



## The New Jersey Society for Clinical Social Work Premier E-Newsletter

**From the President**  
**By Janice Victor, LCSW, NCPsyA**

For some time I have observed that a tiny bit of good often comes from some trouble. One bit of good from this COVID-19 catastrophe has been long distance activities. The NJSCSW board meetings have been what I called hybrid meetings, that some people attended in the body, and some by conference call.

However, our new “shelter in place” concept has drawn to my attention, that all of our members, from one end of the state or the other, would be equally available to become board members, and share their thoughts about our organization, on our conference call.

We usually meet the third Sunday of the month, at 10:00 am, except when we have a workshop, at which time the board would meet at 9:30.

Please allow this concept to help you decide to join the board, as an at-large member, committee chair, member, or officer. You can have a voice in your organization.

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### **Splitting: Stream of Consciousness** **Style**

**By: Susan Donnelly, LCSW**

These days we've been doing a lot of streaming, but I'm concerned that the defense mechanisms are getting short shrift. Absolutely nothing on Netflix or Hulu. Splitting in particular has been on my mind. It's most definitely in vogue. There is the customary good object/bad object, introjected or otherwise. In order to survive with something of an intact self, abused children must construct a good daddy narrative out of the bad. It has long been said that adolescents must do the opposite; that they must make a concerted effort to dislike their parents in order to individuate. In my personal and professional experience, however, this is not the case, but rather that teens mature in the context

### **Upcoming Events**

October, 18 2020-Jeff Longhoffer, LCSW, who is a faculty member of Rutgers School of Social Work will present a workshop on Narcissism

Date TBD- Dr. Rob Staffin, a psychologist in Teaneck who is President of the Clinical Hypnosis Society of New Jersey, will present a workshop on Hypnosis

Date TBD- Thomas Larson, LCSW, will present on working with LGBTQ clients

If splitting is also the tendency to hold apart two apparently incompatible ideas without seeing how they connect, then shareholder profits and child poverty is a poignant

of those – evolving - relationships.

We wish someone a good day and commiserate if they've had a bad one, forgetting most days are fair to middling. We are uncomfortable with ambivalence, and aspire to closure. The dogma and doctrine found in both religious and secular organizations is steeped in good and bad, acceptable and unacceptable, pathology and psychoanalysis. Films and books continue to be populated by heroes and villains. We use and perpetuate polarized, binary thinking. We tend to call it black and white thinking, but never stop to think why the black side is generally considered the one to avoid. We feel anxious and sad about splitting up, and tend to avoid people who are continuously splitting hairs. For many, it seems increasingly important that gender is binary, as evidenced by the exploding popularity of gender reveal parties among expectant parents.

As therapists, we are taught to be aware that someone who often speaks in terms of “always” and “never” may have a distorted view of reality. That person may have rigid and restricted thoughts and emotions, and impose that sort of thinking and feeling on others. We learn that there is no such thing as “perfect”, even if it's over the phone.

And as therapists schooled in neutrality, we're not sure how to assess the immense amount of splitting that is occurring on the national scene. Do the Left and the Right have equal claims to legitimacy and authority? If we think they don't, are we splitting? Are we indulging in I'm-okay-you're-not-okay thinking as a means to reinforce ourselves as good and reasonable? Or are different points of view not always created equal? Just between us, my Magic Eight Ball has responded, “it is decidedly so.”

Increasingly, I think my Eight Ball has a point. What about the burgeoning calls from the Right to put “the economy” ahead of human welfare? Can they really be split? And what is the economy anyway? Just the DOW?

There may be a cause and effect relationship between the market and the Walmart employee without a livable wage, healthcare, or sick leave – but I suspect it's an inverse relationship.

example. Another is the pervasive but preposterous idea that one can ever mix health care and the profit motive.

Furthermore, because shareholder profits are not essentially corrupt, we cross into the great realm of grey. The issues involved in most personal relationships, and with ethics both particular and universal, come in variegations of grey. The grey tones of nuance are incomprehensible for children, difficult for rigid character structures, and intolerable for bigots. Huzza! Splitting diffuses the anxiety which arises from an inability or unwillingness to grasp nuance. And as a bonus, it exempts the splitter from the messy and enervating job of ever taking their point of view to task.

Now, to the hardy souls who may have read thus far, it is more than likely you are anti-splitting advocates, or at the least, splitting averse. We all most likely have had experience trying to lead people away from a strict adherence to good/bad, sick/well, ego/id, mind/body. We're familiar with people who lash out if their rigid world views are threatened. The people to whom “mystery” only means a type of novel, rather than also a realm of the good questions, of curiosity, of vision quests, and of inclusivity.

So it is important work to stand fast with mystery, grey areas, and nuance. We could be planting seeds of grown-up and flexible thinking where we least expect it. And it's helpful to recall that for thousands of years it has been a struggle to find balance and relatedness between seemingly opposing ideas and ways of being. While a bit misogynistic, the concept of yin/yang illuminates a world chock full of complementary dualities. Yin and yang remind us that not only polarized politics but cosmic energies are, in fact, interconnected and interdependent. Quite a streaming experience, that one.

## Letter from The Editor By Kaitlin Vanderhoff, LCSW

I wanted to take this opportunity to create a special mini-edition of our regularly printed newsletter so that it may reach both our members and affiliates during these challenging times. I hope that during this period of isolation that you may look to the NJSCSW as a potential resource for connection. Joining the society has certainly expanded both my professional and personal relationships with those in the field and has given me support and wisdom during this complicated and chaotic time. If you enjoy this newsletter and are interested in joining please visit our website today. I wish all of our members and affiliates health and hope during this time.



### **Taking Charge of School Refusal: Once and For All**

By Zachary Schwartz, MSW, LCSW

School refusal in children and adolescents is a growing issue that impacts not only the student but the entire family, school personnel, and mental health professionals working with the student. Although school refusal may appear to be a very simple or concrete issue to resolve, it is often misunderstood and consequently minimized or mistreated. Without proper intervention, the student's attendance will further deteriorate, his or her anxiety will further increase, and this cycle is then perpetuated. If left unchecked, school refusal can become a chronic struggle and also present a significant obstacle to a child's healthy development.

Many school refusal issues stem from strong feelings related to the process of separation/individuation. Frequently, the school avoidant child has anxiety about separating from his parent(s) and is intensely worried about peer/social relationships at school. In other cases, the child is afraid to separate from the parents due to concerns about the parent's own feelings about separation. Unfortunately, the feelings that lead to school refusal are not often discussed, understood, or fully identified by either the child or the parents. These can be overt feelings of anxiety or other underlying feelings such as abandonment, disappointment, guilt, worry, shame, embarrassment, etc. These unexpressed and unaddressed feelings can become key precursors to school refusal.

Although it is difficult to recognize feelings

### **Helping Children Avoid Depression During Quarantine**

By Andrew Walsh, MSW, MHRM, LCSW, LCADC Intern

As this pandemic continues there are serious concerns about the effect it will have on kid's mental health. As a therapist who specializes in issues youths and young adults face, I have seen this impact locally in Morris County with clients and families that I work with.

Further contributing to my concern about kids' mental health is early research out of China. Research from the Hubei province shows significant increases in depression and anxiety for kids. For reference the Hubei Province is home to Wuhan which is considered the center of the COVID-19 outbreak. Research shows that approximately 20% of kids are struggling with depression and anxiety.

In response to the pandemic schools in the Hubei province had closed for approximately 3 months. During that time kids stayed home and had little socialization outside of their house.

### **What US Parents Can Do to Help Their Kids**

As a researcher and therapist I was not surprised that kids would experience heightened depression and anxiety when socially isolated. I was surprised though that the higher levels of

that have not been expressed, there are early (and often subtle) indicators prior to the onset of school refusal that parents and school personnel are advised to address before the situation intensifies. The following are some of the common early warning signs of a child's increasing anxiety that lead to school refusal:

- Increasing/excessive tardiness to school
- Monday and post-holiday absences
- Increase of vague somatic complaints in the morning
- Unspecified illnesses or sickness in the morning
- Frequent visits to the nurse's office and/or bathroom
- Unsubstantiated complaints about peers and teachers
- Refusal/withdrawal of school-related activities, such as sports, clubs, etc.
- Crying and/or tantrums when topic of school is brought up
- Irrational excuses by the child about why he or she cannot go to school on a particular day (e.g. "I'm already late and can't walk in during the middle of a class")
- Fantasy-like communication by the child related to his or her absenteeism (e.g. repeatedly promising to go to school tomorrow and then not going)

It is essential to recognize these signs at an early stage rather than assume that the child will just start feeling better on his or her own and return to school. The reality is that the child's emotional state will not improve when he or she is at home if interventions are not employed to address the behavior. It must be emphasized that while the child may indicate that he or she is feeling better during a school day spent at home, these feelings are very temporary; they provide relief for the child in the moment. The underlying feelings will continue to resurface the next morning when the anxiety returns about separating and going to school for the day.

Treatment professionals may need to help the child's parents take charge, provide firm expectations, and make decisions rather than allow the child to dictate the appropriate course of action. At times, there may be some underlying parental ambivalence about their child going to school against his or her own will. The parents will understandably need support to recognize and work through these feelings in order to diminish the likelihood of unintentionally hindering the student's

depression and anxiety continued after the kids returned to school.

New Jersey just cancelled the rest of the school year. With most schools closing in mid to late March and cancelling through the rest of the year that will total about 3 months. This is the same amount of time that schools were closed in China.

There are several reasons that kids in China were experiencing distress. There was the social isolation, total disruption of their lives, financial distress of their parents. They were scared of getting the virus. Many children in the Tri-State area face the same concerns.

Fortunately, there are several things that parents and community members can do here to help kids and their emotional health. The suggestions I outline below are simple changes which can have a positive effect.

### **Maintain a Routine**

Kids, like adults, do better when they have a routine. There is nothing wrong with taking a break from your routine. That's one of the benefits of vacations. However, now that we are several weeks into the quarantine it's important to establish routines. Work with your kids to build a schedule which includes time for school, play, and family. Kids do better when they have a routine in place.

### **Talk about Feelings**

Prior to the pandemic I knew that youth and young adults were not good at identifying or sharing their emotions. The pandemic has only made these struggles worse. However, it also provides an opportunity for growth. With families spending more time together than before, parents can model how to talk about feelings to their kids. Sit with your kids and talk to them. Ask them how they are feeling. If they are scared ask them what they are scared about. Practice active listening. Share with them how you are feeling. Clearly communicate to them that it is okay for them to feel whatever they are feeling. This can also help them beyond the

return to school. It is essential that the parents realize this by ensuring that they make staying home feel more uncomfortable for the child if he or she resists going to school...

To view the rest of this article please visit: <https://www.zacharyschwartzlcsww.com/post/taking-charge>

#### **NJSCSW 2020 Board**

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#### **Legislative Update By Luba Shagawat, LCSW**

It is with great pleasure that the NJSCSW board is announcing the hiring of lobbyist, Rob Nixon, to advocate with the ever changing legislation needs of our members and the community we serve. We have been vigilant in our efforts to ensure confidentiality with our patients and have fought the insurance companies that have threatened our integrity, reimbursements and the foundation on which we practice. For the past few years some of our members and patients have testified before the senate and the assembly to get the confidentiality legislation passed but have not succeeded yet. We realized that with COVID-19 and the reality that some of us might never return to face to face practices that we need, more than ever, to keep with legislative changes that affect us.

To give a little background, Robert A. Nixon is the Director of Government Affairs for the New Jersey State Policemen's Benevolent

pandemic as they move forward in life.

#### **Encourage Them to Rediscover Old Hobbies or Find New Ones**

Prior to the pandemic kids were busier than ever before. They had school, sports, and after-school activities. Such structured schedules make it difficult for kids to be kids. With this unique time and space, we should be encouraging kids to rediscover old hobbies or find new ones. This shouldn't be a time where kids spend more hours than ever on social media or video games. Hobbies are meant to enrich our life. Help your kids get in touch with theirs.

Association, and Founder and President of the government affairs firm State House Strategies. He has been a government affairs professional in New Jersey since 1995 with a specialty in the legislative process. Mr. Nixon received his B.A. in Politics from Saint Joseph's University and his Master's Degree in Governmental Administration from the University of Pennsylvania where he currently serves as an Adjunct Professor at University of Pennsylvania's Fels Institute of Government. For the past 16 years, he has served on a number of State Boards and Commissions, including the Board of the New Jersey Schools Development Authority since 2010. Governor Murphy appointed him as Chairman of the Board of the NJSDA in 2019.

We welcome Mr. Nixon to the NJSCSW and look forward to working with him in the legislative halls of Trenton.

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