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Get Real, Mom!

by Christina Ray May 30, 2007

A recent survey for Shopzilla found that most mothers today view themselves as the least happy family member.

This is not news to Sherri Muroff Kalt, founder of *The Authentic Mom*, who runs weekly discussion groups for moms in Rye and White Plains.

Deep down inside, many moms are hiding feelings of shame, anxiety, guilt, and unfulfillment that trickle in and touch every other aspect of their lives, Kalt believes.

In her groups, moms can let go of the negativity, Kalt explains. The get-togethers are designed to provide a safe place for mothers to come and discuss similar peers; the groups help mothers to accept and understand their feelings.

Providing an outlet for mothers to speak openly about their roles was "the logical extension of my experiences," says Kalt, who has spent the past decade at some of the most reputable mental health agencies. But it was her work with the PACT (Parents and Children Together) program at the Center for Preventive Psychiatry involving mentally ill mothers and their emotionally disturbed children which prompted her to start *The Authentic Mom* — so that other mothers could come and discuss issues of motherhood in today's society.

Limited to eight moms, the intimate self-exploration groups offer the support of other mothers dealing with similar issues, along with the insights and guidance of a facilitator. Each group session typically looks at both sides of a particular issue and explores ways to deal with the negative feelings that are still taboo. From own feelings, the mothers can then begin to live an 'authentic' life, says Kalt. The issues, such as the relationships each participant has with her mother, father, or other, on top of how each mother feels about her professional life or financial situation, can play into the dynamics with their own children.

Groups also discuss societal issues and expectations. Since society places so much value on performance and status, a lot of mothers feel like they are constantly battling when raising their children. "Motherhood is filled with conflicting feelings," says Kalt. "It's time to realize that it is perfectly OK to feel ambivalent about something that's completely normal."

This approach, says Kalt, helps mothers open up about what they think motherhood is really like and to break the bonds of guilt and self-doubt. For mothers who feel they have nowhere to turn, it provides an opportunity to enter into a dialectic process with women who are having the same feelings and can understand. The goal of each session is to empower mothers to talk about what is bothering them and, through accepting those negative feelings, to go out into their lives less worried about what others perceive.

"Motherhood is one of the few experiences that lends itself beautifully to group process," says Kalt. And while it is not therapy so much as a place to discuss feelings, she confides that *The Authentic Mom* is "still unfolding and we're seeing what happens." There are no formulas to the group process. It is merely a place to encourage women to see that there is no right way to do things and that motherhood is a totally unique experience. "Living an authentic life is not just about a better quality of life; it is about modeling for our children the importance of being true to ourselves."

Sherri Muroff Kalt conducts *The Authentic Mom* group at the Rye YMCA on Thursdays from 6-7pm. The group also meets every Tuesday evening from 7-8pm at the Full Circle Family Care Center at 1241 Mamaroneck Avenue in White Plains. You can call Full Circle at (914) 421-1500 to register, and get more information on *The Authentic Mom* by calling (914) 582-0801 or by visiting www.theauthenticmom.com. The first introductory session is free; cost is \$30 per session thereafter. Space is limited and reservations are required. Childcare is available on the premises. Sherri Kalt can also be reached by email at moms@TheAuthenticMom.com.

The Top 9

How moms are feeling

In the moms she sees, Sherri Muroff Kalt observes the following characteristics:

- Guilt, self-blame and feelings of inadequacy around motherhood ambivalence.
- Consciously or not, hiding/denying so-called "negative" feelings.
- Societal obsession with status and perfect performance/achievement trickles down into the parenting realm. Overscheduled, over-involved, and operating at a relentless pace, women are feeling anxious and overwhelmed.
- Subjugating their own needs to those of their children and the family system — losing sense of self in the process; leading lives out of sync with their true needs and values.
- Feeling pressure to parent "perfectly".
- Classic difficulty balancing often competing demands of multiple roles.
- Conflict due to lack of alignment with spouse/significant other around childrearing approaches.
- Feeling the lack of a true parenting partnership — because of women's disproportionate share of child rearing tasks and household management.
- Conflicted relationships with children (and often originating in family-of-origin).