

# A couple of good reasons work in unified lifestyle

By CAROL MAHONEY

Fred and Rosalyn Lessing, a husband and wife team who work together as psychotherapists, describe their relationship as two overlapping circles.

At the Humanistic Psychotherapy Center in Southfield, an out-patient clinic where the Birmingham couple are employed, they sometimes see clients together and other times work independently.

"Because we are a couple, we do a lot of work with couples," Fred said. The Lessings became therapists in a roundabout manner. Both taught philosophy courses at the university level, but found something lacking in the lecture and grading system they were compelled to use.

Fred, who earned his doctorate in philosophy at Yale University, said, "I became aware of problems that students had in their families." Many of them, he discovered, were coping with divorce, alcoholism and even suicide.

It was frustrating trying to reach the students, he said. "Standing up in front of the class with all your notes, you could hit two or three kids and the rest were somewhere else."

He experimented with smaller classes, but found that the kind of individual attention he hoped to give students just wasn't possible in a university situation.

ROZ HAD much the same experience. "I kept trying to make the study of philosophy relative, to teach it in such a way that my students could use it," she said. "I tried to help students to become self-directed."

By the time they met in 1969, it was evident the couple reached a crossroad. Both decided to go back to school to train for counseling and psychotherapy.

They have also been in individual and group therapy and believe it is an important asset in being effective therapists.

"Marital and personal therapy has helped us a lot. When we get into problems we can't resolve, we feel OK about getting help from another therapist," Roz said.

The couple admit they have had problems. This is a second marriage for Fred who has two teenage sons by his first marriage. He and Roz have a five-year-old son named Ben.

Although the older boys live with their mother, they visit periodically during the year. Fred is concerned about maintaining a good relationship with them.

Also, since the Lessings work full-time, they have to arrange for Ben's

care while they are away.

"IT IS A DIFFICULT business of allocating space and time," said Fred. "It requires an enormous amount of maturity on our part." They laughed as they admitted it is something they don't always achieve.

Conceding that the work they do takes a lot of energy, Roz said that at least one of them manages to spend at least three or four hours a day with Ben. "Sometimes we are home together, some times not."

However, she added, continuity is maintained because Ben has had the same woman as his sitter since he was a baby.

Because many patients can only come in for therapy about once a week, the Lessings don't keep a nine to five schedule. Both work at least three evenings a week, often guiding patients who meet in therapy groups.

"The people we see are people who have problems in living," said Roz. Fred said the bulk of his clients fall "into the broad category of neurotic."

"They are people who function out in the community as business people, doctors, kids in school, but they are hassled."

Since many people could be described as neurotic in one way or another, why do these people seek help? Fred believes there are several reasons.

"In some families going into therapy is looked upon as an OK thing, much the same as going to the dentist for a toothache. Other people think it is only for people who are crazy."

SOMETIMES CRISIS, a divorce or the loss of a job, sends people looking for help. "People are feeling so bad that they are frightened about how they are feeling," Roz explained.

"They say that they would never kill themselves, but they do think about it and frighten themselves with those feelings."

She believes that some people live with a problem for years before seeking help. Patients like these have been referred to her by other clients she has helped. "They watched other people change and grow," she said. "This encourages them to come in."

Fred said that children are frequently brought to him by their parents. "The most common problems are school work and discipline or problems at home."

He added that still other patients come in not out of a critical need, but rather to improve the quality of their lives. What about the professional

patient, the person who dab bles in various forms of psychotherapy just to be in vogue? Can anyone help this kind of person?

"This patient," Roz said, "tries various means of therapy, but the feeling of inadequacy keeps coming back. He's still not OK, he thinks, so he tries something else."

THE LESSINGS say they try to re-

late to their patients as people. "I feel very strongly about communicating to my clients that I am a person like they are," said Roz.

Fred agreed that it is necessary to decrease the distance between himself and the clients. "What makes therapy work is that the person seeking help connect with a therapist he can learn to feel good about," he said. Helping people to cope with the

stress in their lives seems to be a natural result of Fred's early experiences. As a Jewish child living in Nazi occupied Holland, he saw "the most extreme example of dehumanization that ever took place."

Separated from other family members—his mother was in a concentration camp—he said he learned how vital it is to be treated as a person. Fortunately the family survived in-

tact and came to this country in 1948.

The Lessings concede that psychotherapy at a private clinic can be costly, but they said that many health insurance policies offer extended coverage to include the treatment. Even where no such coverage is available, many therapists offer reduced rates on the basis of need.

If the couple has one complaint it is that they don't have enough time for each other. "Each of us sees about 50 people regularly," Roz said. "It's like visiting 50 families in the course of a week."

Satisfaction, they said, comes from helping people understand and accept themselves. To Roz a successful outcome is one in which "a person who was not able to solve his own problems is now able to."



When Fred and Roz Lessing met, they both had reached a crossroad in their careers as teachers. Both decided to go back to school to retrain themselves for counseling and psychotherapy.

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