

Stonebriar Psychiatric Services News & Views

By Wendy Copeland, MA, LPC, ITC

MARCH, 2011

VOLUME 7, NUMBER 3



**David T. Tharp,
M.D., M.Div.**

**Board Certified
Psychiatrist**

Medical Director



*Wendy Copeland,
MA, LPC, ITC*

Staff Therapist



**Stonebriar Psychiatric
Services, PA**
3550 Parkwood Blvd.
Suite 705
Frisco, TX 75034

Phone
972-335-2430

E-mail
NewsletterQuestions@
stonebriarps.com

We're on the Web!
www.stonebriarps.com

Services We Offer

Individual Therapy
Marital / Couple's
Family Therapy
Personal Life Coaching
Group Therapy
Medication Management
Speaking
Seminars

Family Therapy: Healing for Individuals & Families

What is Family Therapy?

Family therapy is a specialized therapy approach that addresses the needs of the family as well as the needs of individuals within a family system. This work is done with the understanding that every family possesses a distinctly unique culture and organizational structure. Within each family, members are interacting on multiple levels, including from the orientation of self as well as contextually and interpersonally within the family system.

Why Family Therapy?

Family therapy is used as a form of therapy to address a variety of issues that may originate with one member, but affect the entire family unit. This includes, but is not limited to, specific or diffuse mental illness, learning disorders, addiction, eating disorders, and developmental challenges such as oppositional defiant disorder or autism. Family therapy is also utilized when families have experienced or are working through major family changes, stressors, or trauma. This can include death in the family, serious illness (e.g., cancer), physical dismemberment or traumatic brain injury, special needs children, adoption, divorce, relocation, empty nest, or abuse or victimization. As you can imagine, the reason(s) why a family may seek family therapy varies and can be multi-faceted.

What are Common Symptoms or Problems of Families Seeking Family Therapy?

Typically, families seeking therapy describe distressing levels of emotional disconnection and dysfunction. They may report significant problems communicating, resolving conflict and repeatedly getting stuck in power struggles. They may also report problems collectively solving a family issue, working together, or working through a significant life transition or loss. Many families seeking therapy describe long-standing and chronic patterns of disconnection, unhealthy fused connection (called symbiosis or enmeshment), enabling or general rigidity. They may feel a sense of despair, unsure how to create positive and effective change that result in reconnection of members and restoration of the system.

Individual and Family Therapy?

Sometimes, family therapy is initiated after a specific member seeks individual treatment. As the therapist and patient work on collaborative treatment goals, the family may be asked to participate to support the healing process. Many times the attachment bonds in the family and the members' actual presence in therapy provide the most powerful catalysts for meaningful change. This is in part because the individual is directly impacted by the system within which they live. Sense of security, understanding of relationships, and sense of self are often tremendously affected by family life. Family members who are willing to participate in family therapy can be powerful agents of change and meaningful partners in healing and growth. Studies have shown that when individuals in private therapy also share about what they learn with their loved ones, they are more apt to integrate learning and maintain positive gains across time.

Treatment for

Depression
 Anxiety / Panic Attacks
 Eating Disorders
 Bi-polar Disorder
 Obsessive –
 Compulsive Disorder
 Compulsive Behaviors
 such as sexual
 addiction
 Post-traumatic Stress
 Disorder from past
 abuse
 Relational issues
 Adjustment to life
 changes

Ages Served

Adult
 Adolescent
 Children ages 10 & up

Conversely and tragically, when family members decline to participate in therapy, the individual may struggle with applying learning and sustaining positive gains made due to an unsupportive system.

Who Attends Family Therapy?

Although family therapy often involves blood-related family members living together in one domicile, there are many different types of family constellations that attend family therapy. Family therapy may include extended family members that are actively involved in the life of the family or have particular influence. Family therapy may need to include more than one household or shifting households due to separation, divorce, military deployment, etc. Also, family therapy may involve individuals living together that are not blood-related, such as roommates experiencing conflict.

What Should I Expect In Family Therapy?

Typically, family therapy begins with an initial assessment by the clinician. This involves a meeting to discuss family history, presenting problems, and treatment goals. The parents or family as a whole may be requested to complete paperwork to provide additional information about family and medical history, personality styles within the family, religious beliefs, roles and responsibilities of the members, and relationship patterns.

After the initial assessment, family therapy begins to address the family's needs. Depending on treatment needs and issues, a therapist may request to see all or sometimes just part of the family. Variations can include working with one member of the family alone, the parents only, or others subsystems such as groups of siblings, etc. Who attends family therapy sessions, in what sequence, and to what frequency will be determined by the therapist, in close collaboration with the family.

What Do We Actually Do in Family Therapy?

Family therapy involves interactive dialogue and discussion. Other aspects of family therapy may include interactive activities that facilitate family exchanges and process learning, specific education, and skill-building to hone communication and relational skills. Collective, collaborative problem-solving is also utilized in sessions.

Additionally, information about interpersonal neurobiology may be included to deepen awareness and understanding. Interpersonal neurobiology involves how the mind stores and interprets information, how it responds to perceived environmental safety, and how the mind then responds on the physiological, emotional, cognitive, and interpersonal levels. When family members begin to understand how their verbal and nonverbal behavior can directly influence each other's mental health and well-being, new possibilities for change and growth can emerge. Very often, we do not realize the way we influence our loved ones' health and well-being through our words and actions.

Finally, the strengths and insight among members as well as in the family at large can be wonderful assets to promoting healing in the family. A family therapist recognizes that the family possesses considerable power, presenting incredible possibility for emotional healing and life-giving connection.



Stonebriar Psychiatric Services, PA
 3550 Parkwood Blvd. Suite 705 Frisco, TX 75034

972-335-2430

www.stonebriarps.com