

Casa Serena

Eating Disorders Healing & Recovery

Doing More than SURVIVING the Holidays

Fall 2011

As Fall comes creeping in and the pressure of the holidays begins to be on people's minds it is vital to reframe our outlook from "surviving" to actually enjoying the holidays and finding ways to take care of ourselves in the midst of social messages about "HOW" to do the holidays.

For those who are struggling with an eating disorder it all starts with Halloween, a sugar binge for all, loaded with the sentiment of "trick or treat." It ends up feeling like a trick more than a treat. As if eating enough sweets will make you feel better, instead it contributes to feeling the first push of being out of control. Deciding to focus on costume parties and healthy treats to hand out can be a way to keep the spirit of Halloween alive. It's fun to "dress up and try on being someone else for a day."

Right on the heels of Halloween is Thanksgiving, a socially sanctioned binge dinner. Instead of it being a time to look at what we are thankful for and spending time with friends and family for a joyful dinner meal, this holiday ritual becomes a stress producing event for the eating disordered person. Food is everywhere and the pressure to over eat can cause distress and uneasiness. I frequently suggest that my clients re-think Thanksgiving and find ways to do the dinner differently. Helping out at a church or shelter or spending time with friends over a non-traditional meal can be a way to take back the spirit of the day. One of my clients went with her family for Chinese food and went bowling for Thanksgiving, they had so much fun they decided to make it a new family ritual and they plan on picking new activities each year. How about Mexican food and a hike on the beach? To be thankful for what we have is the primary focus not how much we can eat and complain about feeling "stuffed."

Of course the grandmother of all holidays is Christmas. This holiday is full of expectations and social and familial pressures to uphold traditions. Christmas means so many different things to all of us. For some it is a religious celebration. For others it is about giving and receiving gifts. For others it is a time to review the year and make plans for the new year. Ask yourself, "what are the holidays about for me? What makes me happy?" Then do what you love...decorating, giving gifts, attending church, helping out others in need, spending time with family and friends or going bowling or to a movie and spending the day taking care of your self and others. Try to let go of SHOULD and look to what feels right for you this holiday season. Try something different if the holidays have been stressful in the past.

Remember it all ends and we are on our way into a new year, where we can always begin again!

Special Points of Interest:

- Eating disorders are not about food, weight or body but rather about how we struggle with these as a way to deal with difficult feelings and life situations.
- Casa Serena offers a step down program for those returning from residential or inpatient programs and we are also a step up from Outpatient services where the client needs more support and structure.
- Casa Serena is also a resource center for those seeking information and referrals for all services related to Eating Disorder treatment.
- We provide speakers and presentations for groups who are seeking to learn more about Eating Disorders.
- Call for information!!

(925) 682-8252

Staff Profile— Beverly Swann, MFT



As facilitator of the Living Skills Group, Beverly seeks to assist clients in improving the areas of normal life that often get overshadowed by an eating disorder. Many times, clients find their everyday lives in chaos because the disorder has taken a front seat. In a curious and gentle manner, the group explores areas like anger management, relationships, budgeting, and time management. We often incorporate art therapy, guided visualization, and movement to give clients healing experiences at many different levels.

As a therapist Beverly sees her role as one of a facilitator, providing an environment that is gentle and safe for exploration and healing, while incorporating the qualities of awareness, creativity, spirituality, humor, and resilience. The foundation for her strengths-based, whole-person approach to psychotherapy is a Masters Degree in Counseling Psychology from John F. Kennedy University, with a specialization in Body Oriented (Somatic) Psychotherapy.

In addition to her work at Casa Serena Beverly is a therapist in private practice, specializing in trauma, eating disorders, and chronic illness/pain. She also facilitates the "Why Did I Eat That?" group, which focuses on all areas of problem eating as well as exercise resistance.

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Dietitian's Corner— Pull up to the Holiday Table

by Marcia Yamashiro R.D. Program Dietitian

The upcoming holidays can be a very stressful time of anyone who is struggling with food, weight and body image issues. There are often feelings of dread or fantasies of running away to get away from the focus on food. There is another approach! Try pulling up to the holiday table with some new tools in your back pocket.

1) Be prepared for the holiday party. Don't skip meals when you know you are going to a function where there is going to be food served. Going to a gathering hungry can be a set up for failure—either not eating enough, or over eating to fill up. So follow your normal meal plan for the day and make choices that meet your plan.

2) Offer to bring a dish, that way you can feel safe eating rather than avoiding the buffet.

3) Enjoy fun activities that can take your mind off of the food thoughts and distract. Try decorating the table or playing board games or taking photos at a gathering.

4) Seek support. Have a friend you can call if you begin to feel overwhelmed or preoccupied with food thoughts. You could also seek out a support group or call your therapist.

The main thing to remember is to take it one meal at a time and one event at a time. The new year is right around the corner and it is a wonderful feeling to get through the holiday meals and feel successful —meaning that you took care of yourself and enjoyed being with your family and friends.



Ask Marcia about food questions at info@casaserenaedp.com

Breaking Free from Binge Eating—Jackie Holmes, MFT

In our culture there is a focus on being thin and controlling your weight and food through dieting. As a result of all the diet mentality we are seeing an increasing number of clients who are now struggling with Binge Eating Disorder (BED). 3% of women and 2% of men are suffering from BED nationally according to a study done with NEDA. That is more than all the people struggling with Anorexia and Bulimia combined. Binge eating is a natural response to dieting, since we are often starving while dieting and this can set the body up to crave more food. When you add the emotional drivers and stress of the behaviors, you create a binge eater.

If you are a binge eater it is easy to feel invisible or even discounted since you aren't starving or purging, so you wonder if you have an eating disorder. The problem seems to be that you can't stop eating large quantities of food and you can't seem to control your weight as it fluctuates with the binge episodes. As with all eating disorders the binge eating is also related to psychological issues like low self-esteem, stress, depression, anxiety and trauma. Over eating has become the coping mechanism to avoid more difficult feelings and situations.

Often the habit of turning to food for comfort, control or self pleasuring can create new problems like increased depression, isolation, medical complications from poor nutrition and weight gain. My clients often say that it "doesn't matter what the feeling is the answer is food!" If I'm sad I eat. If I'm mad I eat. If I'm bored I eat. If I feel lonely I eat, and so on. Food isn't the answer to a feeling. We have to learn the difference between feeling hunger and these other feelings. Hunger is the primary reason to eat. If there are other feelings there then we need help to find ways to experience them and to decrease self harming behaviors.

Breaking free from binge eating isn't only about managing a food plan and increasing your exercise, though those techniques can be helpful. Instead it is important to explore the triggers and underlying psychological drivers that take us to food for comfort.

There is an answer to anger, sadness, boredom and loneliness and that is finding ways to feel them and to learn about how to manage them in your daily life. Identifying the situations and triggers for the binge can be helpful in developing other strategies for coping, rather than turning to food. Some helpful tools are: Keeping a "feelings journal" and becoming curious about the desire for food. When do I binge? What do I choose to binge eat? How am I feeling before, during and after the binge episode? Is food going to help or hurt me right now?

You begin to ask yourself, what else could I do? We need to develop other forms of self nurturing and self comforting. What other activities do you have that make you feel good? Something like—reading, taking a walk, calling a friend, playing an instrument, doing a hobby—knitting, painting, craft work or just tinkering and completing a chore.

I also feel it is vital to break the isolation of binge eating. You could seek out a support group with other people who are seeking recovery. OA and ANAD groups as well as Recovery groups for Eating Disorders can be very helpful. The important thing is to talk about it with someone, and find out that you are not alone and there is a way out of the habit.

THERAPIST CORNER:

The Power of Pen to Paper: Write Now!—Jill Sabotka, LMFT

Journal writing and writing in general are important tools for clients in recovery. When working with eating disordered clients, writing serves as an entry point to coming back into relationship with the body which is often severed at the hands of their eating disorder and self abusive behaviors. The act of writing itself requires pen to hand (or in my case at present -fingertip to keyboard) which is naturally embodying. Its very nature creates expression going through the body. One of my clients once said “there is something about writing my guts out on paper that somehow puts me back into connection with my body.” It is this connection that opens the door to innumerable discoveries.

There is a gentle but potent emergence that occurs in journal writing and writing in general. Writing is a process that reveals to the client what is ready to take form. Writing is a conduit which brings information and experience held in the body and perhaps in an unconscious part of self to the surface for expression. It can give a client who is disconnected from his or her body a tool to rebuild that broken relationship and bring voice to what the eating disorder (or other presenting issue) has silenced or stuffed.

Writing is versatile because it can be used as a lifelong tool. It can also never grow old because it occurs in the now and thus always illuminates new material, allowing whatever is present in the moment to be spoken. It is this quality that I believe to be one of the most effectual characteristic of writing – it requires presence. It continually returns the writer to the present moment.

In addition to bringing the writer back to the here and now, writing is intimate and personal, belonging solely to the individual. It provides a foundation, a ground from which to begin the recovering and rebuilding process. The page (or laptop screen) offers no judgment; it is safe which can be encouraging for clients as they begin to build autonomy and take ownership for themselves, in addition to uncover insights within their lives

I have never had a client who after writing reported disconnection or lack of body awareness. Rather, clients can more easily identify body sensations, label their emotions and often, also recognize insights about their triggers, patterns and motivations which are all fundamental in recovery.

Clinical research studies continually emphasize the emotional, physical, and cognitive benefits of writing for all clients. In addition to using writing to help facilitate a release of trapped feelings and stuck emotions, it also helps to overcoming creative blocks; supports the development of new interpretations of one’s personal history; and can enhance a sense of emotional balance in the body. Physically, writing helps reduce stress levels, decrease blood pressure, boosts the immune system and resilience, in addition to improving overall physical health.

So, consider giving your clients a writing prompt or journal assignment in your next session. Or if you, yourself are feeling stuck, down, confused or disconnected, try it for yourself. I just did!

NEW Teen DBT and Eating Disorders Group at Casa Serena

Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT) uses a skill building approach to developing 1) Mindfulness 2) Emotional Regulation 3) Distress Tolerance and 4) Interpersonal Effectiveness. In a small group setting for Teens (12-17 yrs of age) where they can develop these skills and learn their benefits in recovery from Anorexia, Bulimia and Binge Eating Disorders.

When: Fridays after school 3:30 to 5:00 pm Open enrollment now!

Where: Casa Serena Eating Disorders Center
1868 Clayton Road Suite 123
Concord, CA 94520 (1.5 blocks from Concord BART)

Cost: \$40 per session (sliding fee scale is available)

Facilitator: Gertrudes Hernandez, Ph.D. Call for information or to register: 510-301-8655

Gertrudes has been teaching DBT to teens for over 6 years at Sutter Health’s Herrick Program in Berkeley. She gears the skill building exercises to address issues with food, weight and body image. She provides a safe group setting to help to build a supportive healing community for teenagers who are struggling with these deadly disorders.

Casa Serena Eating Disorders Program
1868 Clayton Road, Suite 123
Concord, CA 94520

Eating Disorders Events and Workshops

Free ANAD Support Groups for Families and Those Suffering with Eating Disorders

2nd and 4th Monday of each month at Discovery Counseling Center:
115A Town and Country Drive, Danville, CA
Contact Nancy Clarkson at 925-829-5554 or lablimo@pacbell.net

Women in Recovery: Eating Disorders Support and Therapy Group

Meets Wednesdays at Casa Serena with Jackie Holmes, MFT —Program Director
7:00 pm to 8:30 pm.
Fee: \$40 per session.
Call for information (925) 682-8252

DBT and Eating Disorders Group for Teens

Meets Fridays at Casa Serena with Gertrudes Hernandez, Ph.D.
3:30-5:00 p.m.
Fee: \$40 per session (sliding scale and Medi-Cal accepted)
Call for information (510) 301-8655