

# Monterey County Life

## 'Fear of Intimacy' seminar fosters close relationships

By **KATHRYN MCKENZIE NICHOLS**  
*Herald Staff Writer*

An awful lot of couples are singing the "D-I-V-O-R-C-E" song these days.

Nearly half of all marriages end in divorce, and the average marriage only lasts seven years. And even 50 percent of married folks confess to being unhappy in their primary relationship, according to Dr. Lisa Firestone, one of the presenters of this weekend's "Fear of Intimacy" seminar at Esalen Institute.

In fact, the seminar — which really was intended for psychologists and counseling professionals — has completely filled, and there's a waiting list to get in.

Firestone said there's no doubt it's a topic that concerns a great many people.

"Even young people, when asked, don't see themselves as having long or happy relationships," she said. "What we're trying to do is teach people how to develop and maintain close relationships."

Firestone and co-presenter Joyce Catlett, who both

spoke at Thunderbird Bookshop Thursday night, use the book "Fear of Intimacy" as their bible. The book, written by Catlett and Firestone's father, Dr. Robert Firestone, is a guide to understanding the obstacles that hinder true intimacy in a marriage.

The book is available at the Thunderbird and through online booksellers; cost is \$24.95. It's published by the Glendon Association, a nonprofit organization based in Santa Barbara and dedicated to psychological research. The organization has a special interest in understanding the dynamics of self-destructive behavior and alleviating social problems such as child abuse, suicide, violence, substance abuse and disturbed family relationships.

Lisa Firestone, the association's program and education director, said many of these barriers are first put up in childhood, and getting past them often can take some work.

The issue becomes even more complicated when children are involved. For some years, the experts held that youngsters were not greatly affected by parents

divorcing, and, in fact, could be better off than being raised in a hostile atmosphere.

But recent studies have shown long-lasting effects of divorce, and family advocates now are siding with the idea that perhaps staying in a marriage "for the sake of the children" is preferable.

Firestone said she thinks a better way is to strengthen marriages and show children how good a loving marriage can be.

"Kids learn so much by example," she said.

Response to this weekend's seminar in Esalen was so strong that Firestone said another now is being planned for November. The seminars also are available throughout the year in other cities; a complete list may be found at the Glendon Association Web site ([www.glendon.org](http://www.glendon.org)).

For instance, "Fear of Intimacy" seminars will be held Feb. 9-11 in San Francisco and March 3 at Sonoma State University.

For information or registration, check out the Web site or call (800) 663-5281.