

# Turning a New Leaf

## Adult Attachment - Feeling Secure in Your Relationships

by Terry Top, Executive Director/Marriage & Family Therapist



From the beginning, God created us to be in relationships. Genesis 2:18 says “it is not good for the man to be alone.” We all have the need and desire to be “attached” to others in loving, supportive, secure and nurturing ways. This is true for adults, as well as, children. We date and get married because we seek the secure attachment in a relationship. Author Susan Johnson says that at the core of primary relationships is the question: “Can I count on you to be there to understand me and respond to me when I need you?”

You may have heard stories about children from Eastern European orphanages who were not held or nurtured in their early years, have difficulty bonding with adoptive parents. This is an extreme example of an attachment problem, but many of us have had experiences that may make secure attachment to others difficult. Secure attachment is developed early in life when our “attachment figures” are accessible and emotionally responsive to us. When they

provide comfort, support and love, we feel secure enough to venture out and explore the world around us.

When our attachment bond is threatened our response follows one of two courses— anxiety or avoidance. With the anxiety, we typically respond with anger, clinging, or pursuit of the person in an effort to get that person to respond and reassure us that they are emotionally attached to us.

If we feel more hopeless about getting our emotional attachment, we may go the opposite route and become depressed, feel despair or eventually detached, avoiding emotional contact in an attempt to deny our emotional needs. We may even do a combination of anxiety and detachment by at first seeking an emotional connection, but then rejecting it when it is offered.

John Bowlby, a pioneer in the study of attachment, believed we form our view of self (Am I lovable?) and of others (Can I trust you?) from our early attachment experiences. His theory suggests that anxiety related strategies are related to a negative view of self (unlovable) while avoidant strategies are related to a negative view of others (untrustworthy).

People who are securely

attached see others as dependable and trustworthy and they expect to be accepted and loved. Insecurely attached people don’t trust others and fear they will be hurt or rejected like they have been in the past. If we have a history of difficulty in relational attachments it will cause significant problems in our friendships, family and marriages.

How can we develop more secure attachments as adults? It involves working on ourselves as well as our interactions with others. Often this is done in the context of marital or family therapy and it can lead to a more rewarding and fulfilling life. Old wounds will need to be explored and understood. We will need to change our thoughts, feelings, perceptions and patterns of communication.

Change and growth is never easy, but it is worth it. I believe God calls us to be reformers of this broken world in which we live. That is what we attempt to do at New Leaf as we help people to heal. I find it very rewarding to see partners, one anxious and one avoidant, learn how to securely attach to each other. God’s desire is for us to be securely attached to Him and to each other and be able to say, “I can count on you to be there to understand me and respond to me when I need you.”

### Assess Your Level of Secure Attachment

- Am I preoccupied with the relationship, looking constantly for signs that I am loved and connected?
- Do I feel anxious in the relationship and therefore resort to jealousy, blaming, criticism or coercion in an attempt to gain a connection?
- Have I numbed or denied my emotional needs with others and therefore invested little of myself in the relationship?
- Have I become withdrawn and dismissive of others, taking a rational, cool and distant attitude in my relationships?
- Have I been hurt badly in relationships, but yet I seek them desperately?
- Do I have difficulty maintaining positive, secure relationships with those that are closest to me?



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**Our Mission**

New Leaf Resources promotes healthy relationships and personal growth through counseling, education, and consultation from a Christian perspective.

**Providing Psychological First Aid**



In September of 2008, when the region was being pummeled with record rainfall and the flood waters continued to rise, numerous residents in Lake County, Indiana were driven out of their homes. Many houses were destroyed, cherished possessions ruined and a lifetime of memories was gone in an instant.

Coping with such a tremendous loss and the stress of dealing with such a tragedy can take a significant emotional toll.

That is why the State of Indiana Department of Mental Health and Addictions has developed District Mental Health Teams in the 10 Homeland Security Districts covering all of the state of Indiana.

District One was in place to respond quickly to the flooding as it had done for the past five years to other natural disasters. Team members are provided with training in mental health response and homeland security emergency management incident command are called in just as other first responders are called in.

New Leaf Resources' Clinical Psychologist **Angie Valente** is a member of the District One and Two Mental Health Teams. According to Valente, these teams provide what is called "Psychological First Aid."

"Once the rescue phase is over, the shock has worn off,

people are dealing with a variety of emotions," explains Valente. The teams' purpose is to help stabilize emotions by providing the needed coping skills—which could include listening, empathizing and problem-solving.

"This isn't therapy," says Valente, "we help the person normalize an extraordinary experience. While we screen to see if there is a need for mental health counseling, helping them in that moment can be very powerful. Most people find that immediate psychological first aid is what they need to begin the journey of recovery."

Valente joined the team during her pre-doctoral APA internship with Tri-City Mental Health (now Regional Mental Health). "I've always had an interest in disaster and trauma response, and during my undergraduate studies decided to focus on how trauma affects children," tells Valente.

During the '08 flood, she was part of a group that developed a coloring book for kids, worked with the schools to do trauma education and developed a children's group that met at a local church.

"Some children in Lake Station were especially disadvantaged prior to the flood and to see them lose everything was devastating," says Valente. "This work reminds me of what's really impor-

tant. We should appreciate the blessings that God gives us every day because in an instant it can be all swept away."

This spring, Valente will be in training with the Strike Force group out of The District 2 Team based in South Bend. This team trains dogs to be a therapeutic presence to those involved in a disaster.

*Special thanks to...*

- The staff at **Great Lakes Bank** for helping with the newsletter.
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- **John Stob** for maintaining the landscaping at the Lansing office.
- **Shari Krajewski** for coordinating the payroll.
- To **everyone** who did their on-line holiday shopping through GoodShop!

## Seeing a Need for Christian Counseling

Isn't counseling a sign of weakness? By seeking counseling does it mean I lack faith? Sometimes these were the responses **Gerrit Veenstra**, Minister of Pastoral Care at Bethel Christian Reformed Church, would get when he suggested to a parishioner that they seek mental health counseling.

"Because there was such a heavy emphasis on duty and rules in some Reformed-type Churches, emotions became suppressed and hurts were buried," explains Veenstra. "Some church-goers were and still are hesitant about dealing with their feelings and think counseling is 'un-Christian.'"

"But, there is such a great need for Christian counsel-

ing," says Veenstra, who recently retired as New Leaf Board President. "As image bearers of God, therapists use the resources God gives them, like the understanding of psychology. The hurting are in need of grace and healing is possible."

Veenstra became involved with New Leaf through Bethel's Adult Education and Stephen Ministers programs. Therapists from New Leaf would help conduct training and teach classes at the church. Eventually, Veenstra was asked to serve on the Board, three of those years as president.

Over the past seven years, he has seen the organization change and evolve and predicts there will be more adjusting in the future. "The

vision of New Leaf hasn't changed, but it has successfully adapted to the 21st Century by being more efficient, diversified and productive," Veenstra says. "We've expanded beyond helping the 'addict' with a broader scope of therapy."

While not everyone finds satisfaction in counseling, Veenstra realizes that therapists can't always 'fix' someone's problems.

"The counselors at New Leaf have transformed and liberated many lives and there is no way to quantify the impact," says Veenstra. "The words of New Leaf's tag line—help, hope, healing—are very real. Those who have come here have experienced it."

## CARE 360° Helps Kids Make Good Choices in Life



Kids participate in a small group activity at CARE 360°.

For the past 15 years, New Leaf Resources together with Illiana and Timothy Christian High Schools, has hosted a uniquely Christian prevention program for sixth-grade

students. Held twice a year, CARE 360° (formerly CARE Convention) provides tools and resources to middle-schoolers to help prevent them from being harmed as a result of unhealthy behav-

iors and/or relationships.

With the help of high school volunteers and teachers, the students hear from motivational speakers, engage in small group discussions, and participate in skits and songs during the day-long program.

This past fall, students from Lansing, Calvin, Highland, Crown Point, Demotte and Deer Creek Christian Schools participated at Illiana.

CARE 360° will take place at Timothy Christian School in the spring.

To see more pictures from CARE 360°, log onto [www.newleafresources.org](http://www.newleafresources.org).

## Special Gifts

Contributions to New Leaf Resources can be made in memory or in honor of a loved one or friend.

In Memory of  
**William G. Noorlag**  
Jack & Karen Folkerts

## What's "New" at New Leaf...

We are excited to announce that three new members have joined our Board of Directors - **Lisa Doot**, of Chicago, **Dr. Burt VanderLaan** of Orland Park and **Rev. Joel Zuidema** of Demotte. Lisa has a Master's Degree in Social Work and is a Program Supervisor for Lawndale Christian Health Center. A former oncology specialist, Burt is an Administrator for Aetna. Joel serves as the Pastor of Community CRC of Roselawn.

Thank you to **Rev. Gerrit Veenstra** and **Liz Metcalfe** who are retiring from the Board. Their dedication and support has been invaluable.

Welcome part-timer **Shannon Heim** of Mokena to the Administrative Support team. A native of Delaware, Shannon attends Lewis University and is pursuing a degree in Applied Sociology and Political Science. She and her new husband, Dan, have a dog named Wrigley. She enjoys reading, live music, fishing and watching sports in her spare time.

## Save a tree

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## *Save the Date* Annual Celebration Banquet



Making people laugh for more than 22 years, David Dean has traveled the world sharing one simple truth - God does have a sense of humor! His comedic journey began at the famous Second City Improvisational training center in Chicago and he frequently tours with fellow comedians Ken Davis and Chonda Pierce.

Featuring ~  
**Christian Comedian  
David Dean**

**Friday, April 30, 2010**  
6pm Fellowship  
7pm Dinner

**The Center for  
Visual & Performing Arts**  
1040 Ridge Road  
Munster, Indiana

Please RSVP by April 16 ~  
(708) 895-7310 or  
[banquet@newleafresources.org](mailto:banquet@newleafresources.org) or  
[www.newleafresources.org](http://www.newleafresources.org)

Sponsorships are available.  
Contact Terri Kasper for  
more information.

 **new leaf resources**  
hope. help. healing.

### **New Leaf Resources is...**

A **professional mental health agency** which provides counseling services to individuals, families, couples, children, churches, schools and businesses.

A **ministry** which brings the best possible care to those we serve, striving to reflect God's grace and love to all who seek help.

A **community resource** offering educational services, prevention programs, training, support and coaching.