

# SCENE

January, 2005



**Lonne L. Sterling**  
LMHC, CEAP

Lonne Sterling and Christine Michaels, Licensed Mental Health Counselors (LMHC) and Certified Employee Assistance Professionals (CEAP) and the co-founders of the Center for Change of Florida, have worked in the mental health, employee assistance and substance abuse fields for over 25 years. Their Center provides clients with outpatient counseling and area businesses with Employee Assistance Program (EAP) services. Together they have established a reputation as dynamic professionals, each bringing unique and varied experiences to their practice.

The Center services a diverse client population dealing with a broad range of mental health issues, such as mood disorders, relationship and family problems, anger and stress management, grief and loss, addictions, eating disorders and relapse prevention. The Center's staff is highly skilled, utilizing a brief, solution-focused, therapeutic approach and techniques such as EMDR and Hypnotherapy.



**Christine Michaels**  
LMHC, CEAP

For further information or assistance call the Center for Change of Florida at (941) 955-5518.

## ***Mental Health Fitness: A Total Workout***

It is probably difficult to remember a time when the term *physical fitness* was not a part of our everyday vocabulary. We now take for granted what was once a novel concept.

When we were children, physical education was just another word for recess. It was not until the early Sixties, during John F. Kennedy's presidency, that physical education took on a new meaning. Just as academic subjects were fuel for growing minds, it was then recognized that physical fitness was fuel for growing bodies. Today, few question the benefits of physical fitness as a component of a healthy lifestyle.

However, the fitness craze would not be a billion dollar industry if it didn't produce tangible and positive results. We have identified some of the more obvious benefits: longevity, youthfulness, physical attractiveness, sexual vibrancy, vitality, mental acuity, stress reduction, increased mobility, disease prevention and fewer trips to the doctor for physical complaints. If these outcomes are desirable for the body, then it also would be true that the concept of fitness could achieve similar benefits when applied to the mind.

In the early Seventies, the concept of the Mind-Body connection had a small following and was primarily identified with alternative lifestyles like the Hippie Movement. It seemed to remain on the fringe of popular culture until the early Nineties when the Baby Boomers were starting to turn fifty and having difficulty accepting the idea of aging. This generation began to understand that physical fitness alone could not guarantee quality of life and turned to the Mind-Body Connection as the key. It made sense that the body and mind could not be seen as separate entities but as an integrated whole. That meant that our physical being was interconnected to our thoughts and our feelings.

With this in mind, we have coined the term ***Mental Health Fitness*** as a corollary concept to physical fitness. By exercising both the mind and body regularly, we can achieve the maximum benefit from this Connection thereby ensuring greater quality of life.

How do we know when we are not mentally fit? Here are some familiar symptoms: stress, depression, anxiety and impatience, fatigue, relationship and family conflict, substance use and abuse,

over and under eating, over and under sleeping, angry outbursts, sexual dysfunction, compulsive behaviors, negative thinking and low self esteem, just to name a few. We believe to prevent and treat these symptoms and aspire to total well being, we must recognize and accept that, just like physical health, we must engage in an exercise program for mental health.

How then would individuals benefit from a ***Mental Health Fitness*** program? They would experience healthier families and more intimate relationships, greater self esteem, increased productivity and creativity, more empowerment and control, more effective coping skills to deal with everyday stressors, increased understanding of personal strengths and limitations, effective communication skills and boundary setting, goal achievement and success, willingness to accept greater challenges, fearing less and risking more, mood stability, open mindedness, flexible thinking and behavior change, greater focus and concentration.

Think about this for a moment: When you physically move a muscle, you build body strength; when you exercise a mental muscle, you build ego strength. When you are in top physical condition, your immune system is at its' peak and protects you from disease; when you are mentally fit, your emotional immune system kicks in and protects you from mental illness and dysfunction behaviors.

We hope we have been convincing in drawing the parallels between physical and ***Mental Health Fitness*** and showing how both together will help you live longer, feel stronger and enjoy more enriching and fulfilling lives. One last parallel: as with physical fitness, ***Mental Health Fitness*** is a life long process. It is more than a New Year's resolution. It is a life style change requiring hard work and commitment to achieve maximum and lasting results.

If you are interested in learning more about the Center's unique ***Mental Health Fitness*** program, please contact us at (941) 955-5518.

***Mental Health Fitness*** is pending as a registered trademark of Center for Change of Florida