

The American Counseling Association's "*Counseling Corner*" Weekly Columns

Facing Big Problems Shouldn't Be A Solo Activity

from the American Counseling Association

When someone faces a problem, it's not uncommon for the person to think that burden is his or hers alone. But few of us live in isolation. When we face a very difficult or serious situation it generally ends up affecting those closest to us as well – our families.

Involving family members can often be an enormous help in coping with problems. Close family members can provide support and understanding, and often can play a key role in helping find and treat the causes of a problem.

Getting families to work together is so important that there is now a field within the counseling profession that specializes in family counseling. First formally developed in the 1950s, family counseling focuses on the family as the client, rather than just seeing a single person as the only one with the problem.

While family counseling is not right for every situation, there are signs that can indicate family counseling might be a good approach for what's troubling you.

One such sign is if you believe that you would feel better if others in the family knew of the dilemma you are struggling with. Family counseling helps make that happen.

Similarly, if you find family relationships aren't going well, or a family member's behavior is affecting the quality of family life or is contributing to or complicating your problem, then a professional counselor is a wise choice.

Family counselors work in a variety of ways. There may be times when a counselor will suggest that the entire family come in for one or more sessions. At other times it might be advisable to see the couple in the relationship, or to work individually with family members. A counselor takes into account the type of problems being faced and the family dynamics as well as his or her own counseling approach. Ask before beginning treatment how a counselor generally works and the type of approach usually used.

Finding a professional counselor specializing in family counseling is usually easy. Your physician, family clergy or school counselor should have recommendations, as might your local mental health agency. In the phone book or online you'll find specialties listed under professional counselors.

While families are sometimes reluctant to seek help as a group, when they do they usually find it helps break down barriers to healthy communication and intimacy, thus creating more productive ways of operating as a family.

"Counseling Corner" is provided by the American Counseling Association. Comments and questions to ACAcornet@counseling.org or visit the ACA website at www.counseling.org

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