

Sand Paper

Summer 2017



Happy summer! This issue of the Sand Paper is dedicated to the topic of family relationships. When family relationships are close, strong and harmonious we seem to better weather the storms of life. When our relationships at home are conflicted or dysfunctional, all other aspects of life seem to be thrown off too.

Relationships are the most frequently presented problems to Sand Creek's EAP. Why is this so? Probably because they are so core to our feelings of self-worth and wellbeing. Also, the impact of problems at home are often felt in work places. And of course, problems at work and in work relationships are felt at home. Another reason we see so many requests for help in relationships is because most health plans do not cover marital counseling or parent/child counseling. EAP offers help not easily available and at no cost for your covered sessions.

In this issue Dr. Erica Kanewischer explains how the short term model we use in the EAP can help your family during times of relationship tension and concern. DJ Enga has written an article on family traditions. This article alone has gotten many of us on Sand Creek's editing staff reminiscing about our childhoods and current traditions. Dear Sandy responds to a mother concerned about her son's absent father who is wanting to start a relationship with his son.

Dr. Kanewischer, whose education and experience is in this area, discusses the modern family and how far American society has moved away from the stereotyped traditional view of family. At Sand Creek we strive to serve individuals and their families with openness, understanding and compassion.

If your family relationships are causing concern contact us. We can help.

Wishing you much family fun. Enjoy the lazy days of summer!

Gretchen M. Stein, Ph.D.
President and CEO of Sand Creek

We Need Help... But Can Short Term Family Counseling Really Work?

By: Erica JW Kanewischer, PhD, LMFT

I believe there are no more challenging tasks than being in a partnership and parenting children. It can be physically, emotionally, psychologically and spiritually exhausting.

We all need support sometimes. Going to family counseling can sound daunting and like a huge time commitment. However, short term family counseling, especially before those challenging issues get really big, can be helpful and effective.

Short term family counseling can:

- Help resolve a specific problem and work toward a solution.
- Include education on a specific issue within the family.
- Help improve communication.
- Align expectations within the family.
- Change patterns of behavior.
- Highlight and elicit strengths of family members.
- Clarify and modify roles and rules within the family system.

The specifics of a family counseling session will depend on your clinician and family. However, common topics that can be tackled are issues such as conflict, challenges in parenting, feeling distant, anxiety and difficulties with extended family. In many cases, a clinician will want to meet with the parent or parents, and the child who is most affected by the issue. Specific goals will be set and the session time will focus on change and

the future. Each family member's perspective is taken into account and everyone should be given a chance to be heard and understood. The goal of family counseling is never to place blame for a problem on one person, but rather help the family work together to utilize their strengths in understanding each other and solving the problem.

We are usually diligent in getting our cars tuned up with a fresh oil change regularly. This helps them to work better and prevent costly problems due to normal wear and tear. Consider seeking professional support as a tune-up for your family's communication and relationships. The stresses of typical family life can wear us down, but finding new ways to work together can help keep family relationships positive and strong.

Center for Substance Abuse Treatment, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, US. (1999). Brief Interventions and Brief Therapies for Substance Abuse, (Treatment Improvement Protocol (TIP) Series, No. 34.) Chapter 8—Brief Family Therapy. Rockville, MD. Downloaded from: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK64953/>



"I SUSTAIN MYSELF WITH THE LOVE OF FAMILY."

-MAYA ANGELOU

THE IMPORTANCE OF FAMILY TRADITION

By: DJ Enga



Family traditions are the rituals, practices and beliefs of a family that are handed down from generation to generation.

Family traditions can create emotional security, safety and establish fond memories. They are the very things that help us remain hopeful and optimistic in our daily lives.

Rapid technological advancement and increasingly busy lives make for the creation of all types of distractions. We may find that we don't make enough time for relationships. Family bonds erode with extended families and keeping in touch is difficult and periodic. Maintaining purposeful family traditions works against this current trend and helps sustain members of a family.

Psychologist Barbara H. Fiese, Ph.D., and colleagues at Syracuse University, point out the difference between a family routine and a family ritual (Fiese, 2002). "Routines involve instrumental communication conveying information that 'this is what needs to be done' and involve a momentary time commitment so that once the act is completed, there is little, if any, afterthought," says Dr. Fiese. "Rituals, on the other hand, involve symbolic communication and convey 'this is who we are' as a group and provide continuity in meaning across generations. Also, there is often an emotional imprint where once the act is completed the individual may replay it in memory to recapture some of the positive experience."

Many family traditions and rituals have been passed down from one generation to the next. It is important to honor the new generation with the old time-honored traditions, while also inviting new traditions to help keep the family engaged and connected.

These traditions can come in countless forms. From weddings, holidays and family reunions to even the simple act of sharing food together. With different cultures giving rise to many different family traditions that honor the foundation of gathering together as a family to tell stories, share food, and break bread.

There are also many old family traditions that are designed for the sole purpose of celebrating the new generation. Birthday parties with gifts and ice cream celebrate life. Other traditions are grounded in meaningful, sometimes symbolic, rituals marking important milestones on the path to maturity, (Bar Mitzvah's, Sweet Sixteen parties or going on your first fishing or hunting trip with a parent). In each, the older generation has the opportunity to honor and invite the new generation into maturity in hopes that one day they will share the same experience with their own children.

For many, gathering together is not an option. This is increasingly common nowadays as families find themselves spread around the country. However, old family traditions can help sustain family bonds. Knowing that hundreds of miles away, other family members are engaged in the same traditions and rituals can still keep that feeling of closeness among its members.

Introducing the new generation to old family traditions and rituals can help preserve the family through the years, even during times when they cannot gather together. This creates a sense of belonging that will be a source of joy for years to come.

Fiese, B. (2002, December 8). Family Routines and Rituals May Improve Family Relationships and Health. Retrieved June 19, 2017, <http://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2002/12/rituals.aspx>

Modern Family

By: Erica JW Kanewischer, PhD, LMFT

The word 'family' conjures up different and varied images, emotions and memories for all of us.

How do you define family? There are many definitions of family, and depending on the source they are quite different. Is a family people who are biologically related? Legally connected? Live under one roof? Or those who have inter-dependent relationships and choose to call each other family? In understanding modern families, all of these are true. As social, economic and political forces continue to change family life, the concept and processes of family are ever changing.

According to Froma Walsh (2012), who has been studying and writing about families for decades, three of the current trends that are most affecting family life are: Varied family forms, varied gender roles, and expanded family life course.

Recognizing and valuing varied family forms means realizing the stereotypical 'nuclear family' is not the most common family form. Many families today are dual-income, multi-ethnic, single-parent, child-free, cohabitating, single, divorced, remarried, adoptive, kinship, transgender or same-sex families. In 2014 the Pew Research Center found that fewer than half (46%) of children were growing up in a home with heterosexual parents in their first marriage (Livingston). There truly is no 'standard' family form and many years of research have shown that children and adults thrive in a variety of family structures (Cherlin, 2010; Landsford, Ceballo, Abbey & Steward, 2001 as found in Walsh, 2012).

Walsh (2012) also writes that as men and women have stepped away from 'traditional' gender roles of men as income providers and women as caregivers. Today it is most common for both people in a partnered relationship to work outside of the home (The Rise in Dual Income Households, 2015). This has increased independence for women and opened the door for men to become more engaged with housework and childcare. When couples perform less traditional gender roles, many marriages move to a more egalitarian structure. Though egalitarian relationships can take more communication, they often result in higher levels of satisfaction for both partners.



Lastly, as we are living longer, families with four or five generations are becoming more common (Bengston, 2001; Waite, 2009 as found in Walsh, 2012). Caregiving to older adults is a stage that most families will enter. Emotional and financial challenges can come with this role. Longevity also means that it is increasingly likely many people will live through several long-term monogamous relationships. As families weather these transitions it is their strengths, such as communication, humor, hard work and patience, which help them continue to lean on each other.

There is no 'normal' family. No family is problem free. No family is average. Every family will have its own unique strengths, structure, challenges and processes. Families develop their own norms, roles, expectations, values and belief systems. They expand to include new members and reassign roles when members exit.

Who do you call family?

Livingston, G. (2014). Fewer than half of U.S. kids today live in a 'traditional' family. Retrieved from: <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/12/22/less-than-half-of-u-s-kids-today-live-in-a-traditional-family/>

The Rise in Dual Income Households. (July 9th, 2015). Retrieved from: http://www.pewresearch.org/ft_dual-income-households-1960-2012-2/

Walsh, F. (Ed.). (2012). Normal Family Processes: Growing Diversity and Complexity. New York, NY: The Guilford Press.

DEAR SANDY,

I am a single Mother to a three year old son. Recently, my son's father contacted me and expressed a new interest in being more active and engaged in his son's life and asked if they could meet.

I am worried that my son's father won't be consistent, and – up until now –has not shown any interest in being involved (financially or otherwise) in any parenting responsibilities. As a result, I'm pretty confused and anxious about how to go about navigating his request, any thoughts?

Signed,

Concerned Mommy

DEAR CONCERNED MOMMY,

My first reaction to reading your letter was the idea that as a result of the father not taking part in any of the parenting responsibilities during the first few years of your son's life probably means that you have established your own set routine, support network and emotional bond with your son.

As a result, you may be feeling fiercely protective of any outside influences, father or not, that might be potential problems for you down the road. Not to mention any existing anger or resentment towards the father not being there when you needed him most.

That said, if the father has expressed interest in meeting his son with the idea of possibly becoming more active in his life, it requires some planning and clearly communicated boundaries. This will allow for a basic understanding for both you and the father moving forward.

My recommendation would be to carefully consider how you feel about the idea of meeting with Dad and whether or not you are willing to allow a meeting to take place at all. If so, do you want it to be at your home? Do you want someone else there as a buffer? Basic considerations will go a long way in terms of keeping the environment emotionally safe and familiar for both you and your son while allowing Dad to engage with his child for the first time.

If a meeting did take place, keep it simple and light-hearted. Keep the focus on the child. If Dad wants to ask questions and/or express any ongoing desire or intentions to play a more active role in parenting then this can be between you and the father as an ongoing discussion.

Remember, this will be the first time that the father has ever seen his son and it could be pretty emotional for him, even long after the initial meeting is over. That said; it's probably best to take it very slow and not make any impulsive decisions regarding parenting. My sense is that you would need to see the Dad showing consistent desire and more importantly, consistent behaviors that would reflect his ability to play a productive role in his son's life before making any decisions on how to best move forward.

Best of luck,

Sandy



SEND YOUR QUESTIONS TO DEAR SANDY BY EMAILING US
AT INFO@SANDCREEKEAP.COM.