

"Inner child" may hold clues to a troubled past

□ Counselors look to heal through contacting one's hidden self

By Tammy Batey
Emerald Reporter

Inside every person lives a small, fragile child screaming for attention. This inner child wants to be held and comforted. This child holds the key to a person's actions in adulthood.

Counselor Juva DuBoise said some psychologists use the term "inner child" to describe the part of an adult that is emotionally stunted. People who experience intense trauma when they're children are incapable of working through their emotions at that young age, she said. Inside, they may remain terrified children.

"Often when something happens to us as children, a part of us gets frozen," DuBoise said, "so a part of us may still be there."

The wounded inner child may develop from something as traumatic as sexual abuse to something as seemingly insignificant as a teacher who often yelled.

People are most likely to sense the presence of their inner child in adult relationships, DuBoise said.

"You're having a fight and suddenly you find yourself stomping your feet," she said. "You've reverted back to age six."

People find it easier to detect this child-like behavior in others than within themselves, she said.

If women are sexually abused when they are young, their inner child may communicate her pain through weight problems, DuBoise said. DuBoise facilitates a workshop for women called "Weight Issues and Your Inner Child."

"Weight is a way of protecting yourself from sexual advances and from other women," she said. "Women don't see you as competition."

DuBoise said the inner child isn't always wounded. People can access their inner child at different times in their lives to

figure out why they're doing the things they do.

"When I'm having strong emotions I sit down and go inside and ask myself what's going on," she said. "It's making a connection so we can access that inner voice."

People can improve their adult lives by acknowledging the inner child that exists within them, DuBoise said.

"When you start to treat yourself like a precious child you start healing yourself," she said. "Until you start to listen to (your inner child) you don't know what you want."

University student Morgan, who asked that she remain anonymous, said she was physically neglected and abused when she was a child. Now Morgan's inner child fears that Morgan and the people in her life will abandon her.

Morgan, who is in her early 20s, began inner child therapy in January. In therapy she began to communicate with her inner child. She would write

down questions for her inner child with her right hand, and her inner child would respond by writing with her left hand.

"She was so honest," Morgan said. "It was frightening. I started realizing how neglected I was, how abused I felt, and how painful I was inside."

Since January, Morgan's inner child has been growing up. When she first began therapy her inner child was an infant and now is either four or five.

"She's just so damn needy," Morgan said. "She lectures me on the way I treat her because it's the way my mother treated me. I have to be patient. I'm graduating and I want to go to grad school, but she's not ready yet."

Some people can deal with traumatic events from childhood easier than others, counselor Ruth Songer-Jensen said.

"If a person has been allowed and encouraged to seek self-expression in art, dancing, music, the outdoors, these are all child

'I'm graduating and I want to go to grad school, but (my inner child is) not ready yet.'

— Morgan,
University student

things," Songer-Jensen said. "The first thing we learn as children is to play. That is how we learn to express ourselves. If people have traumatic things happen to them, but they have other ways to express themselves, I think they have less trouble."

When people act irrationally, their inner child may have found a voice because children are irrational, she said.

People can have more than one inner child, but everyone has one primary inner child, she said. The inner child won't necessarily be unhappy, she

said.

Getting in touch with their inner child helps people understand their adult problems, Songer-Jensen said.

"It lets us be a nurturing parent to ourselves," she said. "The inner child has been abandoned not only by your parents but also by you."

Pam Birrell, director of the University Psychology Clinic, said the term "inner child" turns her off.

"I think it trivializes something very complex and rich," she said. "It's a mix of things. I don't think of it in those terms."

Birrell said she believes many psychologists simply use the concept of an inner child as a clever catch phrase. Clients may also grab on to the concept in the hope it will take away their problems.

"Sometimes they do, and that can hold them back," she said.

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