

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

Family Counseling - An Option For Many Situations

from the American Counseling Association

Each of us faces problems at various times, and when we do we usually think the burden of these problems is ours and ours alone. However, there are many times when there may be real value in involving those with whom we're the closest - our families.

Many times we fail to realize that family members can offer important assistance in a variety of ways. Involving them may lead to greater understanding, to more support, or to helping find and treat the causes of a problem.

Family counseling is a specialized field within the counseling profession that first developed in the 1950s. Professional counselors working in this field tend to focus on the family as a client, rather than just seeing a person or two as the ones with the problem.

While there are no specific indicators showing that family counseling may be right for your situation, there are some general signs that a family may be well served in getting treatment. For an individual facing a problem, family counseling might be appropriate if the person really wants other family members to know of the situation, or if he or she believes that actions by other members of the family need to change in order to deal with the problem.

Many problems, of course, can be addressed individually. A young adult having dating or career concerns might benefit from working with a professional counselor, but family counseling would likely serve little purpose.

But when the problems being faced are long-term, serious issues, such as addiction or severe depression, family counseling often can yield positive benefits.

Finding a family counselor need not be difficult. The American Counseling Association website at www.counseling.org has a "Find A Counselor" tab at the top of the home page that will take you to a page explaining the various types of counseling specialties with a link to professional counselor listings. You can also check with your local mental health association, the local phone book or through an online search for family counseling.

Professional counselors specializing in family counseling will be glad to describe how they work and the methods they use. Don't be afraid to ask questions.

Family counseling has been shown to be as effective as individual counseling. It is an excellent way to break down barriers, improve communication and intimacy and to find more productive ways of operating 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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