Family Therapy

Family therapy is a special form of psychotherapy that focuses on changes within a family, and recognizes that family relationships have an impact on the feelings, behavior and psychological adjustment of every family member. Instead of meeting with one individual, all or most family members are involved in the therapy process. In blended families, this may include stepparents, step-siblings and half-siblings. When children in blended families have adjustment problems, it may be helpful for all the parents and stepparents to work together in family therapy. But, this depends on the ability of the divorced parents to work together to help their children resolve psychological problems. Many divorced couples are not capable of focusing on their children's adjustment issues, instead they rehash the couple conflicts in family therapy sessions. Such behavior is not productive, and helps determine who will be included in the family therapy process, or how it needs to proceed.

Family therapy is most frequently the treatment of choice when children or adolescents are identified as having psychological problems. However, family therapy is sometimes used when an adult family member has significant psychological problems, especially when those problems impact on other family members. For example, a parent with chronic depression or substance abuse problems might benefit from family therapy to address the impact of their problem on family relationships, while also receiving individual psychotherapy to directly address their personal change issues.

With younger children, psychologists will often combine individual, parent, and family therapy sessions. The parents may be seen to focus on behavior control, discipline procedures and "trouble shooting" specific behavioral problems. The child may be seen to focus on self-control issues, self-esteem, and to teach social skills and coping skills. The family therapy sessions will focus on all family members having input into identifying problems and resolving them. Children are given support in voicing their issues to parents, and siblings are allowed to express opinions. Frequently, the family therapy sessions result in problems being identified in the other siblings, rather than focusing only on the behavior of one child. This not only helps the family make needed changes, it is essential in helping the identified problem-child rebuild self-esteem.

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