

SPRING  
2024



House of Mercy and Encouragement

*play therapy, counseling, tutoring  
help for children and families*

»»» HOMETown News «««

# HOUSE OF MERCY AND ENCOURAGEMENT

FROM OUR DIRECTOR

## THE RENEWAL OF SPRING CLEANING

By Susan O' Neil, LMHC

### The Renewal of Spring Cleaning

On a recent Saturday, I was at HOME doing some Spring cleaning. We serve people of all ages, but we are known for providing play therapy.

That means we have LOTS of toys! On this day my cleaning was focused on the playroom. I tackled all the small toys – the people for the doll house, furnishing for their house, hospital, and school. In this group was all the toy soldiers, superheroes, villains, wild animals, dinosaurs, cartoon characters, cars, trucks, airplanes, trains, military jeeps and tanks. Each piece got a quick scrubbing, rinsing and then was air dried. This process was oddly meditative. As I scrubbed each toy, my thoughts turned to all the stories that our children told with these small pieces of molded plastic. Stories of family life – meals, bedtime, vacations, going to school, to the hospital, weddings, births, deaths, and divorce. There are also stories of warring militaries, superheroes, and animals. There are disasters and daring rescues! All these stories are held in a little playroom, made up of toys and a trusted adult.

All of us need to be cleansed. All of us need to feel the hope and renewal of Spring.

Peace be with you,  
Susan



- HOME did a presentation in March on Tips for Handling Big Emotions for the PTA at Curtis Fundamental Elementary School. There were approximately 100 parents in attendance and they were very welcoming.
- HOME has been blessed to receive grants from The City of Dunedin, Pinellas Community Foundation, Allegany Franciscan Ministries and the Kiwanis Club of Dunedin for 2024
- We will be hosting Coffee with the Counselor at Our Lady of Lourdes in Dunedin on Monday, May 13th-HANDLING BIG EMOTIONS

««« GENERAL  
HAPPENINGS  
at HOME

# Client STORY <<<

By: House of Mercy Client

In 2020, I had just gotten divorced and my daughter and I needed some extra support in communicating with each other and navigating the change. A friend of mine suggested I speak with Dolores Mortimer at the House of Mercy and she got us all set up with Miss Ana. My child has done one on one sessions and group sessions and has done so well with the help of Miss Ana and everyone at House of Mercy. Her coping mechanisms, attitude and emotional regulation have all improved. The support of Miss Ana and the entire staff has gotten us through all walks of life the past 4 years and we are so grateful. My daughter loves to come in and have time that is designated as hers. And I love knowing she has extra people to listen and help her along the way.

## A Guide to Understanding Anxiety in Adults and Children

By: Winnie Holland, MPH, MA, LMHC

MANY PEOPLE TODAY ARE EXPERIENCING ANXIETY. ANXIETY IS THE MIND AND BODY'S REACTION TO STRESS, DANGER, OR UNFAMILIAR SITUATIONS. ANXIETY CAN CAUSE DISTRESS AND/OR DREAD PRIOR TO A SIGNIFICANT EVENT LIKE A WEDDING, GRADUATION, NEW JOB, ETC. EVERYONE EXPERIENCES SOME LEVEL OF ANXIETY, AND THIS IS NORMAL. PEOPLE WHO HAVE REPEATED INTENSE OR PERSISTENT WORRY AND FEAR ABOUT EVERYDAY SITUATIONS CAN END UP WITH PANIC ATTACKS. OFTEN TIMES THESE ANXIETY EPISODES CAN INTERFERE WITH OUR DAY TO DAY LIVES BY AVOIDING EXPERIENCES AND OPPORTUNITIES.

SYMPTOMS CAN BEGIN DURING CHILDHOOD OR TEENAGE YEARS AND CONTINUE INTO ADULTHOOD. THE MOST COMMON SIGNS INCLUDE:

- FEELING NERVOUS, RESTLESS, OR TENSE
- HAVING A SENSE OF IMPENDING DANGER, PANIC, OR DOOM
- HAVING AN INCREASED HEART RATE
- BREATHING RAPIDLY
- SWEATING
- TREMBLING
- FEELING WEAK OR TIRED
- TROUBLE SLEEPING
- CONSTANT WORRY

HOW DO YOU KNOW IF YOU NEED HELP?

- THE WORRY IS INTERFERING WITH YOUR WORK, RELATIONSHIPS OR YOUR LIFE IN GENERAL
- THE FEAR, WORRY OR ANXIETY IS VERY UPSETTING TO YOU
- FEELINGS OF DEPRESSION
- USING ALCOHOL OR DRUGS TO MITIGATE THE SYMPTOMS
- SELF-HARM THOUGHTS OR BEHAVIORS

WHAT SHOULD YOU DO?

SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP BY ASKING YOUR PHYSICIAN FOR ASSISTANCE. SOMETIMES THE CAUSE CAN BE THE RESULT OF A MEDICAL CONDITION, SO IT IS ALWAYS GOOD TO START WITH YOUR DOCTOR. THE MOST IMPORTANT THING TO REMEMBER IS THAT THERE IS HELP FOR ANXIETY—YOU DO NOT HAVE TO SUFFER ALONE.

ANXIETY IN CHILDREN

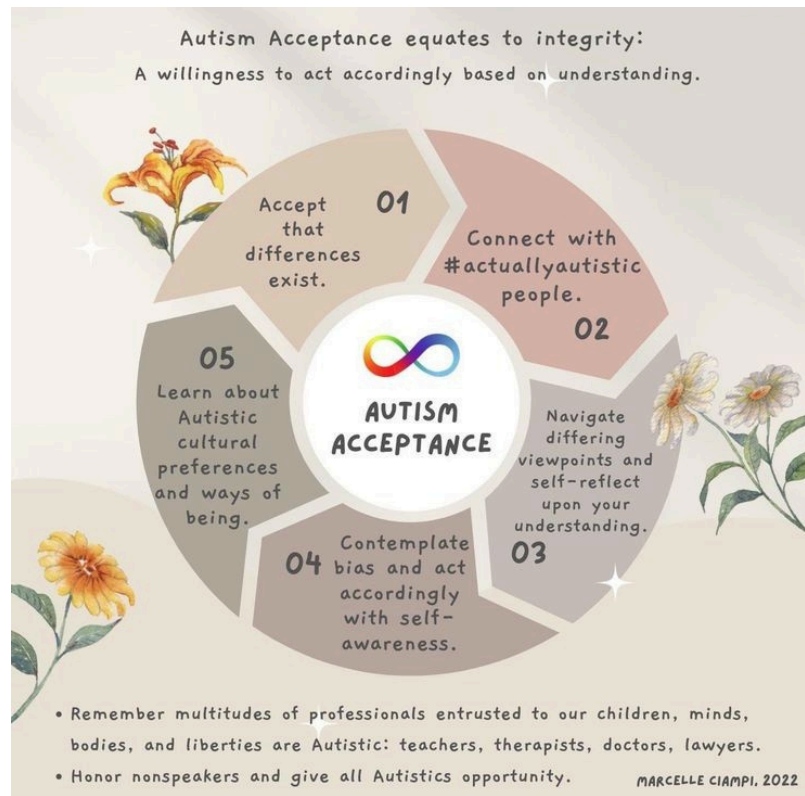
CHILDREN ALSO EXPERIENCE ANXIETY OFTEN AS A RESULT OF TRAUMA OR STRESS. THE SYMPTOMS EXHIBITED BY CHILDREN WILL VARY FROM THOSE OF ADULTS AND ARE OFTEN NOT RECOGNIZED AS EASILY.

SOME OF THE SYMPTOMS OF ANXIETY IN CHILDREN ARE:

- ANGER AND/OR HOSTILITY
- EXCESSIVE QUESTIONING
- SEEKING VALIDATION
- PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS SUCH AS BEDWETTING, CRYING, OUTBURSTS
- AVOIDING ACTIVITIES AND PEOPLE
- STRUGGLING OR DIFFICULTY FALLING ASLEEP
- INABILITY TO FOCUS
- MORE EMOTIONAL
- CLINGINESS

A CHILD'S BEHAVIOR IS AN INDICATION OF WHAT IS GOING ON WITH THEM. IF YOUR CHILD IS EXHIBITING ANY OF THESE SYMPTOMS OR OTHER UNUSUAL BEHAVIORS, IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT YOU TALK WITH YOUR PHYSICIAN TO DETERMINE IF SOMETHING IS GOING ON. ANXIETY CAN BE VERY DIFFICULT FOR CHILDREN.

# AUTISM ACCEPTANCE MONTH



## *Welcome HOME: Our New Intern* Stephanie Watkins

I am thrilled to introduce myself as the newest counseling intern here at House of Mercy and Encouragement. My name is Stephanie Watkins, and I am currently pursuing my Masters in Clinical Mental Health Counseling at Walden University. Scheduled to graduate at the end of 2024, I feel very thankful to have earned the opportunity to complete my internship here as I share a passion for supporting individuals in their mental health journeys, similar to everyone here at HOME.

Residing in Palm Harbor with my loving husband Justin and our three wonderful children—Caroline (6), Natalie (4), and Alexander (19 months)—I am deeply rooted in my family life. Prior to pursuing my counseling degree, I spent a fulfilling decade as an Elementary School teacher within the Pinellas County School System. It was during this time that I developed a profound appreciation for the complexities of child and adolescent development, igniting my passion for working with young people.

In my free time, I cherish moments spent outdoors, traveling, and creating magical memories with my family at Disney World. These experiences not only bring joy to my life but also provide valuable insights into the importance of holistic well-being and self-care.

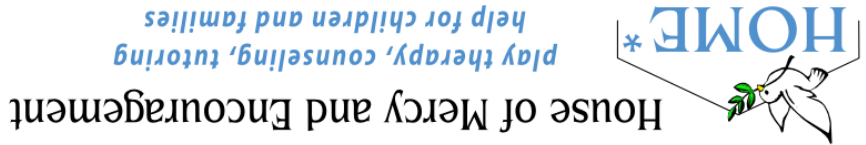
My journey at House of Mercy and Encouragement has been nothing short of inspiring. The opportunity to collaborate with exceptional counselors, volunteers, and staff members has enriched my learning experience immeasurably. I am grateful for the chance to observe and engage with clients under supervision as I strive to develop into a competent and compassionate counselor.

I am excited about the prospect of contributing to the incredible work being done at House of Mercy and Encouragement. Together, I am confident that we can make a meaningful difference in the lives of those we serve.

Thank you for welcoming me into this supportive community, and I eagerly anticipate the journey ahead!



Stephanie in our Play Room here @ HOME



House of Mercy and Encouragement

House of Mercy and Encouragement  
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Our vision is to compassionately serve as a resource for those children and families who are affected by mental health, learning, emotional, or behavioral issues. We are a faith-based provider who believes in the God given dignity of every child and family. All families are treated with respect and kindness. HOME is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization dedicated to helping children and families.

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## Do you or someone you know need therapeutic services?

Currently a Provider For:

Aetna, BayCare, Cigna, Sunshine Health and Tricare

If you don't see your insurance, please contact us as we offer a sliding fee scale and may be able to provide a scholarship. Please call for more details.