor" them also. Subsequently, therapy is redefined, trusting, non-threatening, and bridged between the session and home.

As always, thanks, in perpetuity, to my mother and father...

