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Mental Hygiene

Exploring Holistic & Vibrant Psychotherapy with Dr. Dana Spada

BY LILIANN PARAS

Can it be true that psychotherapy is finally shedding its stigma? Therapy has entered the mainstream in recent television shows such as *Shrinking* and *Couples Therapy* and in older programs too: *The Bob Newhart Show*, *In Treatment*, and *The Sopranos*. Do the shows reflect softening attitudes, or is this exposure partially responsible for the increasing acceptance of therapy? Or, maybe the stigma is dissolving because of increasing need. A survey by Kaiser Family Foundation and CNN revealed that 90 percent of Americans believe there is a mental health crisis (not problem) in the US. And it is personal: one half of young adults and one third of older adults reported they have felt anxious either always or often. A large part of the anxiety is not knowing how to process and deal with it. No matter the reason, it is a healthy outcome that

more and more people struggling with their mental health are seeking professional help.

Therapy is not only about treating severe issues. Some seek it to overcome a temporary problem, and still others want a place to explore their personal growth. A vibrant and welcoming group of therapists practice locally at LEAF Psychotherapy. CM met with the founder, Dr. Dana Spada, who has more than two decades of practice experience. Her goal is to make therapy a positive and dynamic experience, filled with energy, creativity, and large doses of laughter, too. Based on the many patient reviews, the goal is certainly being met.

Community Magazine: What is LEAF psychotherapy?

Dr. Spada: LEAF psychotherapy is a private practice that treats adults, teens, and children. We offer individual, fami-

ly, marriage, couples, and reunification therapies. Our approach is very holistic. We use a highly individualized approach to treat the very specific needs of our clients. We offer virtual (and encourage) in-person sessions. We are located in Colts Neck, Little Silver, Hazlet, and Sea Girt.

CM: What makes LEAF special as a place for therapy?

Dr. Spada: How we engage in therapeutic process and the way we work. Our brand and culture are modern, creative, and client driven. You can feel this from the time you first pick up the phone to book your session. An owner speaks with you and will match you with the perfect therapist. Our clinicians are open, creative, passionate, and extensively educated and can draw from many therapeutic modalities to find the perfect treatment for you. Whether it is CBT, DBT, Gestalt, EMDR, Somatic or Hypnotherapy, we have a very easy-going vibe. Because we do not accept insurance, we are not pigeonholed, volume-driven, or focused on clinical diagnoses required by insurance companies for reimbursement. We are able to practice very freely, organically, and intuitively. We offer flexible pricing and can accommodate your financial needs. Walking into one of our locations doesn't feel like you are walking into a doctor's office. It's a beautiful Zen space and connotes peace and well-being.

CM: Who should go for therapy?

Dr. Spada: You don't have to have anything crazy, glaring, or specific going on to book a therapy session. Life is hard. And it's truly the best, having someone who is unbiased and very supportive alongside you to help you navigate. Your relationship with your therapist can be the deepest relationship you have, and they may come to know you more than anyone else does. Navigating life with a professional who can help you



become aware of your blind spots, and help guide you to live your life as fully and vibrantly as possible — what can possibly be better than this? If you feel like you “lost the spark” it might be a good idea to get a couple's session booked. Or, if you experience, anxiety, OCD, ADHD, depression, eating disorders, addiction, workaholicism, and the list goes on, come on in for a session. We can help you! We have a team of clinicians all specializing in different areas and are able to treat almost all things (even things one might consider strange)!

CM: Are there red flags parents should look for?

Dr. Spada: Some things to notice are whether a child is self-medicating, or is becoming more withdrawn or sad. Other children become over active. Kids can really benefit from therapy. They tend to listen to a therapist even if the parents had said the same things.

CM: What is most satisfying about therapy?

Dr. Spada: Bringing the unconscious to the conscious. We all have an inner dialog, an operating system, created in the early years of our lives that sometimes is destructive. I love it when clients are able to identify their childhood operating systems and realize how they are still stuck in them today. Belief systems they surrendered to in childhood became internalized, and are now self-fulfilling prophecies, such as “not being enough.” People unconsciously play these types of belief systems out for their entire lives without even realizing it. They literally find partners who fit their stories and create entire lives around narratives that are not only false, but totally destructive. We can dig deep and bring these old rusty systems to the surface and update them! We don't have to live unconsciously in the old regime. That is the most powerful and profound aspect of psychotherapy.



CM: How do you make therapy effective and what does that look like?

Dr. Spada: What makes therapy effective is the quality of the relationship between the therapist and client. That is where all the magic happens. It's a very special bond, connection, chemistry, magnetic dynamic that is the foundation of the work. It's how the work emerges—through the relationship. So, that's step one of an effective experience. Step two, you'll start to exist differently. Through awareness, you will finally understand why you are doing things you might not be happy with, and recognize there are choices, instead of operating on autopilot. Once my clients take their lives off autopilot and get into the driver's seat, I get to watch their lives transform. And (in the tune of the holiday song), "Oh what fun it is!!"

CM: Do you notice any trend in your practice?

Dr. Spada: I am seeing increased anxiety. Everything is so fast-paced and people can't stop looking at their phones. They don't know how to shut off all the incoming information, how to tone it down, and instead, they look for quick fixes. Can't lose weight? Feeling anxious? Depressed? Can't concentrate? They get on a pill. They want to trust medications for many issues, but meds are just suppressing the symptoms. Sometimes there is a need for meds, but the goal is to not stay on them the rest of your life. Therapy is needed to resolve the underlying issues and to reverse some of the ways we deal with the stress.

CM: Has there been a moment that stands out?

Dr. Spada: Two funny comments said by my clients recently. The first was a reference to *The Sopranos*. "It's like in *The Sopranos*; sometimes a few sessions go by and it feels like not much is happening, but then boom, all of a sudden it's a REALLY good episode and then you realize what was happening in the last few!"

And the other comment was after the session was over and my client was walking out. He turned and looked at me with this huge grin and says, "My life is the same sh**show it was when I walked in here today, but I feel f***ing amazing leaving here!" and basically skips to his car. We both couldn't stop laughing.



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