



## Family Counseling as a Helping Relationship

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### Abstract

*As people become increasingly enmeshed in the lifestyle accruing from the scientific age, the psychological consequences and behaviour become more complex. As people begin to realize the potential for a fuller life that modern technology can provide, they also become aware of the inadequacies of many existing institutions and practices, beliefs and codes of conduct accepted by themselves and their forefathers at an earlier age. As a consequence, while more people hope for a better life, there is simultaneously a feeling of frustration and anxiety that they themselves may not be able to experience this better life which they feel should be available to them. They search for new anchors, new guidelines for plans of action that hold promise for realizing some of their dreams and aspirations.*

**Key words:** Family Counseling, Helping Relationship

### Introduction

Many thinkers hold the view that man's essential nature is neither good nor evil, but is neutral. The modern scientific attitude favours this view. According to the empiricist and objective standpoint, man is neither good nor bad by nature, but has potentialities to develop in either direction. When circumstances are favourable, the individual is likely to behave in 'good' ways, and when they are adverse, he may learn to behave in undesirable or 'bad' ways. If man's essential nature is neither good nor bad, depending on the prevailing conditions and circumstances, man's actions take the flavour of goodness or become tainted with evil. If suitably helped he can become a creative and constructive individual and, if misdirected, he can become dangerous to society.

### **Counseling as assistance**

All of us seek to satisfy our personal needs. More often than not, in trying to gratify our needs, we find ourselves in conflicting situations in which our interests clash with those of others. But through the process of socialization in childhood, and later through education, we learn to moderate our desires such that there is no open clash. We may learn to suppress a few desires and inhibit other needs so long as our happiness is not endangered. In addition to human suffering caused by physical handicaps is not endangered. In addition to human suffering caused by physical handicaps and clash of interests, a major source of suffering is to be found in one's own personality. Often a sense of personal inadequacy and inferiority leads to lack of self-confidence, withdrawal and lack of desire for achievement. Even if the individual has the desire or motivation, he is hindered by subjective and environmental factors. The psychological conflicts, namely those of goals, values, interests, and the like, cause an ebbing of human enthusiasm and zest for life. The counseling psychologist alleviates this suffering by establishing a helping relationship. In the words of Rogers, a helping relationship is one "in which one of the participants intends that there should come about, in one or both parties, more appreciation of, and more expression of, more functional use of the latent inner resources of the individual". The commonly observed relationships such as those between the teacher and pupil, husband and wife, mother and child, counselor and counselee, could all be considered helping relationships.

### **Family problems come in all shapes and sizes**

There is no such thing as the perfect family. Every family is unique with its own combination of strengths and weaknesses. Sometimes families get overwhelmed by what seems like an endless list of challenges when it comes to juggling work, school and individual family members' needs. And sometimes families are blindsided by a huge upheaval such as a mental or physical illness, a job loss, or an addiction. Even "joyful" events such as a wedding, a job promotion, or a financial windfall can disrupt a family with unexpected consequences. The more problems there are within one family, such as a depressed parent combined with a defiant teen-ager, the more challenging it will be to find the best combination of treatment solutions. Treatment would depend upon the nature of the problems and the willingness and ability of family members to participate. Sometimes couple therapy may be in order or it may be that family group therapy combined with individual therapy is required.

### **Types of Common Family Problems:**

- Mental health problems such as depression, anxiety or phobias
- Illness
- Co-dependence
- Communication problems
- Domestic violence
- Anger
- Divorce
- In-law challenges

- Intolerance of differences
- Inability to manage or resolve conflicts
- Financial difficulties or excesses
- Resentments
- Stepfamilies
- Sexual abuse
- Inadequate problem solving skills
- Unwanted separation due to job or personal demands

Family counseling is something that can help to resolve conflicts, identify challenges and to develop strategies for bringing the family back together. Therapists who specialize in providing family counseling understand that family is a little bit different but that the family unit is important. Because of this, family therapists are able to look at situations objectively and to listen to what's going on for each member of the family. Rather than being biased towards one parent's perspective, family therapists are going to be unbiased and will encourage each member of the family to look at the way other see and feel about the situation.

**Counseling with families concerning children:**

The family is the primary group of society. Its characteristic feature is the affective bonds among the members in the family and a concern for each other. When the members of the family are disunited, tension, distress and misery are the natural outcomes. The family counselor should help find ways and means of reducing, if not eliminating, the strife, mutual distrust and ill-will among the members of the family. Most problems in family relations have been identified to result from a misunderstanding which is the layman's term for lack of communication. The parent child relationship comes under stresses and strains for very simple reasons. Growth is a natural process and a normal phenomenon. Children grow and consequently become progressively less dependent on their parents. Each family has its own ethics. Many a time parents forget that children cannot be judged from their own standards of a morality of decency or culture. Quite often parents try to compensate for their failures by wanting their children to achieve what they could not. They tend to become unrealistic in their demands and this causes frustration on both sides.

Sometimes parents take decisions on behalf of, or for their children. These may not be the satisfaction of the children themselves and causes tension between the parents and children. The generation gap leads to an identify crisis and sometimes to alienation which adversely affects family health. There is yet another area of family relations which concerns sibling relations. Most common conditions are sibling rivalry and jealousy and unfounded antipathy among children in a family. Family counseling is concerned with these and other related problems and aims at the release of tensions and the building up of harmonious relations. The counselor here uses the group counseling techniques as well as individual counseling techniques to realize his goals. He may have a few sessions with the parents individually and then several with the children. The major effort is towards increasing



communication leading to better understanding and appreciation of the individual members of the family.

**Counseling with parents:**

Parent counseling deals with the area of parent-child relationships concerning the dimension of dependence-independence. Most parents are deeply concerned about the well being of their children and are afraid that if left to themselves the children may harm themselves. Hence they become over-protective which is resented by the children. Another area of parent-child conflict concerns vocational choice. Most parents begin with the presumption that they know what is best for their children. Children have their own ideas and this usually results in a clash of ideas, interests and personalities. Parent counseling thus is one of the important services that can help foster a healthy home atmosphere. It is becoming increasingly recognized that there should be a close liaison between school and home, parents and teachers. For this purpose parent teacher associations (PTAs) have been formed. The schools managed by local self-government bodies in India pay scant regard to the need for PTAs. A few missionary schools and private schools have been successfully holding PTA meetings and reporting encouraging results. It is firmly believed that there is a genuine need for counseling parents.

Parents understandably are indulgent and so they see their children in a different light. On the other hand, for the teacher, the child of a particular parent is one of the several hundred pupils he may be seeing daily. The parent, as a parent, may not be able to see the problem of his or her child as the teacher sees it (as a problem of a member of his class). The parent may take a defensive attitude or react in a hostile manner. The counselor has to see the pupil's actions without bias and enlist the parent's cooperation for doing something positive for the child. The parent, motivated by his protective instinct, may defend the child's actions. In all such cases, the counselor must behave with great caution and professional experience to win over the confidence and trust of the parent and help him see the shortcomings or the problems of his child in an objective manner. This requires a considerable amount of sympathetic understanding of the parent. In most PTA meetings, group sessions can be organized to use the group approach to resolve problems. In group situations people see their problems in relation to other people's problems and find them similar and, therefore, not unique. Understanding insight can help a great deal in reducing the tensions and anxieties of parents.

**Marriage counseling**

Choosing the right partner in life may be one of the biggest and most significant decisions you will make in your lifetime. The quality of the relationship between you and your partner can impact your happiness and your level of trust, commitment, respect, support, passion and sexual desire for one another. Basically marital counseling is not different from individual counseling. In the case of individual counseling the counselee is the individual client. In marriage counseling the client is not either of the married partners but the marriage relationship itself. Counseling helps in the understanding of this marriage relationship and in

putting it in its proper perspective. A crisis in marriage relationships could arise from the intrusion of a third party. If this third party has affective relationships, it could cause an emotional turmoil leading to a crisis. Another factor that could pose a threat to a marriage is the change in the family structure. Other causes may be financial upsets and changes in the work situations. Such precipitating factors could cause much stress and strain in the family.

The marriage counselor must be acutely aware of the philosophy and objectives of marriage. People enter into marriage for happiness, companionship and affection. More aspects should also naturally enter into matrimonial alliances. In an open society where the individuals are free to choose their partners in marriage the relationship is one of understanding and regard for each other. People marry out of such considerations as wealth, position, or attraction for the personality of the partner. This latter aspect is usually termed love. The counsellor has a very important role here in helping the parties understand each other such that they are not overwhelmed by fanciful misconceptions. Each must seek the other for what he or she is and emotion should not be permitted to have the better of reason. The second aspect of matrimony concerns compatibility. The parties to the marriage should have similar attitudes, interests, cultures, likes, value systems and so on. A fundamental aspect of compatibility is age. People of different ages will not have similar interests.

**Premarital counseling:**

Pre-marital counseling with a professional marriage counselor can help you chart the course. Premarital counseling concerns the very important stage of choosing a mate. The counselor helps the parties to gain a fuller understanding of themselves, as this is basic for a happy marriage. The problem of choosing a partner and entering matrimony is assuming great significance in modern industrialized and urbanized societies where every person works to make a living.

Marriages run into problems due to lack of understanding between partners, leading to strained relations. This situation would seldom result if couples were to have empathy for each other. Empathy has to be cultivated and is one of the important factors for the sustained growth of a husband and wife relationship. Marital problems result in stresses and strains owing to lack of communication of faulty communication. The Socio-economic factors that make or mar a happy marriage concern finances, social life, religious and other values.

**Finances:** Finance could cause enormous inter-personal strains as it is one of the important means of satisfying many needs. Scarce finances could cause serious problems of adjustment.

**Social life:** With the urban and metropolitan conditions of life, there is much scope for socializing. Individuals have their own clubs and associations. Sometimes excessive socializing could lead to misunderstandings and conflicts.

**Religious and other values:** Most societies attach great importance to religious values. When one of the partners changes his / her religion the other is free to dissolve the marriage.

**Relatives and dependants:** Interference by members in the family, such as in-laws can jeopardize a happy marriage.

**Occupational demands:** Working couples may have very little time to be together and may feel aggrieved because of the enforced lack of communication. In seeking out avenues of personal activity they may seriously hinder a successful marriage.

**Counseling for women**

The situation in India, in spite of various efforts at national and regional level to achieve gender parity, is not very encouraging. Societal attitudes hardened over ages don't change easily. Even if change per se is accepted, the deep-rooted prejudices do die-hard. A majority of people, men and women alike, still have preferences for a son, and pay relatively less attention to the girl child in the matters of education, health, etc. education even when provided to girls generally, don't aim at their mainstreaming in the society but only to find a suitable match at a lower dowry. Lopsided sex ratio of 933 females per 1000 men has been the result of such favors for the male child. More worrisome is the fact that instead of showing improvement the sex ratio has been declining steadily during the last century.

Middle aged women who are brought up traditionally, often find themselves left in a void, facing identity crisis. Their children are grown up and preoccupied with their studies and other vocations. They no longer need the mother to do anything for them. The husband is busy with his occupation and mostly lives in a world of his own. In such a situation, the middle-aged wife feels lonely, with very little work of her own. In such a situation, the middle aged wife feels lonely, with very little work of her own. She begins to feel that she is not needed any longer by her children and husband. She may become depressed and withdrawn. This problem can be tackled best by finding a suitable employment so that her time is used gainfully to her satisfaction.

The third and perhaps the most commonly experienced area, is the conflict over woman's dual role as wife and career woman. This involves strong and intimate subjective feelings and experiences. There is no easy solution to this. However, the counsellor can play the role of a sympathetic listener and enable the counselee resolve her conflict. She could perhaps take the help of child care or day-care centers.

Another problem commonly experienced by women is one of poor self image. They have to be helped to redefine themselves in the light of role stereotypes and to improve their self-concept. They can be given appropriate reading materials to help redefine their concept of self. In this regard use of client-centered techniques could be most valued.

**Organization of counseling for women**

**In schools:**

- 1) Identify girls who are first generation learners and prepare individual case studies. This group would be potential dropout group.
- 2) Identify girls with personal, emotional and educational problems and prepare remedial measures.
- 3) Identify girls with poor health and malnutrition and refer them for health check ups and health improvement programme.



- 4) Survey the girls' children who are not enrolled in the school. Organize interaction sessions with their parents to motivate them to send their children to school.
- 5) Identify girls who are coming from poor families and plan a programme for retaining them in the school.
- 6) Organize personality development programme especially for girl children to developing confidence in themselves and change the mindset.
- 8) Organize community awareness campaign to motivate the society against discrimination against girl child.

### **Outside school**

Guidance programmes for women have to be organized according to the target group. There would be women who are talented but do not come out due to family pressures and shyness. Another group may be of the women who are employed but are facing role stress or work related problem. They might be having tensions due to dual roles, i.e., at home and at work place. In rural areas, women might be needing guidance about income generation activities near their homes. Guidance has to be planned according to the target group. For example, women in rural setting who want to start income generating activity may be helped in forming a Self Help Group so that they start some group activity.

Empowerment of women is a pre-requisite for development of women. This empowerment could be facilitated through implementing the programmes by government as well as by developing the abilities and positive self-concept in women. Community mobilization is extremely essential multi-faceted approach can be followed for mainstreaming of women in the society. For example only outside help and legislation may not give the desired results till these are synthesized with self-development of women, creating awareness, change in attitudes etc. An example is the fact that with the 73<sup>rd</sup>/74<sup>th</sup> amendments of the constitution women have been given powers of headings the local bodies. But in practice, at most of these places where women are functioning as sarpanches, only their husbands are doing the work.

In other words, with family counseling, it is possible for families to understand where they are, to learn more about the perspectives of others in the family and to communicate with one another. Misunderstanding can be resolved. Hurts and frustration can be haled and the family tie can be strengthened. Except this:

1. **Face reality.** Be fearless and compile a list of what must be accepted and what must be changed both internally (within you) and externally (situation specific). This is your starting point for prioritizing challenges and identifying the resources you'll need to resolve them. It will also help you identify what is and is not within your control.
2. **Take care of you** one should take care of one's self physically, emotionally and spiritually.
3. **Seek help.** Sometimes it's hard to seek help but remember that therapists are trained to provide valuable perspective while assessing, diagnosing and treating family members of all ages.

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