



# Relationships

The Adlerian Team

## Building community with our children

By Sue Smarkala

We at the Adlerian Counselling and Consulting Group are celebrating our 25th anniversary in the Ottawa community this year. We believe that helping to build a healthy community makes us all stronger. What is the value and impact of community on our lives?

Community is necessary for us as human beings. Historically, community met the needs we had for finding shelter, staying safe from animals and unfriendly foes, as well as extra hands for the gathering of food. In early times, we could not do our lives without support from others. Today, each of us is able to provide those services by paying for them, but, the emotional need to have others in our lives has never been greater. Our wired world has created increased separation of workers, friends, and relatives as we interact via email, voice mail, and electronic games! The human touch, the real time human voice, chatting with workplace colleagues, friends and loved ones is the essence of connection and reality.

Human beings are social creatures. When we are born, we cannot live on our own. We need significant adults for food, love and physical care. In fact, studies of orphaned babies have shown that without cuddling and affection, the touch of another human being, even well-fed babies will die without such emotional support. So, our need for others starts at birth. Our needs change as we grow older and we become more and more capable of fending for ourselves, but, we never outgrow the need for companionship, comradery and connection to others.

"As the world becomes more complex and fearful, we know we need each other to find our way through the darkness. The yearning for community is worldwide. What can we do to turn to one another?" M. Wheatley, *turning to one another*.

Adler spoke about 'gemeinschaftesgefühl,' or the need for a sense of social connectedness and/or good feelings toward others. Adler understood that children who had a warm, loving family had a lifetime model for connection in their lives. An important community for our children is their school, provided through interactions with their teachers, friends, students and support staff. Much has been written about bullying, which tears down a student's sense of security, connection and support that is so vital in our schools. Parents play a key role in working to ensure that schools continue to be a place of positive community for their children.

What represents "community" to your children? The sports teams, clubs, and musical groups, are places where children learn positive ways of participating together. Churches provide multi-generational communities for children to see a variety of people in relationship together. Any situation

where children are supported, honoured, receive lessons and values, are all opportunities for them to learn where they belong in the world, and to grow into honouring, supportive and sharing adults.

Being a member of several groups is important for children. Multiple communities provide children with a variety of friends as they mature. During the early teen years, it is very important that children have several groups of friends. Then, when one group of friends are involved in activities that are less interesting, or are behaving in ways your child is uncomfortable with, he or she can choose to spend more time with another group of friends who are doing fun things and/or activities that your child is comfortable doing.

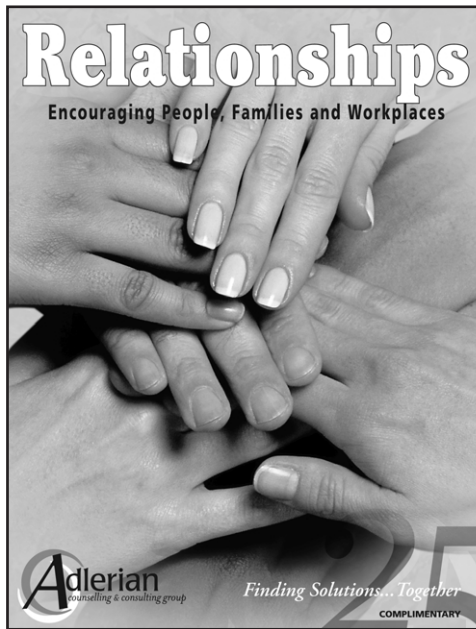
As we age and develop adult relationships, we are building similar communities – each one providing some spice that we want in our lives – physical capabilities, drama, music, bird watching, and the list goes on. These groups become more and more important to us as we get older – they become our hobbies that will entertain us in retirement. Without these hobbies, retirement may be more challenging. Such a retirement, without purpose and fun, can be hazardous to our health. So, the communities within which you participate are a kind of health insurance for your future!

The Asian tsunami tragedy response is a powerful example of community in action. From around the world, people stepped forward to support those affected, who needed food, water, a helping hand. This aid knew no boundaries – help came from every country. Tribal arguments halted. People went to help in any way they could. Even people who had lost everything welcomed foreign vacationers into their homes to provide food and lodging. Humanity at its best.

This kind of community starts at home. Each of us learned as very small children the value of belonging and helping. The community we create in our families is a model for our children's future and their behaviour in community. Our children need strong, stable communities in which to grow and mature. We must treat our communities well. All our good health and well-being depends on them.

*Sue Smarkala is a leadership consultant who offers coaching to individuals or groups to support them in creating positive change in their relationships. Coaching topics may include developing leadership skills, increasing effectiveness in a particular area of their lives, choosing a different focus for their career, improving interpersonal relationships. As well, Sue provides training to organizations seeking to improve team communication.*

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