



## Learn the Do's and Dont's of Family Counseling

### Description

Family counseling can be a difficult task.



Counseling one person with a strong personality is difficult enough; add one or more persons to the session, and the situation can quickly become difficult to handle. This is true for family units seeking mental health care, whether they are couples, new parents, or families experiencing sibling conflict. Consider the emotional and mental complications that one person may exhibit, and then multiply those issues by the number of family members who attend the session. Even though counselors try to acquire as accurate a picture of family life as possible, they may find themselves clutching for control and professional frameworks when arguing or personal assaults threaten to derail the session.

Families have their own set of dynamics and methods of interacting and communicating, which may or

may not be conducive to fruitful sessions. The counselor's goal is to defuse the potential emotional minefield that is family counseling by implementing tactics that will assist the family in achieving some sense of closure, understanding, or relief.

Counselors must always be ready to adapt and learn as interpersonal dynamics arise, even if they have tools and approaches to use during particularly difficult family sessions. "All happy families are alike; each unhappy family is miserable in its own manner," observed the famed 19th-century Russian author Leo Tolstoy. The first sentences of his work "Anna Karenina" lay out the fundamental premise that counselors must address in sessions: Each family will have its own set of issues and tendencies, which may seem to expand in severity as dads, mothers, sisters, brothers, and other family members are added to the mix.

The following are some family counseling dos and don'ts that professionals can use to guide their sessions and help families reach healthy outcomes:

## **Allow family dynamics to emerge naturally.**

It is especially vital to allow family structures and relationships to emerge naturally during the first session. Appearances can be misleading, and the complex challenges that any one family faces cannot be deduced from an introduction. Try to set aside family socioeconomics or demographics that may lead to assumptions or generalizations (this is not to suggest completely dismiss these aspects, as they are markers of their own significance to understanding the family). Asking general-purpose questions to lead the dialogue is an useful method to keep control, but counselors should avoid trying to elicit reactions that match their own agendas.

## **Allow family members to interact with one another instead.**

Observing the family as it would be at the dinner table or elsewhere is crucial to obtaining the most accurate picture of the dynamics and issues at the root of conflicts or fights. Troubled adolescents, for example, may be angry with themselves rather than their parents. Such insights or behaviors may take time to emerge throughout the course of counseling, but allowing family dynamics to show themselves on their own time allows counselors to make the greatest assessment of the issues and personalities that families struggle with.

## **Take no sides.**

Counselors understand the importance of being the room's leader. With family sessions, this ideal may be attacked from all sides. Even an ethical activity can be interpreted by one family member as intended to target, expose, or harm him or her. Counselors must tread a tight line while dealing with families, as they are frequently the ones who function as conduits for the relationships. Consider this: if one family member complains about another (also present in the room), and the counselor responds with a question that can be seen as supporting an attack or assertion that the target of the complaint believes is unfair and not understood. An enraged family member may grasp on the slightest sign of taking sides and drag the counselor into disorder.

## **How does a therapist avoid taking sides?**

By avoiding circumstances that could be perceived as manipulative. Above all, exercise extreme caution while acting on behalf of a family member. Again, ask the correct questions, but let events flow naturally inside the family. Counselors can also establish rapport by telling others in the room to do the same (not speaking for others or letting others speak for them). Avoiding these problems is made easier by being selective with input. Counselor discipline emphasizes a distinction between family therapy and individual sessions. Encouragement may work in a one-on-one environment to urge a stubborn client to chat more, but it may be counter-productive in a family setting.

## **Do ask the family why they are seeking counseling.**

Because they do not want to accept marital or family flaws, some families view counseling as a last resort. However, in order to make any progress once therapy begins, families must identify the issue that prompted them to seek help. It is difficult to express problems, and it is even more difficult to be honest, but counselors must get the family to explain why they have chosen counseling sessions to help their home, personal, and professional lives. Acknowledging a problem can take time and cannot be rushed in any sort of counseling, but it can be especially difficult to achieve in family counseling, since consensus and whole participation are required.

Many family problems fester because they go ignored or are not handled with appropriate remedies. Counselors can assist family members in identifying their concerns, thoughts, and feelings in a way that could be perceived as vengeful or going behind another's back in another context. This form of open conversation is beneficial in bringing a family together over fundamental flaws and beginning to build on strengths. Establishing (and maintaining) group respect for all persons' thoughts and feelings produces a counseling atmosphere that aids therapy progress and allows families to come to grips with their challenges.

## **Remember to think about emotions in the context of dynamics.**

It's not always difficult to discern how one client feels in respect to another family member. Anger and distrust (and other emotions) show up in obvious ways. Even though family members try to hide their emotions, they frequently give themselves up in the process. It is critical to recognize that how clients feel on the inside does not tell the whole story of how their families are affected. Interactions between a son and his father, a mother and her daughter, or a husband and wife can serve as more accurate barometers of difficulties that need to be addressed. If they are informed, people are aware when they have made a mistake. When you're subjected to the silent treatment, it's more difficult to figure out what the real problem is. When it comes to improving family functioning, it is typically the behavior that has to be addressed rather than the feelings that these behaviors produce.

## **Allow for pauses and disagreements.**

Arguments may appear to be counterproductive to healthy expression, but they can be the most open

and honest method of communication amongst families. A counselor's first instinct to a disturbance or interruption may be to instantly tamp it down in order to keep control of the room, but allowing these encounters to run their course can result in illuminating peeks into family dynamics. When unrehearsed interruptions in conversation occur, pretenses and shields are frequently cast away, and witnessing how each family member reacts to the interruption can assist counselors better grasp the situation.

Counselors must be prepared to intervene if the tangent ceases to be beneficial and begins to be harmful. Counselors may be required to take sides in order to prevent one family member from berating another. Arguments and interruptions in a controlled situation where counselors can clearly see dynamics are useful therapy tools, but counselors must stop threads of debate that meander into personal assaults or even violence.

## **Don't overlook the need for proper training.**

As proven, counseling families necessitates professionals using complex approaches. It also indicates that counselors who want to work with families should consider becoming certified as a family counselor. Obtaining such status usually necessitates specialized training as well as supervised sessions. According to the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy, counselors must complete a term of supervised clinical practice (typically two years) after graduating from a recognized program before being licensed or certified.

Even when counselors have such credentials and expertise, some family circumstances may push them past their professional limits. This is common when a counselor encounters a family struggling with abuse (sexual, physical, mental, etc.). Such instances, such as court-supervised appointments, necessitate extremely strict preparation and parameters. Though counselors surely want to assist every client and family, they must occasionally take the difficult step of acknowledging that certain types of families require specialized assistance and may benefit from a referral.

### **Category**

1. Lifestyle

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