

## Pinocchio

When I was a little girl my grandma read me the story of Pinocchio. He was this little guy who told lies. His nose grew with each lie. She taught me that it was wrong to lie. I thought that lying was only telling others untruths.

More than 40 years later, I find myself revisiting this story and the devastation of lies. Much of my daily work as a counselor focuses on uncovering the lies that people tell themselves or have been told. People don't intentionally lie to themselves; they just don't know any better

Unfortunately, the lie forms a basis for our other thoughts and actions: If I believe that two plus two equals five, I'll always use that as a foundational belief. My checkbook will never have the right answer. My recipes will be out of proportion. I'll get into lots of arguments with others when they tell me that I'm wrong. This would mess up my taxes, maybe get me in trouble at work, or cause my children or grandchildren to get a low grade in mathematics, if they counted on me to help them.

Thought distortions, also known as lies, are passed on to future generations.

It is funny to look at in this context, but the reality of this thought distortion can cause great pain. I cannot tell you how many of my clients have a false idea about themselves.

I've counseled men who were raped in childhood by another man who now feel that experience determined their sexual identity. I've counseled countless women who have been molested or raped. Many of these women feel that sex is some dirty painful job and something to be avoided even in the context of marriage. Abuse victims often feel that they deserved the abuse since they were not "good enough." Somehow, this belief system causes them to find themselves either back in the same abusive relationship or in a relationship with another abuser.

Sometimes we can look at someone and wonder how they can think such-and-such about themselves. How come the anorexic or bulimic woman still sees herself as fat even though they are so malnourished that their health is in jeopardy? What about the woman who has had an abortion years ago, but cannot forgive herself? She is active in the church and tells everybody else that Jesus can forgive everything if they will just ask Him, but lies stop her from being able to apply this insight to her situation. What about the young person that commits suicide after the loss of a relationship or some other disappointment in life? Everyone else would think that this honors student had a lot to live for.

The lies and thought distortions seem to erroneously cause people to measure themselves by a

different standard than they measure others.

The spectrum of thought distortions is boundless. Sometimes we know that our thoughts are unfounded, but they are real to us. They determine how we live each day. The list of phobias is endless. Some make us unable to drive, go outside, or even to meet new people. Other times our beliefs about ourselves, however unfounded to an outside observer, cost us our dreams. Maybe, for example, fear is the only thing that keeps us from going to college.

Counseling can be helpful to everyone, not just the mentally ill. It provides a safe place to share thoughts, dreams or wounds. Many times it helps to uncover the lies and see the world and oneself in a whole new way.

Therapy can help a person get a new outlook on issues from the perspective of an impartial person. Counselors are trained to help clients face the “elephant in the living room.” Counselors abide by a client confidentiality agreement and will not spread stories around town. Strict federal regulations are in place to insure client privacy.

The counselor’s impartiality can be invaluable — he or she is not family so the person in need will not be written out of the will and these sensitive matters won’t be discussed at the family reunion. The therapist is not a friend, so clients don’t have to worry about being vulnerable and risking a friendship.

Research has found that patients suffering from many psychological disorders are best served by a combination of therapy and medication. If you are currently taking medication for a psychological condition I encourage you to seek counseling as well.

Counseling is not “mind reading or “brain washing.” It is thought cleansing. It helps people put their thoughts through a complex filtering system. Taking one’s thoughts captive helps one to regain control of one’s life.

Scripture tells us that our bodies are “fearfully and wonderfully made.” That means we are very complex. There is a connection between our thought life and our body chemistry . There is a connection between our spiritual perspective and our health. The full connections in our minds, bodies and spirits remain a complex mystery.

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