

Therapists learn new techniques in repairing relationships

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After a disaster, much of the rebuilding conversation centers on immediate tasks ? fixing homes, opening businesses, repairing roads. But relationships also need attention, a leading trauma expert recently told a group of therapists during a training session sponsored by the [Porter-Cason Institute](#) in the Tulane School of Social Work.



Trauma expert George Faller works with a group of New Orleans area therapists in learning about emotionally focused therapy techniques. (Photo by Joseph Halm)

Couples and families bear a heavy burden during times of trouble, said George Faller, who led the four-day Outreach Externship in Emotionally Focused Therapy at the Bea Field Alumni House on the Tulane uptown campus.

His knowledge is firsthand. As a lieutenant in the New York City Fire Department, Faller worked with traumatized families in the wake of 9/11 while witnessing his own marriage unravel. His expertise stems from his determination to keep that from happening. "I needed to find a way to let her in," said Faller of his relationship with his wife.

The Tulane externship program taught 26 therapists, counselors and social workers how to use emotionally focused therapy (EFT) when clients' relationships suffer. Since the 1980s, this approach has helped individuals, couples and families overcome depression, stress and alienation, in as little as a weekend.

But it's not as easy as it seems. Parker Sternbergh, assistant director of the Porter-Cason Institute, said even trained professionals have trouble implementing EFT concepts.

“They want to be 'human doings' and fix it, but this is about being a human being and listening,” Sternbergh said.

Organizers hope Faller's teachings will have a ripple effect across the region as practitioners embrace the power of emotional healing.

“Because the outreach extends into the community, it touches everybody,” said John Shalett, executive director of Trinity Counseling and Training Center, which cosponsored the event.

A new certification in family practice is scheduled to debut this fall in the School of Social Work. Funded by the late [Dorothy Cason's original endowment](#), the program will keep experts like Faller coming to campus.

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