

MARC'S SENSORY OASIS

Sensory-based Occupational Therapy

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CHANGE THE LABELS.

**NO
MORE
STIGMA!**



PRECIOUS!

CHILDREN ARE

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Talk about Mental Health

WE ALL HAVE CHALLENGES IN LIFE

**Challenges in Life, Not Disorders.
Disorder implies broken, challenges can be faced.**

We live in a world that wants to label everything. In British Columbia, if you have an autism diagnosis, you can receive government funding to support your child. The amount of support does not change whether you are very disabled and cannot feed or toilet yourself or if you are a little Einstein who can do everything above age level. It's the label that counts, not the level of disability, nor impact on family life. When I worked with EIBI, they accepted cases given to them by the Ministry, regardless of need. We supported kids who did not need support. We supported really bright kids with very well off families. Meanwhile, children

with FASD got no support, even if their only nutrition came from packaged foods from the food bank. We need to support people based on their needs, and label-based support will never do that, especially with challenges that spread across a spectrum. One person with mental challenges or mental issues can hold down a job and maintain friendships, while another person with the same diagnosis cannot get out of bed and does not eat every day. Label based supports do not work. We need to find a way to support people based on the level of disability, or how much the disability interferes with self help and independent living/function in

Thinking, feeling, and sensation are always central to brain function and resilience. To support optimal healing and brain function, you must think positive thoughts, enjoy something, and have rich sensory experiences, with or without help and support.

society. We should be working on scales to measure level of disability or level of impact. Relying on a label/diagnosis creates judgment and misperception. If that child with autism can behave, then why can't yours? If that person with depression can work, then why can't you? Single label disabilities are promoting judgment that prevents people from getting the help they need. We need a disability impact scale that is blind to the cause of the disability and provides support according to the degree to which a disability impacts one's life and ability to function. A scale that measures level of impact could be blind as to whether the disability is caused by a physical, biological, social-emotional, psychological, or brain based factor. The more significant the impact, the more disabling to life, the more support would be offered, whether in the home, community, or school. This would require a shift in how we work with people, and a shift in the tools we use.

I'm not sure it will happen, because humans seem to tend not to understand and do not want to understand what people on the street or people with challenges are facing. Maybe they are afraid they will see themselves in the eyes and the stories of those who are suffering, and maybe they will see how close they are to sharing those shoes. "If I could overcome without help, so can they" is another harmful way of thinking. Over the past 30 years I have worked with some very strong families who have overcome the odds with love, positive thinking, and perseverance. I have also worked with families who have no support, no love, no community, and no one who will not judge them for their issues. In this age of information overload, it's easy to rush on and ignore the suffering of others. Often we do things to help where we can, and we can become saddened and discouraged by the world we live in, and we simply cannot persevere because we need to protect our own mental health. This is where our government should take over, but they are so addicted to spending on war and luxuries unspoken that there is nothing left for the desperate, who are then subject to street law, homelessness, disease, and being shot by police for trying to get by in ways we do not approve of, while healthier options are taken away from them. Yes, I am a bleeding heart liberal. That comes from being at the bottom. Being a weak young

boy, bullied at home and sexually abused at school taught me not to expect love or nurturing. I learned that speaking up only made things worse, so I isolated and lived in a bubble of dissociation, trying not to feel. I was overcome with joy when I discovered that alcohol stopped that deep unending pain, but it didn't stop the self hatred from simmering to a slow boil. As an older teen, I would try any drug offered to me, because what was the worst that could happen and how could that be worse than living? My sexual abuse screwed up my sexuality and made it impossible for me to have a relationship and feel the love of another person, until I had a son. I was lucky enough to have a job that paid for me to go into a treatment program, as I now had a reason to live! I had a pretty low life, but a few professionals saw some good in me, and I was eventually offered a tuition paid opportunity to become an OT! I could easily have died on the street 30 years ago, and sometimes I pass by blank looking youth lying on the sidewalk who remind me of this. WE ARE ALL HUMAN, and we are all doing the best we can.

Are there people with perfect little lives who have never suffered? No! Look at Michael Jackson, Whitney Houston, Robin Williams. Everyone has suffered challenges to their mental health, and it is time to stop pretending this is not true. I've only had a few labels in my life: alcoholic, PTSD, depression, anxiety. These are mental health issues or challenges, and they also vary greatly as to how disabling they are and how seriously they impact on life. If I were growing up today, I'd have a few more letters after my name, and they would not be MS or PhD. Perhaps I was lucky enough to get the help I needed, or to ride things out, but that doesn't mean that everyone with a substance abuse problem or PTSD should be able to do as well as I have. (Actually, I have been lucky enough to have accessed a lot of very expensive treatment and support that I could not have afforded if I had been on my own.) I worked very hard to have the tenuous level of sanity that I have now, and many people who are down and out just do not have enough determination or support to do what needs to be done. It doesn't make me better than anyone else but it does break my heart from time to time.

I believe that the way we label people is a big part of why people often lack the resources to recover or to get the help they need. If it were up to me, there would be no mental diagnosis that ends with "disorder" or "disease". These terms imply that I

am broken, and that just makes me want to give up because I am defective or broken. Having a "disorder" implies that I need someone to fix me, and that requires me to trust the 'system' and to trust a professional who looks like s/he has never walked in my shoes. Mental health issues, especially when they involve substance abuse, are often associated with self hatred which causes a person to feel unworthy of recovery. That feeling of unworthiness can lead to depression and despair, and a lack of energy to do what needs to be done to turn things around.

In diagnostic language, disorder and disease should be replaced by "difference", and the 'level of disability' or 'level of impact' scale would guide the level and intensity of the intervention I need. The diagnosis or difference that I have could inform the course of treatment that would work best for me, and the impact scale would indicate the intensity and format for the intervention. Both systems would work together, creating a new way of looking at mental health. We all have mental health challenges that we face at some point in our lives, but this does not make us 'broken', diseased, disordered, or ill.

We would still need to have diverse approaches to treatment and intervention, as many mental health treatments are as much an art as they are a science. There may be times when medical interventions are used, and this should be a choice between doctor and patient. Using medication does not mean I have a disease or am broken, just that there is an approach that might be worth trying.

There are many people who would argue that the use of medication or medical treatments implies an underlying disorder that needs to be corrected, but that is not clearly supported by emerging sciences. Many may think that a mental illness may be caused by the brain or body's inability to synthesize or use certain hormones or neurotransmitters. There is evidence however, that the book is not closed on this belief. Because of neuroplasticity, it is being proven that life circumstances can change our ability to produce neurotransmitters and hormones, so maybe the



egg came before the chicken. Either way, dropping the concept of "treatment means you are diseased" and "therapy means you are broken" would greatly help the cause of mental health, in my opinion.

In my life, I do not believe that I had disorders or diseases that came my way. Rather, life circumstances presented me with challenges that required healing and change. My PTSD is not a disorder, although many of you might disagree. It is PTSR or post traumatic stress response, in which my stress response system was altered by my early experiences. PTSR is natural when people, especially sensitive people, experience trauma such as abuse, war, etc. Depending on the level of impact, it could require some treatment, a lot of treatment, or even residential treatment, depending on the individual.

Let's talk about mental health, not mental illness. Let's talk about our challenges, not our disorders.

Why talk in a manner that promotes shame, self hatred, and reluctance to recover, or that diminishes hope or faith in self efficacy?

You don't want me to use the word retarded, even when I refer to the dictionary definition, because it hurts your feelings, but you can call me mentally ill because I had a substance abuse issue and you can say I have a disorder because I was abused?

Screw being politically correct, that's not my cup of tea. But try being kind. It really helps.

NATURAL CURES NOT MEDICINE

How we feel and think
is central to the way
we live our lives.

Just like our physical health,
our mental health can
have ups and downs.



PTSD Occurrence

