

## Anorexia from page B1

Because secrecy is such a big part of eating disorders, Mahoney is delighted that she is now able to talk about her problems so openly.

"A year ago I would've rather died than talk about this. I'm alive, healthy and able to speak about it now."

Mahoney cautioned mothers of pre-teen and young teen girls to watch out for a dangerous trend she's noticed.

"It's popular to have an eating disorder, or to pretend to have one. They're so involved in how they look at that age," she said. "It might start with dieting, a desire to be thin. But it turns into an emotional device."

The third speaker, Clarissa, revealed an early passion for horses that evaporated when she got to high school.

"I got in a group where how you looked was of major importance. I didn't know who I was anymore. Friends were jealous of me because I had an eating disorder. I was ashamed. I wanted to die."

She received treatment at the William Beaumont Hospital Weight Control Center.

Lori Reinbold's advice for parents: watch what you say to your child and your own behavior regarding food.

"I went on a fasting diet for six months. What an awful thing for (Leslie) to see."

Casual remarks at the peak of frustration, after being pestered repeatedly by silly questions from her daughter, would occasionally cause her to say things like "just stop eating." The wrong thing to say and she knew it the minute it left her mouth.

She told about other frustrations, the guilt she felt at ignoring her other two children, fighting with Leslie to get her to eat.

"Support that child. She needs to know that both her parents love her. Love and patience are important."

Psychotherapist Susan DeAngelo said "It's a fine line we can follow before we go into eating

disorders. We think we're in control but the food ends up controlling us."

DeAngelo also suffered from anorexia and bulimia.

"Eating disorders are a way of dealing with pain, an escape. Know the triggers and choose coping skills. Parents can redirect boys and girls to look at their passions, what they have to offer. Help them to see themselves as more than their looks. Help them find out who they truly are."

She said things parents can watch for in adolescents: questioning their body, counting calories or fat grams, withdrawing from activities like swimming because they don't like how they look in a bathing suit. Other symptoms: depression, anxiety, a tendency to perfectionism, obsessive-compulsive behavior.

"There are support groups, group therapy, and some inpatient programs. Recovery is an ongoing process."

Tita Mahoney adds: "Say 'I love you, I support you to your child. Then let her fly.'"

Parents were encouraged to provide structure. Keep boundaries on issues important to the family. Don't be blackmailed by threats of "If you don't let me have a later curfew, I'll throw up."

Farmington After-School Program Director Todd Lipa noted that \$785 million was spent nationally last year for education related to drug and alcohol awareness, but nothing on eating disorders.

Lipa's after-school program for middle-schoolers in Farmington and Farmington Hills has served 2,400 youths in the past four years.

"I think we could do something on that level," he said.

For more information, write Eating Disorders Awareness & Prevention, 603 Stewart St., Suite 803, Seattle, WA 98101. Information and referral line: 800-931-2237, or visit [www.edap.org](http://www.edap.org)

## Therapy from page B1



A little help from their friends: Ken Johnson of Davis Counseling Center in Farmington Hills with one of his skill skills sessions. He encourages participants to help each other.

dealing with a child who had been bullied. Members not only offered ideas, they also potentially acted as a mirror to the child who may not see himself the way others do. A child who

appears to talk down to others may not even realize it himself, but a gentle assessment by peers in a safe group environment may help him become more aware of how he comes off to others and

can ultimately change.

"Some of the questions we might ask include: What did you do when he bothered you? Did a teacher see it? How did you handle it? What do other people in the group think he should have done?"

An important part of each session is answering the questions. "Who's had something good happen this week?" as well as, "Who's had something lousy happen to them?" An important aspect is encouraging kids to consider what can be done to increase the occurrence of positive things while diminishing negative experiences. They begin to develop an awareness of social clues which is sometimes lacking.

### Kid leverage

"When kids hear it from other kids, there is sometimes a leverage and credibility that adults don't have," said Johnson. "Even more important, when they're successful within the group, they think, 'These kids kinda like me, and they listen to what I say.'"

Johnson doesn't think families are failing kids.

"People are doing the best that they can, but the chemistry gets fouled up. From my own perspective as a parent, one of the worst pains is to have someone messing with your kid or have your child not happy. Most parents do whatever they feel is important to help. But sometimes you don't know what to do. If a kid gets more alienated from a peer group you're not sure how to handle it. This is where a social skills group can help."

Potential clients first meet with Johnson for an individual assessment. Occasionally other problems are identified such as latent depression or ADD. There are two psychiatrists on staff at Davis who are able to prescribe medications when necessary. The average length of treatment is six to eight months, though that is variable.

"Not all kids do well in group. Some need to be seen individually first. If feedback makes a kid feel crushed, the experience is negative. Questions must be asked. Is the opinion of peers important? Can they grow rather than withdraw from it? Feeling unaccepted 'is one of

the more powerful experiences that happen. It's very hurtful."

"If someone gets their emotional finger burned in relationships, it has a snowball effect. Some kids come with special needs such as a language disorder. And sometimes you just happen to be around kids who aren't very nice."

### Greg's progress

Greg, the 17-year-old high school junior, has been in a group for over a year.

"It's made a difference in my life," he said. "I was really shy and afraid to speak up. Now I'm better at that. I can hold a conversation longer. I would definitely recommend the group to others."

Greg's mother, Carol, adds "What a positive, wonderful experience. If I didn't know it personally, I wouldn't believe it. Ken (Johnson) can see strengths and weaknesses and works with that. He builds in success. I see so many kids who would benefit from the group, but no one wants to talk about the problem. They pretend it away."

Martha, a Farmington Hills mother of John, 22, wishes she could have found the social skills group years ago.

"John had a terrible time socially, since a really bad elementary school experience with a teacher. It turned him off to other people. He stopped trying to relate to others, though bright, funny and talented. It's sad to watch your child struggle to make friends then be rejected and quit trying."

On the upside: "He now has a girlfriend who seems to bring out his best qualities."

Johnson recommends "Get kids talking. When the parent can get communication going, that's a big step."

"I look at the groups as therapeutic by experience. It's a powerful experience to have kids interact with other kids and grow and feel good about it. And when they get a touch of confidence, their ability to change in school or home is greater."

For more information, call Ken Johnson at Davis Counseling Center, 553-8550.

## Health consequences serious

Eating disorders are not just a fad or a phase. They are real, complex conditions that have serious consequences, including reduction of bone density, muscle loss, severe dehydration,

dry hair and skin (anorexia); electrolyte imbalances that can lead to heart failure, ruptures of the esophagus from frequent vomiting, tooth decay and ulcers (bulimia).

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