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Dr. Ernest Mastria [above], a Belmar resident and psychologist, has published his book, "The Habit Of Living. A Way To Calm Your Symptoms and to Feel Happy" published. Mastria introduces a new approach to psychology by focusing on the "here and now."

Psychologist devises groundbreaking approach to solving depression, anxiety

By Bill Kolbenshlag

Have you ever felt overly stressed, depressed, nervous, or angry? Have you ever worried about something so much that you couldn't get it out of your mind? Belmar resident and psychologist Ernest Mastria has come up with a new approach to solving these type of problems.

Most psychologists sit their patients down on a couch, make them talk about their feelings throughout a whole session, and then analyze their problems. Dr. Mastria believes that he has come up with a more effective approach for making people's worries and problems less severe.

He has recently published a book titled "The Habit of Living. A Way to Calm Your Symptoms and to Feel Happy."

In the book, he points out what he believes is a single common cause of all symptoms such as anxiety, nervousness, stress and depression. According to Dr. Mastria, all of these problems are caused by a reflex in the brain which he refers

to as 'the habit.'

Dr. Mastria believes that the habit is created in us while we are children. He said that society often teaches us to feel guilty and fearful when we have a difference of opinion. As children, we tend to hold back our feelings due to the fear of offending others. According to Dr. Mastria all of this can lead to a tendency for people to take differences of opinion personally.

He also feels that the habit stays in humans throughout their lives. As they grow up, it grows with them. This causes people to worry about things, such as what other people think about their actions.

Dr. Mastria says that the habit causes all of the symptoms that he sees everyday in his patients. The main problem is that it causes them to think about the past and future, and worry about things that they cannot currently control.

"People are not as happy as they could be," he explained. "When you do something you want to do it fully." "This habit prevents them from doing so."

According to the author, he wanted to find a way for people to draw away from the habit, and focus more on the present, or as Dr. Mastria refers to it, "the here and now."

In his book, the psychologist talks about building a new habit for people to focus on. This serves as a way to get their minds off of the symptoms that are bothering them.

Through his new idea, Dr. Mastria came up with four points for people to focus on so that they can draw attention away from their problems and instead think about the "here and now."

The four main points the doctor shares with his patients, and with the readers of his book, are:

- Know where you are and what's going on around you.
- Consciously use your five senses.
- Be active and don't drift. Take part in activities such as phoning a friend or taking a walk. And focus on the activity which you are doing at that time.
- Think about whatever is hitting

each of your five senses.

Instead of taking the approach of other psychologists, and asking patients to talk personally about their problems and thoughts, Dr. Mastria does most of the talking during his sessions.

He tells his patients about four points, and gives them different ideas about how to implement

them in their lives. "It's been working like a charm," Dr. Mastria said. "People have been leaving sessions very happy."

The doctor also explained that this approach works because it allows his patients to get things out of their mind. If he were to ask them questions about what was bothering them, it would only bring up the problems again, and the patient.

Dr. Mastria said that the habit that he tries to instill in his patients' minds does not completely replace the bad one. Instead, it competes with it for dominance in the mind.

"The Habit of Living" discusses about all of the different symptoms people come across in their everyday lives. It discusses Dr. Mastria's four points in more detail and teaches people how to successfully take their mind off of their problems.

Dr. Mastria is a New Jersey clinical and forensic psychologist with private practices in Jersey City and Belmar. He received a Master of Science degree in clinical psychology in 1968. In 1971, he received a Doctor of Psychology degree from Rutgers University and has been a resident of Belmar since 1985.

He is now working on his second book, which he will call "The Habit of Childhood." This will discuss how his four points can relate to difficulties that children experience. He is also planning a third book, "The Habit of Relationships."

However, it is "The Habit of Living" that has the doctors and their families and friends

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ing. He has already sold some of the copies to his patients, and the book isn't even scheduled to hit stores until February.

"The Habit of Living has also been well received by many of the professionals who have seen it. James J. Ferretti, MD, Psychiatry, Jersey City said, "Dr. Mastria has developed a unique method for dealing with a vast array of psychological difficulties. Because of his elegant return to fundamentals and his refreshing unencumbered approach, Attention Training will appeal to virtually everyone."

According to Dr. Mastria one of the things that makes his new approach successful is that it is very simple. He said that it is easy for people to understand, and therefore

they are willing to give it a try.

Dr. Mastria is currently working on a professional paper on the same topic. After it is completed he hopes to take his approach to Psychology national.

For now he says he is happy to have been able to create an approach to curing symptoms that is easy and successful. "At least now there's an answer anxiety, depression and simple unhappiness," he stated. "The whole point of this book is to make people happy."

Anyone who is interested in ordering "The Habit of Living" may call toll free 1-866-habit-00. Or, they may contact the publishing company at EMT Publishing, PO Box 369, Brigantine, New Jersey 08203.

Interested readers may also contact Dr. Mastria daily at (732) 681-9170.