



NEWSLETTER

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www.StoneHouseAssociates.com

366 DORSET ST., S. BURLINGTON, VT
PHONE 654-7607

TWO NEW GROUPS OFFERED THIS FALL

We are pleased to announce two new groups this fall; one for adult women recovering from childhood trauma (see page 3), and the other for adolescent girls facing various social and/or emotional challenges (see below). In addition to these services, our multidisciplinary team continues to provide individual, couples, and family therapy addressing a wide range of issues across the life span.

To make a referral, receive an electronic version of this newsletter, or to make comments or suggestions, please email us at info@stonehouseassociates.com.

SHA is on facebook:



Our Colleagues:

Christine DiBlasio, PhD

Jan Ogilvie, MSW

Gail Hanson, MS

Carol Heffer, MA

Lizabeth Pontzer, MD

Karen Okun, MA

Bruce Chalmer, PhD

Christina Oravec, MSW

Michelle Turbide, MSW

Georgina Achilles, MS

ART JOURNEY: AN EXPRESSIVE ARTS GROUP FOR ADOLESCENTS

BY MICHELLE TURBIDE, MSW, LICSW

Expressive Arts (EXA) provides an opportunity to increase emotional awareness, is a tool for self-soothing, and can be a useful method for exploring the internal emotional landscape with sensory, body based, creative techniques. Expressive arts has been shown to have positive effects on the flight/flight response resulting from excessive anxiety, stress, and trauma. Differing from Art Therapy, EXA uses multi-modal experiences of visual, movement, sound, music, poetry, and drama to explore the senses and engage the imagination. Meaning and metaphor can be gained from this experience, however the primary use of the arts is experience not analysis.

While talk therapy and cognitive based treatments are effective approaches for a variety of clinical issues, there has been increasing evidence that body based and creative modalities have an effect on the healing process as well. Expressive arts modalities help to unlock some of the body's natural healing and self soothing mechanisms providing a non-threatening experience to explore and attune to one's emotions. EXA can assist clients by exploring the sensory memory of past experience and opening up new ways of experiencing those memories which allows for the possibility of a new cognitive narrative.

Group therapy provides a milieu in which maladaptive patterns and reactions can arise in a therapeutic setting and be given space for exploration and new perspectives. Groups provide a safe environment in which to explore the concept that we are not alone in our suffering while offering the comfort of connecting with others in similar experiences.

The **Art Journey** group will work with a variety of media to explore issues of self-concept, critical self judgment, grief/loss, shame and vulnerability, healthy decision making, and interpersonal relationships. The focus of the group is not on product but process in the creative expression and a 'talent' in the arts is not required for participation.

This group is for teen girls, ages 13-17, who may be struggling in the areas of self confidence, interpersonal relationships, grief, anxiety, depression, trauma, worthiness, and self-harm. Each month, we will work with a different theme to explore the inner landscape of our lives and bring to light the beliefs, thoughts, and perspectives that are shaping our experiences. It will take place 2-3 Fridays a month from 3:15 pm until 4:45 pm, beginning in early November and ending in June.

Admission is rolling throughout the year. Group capacity is 8 youth and commitment is on a month to month basis. Please call Michelle Turbide, MSW, LICSW at 802.654.7607 ext 6 for more information or to schedule an intake.

Michelle Turbide, LICSW has over 15 years experience working with children & families and welcomes inquiries about her services (mturbide@stonehouseassociates.com).

STONE HOUSE IN THE COMMUNITY

“SAFETY TEAM...ASSEMBLE!”

Many of our Stone House practitioners are active in community organizations. Here is an interview with Dr. Christine DiBlasio, about her participation as one of the founding members of a non-profit organization dedicated to the wellbeing, safety and empowerment of women. The organization, The Safety Team (Self Defense Trainings for Women by Women, www.thesafetyteam.org), was officially formed in 2013, but the team has been offering self defense trainings for women for over 10 years.



Q: Tell us a little bit about this organization.

Dr. DiBlasio: The Safety Team Organization currently offers women's self defense programs to teens age 14 and older, and women of any age. We teach practical self defense strategies that most women find useful, fun and easy to learn. I believe that these skills are important for all women to learn and review periodically. We are also in the process of expanding our reach so that we can work collaboratively with other organizations that share a common mission in promoting the wellbeing of women.

Q: What inspired your interest in forming this organization?

Dr. D.: I've been doing martial arts for many years, and have enjoyed the benefit of training on both a physical and mental level. It has enabled me to learn how to be more present in the moment and has absolutely improved my fitness level.

The driving force behind my interest in offering women's self defense classes however, has been my work as a psychologist for the past twenty plus years. In this work, I have had the honor of working with hundreds of survivors of violence. While impressed with the resilience of these women, hearing so many stories of violence against women made me feel that it was important to try to help on the “front end” as well. That is, I hope that by offering these programs we can help women feel empowered and find ways to enhance their safety. Make no mistake: *while the responsibility for violence falls squarely and solely on the shoulders of the perpetrator*, women can find ways to reduce their risk and enhance their self defense skills. It has been powerful to witness women who participate in these classes walk away not only with the physical and mental skills (awareness and avoidance) of self defense, but also to hear them express repeatedly that *they feel different* after completing these classes.

Q: They feel different? What do you mean by that?

Dr. D.: For some women, there is a tremendous sense of accomplishment that they get from participating in these classes. As you can imagine, this is a difficult subject matter for many women, and participants often feel pleased that they have learned various new skills. In addition, a sub group of women who participate have already experienced some form of violence against them, whether it was verbal, physical or sexual, or some combination of all three. These classes, when sensitively offered, can assist women in recognizing that they can make a difference in the future in terms of their ability to keep themselves safe. And, with careful consideration and planning, it may help in their healing from past traumas as well (see the work of Dr. Bessel van der Kolk, Dr. Peter Levine and others). This area in particular (“somatic or mind/body” methods to promote healing from trauma) is one that I would like to pursue further in both the research and “real world” applications in regards to our women's self defense program, and we are seeking grants to start this work.

“Courage is like a muscle. We strengthen it with use.” ~Ruth Gordon

Q: Your women's self defense program is named “The Safety Team.” Who is the team?

Dr. D.: I am fortunate to work with a very talented group of women on this team. We are all professional women who work in fields that expose us to the realities of violence against women. While we each have extensive martial arts training (more than 45 years combined in various styles and all black or brown belts in kempo-jitsu), it is our professional lives that really allow us to offer a special and comprehensive program to women. More specifically, the team consists of a middle/high school educator, a law enforcement officer, a forensic toxicologist, a forensic chemist, a physical therapist, and a psychologist (me). This makes for a unique program that is enriched by the blend of our martial arts and professional experiences. The website gives great information as to the team member's talents as I can't do them justice (www.thesafetyteam.org)! I am truly honored to be a part of this team.



Q. How important is the “For Women By Women” component?

Dr. D.: I think that it is very important. As women (and mothers of daughters), our team clearly understands..

Women's Trauma Recovery Skills Group, Part 1

Wednesday 6:30-8:00, 8 weeks, Start Date TBA

Facilitators: Carol Heffer, LCMHC & Katie Fallin, LPMA

This 8 week psychoeducational group is for women who have experienced and are recovering from the effects of childhood sexual, physical, and emotional trauma. This group is meant to enhance individual therapy experience, not replace it. We require that all group members be in ongoing individual therapy to participate. Some of the group topics that will be covered include:

- Develop and practice grounding strategies
- Enhance self-care and self-soothing strategies
- Identify & manage different feeling states
- Increase ability to modulate negative feeling states
- Identify & manage symptoms of dissociation
- Identify & counter common unhealthy thinking patterns and trauma related beliefs
- Identify & manage triggers
- Shame reduction

If interested, please call Carol Heffer, LCMHC 654-7607 ext 5 to schedule a screening interview.

STONE HOUSE IN THE COMMUNITY (CON'T):

...the realistic concerns of women regarding their personal safety. All of our instructors are attuned to the needs of women, and well aware of the sensitive nature of the material presented. I also believe that the women participants feel more comfortable and connected in this all women environment, and subsequently are more likely to share their safety concerns. Of course, we have male instructors available as needed and when requested.

Q: How physically fit do you have to be to take these classes? What about age?

Dr. D.: These classes are appropriate for all fitness levels, and we can make accommodations as needed for injuries or other physical limitations. In addition, we emphasize awareness, avoidance, physical evasion, and verbal diffusion; these skills are extremely valuable yet don't require any strenuous physical exertion. Our goal is to have women feel "comfortably challenged, by choice", which is the same theme that I use in my clinical work with clients. And I would add—these classes are appropriate and recommended for women of all ages. I see many moms insist that their daughter(s) attend one of our trainings before leaving for college. This is, of course, both important and wise. Frequently these moms will attend the classes with their daughters, and remark afterwards that they learned new skills and improved their own awareness. Sadly, there is not an age that is immune from the risk of violence, and consequently, we have offered these classes to women of all ages in various settings (e.g., corporate sites, colleges, high schools, community and recreational centers, etc.).

Q: How do I find out more about the programs that are offered?

Dr. D.: I am happy to talk with anyone who is interested in learning more. I can be reached via telephone (654-7607 ext 2) or email: cdiblasio@stonehouseassociates.com. Our website (www.thesafetyteam.org) has information about upcoming events, as does our facebook page ([The Safety Team](#)). We will be offering a class on November 13th that in part will focus on the safety concerns of moms or caregivers, but is appropriate for all women (6:15pm, Maple Street Recreational Center, Essex Junction). Instructors are volunteering their time and all proceeds go to support our programs for women.

Q: Is there anything else that you would like to add?

Dr. D.: Just that we welcome input, suggestions, and support. Together, we can make a difference in the lives of women. Thank you.



366 Dorset St. Suite 10

Phone: 802-654-7607

Fax: 802-654-9155

<http://www.stonehouseassociates.com>



One Perspective on Getting Hurt

By Carol Heffer, MA, LMHC

When we were newly born, we mostly came with the expectations of being welcome. You can sometimes witness this in the calm expectation a young one has when they approach you, a complete stranger, to show you their new toy, expecting you to share in their excitement. Or you can view our entry as comparable to a brand new computer ready to take in all the information you need to store, filing it away for later appropriate use. It is like touching a hot stove, getting burned and learning not to touch hot objects again.

Emotional hurts look different. With these hurts, the information that is coming in does not necessarily make sense. As such, the brain can't file or process this information. So all the information for that instance gets stored in one neuron pathway (as far as we know at this time), in the amygdala. Everything in that neuron pathway will stimulate everything else in that neuron pathway, which we call triggers. So what we see, smell, hear, experience in the present can open up memories in our brains of past hurts, which will affect how we respond in the present, whether it makes sense or not. I use a story about "The Girl and the Spaghetti" to demonstrate the reaction.

There's a young girl, maybe 4 or 5 years old, and she is playing with her mother. Her mother is cooking spaghetti for dinner so the entire house smells of spaghetti sauce. Then Mom gets a phone call. It's not a good call. Someone died...someone lost their job. Mom goes into the kitchen to think, stirring the pot. Her daughter comes into the kitchen and says, "Where'd you go?"

If Mom is thinking clearly, which I understand we can do 33% of the time, she could say, "Sorry, dear. Mommy got a bad call, but we're ok, and I'm feeling a little sad, and that's okay. If you go play I'll join you shortly." Now the child knows that bad things can happen, but they're safe. Mommy can feel bad and that's ok; she didn't do anything wrong and Mom will play with her soon. However, even the best parents can get distracted and say things like, "Why are you bothering me? Can't I have a minute to myself? Can't you play alone?" Maybe they even yell at the child and send her to her room. If there is no one to explain to the child at some point that her parent is just having a rough time, she won't be able to make sense of the experience. All this information will get stored in one neuron pathway we spoke of earlier: the play room, the kitchen, the smell of spaghetti sauce, the phone ringing. Now Mom calls her for dinner and the child feels nauseous, so she starts making decisions based on the hurt. "I don't like spaghetti. I won't eat it anymore." Then she notices that every time the phone rings she has a startle response and she hates being in the kitchen where she feels isolated and alone. Now she's 15 and she still hates the kitchen so decides it must be because she hates cooking....so she's not going to cook. At 30, she has her own child and they're playing having a great time and she has to go into the kitchen to make dinner and starts feeling uncomfortable, edgy, and irritable. She starts snapping at her children and can't figure out why. This story is not meant to imply that a single scolding will necessarily result in long standing impact, but rather is here to illustrate the general process of how sensory and emotional information may be stored and triggered at a later date.

Our minds are imprinted with all the information that we have gained. The situations in our present life where we find that we are reacting in a way that doesn't make sense to us could be the result of an early hurt. The important information is that these feelings, reactions, and behaviors can be understood and healed. We can go back and review, disentangle and re-evaluate these situations. We can reduce our triggers and make new decisions that help us to get more of what we want in our present life. We can understand ourselves, our needs, our reactions, and find new ways to create the lives we want to be living.

Carol Heffer, LMHC has extensive experience working with adults dealing with life transitions, trauma, anxiety, depression and loss. She can be reached at 654-7607 ext 5 or via email at cheffer@stonehouseassociates.com.

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