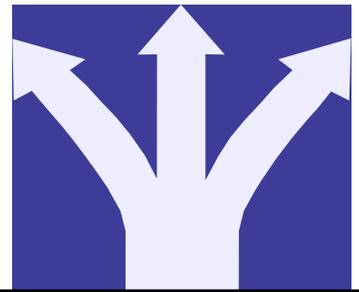


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Sibling Anger

For those of us with siblings, memories of play and affection coexist with memories of fighting and competition. Sibling relationships exist across a lifetime and substantially affect our quality of life. Sibling rivalry is a familiar phrase when speaking about children and adolescents growing up together. Rivalry also extends into adulthood. The legacy of early experiences easily complicates ongoing family relationships. As adults, we have the opportunity to reconfigure roles and relationships. A mature family provides strength and nurture to each other and moves more smoothly through transitions, celebrations, and tragedy.

Distancing

Jealousy and conflict are common in sibling relationships. There is a continuum of tension for each family and the rivalry can become argumentative, even hostile. People cope with rivalry in a variety of ways to contain anger and rage. Siblings may not spend much time with each other, purposely avoiding family events. Some have completely severed ties. Confusion about feelings or having no feelings can be another way to distance from conflicts that remain. Brothers and sisters may feel that they don't have much in common with each other or that they are exact opposites. Both devaluation and idealization provide emotional distance.

The adult manifestations of childhood experiences are powerful and often bewildering to people. When around family, it's as if we are children once more. Feelings of anger and disappointment boil up without warning. Sisters and brothers slip easily, and with alarming speed, into old roles. The hurts and hostilities surface as if recently experienced. Awareness and insight, accessible through counseling, can stop or slow this regression. Even if one person recognizes the dynamic, tension can be reduced and conflicts that seem insurmountable might be managed and resolved.

Family constellation, values, and history deeply affect closeness and competition. Children around the same age tend to be more connected. Norms of family unity differ, based partly on parental values. Rivalry is sometimes started by adults who have favorites, or starts when siblings are fighting for control and power within the family. Certain traditional cultures expect fidelity and obligation to family despite underlying tensions. Sisters are closer with each other than brothers are, and brothers are most rivalrous with each other. Divorce and separation or death of a parent significantly disrupt family relationships.

An otherwise peaceful or distant coexistence can rupture into conflict at times of family stress. These crises may also lead to an increase in affection and cooperation. Major incidents include marriage, change in jobs, having children, geographic moves, illness and death of siblings and loss of spouses or partners. The loss of a parent is often a time when regression and rivalry emerge. With support from counseling, families can negotiate these experiences with a minimum of conflict and hostility. Elder care providers have a significant role in providing assistance and referrals to families in need.

Strategies

People often do not think that approaches to reducing hostility about family dynamics are viable for themselves. Growing up, they saw that situations rarely if ever changed and trying to work things out was unsuccessful. To alleviate resentment and anger, a person needs to keep in mind that one cannot change the behavior of others. The ability to regulate anger about family issues begins with a person being responsible for his/her own feelings and also to consider avoiding attachment to how life with one's family "should" or "needs" to be. Trying to put things in perspective can possibly make it easier to cope with time with siblings.

(Over)

(continued)

Other points to consider:

- ⇒ Uncover and examine old patterns of behavior and thinking experienced while growing up within the family
- ⇒ Recognize specific vulnerabilities in sibling interactions and situations (ex- "Whenever my brother Bill starts to talk about how successful he is, I start to get really annoyed.")
- ⇒ Reorient to present life situation and reality of current relationships in all aspects of life: "That was then, this is now."
- ⇒ Objectively contrast current abilities and strengths with beliefs from childhood and examine those beliefs that still exist (ex- "I sometimes think that I am not as good as my older sister.")
- ⇒ Open-mindedly look at the reality of siblings' accomplishments and vulnerabilities (i.e.- consider their strengths and positive qualities as well be sympathetic to their limitations)
- ⇒ Visualize and plan for interactions in advance of contact

Sources:

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Lamb, M.E., Sutton-Smith, (Ed.). Sibling Relationships: Their Nature and Significance across the Lifespan. Hillsdale NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1982.

Leder, J.M. "Adult sibling rivalry". Psychology Today, psychologytoday.com, Jan/Feb 93, Last Reviewed Aug 30 2004.

(This article was done with the research/writing assistance of Alice Miele, LICSW)

FROM OUR FILES:

State Anger and the Risk of Injury

A study was done to determine if there was any relationship between the anger in a given moment (state anger) and the potential for a person being injured.

Cases were patients seeking care at any of three emergency departments in Boone County, MO within 48 hours of injury between February 1998 and March 2000. Structured interviews were provided by trained research staff in the emergency departments during systematically selected times and with more severely

injured patients in the hospital within 2 days of injury.

A total of 2,517 injured patients were interviewed. Of the 2,517, 644 (26%) were injured in a fall, 601 (24%) were injured in a traffic or motor vehicle incident, 290 (12%) were cut with a sharp instrument, 277 (11%) were injured during sports, and 103 (4%) had an intentional injury inflicted by another person. The rest were injured by a variety of other mechanisms.

In this study, emotions reflecting externally directed anger were common. The prevalence of anger among injured patients was as follows: 31.7% reported some degree of being "irritable" just before the injury, 18.1% reported feeling "angry," and 13.2% reported feeling "hostile".

Anger was associated with injury in this study primarily at higher levels of anger. The associations were stronger in men than in women.

The association between anger and injury varied substantially by injury mechanism. Traffic and fall injuries were generally not associated with anger. In contrast, injuries inflicted by another person were strongly associated with anger.

Annals of Family Medicine, 2006; 4 (1): 63-68

Relationship Between Alcohol Outlets and Overnight Hospital Stays Due to Assaults

Roughly 15 years of research has shown that the availability of alcohol-as measured by the number and types of alcohol outlets (bars, liquor stores) is directly related to interpersonal violence. A recent longitudinal study spanning 6 years is the first of its kind to use overnight hospital stays to reexamine the influence of alcohol outlets upon violent assaults.

Paul Gruenewald, senior research scientist at the Prevention Research Center indicated that, "We found that rates of violence increase in areas with growth in the numbers of bars and off-premise establishments that sell alcohol. These relationships are independent of changes in other aspects of communities related to violence such as poverty and vacant housing."

Alcoholism: Clinical & Experimental Research June, 2006; 30(6)

Anger Management in Maine

Paul Murphy LCSW, LADC, a former member of Outlook Associates of New England is now providing anger management treatment in Portland, ME. Paul was instrumental in developing the anger management model that is being used. For further details and contact information please go to the website www.outlookassociates.com.