

A problem shared

Staffordshire Life features editor **BRYONY VALE** talks to therapist Frances Weston about her work with children and a new treatment called EFT



FOR MANY people, identifying a deep rooted problem is a difficult thing to do. For children, this is even harder. They often lack the maturity and the vocabulary to talk freely about their problems, whether it is in the form of a bully in the playground, a family bereavement or an abusive adult. Therapists across the world have spent their careers searching for methods and techniques that make helping children that little bit easier, not for their own benefit, but for the benefit of their clients. Play therapy has been proven to put vulnerable

children at ease, making them feel more comfortable about talking to their therapist. Frances Weston, a counsellor and play therapist from Uttoxeter is a specialist in child therapy and works with children through the NHS, within a local Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service team, as well as on a private client basis. She also offers a counselling service to adults.

Not only is Frances highly qualified, but now she is also able to offer her clients, whether they are children or adults, AAT (Animal Assisted Therapy). She is ably assisted by her lovable

chocolate Labrador, Tilly, and clients – both private and NHS – are offered the opportunity to have Tilly present in their sessions if they wish. The use of animals in therapy is being used more and more to help adults and children with a wide range of emotional and psychological disorders including depression, recovery from trauma, anxiety and neuroses. The presence of an animal in the room during therapy can make the session seem more enjoyable and less threatening, therefore improving the outcome of the therapy sessions.

Those who own a dog will be able to appreciate the soothing effect they can have. So imagine that you are a child who is suffering from depression, trauma or abuse and you are finding it difficult to communicate how you are feeling. The benefits a child like that can gain from interacting with a dog are vast. Children are often able to develop a rapport with the counsellor through the animal as well as finding it easier to relax.

"Animal Assisted Therapy is very popular in the States," says Frances "The concept is used in a variety of ways, from kids swimming with dolphins to people with disabilities learning to horse ride."

Tilly has had to undergo rigorous training in order to be allowed to take part in AAT. She has taken part in the Kennel Clubs Good Citizen Dog Scheme, the largest dog training scheme in the UK, and has been assessed by the organisation Pets As Therapy.

Frances also uses a new kind of therapy called EFT (Emotional Freedom Technique), a concept that was developed in the US during the 1990s by Gary Craig, using the same principals of Thought Field Therapy (TFT) discovered by Dr Roger Callahan. The roots of EFT are in acupuncture, kinesiology and psychology and it can be used to deal with a number of issues including phobias, anxiety, weight loss, trauma and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. It has been likened to acupuncture without needles, tapping into the body's energy system to allow emotional issues to be resolved quickly and effectively through this completely safe and non invasive procedure.

EFT tunes into the issue that needs to be worked on, by asking the client to focus on that issue while the therapist taps on specific acupressure points with their fingers. For example, if you have a phobia of spiders, the therapist would ask you to think about a spider and take note of how it makes you feel on a scale of one to 10. You do not have to relive past events but you do have to share your negative feelings with the therapist. After having EFT you will still have the memory of the issue you were working on but it will no longer have the same intensity as it did before.



Frances and Tilly

Having suffered from a debilitating phobia of needles since childhood, I was keen to try out EFT with Frances. My phobia had meant that it was virtually impossible to have blood tests or injections without a sedative and had even resulted in my having to have a filling at the dentist without an anaesthetising injection.

Frances very sensitively managed to get me to think about the roots of my fear, encouraging me to remember the situation I was in when it first began. Using the tapping on the various pressure points, she was able to bring my scale of fear down from 10 to around four and by the end of the session I was able to pick up a syringe and needle, even touching the point of

the needle, an impressive thing for someone who had previously been unable to even see one on the television. Frances has a calm and soothing nature that makes you feel very safe and secure in your surroundings, allowing you to relax and focus on the problem you want to work on. Her serenity means that you instantly want to open up to her and it is easy to understand why she has been so successful as a child therapist. Although I instantly felt the benefits of EFT, I still want to go back to see Frances as a client so I can work on my phobia some more and, although it might not be beneficial to everyone, I certainly felt that it helped me.