

Ground-breaking therapist visits Cobourg for workshop

By Cecilia Nasmith

cnasmith@northumberlandtoday.com

The times they are a-changing in the world of therapy.

The classic model of a detached therapist with a decidedly objective mind-set has been replaced by a new approach — one pioneered by a Maine therapist who was in Cobourg last week to offer advanced training in attachment-focused psychotherapy and parenting.

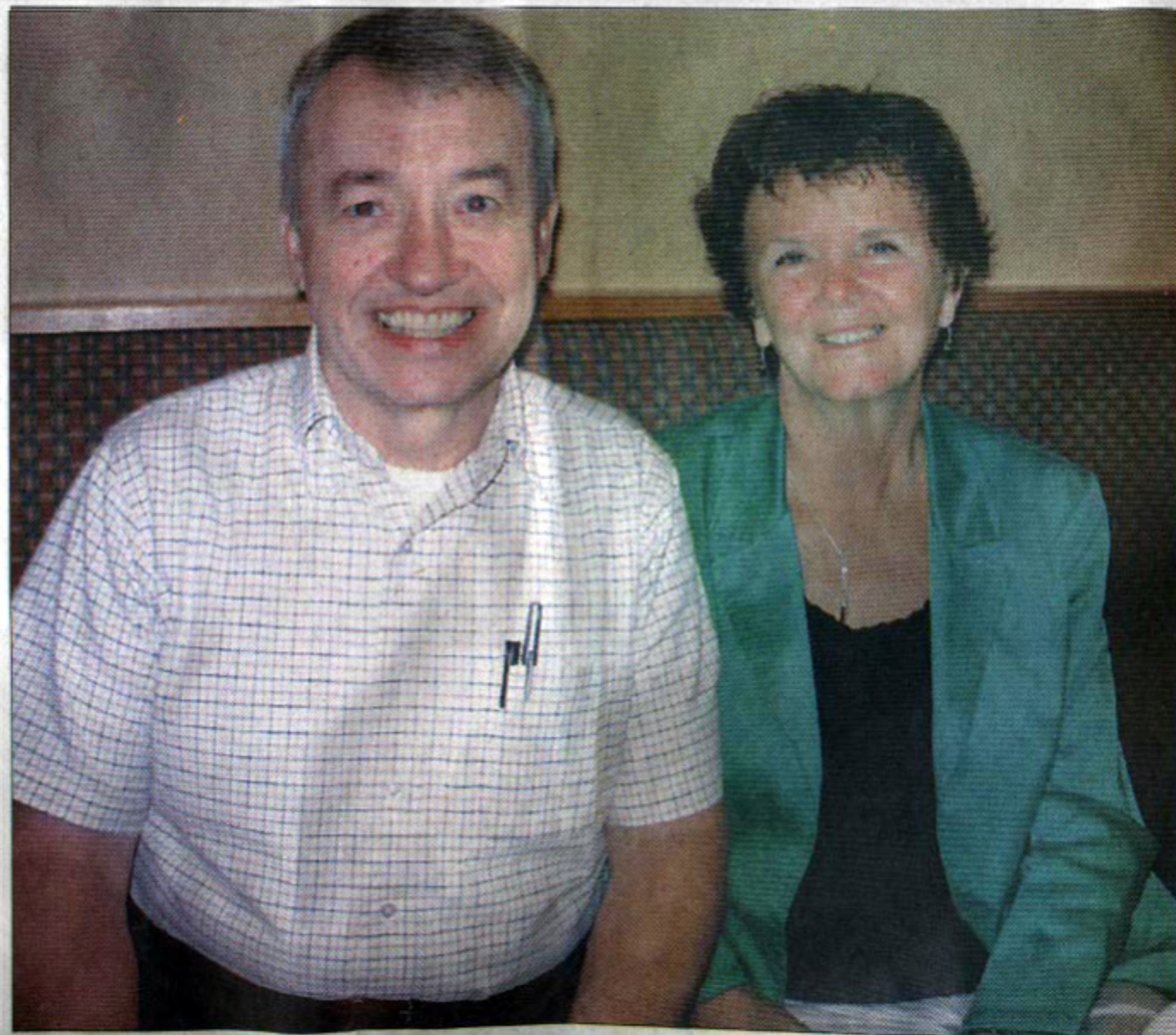
This approach puts the therapist in the middle of things, Daniel Hughes said in an interview during his visit — and the attitude is decidedly subjective.

This was Dr. Hughes's second visit to Cobourg at the invitation of Sandra Webb Counselling, following a visit last year to offer an introductory workshop.

"There are many professionals who assess attachment disorder in children, but there aren't many who provide or are aware of treatment for children with trauma/attachment problems," Mrs. Webb said. "It has changed the way I work with children and families — and adults too."

When first developed, this model focused on children (especially adoptive and foster children) who struggled with forming secure attachments. However, he said, "attachment principles are characteristic of all relationships — especially in families, close friends, mentors and protégés. It's how relationships develop, so it uses those principles in relationship development.

"And good relationships are crucial to all kinds of things: resolving conflicts, accepting comfort and support, being able to manage your own emotions, being able to talk about your experiences and make sense of our experiences — the best way to do these things in a safe



Return visit: Following the workshop he offered in Cobourg last year on attachment-focused psychotherapy and parenting, Dr. Daniel Hughes returned last week for a more advanced workshop, at the invitation of Cobourg therapist Sandra Webb.

PHOTO BY CECILIA NASMITH

relationship."

The key word here is safety. Conference attendee Michael Blugerman, executive director of the Children's Resource and Consultation Centre of Ontario, explained that this is a kind of emotional safety, as opposed to simple physical safety — the

feeling that one can say anything and still be recognized as worthy of being acknowledged and listened to, as opposed to being shamed or ridiculed.

The need for safety applies to everyone, Dr. Hughes said.

"If there is a lot of conflict in a family, no one is feeling safe —

not the children and certainly not the parents," he explained. "If I am a parent, that is a central part of my self-worth. And if I am not doing well with my children, I'm not feeling safe.

"It's about helping people feel safe so they can start to explore and resolve relationships with

different people in their lives."

In her practice, Mrs. Webb applies treatment principles to the adults as well as the children in the families she sees. Dr. Hughes does so in his practice as well — while you are counselling the child, he said, it is important also to focus on the parents and their marriage (or, in the case of a single parent, his or her experiences and relationships).

Marriage and family therapist Rita Benson, another conference attendee, has found applying this approach actually makes her clients seem to blossom as the safety takes shape around them.

"Kids in foster care or adoption start getting the feeling fairly early that something is wrong with them," Mr. Blugerman said. "In helping families work with those kinds of kids, it's important to help build the feeling that they are a person in this family with feelings that have to be listened to and paid attention to.

"And you have to do the same with the parents. This kind of relationship only takes away from that loser or victim persona."

"The therapist is a human being who develops a relationship with each member of the family so now they feel safer," Dr. Hughes said.

"They know what they do or say will have an impact on you too."

Dr. Hughes is the author of *Facilitating Developmental Attachment* (1997) and *Building the Bonds of Attachment* (1998), both published by Jason Aronson Publishing Company.

The second book will be out next year in a second edition. And he is working on a third book that is essentially a rewriting of the first book that will be ready for publication in a year or so. Both projects reflect some of the changes that have taken place in the ensuing years.