**Minding Mendocino**

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**Homeostasis**

Most of us remember this word from science class, even though it applies in many other areas of life. In therapy it refers to an individual (and all his/her parts), or an entire family, community, or system. It is the balance, the status quo, the comfort zone, or “how we have always done things”. Homeostasis can be difficult to break or move, because once it is established all the parts of the system seem to hold it in place with their own, individual thoughts and behaviors. If the balance is in a healthy place, this can be a very good thing. If it is unhealthy, it may take awareness and work by all parts to change it.

Often individual parts of the whole seem to hold one another in the old place because a change in one means the whole system has to change. It has to change, and thus the balance called “homeostasis” is thrown off until a new homeostasis can be formed. Some of us have experienced the difficulties in attempting to grow and change in a dysfunctional system whose survival depends on everyone staying the same. Generally one of three things can happen:

1). the person who is trying to change and grow gives up and goes back to the old role.

2). the family/system is able to change and grow with that individual. This may mean making new boundaries that are respected, or changing the way the communication happens. If these new boundaries cannot be respected, it can sometimes lead to number three.

3). There is a breaking apart from one or more individuals from that family/system.

So often when someone begins therapy, there is an eventual change in relationships, jobs, or habits that follows treatment. The primary reasons is summed up in the term: Homeostasis. We are all part of a larger system, and our symptoms can be mere reactions to the chaos, unbalance, injustice, or disease of that system. For us to find health, it often means that we have to ask the system to change or break apart from it. The person in therapy is sometimes asking for support and tools in doing this very thing, whether they are aware of it or not.

In many cases, the person in therapy is reacting very normally to a very unbalanced situation. In these cases, it is often the system that requires change and not the person who sought help alone. They were simply the ones who had the symptom which could hopefully bring better health to the whole family or community. They were the ones who had the courage to be and act honestly.

Here are some examples:

* Think of the child whose only voice may be her behavior. Are her symptoms solely her problem, or is she attempting to bring awareness to an imbalance of the family?
* Think of the employee struggling with a high stress job who seeks out therapy. Is there a change that could be made in the workplace to lessen some possibly unfair demands?
* Think of that part of one of us that feels depressed or anxious. Is there an awareness or understanding that could be found for this piece of us, instead of the typical self-judgement and avoidance?
* Think of your family member who is currently in therapy. Is there a way to alter the communication or boundaries so that the homeostasis of the family could be raised to a higher level, in order to grow with this person?
* Think of the addict who is attempting to stay sober. Is there any way a previously enabling or unhealthy system can change to truly be helpful to this individual’s recovery? Is there a change in this person’s internal environment that will provide better long-term outcomes?

Keep in mind that you can write in with topics you would like to read about, to: Long Valley Health Center, PO Box 870, Laytonville, CA 95454. Attn: Jessi Maness.