

Learn to ad-lib your way through anxiety

“Improv for Anxiety,” a six-week class in expressive therapy offered by licensed clinical social worker Margot Escott, starts Saturday, Sept. 29, at the Sugden Community Theatre in Naples.



ESCOTT

Up to 20 percent of adults in America suffer from anxiety, making it one of the most common psychiatric complaints today. Using improvisational theater techniques to relieve anxiety is a relatively new option to talk therapy. It started several years ago at Second City in Chicago and is now blossoming in theaters around the country. Offered in a fun, supportive environment, this new approach to alleviating social anxiety, phobias and ordinary forms of shyness requires no prior improv or theater experience.

Ms. Escott incorporates more than 34 years of experience as a counselor, speaker and teacher in her wellness classes and workshops designed to use humor, play and improv to achieve well-being. In addition to teaching and performing improv professionally, she has presented workshops and seminars on the therapeutic value of humor and play on a national level and was a featured speaker at the Chicago “Yes, and” conference on improvisation and mental health.

Through the combined use of improv, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy and mindfulness, students learn significant tools to help them manage anxiety felt in social situations.

Ms. Escott became a devotee to the power of improv when she suffered a brain aneurysm and almost died in 2011. During her recovery, a friend suggested she try acting to assist with her recuperation. Escott took a class with local improv master Craig Price and within six months was performing professionally with his troupe.

“Improv helped me gain confidence in

myself during my recovery, and it made me much more confident as a speaker and a person,” she says. Despite the lack studies on using improv as a therapeutic process, she says, she has seen its benefits to mental health when it is applied to people who suffer from stress, anxiety and depression.

“When people hear the word ‘improv’ they might think of comedy or perhaps the TV show ‘Whose Line is it Anyway?’” she says, adding, “There’s a big difference between stage improv and applied improv for dealing with specific issues.”

Her classes are not about being able to tell jokes or even being funny. They are about being open to new experiences and taking risks.

Anxiety comes in many forms, from worrying about the future to social anxiety and panic attacks. There is clinical experience showing that using improvisation can help people with anxiety learn to better manage and cope with these feelings. Improv classes also use mindfulness techniques that help students remain in the present moment. “This is one of the first things we learn in improvisational theater,” Ms. Escott says.

Actress Emma Stone shares openly her struggles with anxiety that led her to take improv classes as a young teen as a means of expressive therapy. Improv offered her creative expression, alternative communication approaches and physiological intervention to lessen the impact of her crippling anxiety. It allowed her to express her worry in a creative way and taught her how to roll with the punches.

In sessions from 1-3 p.m. Sept. 29-Nov. 3, Ms. Escott’s class will cover basic improv skills such as embracing spontaneity and the concept that there are no mistakes. CBT therapy and mindfulness techniques will also be incorporated.

Registration for the six-week class is \$150 (some scholarship assistance is available). To sign up or for more information, call 434-6558 or email info@margotescott.com. ■

Learn about nursing at Hodges U.

Hodges University hosts a free information session at 5 p.m. Tuesday, Sept. 18, for everyone interested in a career in nursing and earning a bachelor’s degree in nursing. The session takes place on the Naples campus.

BSN graduates’ average annual salary is \$70,000 in a career that is experiencing a 15 percent growth rate.

Hodges’ BSN program is offered during the evenings and on weekend days. Students can complete the program in less than four years.

Hodges University in Naples is at 2647 Professional Circle, off Immokalee Road just east of Interstate 75. For more information, call 598-6285 or email mvacca@hodges.edu. ■



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