

James Vastag, MA, LMFTA

Contributed by Leslie Karsner

More info...

*Individual therapy: children, adolescents, and adults *Couples therapy: premarital, marital, and extramarital affair issues *Family therapy: changes in family structure, parenting and behavior concerns, school concerns, etc. *Public safety counseling *Grief and loss issues *Trauma/crisis concerns and experiences

The primary focus of my private practice is to establish a comfortable therapeutic relationship with individuals, couples, families, children and teens who are seeking help and support in restoring hope during stressful times when answers seem evasive. Some examples are relationship crisis, couples and families needing to improve their communication skills, anger management, chronic illness and death, parent-child conflict, and a variety of loss issues. As the founder of Brooke's Place for Grieving Young People I have a great deal of experience assessing family members needs following the death of loved ones and determining how the griever will reconcile their tragedy's through healthy self-care.. I have also experienced success in facilitating groups in corporate settings, schools, universities and congregations on a variety of topics.

For more information or to schedule an appointment contact me by phone at 317-753-9030 or email, pamwright@comcast.net.

I work with children of all ages and college students. I enjoy working with families in forming solid attachments, abuse and trauma post-care, teaching parenting skills, working with learning and physical disabled, and helping foster children transition. I also work with families on a whole to discuss problems and issues and try to find healthy solutions for grieving families, blending families, and foster/adoptive families.

For yet another fictional book that touches on therapeutic themes, read Jhumpa Lahiri's novel, *The Namesake*. It touches on two of the main tasks for adolescents, identity development and differentiation from parents, made all the more difficult by the main character's struggle with his Indian immigrant parents. How does one form an identity when their live experience is fundamentally different than that of their parents? It also deals with the fine balance of what to keep of family tradition and what to leave behind and the struggle to find that balance.

At the risk of sounding like a dated Madonna song, we do live in a material world. As adults this effects our daily life but more importantly, it effects how our children are being raised and it is shaping the values of future generations. Our culture inherently supports the value of material items, especially for children. Go to McDonalds, get a toy, go to a birthday party and there is a treat bag full of goodies for you even though it's not your birthday. Play on a game system that costs several hundred dollars using games that start at \$30 each. Don't forget that IPOD to listen to music but pay attention because there will be a newer, cooler model out in just a few months. So why is this a problem? Our children are happy and stimulated and some might say even enriched by these perks. Who wants to deprive their child of the best? Who wants to revisit the childhoods of generations past when there might have been poverty and not enough food? My concern is that the focus on material things creates a sense of entitlement for our children and creates a standard of living that they may not be prepared to perpetuate for themselves. I wonder how this effects the work ethic for children who have been taught that there are immediate rewards for everything that you do. It could send the message that there is little value to old things since there is always something new and little need to recycle. Finally, there is a psychological value to longing, to not getting what you want when you want it. This value includes developing the discipline to set long term goals, using creative thinking and problem solving skills to making the goal happen and finally the gratification of knowing that you accomplished the goal. American culture isn't going to change any time soon but here are some ideas for things you can do at home to create some balance to combat the materialistic messages in society. Set an Example Be aware of the messages you send in your family about the importance of material goods. Are you trying to keep up with the neighbors? Is buying a big tag item a special occurrence or an every day thing? Are you sending the message that how much "stuff" you have is important to you? Set Limits Teach your children the difference between privileges and needs. Have them contribute financially to items that are special so that they know how much they cost and feel like they have earned them. Don't be afraid to say no, even if "everyone" has something. Model Gratitude Show your children that you appreciate what you have. Teach them about other countries or time periods that were less prosperous. Expect that your children be thankful when given something including requiring thank you notes. We are very fortunate to be living in a time and in a country of prosperity. It is important that we both show and teach our appreciation.

Upon hearing these words, some parents freak out. They think their children are considering suicide. They have concerns about their child's mental and emotional stability. They worry that their children are unhappy.

It's probably true that the child is unhappy. This unhappiness is not a bad thing. It is likely temporary and in response to frustration, a frustration perhaps caused by their parents. And seeing to it that your children are occasionally frustrated is a good thing.

Typically, when kids say any of the following things--"I wish I was dead" or "I hate my life" or "I can't stand it here" or "You'll be sorry when I'm no longer around," it is typically code. It is not meant literally. Instead it should be translated as "I really don't like the way things are going right now" or "I'm very unhappy with the decision my parent just made."

These comments are usually made when the parent has said that the child cannot do something they wish to do (go to a

party; have their own cell phone; wear unacceptable clothing)or they must do something they'd prefer not to (turn off the video game; get ready for bed; do homework). If this is the manner of their remarks, there is no worry about suicide.

While any comment regarding suicide must be evaluated for its seriousness, the context of the statement must be taken into consideration. Said in the fashion described above, there is no sense of serious suicidal intent.

If your child were to calmly make comments such as "Sometimes I wish I were dead" or "No one would miss me if I weren't around"then these statements should raise a parent's concern. They likely reflect, if not clear suicidal intent, some depression of mood which should be taken seriously and be addressed