

Emotional Problems in a Family Member

“Good health” means both physical and emotional health. A deficiency in emotional health damages a significant part of the “self.” Thus, the existence of an emotional illness in a family member is threatening to the others.

This threat can cause common reactions:

1. **Denial**—of the existence of the problem. Families who deny the emotional problem may say things like, “Nothing’s wrong, everything’s fine,” “He just wants attention,” “With a little effort, everything will work out okay.”
2. **Fear**—that emotional illness is an infectious disease.
3. **Embarrassment**—toward the extended family and neighbors.

These feelings may lead to the following behaviors:

1. **Abstention**—distancing oneself from the emotionally ill person. The patient remains in the care of one family member, usually the mother.
2. **Inappropriate behavior**—contempt and disrespectful attitude toward the emotionally ill person, who, like all of us, needs warmth, love, and a sympathetic ear.
3. **Over-protection**—the immediate environment overprotects the ill “child” and prevents him from addressing situations he is capable of handling.

What to Do?

Therapy for the entire family (not just the parents) can ease the suffering within the family. This therapy is in addition to the psychiatric/psychological care that the patient needs. Family members require courage to state their feelings openly and to listen to the opinions of the rest of the family. Sometimes, the family is so worried about an emotionally ill person that their healthy children feel jealousy, neglect, and less important or less loved than the unwell child. They may feel that they are paying a price for being healthy. Therapy gives everyone the chance to be heard and looks for ways to provide for the needs of all family members.

Research shows that family therapy is beneficial for the entire family, and increases the efficiency of treatment of the individual.

Family therapy is not a substitute for treatment of the emotionally ill person, but it can have a positive influence on a person's daily functioning.