



Help for Your Family

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NORTHSTAR COMPASS

*Navigating
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FAMILY SUPPORT

Family life is often filled with kindness, joy, support, laughter, and love. It can also have a harder and heavier side that includes sorrow, sadness and conflict. Most people have several family members they can count on when times are tough. Listening to each other and quickly resolving conflicts are important qualities for a successful family.

FAMILY PROBLEMS:

Family trials and difficulties come in a variety of sizes and shapes. Typical troubles include:

- Marital conflict
- Family conflict, sibling rivalry
- Addictions
- Teaching of family values
- Job stress
- Divorce
- Blended family issues
- Domestic violence
- Parenting problems
- Favoring or disfavoring a particular family member
- The death of a family member or close friend
- Anger and aggression
- Illness in the family
- Struggles in school
- Discipline issues
- Mental health problems such as anxiety, anger or depression

THE FAMILY SYSTEM

As with any social system, families function according to roles established over time. These roles allow each member to understand what is expected of them and how they fit into the family. From this framework, each family develops patterns of behavior and reaction which are predictable, and when healthy and balanced, provide a sense of security and belonging for individual members.

When these patterns are not balanced and healthy they lead to dysfunction. Sudden change in roles can also lead to disruption in familiar patterns and throw the family system out of balance. Change can be natural, such as the birth of a new child or adult children leaving the home. Change can also result from a crisis, such as divorce, death, sickness

and disability, mental health issues, job loss, or relocation. As a family adjusts to these disruptive changes, new roles can emerge, and new patterns and expectations develop. As each family member adjusts to these new, sometimes unwelcome expectations, the sense of security and belonging can be compromised.

SYSTEM ERRORS

Family systems can be problematic in several key ways. Families may struggle to give acceptance and approval, making it difficult to produce a stable sense of independence and self worth for some family members. At times, the emotional struggles of one negatively impact the whole family system. Emotional distance of one member to another may also alter the system and health for the family.



IMPORTANT VALUES IN HEALTHY FAMILIES

Acceptance. Families need to be the place everyone is loved and accepted just as they are.

Respect for authority. A person's attitude toward authority develops within the family context. When mutual respect is modeled at home, children learn to respect those with authority over them.

Self-respect. Children learn about themselves from their parents and other family members. Healthy self-respect is the result of consistently being treated with respect.

Security. An environment providing acceptance, structure, boundaries, and predictability gives children a sense of safety and security.

Forgiveness. Holding on to past hurts and offenses leads to broken relationships, and often physical and mental health issues.

Diligence and hard work. A basic building block for success in life is a good work ethic. This is best established in the home and begins at a young age.

Honesty. Good family function and balance cannot be accomplished without honest communication. Healthy family interaction is not built if family members cannot be taken at face value.

Generosity and Gratitude. A thankful spirit within the family as a whole encourages contentment and satisfaction.

Responsibility. In a healthy family, each member has appropriate tasks to accomplish and when everyone carries responsibility, a sense of appreciation for, and healthy dependence on, one another develops.



Communication-talking and listening. Good communication, where every family member is valued and has the opportunity to speak and be heard, helps children learn assertiveness and listening skills.

Conflict resolution skills. Conflict is part of living in any social unit, including the family. When facing conflict, a balanced, functional family has the ability to talk, listen, understand, and compromise.

Affirmation of others. Words are powerful. They can tear down or build up, destroy or heal. The family needs to be the place where there is always a hug, word of encouragement, or pat on the back.

Selflessness vs. Selfishness. Appropriate self-sacrifice is basic to the foundation for healthy relationships in any context. The family helps a child learn to understand and empathize with the needs of others. When necessary, they begin setting aside their own wants for the good of the whole.

GETTING HELP

Because family relationships tend to be very emotional in nature, it can be very difficult for families to resolve their dysfunction without help. An objective, knowledgeable professional can help sort through core issues and work toward solutions.

Some family issues can be addressed in a group setting, while others are better undertaken through individual counseling for each family member. If a core issue, such as mental health, behavior, or addiction issues, greatly impacts all members of the family, the best option may be family therapy.

Family counseling is also often recommended for family-wide issues such as sibling conflict, divorce, and parent-child relationships.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Hal Baumchen, PsyD, LP, LADC is the President and Clinical Director of NorthStar Regional. He is a Licensed Clinical Psychologist (LP) and a Licensed Alcohol and Drug Counselor (LADC) with over 30 years of counseling experience.

He received his Master's Degree from Wheaton Graduate School, his Doctorate of Psychology (PsyD) from the Illinois School of Professional Psychology, and his Certificate in Co-Occurring Disorders from Adler Graduate School. He serves frequently as a seminar leader, and has taught workshops in the USA, Canada, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, South Africa, and India.

He is the author of *Journeys* and *Destinations*, two books on co-occurring disorders treatment, and the co-author of *Finding Hope Again: Overcoming Depression* with Dr. Neil T. Anderson.

This information in this publication is not intended as a substitute for professional help or to be used as a diagnostic tool. If you have serious difficulties with anxiety, depression, or other mental health issues, please seek professional help.