



## INDIVIDUAL, MARITAL, AND FAMILY THERAPY. MEDIATION, PARENTING COORDINATION, & PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

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Welcome to our September 2016 newsletter. As you may know from our last newsletter, we have been very busy over the summer and will continue to be busy with a number of important projects this month as well. Our priority continues to be focusing on our ongoing commitment to providing quality psychotherapy, counselling, and mediation to our existing and new clients/patients.

Allison Elliot, MSW, RSW, continues to offer the cognitive behavioural outreach program at the nominal fee of \$1.00. Allison is accepting young adults, who typically cannot afford private therapy, for CBT intervention. New referrals will be accepted from physicians in the Burlington, Oakville and Mississauga areas.

Wendy Kenrick has officially joined our team this month as a full time therapist. Wendy has worked with high performing individuals in the corporate world for over 15 years and is now committed to helping talented people find emotional relief and clarity in their personal and professional lives.

Wendy works with individuals, couple relationships, and with client's families in a warm and supportive yet collaboratively challenging environment of positive change and growth. Improving adaptability and resilience are fundamental principles of Wendy's practice and she provides clients with an opportunity to better manage the pressures and challenges faced on a daily basis.

Using mindfulness-based cognitive behavioural therapy, rational emotive therapy, motivational interviewing, exposure response prevention using classic psychotherapeutic modalities and techniques, Wendy's full time practice focuses on helping individuals with depression, anxiety, and obsessive compulsive disorders. Assisting clients in a process of emotional redefinition, Wendy guides clients in a

process of recalibrating their goals on a personal and professional level.

Wendy also has a special interest in working extensively with stepparents as building a stepfamily is a very unique and complex process. Working with families in transition is also a critical area of interest and Wendy is developing a strong clinical practice in assisting families struggling with the challenges of divorce, mediation, and parenting coordination.

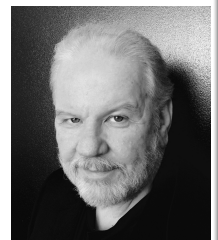
Overall, helping clients improve their ability to navigate complex life decisions and manage stress to avoid burnout are key elements of Wendy's full time practice.

We are also pleased to announce that Accendus Group is expanding our mediation and parental coordination services into Waterloo, Kitchener, Cambridge, as well as our psychotherapy services. The second office will be located in uptown Waterloo and easily accessible from the 401. In addition, we are planning to open an office in downtown Toronto due to a number of referrals that have been coming from that location.

Finally, we are also working on an update to our website at [www.accendusgroup.com](http://www.accendusgroup.com) and hope to have the updated site available for you in a few weeks.

We look forward to your ongoing confidence in our group practice.

Greg Koval, MSW, RSW.



## BUILDING A STEPFAMILY

BY WENDY KENRICK M.A. (COUNSELLING PSYCHOLOGY), OACCPP

Building a stepfamily is a very complicated process. Gibson (2013) notes that most intact families have an existing story that defines their values, dreams, and goals, adopting many of those aspects from previous generations. These stories are important, bringing meaning, purpose, and cohesiveness between family members (Gibson, 2013). As family units evolve, stepfamilies can face challenges in trying to transition and understand where old family stories end and new family stories begin (Gibson, 2013).

Creating new family stories can help every member of the stepfamily have a more clear understanding of the various roles and some of the expectations for those roles (Gibson, 2013). The task of creating a new family identity and sense of cohesion with individuals who do not have any common history is one of the most difficult transitions a family can attempt to make (Gold, 2016). This has a direct impact on the health of the relationship between the adults attempting to start the new family unit (Gold, 2016).

According to Gold (2016), the stress levels in stepfamilies can rise to levels consistent with first marriages. With divorce rates for second marriages at 67% (and third marriages at 73%), the dissolution of the marriages is being attributed to high stress in stepfamilies during the first 5 years (Gold, 2016). With stepfamilies being the fastest growing family unit in North America and the lack of social support offered by society, these new family units are fighting an uphill battle to remain intact (Gold, 2016).

Some of the adaptive challenges stepfamilies face include elements that may have caused the first marriage to dissolve (Gold, 2016). Examples include managing equality between spouses, communication, finances, intimacy, responsibilities at home, and time reserved to maintain or improve the health of the marital relationship (Gold, 2016). In addition to those challenges, stepfamilies are also faced with trying to manage previous financial commitments, relationship boundaries, previous

spousal relationships (including residual anger and resentment between former spouses), and the stresses associated with parenting and stepparenting (Gold, 2016). Unfortunately, the difficulties in stepparenting are one of the main reasons the divorce rate is higher for couples with stepchildren (Kuther, 2015).



The stepparent to stepchild relationship is the most complex and challenging relationships in a stepfamily context and their bond is one of the major tasks of stepfamily life (Schrodt, 2006). Stepparents need to consider and employ various styles of stepparenting so that children and teens are better able to facilitate their adjustment into new stepfamily situations (Cartwright et al., 2009).

If the children are not properly engaged, they can create the greatest source of stress for the stepfamily and the new partners (Cartwright et al., 2009). A stepparent with a highly supportive parenting style combined with an authentic ongoing affinity towards their stepchildren is more likely to generate a close, reciprocal relationship with their stepchildren (Cartwright et al., 2009, Schrodt, 2006).

Schrodt (2006) notes that liking is considered to be one of the most important elements of developing a positive relationship and bond between a stepparent and a stepchild. Cartwright et al. (2009) also remind us that a laid-back stepparent tends to be more successful in building relationships with stepchildren. When stepparents are able to show consistent acceptance of their stepchildren and encourage the biological parent to continue to hold responsibility for their care and discipline, there is a higher probability that positive relationships

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between the stepparent and stepchild are likely to grow, ultimately creating a stronger stepfamily unit (Cartwright et al., 2009).

Another critical aspect to the success of the new family unit is the stepparent's ability to offer support (emotional, practical, etc.) to their stepchildren (Cartwright et al., 2009). Offering support to stepchildren can come in many forms. Some examples include helping with practical problems like homework or getting to work on time, offering emotional support, providing financial support, or something as simple as doing nice things for them (Cartwright et al., 2009).

Some children also value the positive effects that a stepparent's support can have on the well-being or general health of their own parent (Cartwright et al., 2009). Appreciation of these elements may not be shown at the time but are usually experienced after the child has grown up and is able to look at their parent/stepparent's relationship from a different perspective (Cartwright et al., 2009).

An equally important factor that contributes to the success of the new family is that the role of the stepparent is directly influenced by the support of the biological parent (Kuther, 2015). The biological parent is responsible for the children's perception of their relationship with the stepparent, and their willingness to accept the new adult into the family (Kuther, 2015).

A high-quality marriage, positive child communication, and social support systems directly influence a stepparent's ability to cope. Stepparents who perceive a lack of support and/or control, are more likely to feel powerless, anger, and resentment, which can eventually lead to a depression, and the demise of the couple's relationship (Kuther, 2015).

As the number of stepfamilies in North America continues to increase with at least 40% of people having either a stepparent, stepchild, or step-relationship of some kind in their family (Gold, 2016). ). At least 33% of all marriages create stepfamilies and 50% of children will have a stepparent at some point in their lives (Gold, 2016). Stepparents and stepfamilies need therapists who are prepared to offer support

through specialized counselling and psycho-education. As a stepparent myself, this is an area I am very familiar with. There are unique and complex challenges associated with being part of a stepfamily and I am very excited to be able to offer my services in this area.

Cartwright, C., Farnsworth, V., & Mobley, V. (2009). *Relationships with step-parents in the life stories of young adults of divorce* (82). Retrieved from Australian Institute of Family Studies website: <https://aifs.gov.au/sites/default/files/cc.pdf>

Gibson, D. M. (2013). Ambiguous roles in a stepfamily: Using maps of narrative practices to develop a new family story with adolescents and parents. *Contemporary Family Therapy: An International Journal*, 35(4), 793-805. doi:10.1007/s10591-013-9258-2

Gold, J. M. (2016). *Stepping in, stepping out: Creating stepfamily rhythm*. Alexandria, VA: American Counseling Association.

Kuther, T. L. (2015). *Lifespan development: Lives in context*. Canada: SAGE Publications.

Schrodt, P. (2006). The stepparent relationship index: Development, validation, and associations with stepchildren's perceptions of stepparent communication competence and closeness. *Personal Relationships*, 13(2), 167-182. doi:10.1111/j.1475-6811.2006.00111.x

Counselling referrals can be made directly to Wendy Kenrick, MA (Counselling Psychology) at 226-808-0473 or [wk@accendusgroup.com](mailto:wk@accendusgroup.com)



## LIFE IS WHAT YOU MAKE IT

BY JOHN FRANCHI M.A. (COUNSELLING PSYCHOLOGY), OACCPP

While it is rarely articulated by individuals, each of us constructs our philosophy of life through our thoughts, the words we choose, and the actions we take. For the most part, we work out our life philosophy unconsciously. An essential understanding of this assertion arises from the notion that life is practice.

In our existence, our practiced actions become automatic. This tenet is at the base of activities and behaviour. It is a key component of Aristotle's instruction that forming good habits is the foundation of moral excellence. Habits result from the life we practice. As Aristotle postulated, what we do develops our character. If we incorporate appropriate action in gradual and repeated steps, we gain sound character. A means to achieve such an outcome is to practice the art of living in day-sized sections. It is the practice of living, working, and enjoying the day. This is the philosophy premised on the notion that one must favour the present – the present day – as the best time to act, encounter and achieve. This promotes an effective existence.

There is a sound basis for focusing on the day and refraining from looking back or in worrying about what comes next. Planning the next step may enhance the efforts of this day, but worrying about that next step has little value. A focus on the task at hand as it occurs in the moment gives peace to the anxious individual since what is past and what the future holds have little influence on present good behaviour and actual activity.

We may glance back in small measure to take stock of the situation, but it becomes a heavy weight of retrospection when the past impinges on today's activities. Worries and mistakes from the past have imposed their lesson. Revisiting that instruction impinges on today's effort. The better course lies in making this day's activities into the next lesson.

To pack tomorrow's concerns onto the cart with yesterday's memories and then pull it as part of today's work is a tall order for even the strongest among us. What the future holds has little certainty. That little certainty exists today and what is achieved

among us. What the future holds has little certainty. That little certainty exists today and what is achieved in the day we have. A philosophy that promotes too much attention to future detail may create a habit of missing the truth, opportunity and happiness that is present today. Energy, stress, and worry about the future consume the precious moments of today – moments better used to act now – thereby impinging on future opportunity.

The better outcome lies in grasping opportunity as it exists, not as it may be promised. Our enjoyment of life is enhanced by experiencing what is here – the sun and blue sky of today – and what we can do about it now. Taking on the challenge of life in a day-to-day approach assists our efforts to meet burdens, seize opportunity and enjoy our activities with a lighter mood and a quicker step. It is a sound way to practice life.



Counselling referrals can be made directly to John Franchi, MA (Counselling Psychology) at 416-553-8420.



## STEPPARENTING WORKSHOP AVAILABLE

ANNA NOSKO MSW RSW &  
WENDY KENRICK M.A. (COUNSELLING PSYCHOLOGY), OACCPP

### WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW TO HELP YOU EFFECTIVELY STEPPARENT

#### **Some Issues to be covered:**

- How do I fit in with my new family and adjust to my new role?
- What are my responsibilities as a stepparent?
- How do I deal with the other biological parent?
- What is realistic to expect of myself?

**This group was created specifically for individuals who are in a step-parenting role either through a blended family or an independent joining a family.**

The purpose of this workshop is threefold:

1. To answer questions about stepparenting because it can be really challenging,
2. To offer support in the sharing of experiences and exchanging information because you are not alone,
3. To have information from research in the field provided by professionals.

**When:** Tuesday evenings

**Where:** 345 Lakeshore Ave E, Suite 200, Oakville, L6J 1J5

**Fee:** Please call for details

To register, or for inquires, call Anna 416-729-7350 or Wendy 226-808-0473

**Preregistration is required.**