

COUNSELING SERVICES FOR PREVENTING CONFLICT IN THE FAMILY

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Abstract

The paper examines counseling services for preventing conflict in the family. It defines conflict as a disagreement between two or more persons whereby one person perceives a threat to their needs, values, interest and concerns. It discussed the theory of conflict in the family or within families which starts with the basis that family members undergo conflicts and disharmony. When the family is dissected and sources of conflict and power identified, the family then can find better and more effective ways to communicate. Understanding can lead to a desire for change and motivate family members to participate to develop more positive relationships. Through the study of the counseling services for family dynamics, members may become more empathic and understanding of the underlying causes of their conflict. Three kinds of family conflict were identified and discussed; preventing problems in the family was explained alongside meaningful interaction and counseling services for family cohesion. Finally, the paper concluded that conflicts in families are inevitable. However, conflicts in families can be managed when they occur or prevented in resulting to partial or total collapse of homes and recommended the Provision of social, psychological, and other forms of support or opportunities for the family members of those engage in conflict.

Keywords: Counselling, Preventive, Conflict and Family

Introduction

People have different needs, values, interests and concerns. It is not a question whether that's right or wrong. It is a question of whether we are willing to verbalize them and how we do so. Lack of awareness of these differences can often result in a clash of goals. Sometimes the differences are not obvious and we don't even recognize they exist. Arguments result when we are convinced that our opinion is right and we focus on providing reasons to push our point of view. At the beginning of a rising conflict we often meet moments of argument. It can be healthy to argue and to discuss options because it clears the air between people, ensures everyone knows each other's position, and provides opportunities for change.

A conflict is a disagreement between two or more persons whereby one person perceives a threat to their needs, values, interests, concerns. Communication takes place on two levels, rational and emotional. The rational level consists of all facts, while the emotional level is comprised of our values, needs, interests, and concerns underlying the surface. Everyone interprets messages differently and sends messages differently; therefore the potentials for misunderstanding and confusion is high. Often arguments start because we haven't begun by stating our own interests or values. This is also often the case when we are asked to define the issues.

In order to prevent conflicts it is important that we understand our own responses and are aware of our values, interests, needs and concerns. If we are able to clearly communicate these needs we are likely to be able to prevent conflicts. It is also important to ensure that we address our issues with the person whom it concern. If we are able to use even just one of these strategies we will be better able to prevent conflict and resolve the issues with the person in question.

The theory of conflict in the family or within families starts with the basis that family members undergo conflicts and disharmony. When the family is dissected and sources of conflict and power identified, the family then can find better and more effective ways to communicate. Understanding can lead to a desire for change and motivate family members to participate to develop more positive relationships. Through the study of the counseling services for family dynamics, members may become more empathic and understanding of the underlying causes of their conflict.

According to Ray (2019) it is not possible to interact with other members of the family and in general human beings without eventual conflict. Growth takes place within the context of conflict. Change and the ensuing conflicts it brings are normal and necessary for human growth and development. The primary goal should be for family members to learn how to manage the conflict so that it doesn't escalate and alienate others and lead to estranged relationships.

Among the resources that present conflicts in families are time and money. Family members concerned with self-interest alone see a scarcity of both and present conflicting ideas of how each should be spent to make sure they receive their due. Love, affection, power to make decisions and knowledge also are commodities seen as scarce resources. Conflict negotiations highlight these needs and agree they exist.

Once the family understands the complexities of their motivations and intent, it can find resolutions. Families can learn to express their feelings in a safe environment where each member receives a certain amount of

uninterrupted time to talk. Ground rules may be set that discourage raised voices or physical acts. Discussion remains focused on each issue and does not turn to personal attacks. Each family member must believe that a solution is possible and then participate in finding it. Counseling services then can be used to prevent conflict in the family and to settle future conflicts.

Preventing problems in the Family

Due to the relationships established and the characteristics of the members that comprise a family, Life persona (2019) identified three (3) different types of conflict in the family:

1. Conflicts in the couple.
2. Conflicts between parents and children
3. Conflicts between siblings
4. Conflicts with the elderly

1. **Conflicts in the couple:** They are family conflict that appears because of the fact that each person (husband and wife) acts, thinks and feels differently. It is inevitable that couples appear situations of conflict, which if resolved correctly will help the personal growth and the partner. Most of these confrontations have their origin in misunderstandings that arise in a daily way. Some of the elements that cause these misunderstandings are: bad communication, feeling of loss of freedom, the Attempts to change the other and, lack of skills Problems.
2. **Conflicts between parents and children:** This type of family conflict in turn is divided into more specific ones depending on the vital stages.
 - i. **Conflicts in the childhood.** This stage is characterized fundamentally by the development of the person to his autonomy. It is about learning how to do things for yourself, how you are learning what your parents do or other significant people around you. It is in this process towards the autonomy of the child that the conflict usually arises, because parents do not know how to facilitate this autonomy, because the child has demands that do not match what parents consider appropriate, because the child advances in a direction that Parents do not want.
 - ii. **Conflicts in the adolescence.** This stage that is between the ages of 12 and 18 is characterized by the rapid changes experienced by the person and by an individual emotional instability. Also at this moment is when they set the main patterns of behavior and values that will rule your life. In addition, the goals of adolescents are

usually not in accordance with the goals of the parents. Often this stage is where more conflicts and difficulties of relationship arise and also in which the generational differences are more clearly manifested.

- iii. **Conflicts with Adult children.** This type of conflict usually arises from the different ways of deciding, organizing or living two people who are already adults and impose their rights to think and act in the way that each considers more appropriate.
- iv. **Conflicts between siblings:** The confrontations between siblings are very habitual and natural. They usually last a short time and end up solving for themselves, without the intervention of parents. This is very important because it serves as teaching to resolve conflicts in adult life with other people without the need for a third party to intervene.
- v. **Conflicts with the elderly:** This stage can be especially conflicting in the family environment because the person who enters the elderly lives a series of very significant changes. At the biological level, although the individual is well, some aspects deteriorate, the body grows older, they are slower in their movements, they lose vision and / or hearing, they suffer memory loss, they have less strength, etc. And at the social level a series of critical events such as retirement, the birth of the grandchildren, the loss of loved ones like the spouse or siblings, and so on. All these events can be lived very dramatically if the person does not face them with the right attitude and contribute to the emergence of conflicts with other family members.

Sababa and Domiva (2012) has observed that the survival of Nigeria as a nation depends largely on our degree of tolerance not only in economic, social and political stability ,but to a large extent, on the ability of every citizen to possess some measure of common understanding, attitudes, beliefs, skills and purposes. These attributes can be inculcated in youths very early in their educational development. Thus, the importance of guidance and counseling in this respect cannot be over-emphasized. Olorungbemi (2012) mentioned that the government should expedite action to legally enact law that backs up the counseling profession; this is because the trained counsellor can help to ensure effective national unity.

Passer and Smith (2007) noted that human behavior is environmentally controlled. The behaviorist explained that behavior are leant and can be unlearnt. Counselors can help to develop new skills, encourage peaceful co-

existence among various parties, improve communication and negotiation skills at die same time modify maladaptive behavior. According to Agbakwuru, and Opara (2013), the counselor can promote national integration and peaceful coexistence by identifying the problems militating against this process. They can set goals and select techniques that will be useful in each community. The counsellor, through the assistance of Counsellor Association of Nigeria (CASSON) can move from one community to another where there are problems engaging in enlightenment programmes on the need for national stability and integration.

Meaningful Interaction

There are a variety of stages within a relationship, where in the initial stages the mixture of emotional excitement brought the couples together, six or sixteen years later the love that has evolved is very different. The various stages that transpire within a relationship are quite normal, and are necessary for growth and development.

Every relationship has its teething periods, but the problem really isn't what happens but rather how clients handle and deal with those issues that matters. Conflict is to be expected in every relationship. Everyone has their own belief systems and personal habits which have been learnt from young and some of these may irritate the other person, no matter how much love there is. In healthy relationships, couples are able to settle their differences whether it be by compromising or acceptance. In some family, where there is no resolution, tension and frustration sets in, causing the couple to become detached within the relationship and leading to emotionally distant lives. This is when couples are faced with a relationship breakdown situation, and at this point a decision needs to be made to either make the relationship work, or to end it.

Communication is vital in any relationship. Understanding can be created and perhaps any hurt can be healed provided people can be kept in communication with each other. Therefore communication and problem solving are key areas to be considered when dealing with relationship counselling. The counsellor's aim here should be twofold:

- i. To help clients acquire skills and practice in communication and developing and maintaining affinity and rapport.
- ii. To help client acquire skills and practice in dealing with conflict situations that are “getting out of hand”.

Where there is a clear expression of feelings and opinions, even if this is done in anger, there can be a de-escalation of negativity (Gottman,1998).

Furthermore, active listening is not necessarily an element in conflict resolution. Not surprisingly, couples find it difficult to paraphrase, summarize and validate their spouse's feelings in the heat of an argument. Active listening and the associated skills may be of most use in preventing conflict and maintaining understanding and affinity; a more specialized approach may need to be taken with conflict itself. If a health expression of emotion can clear the air and lead to resolution of problems, then it would be of benefit to coach the couple, as needed, towards assertion and the open communication of feelings and needs. Then as they progress into their relationship they have at least been given them a reference point, something they can look back on. And they can always see the counsellor again for a refresher course in these skills.

Having interacted with the clients by now on a number of occasions the counsellor will be in a position to assess their need for some coaching in relation to their speaking, listening and conflict resolution skills. What sort of listeners are they? In interviews with them, a counsellor could ask one to paraphrase what the other has been saying, then repeat this exercise with their partner. Has one of them drifted off? Are they talking a lot to compensate for not being listened to when they were younger? In general is there a pattern in their communication, and is there anything that is either dysfunctional or that has the potential for future conflict?

What sort of arguments have been between them, how did they begin and if they were resolved, how was this done? Are they bringing anything with them of note in these areas from their family of origin? Lack of communication is a common problem and the one that probably needs most attention. One partner or sometimes both simply don't know how to put into words what they feel. They may have grown up in a family where personal feelings were never shared openly, and so they lack the confidence to be open with their partner for fear of looking silly or being rejected.

When problems arise in relationship, is often as a result of poor communication. In order to communicate desires and needs to a partner, clients need a healthy sense of their own identity. A successful relationship is dependent upon them being two individuals with a strong sense of self and clearly defined, healthy, personal boundaries. An appreciation of their own qualities enables them to see and value them in another and increases their capacity for intimacy and commitment.

Increasing their understanding of who they are and how they have developed as well as learning practical skills in communication and problem solving, can lead to more satisfying and harmonious relationships, and to personal fulfillment.

Counselling Services for Family Cohesion

Family cohesion is the level of support and commitment family members have towards one another Annunziata, Hogue, Faw, & Liddle in Borden (2014). This component is often reflected in supportive family involvement, family bonding, and family climate. Current research supports the importance of family cohesion in couples, parent-child couples, and sibling relationships.

i. Couple.

A key component of intimate relationships is intimacy, or the level of connection and closeness partners feel towards each other. Relational intimacy has numerous domains, such as feeling connected via spiritual activities, physical/sexual intimacy, co-parenting, and shared leisure activities. Couples that have a strong positive relationship support one another, regularly express appreciation, communicate openly, have high levels of trust, know they can depend upon each other, and continually work at enhancing the closeness in the relationship (Asoodeh, Khalili, Daneshpour & Lavasani, 2010). The level of cohesion fluctuates across time and situation; committed couples strive to stay connected and share in life's joys and challenges as a team (Johnson & Greenman, 2006).

ii. Parent-Child.

A strong bond between the parent and child is important for family cohesiveness. Children are well-served when they feel a strong bond with the adults most responsible for their physical and psychological development (Lewis, Jones, & Barrett, 2008). The bond between parent and child starts early and for this reason research on infants and newborns has proliferated. Journals such as the *Journal for Neonatal Nursing* and *Neonatology* are just some of the scientific publications available. DeFrain and Asay (2007) note that family bonding manifests differently across cultural contexts. Thus, professionals who work with and on behalf of families should note how cultural factors influence the family's interactions.

iii. Siblings.

Sibling relationships can be complex, composed of multiple coupleic and triadic relationships when present in larger families. Regardless of family size, sibling relationships function according to a different set of rules and power dynamics than can be observed in other coupleic relationships within the family (Kozłowska & Hanney, 2011). For example, a sibling couple may have a more equal power dynamic within the family than the parent-child couple. Brody (2004) found that

the extent of conflict between siblings is affected by the amount of family cohesion and the parent-child relationship. Families exhibiting a strong parent-child bond tend to experience less sibling conflict among the children. This parent-child bond can impact how siblings respond to differential treatment by their parents. Specifically, parents may treat siblings differently, and siblings often observe and feel the effects of such differential treatment. Brody (2004) noted that children who experienced a sufficient amount of family cohesion and had a positive relationship with their parent tended to rationalize the differential treatment. They deemed the differential treatment necessary due to age, personality, or special needs. In this way, children did not cause conflict with each other and continued to have strong sibling bonds. However, when a child rationalized the preferential treatment of a sibling due to a problem in the parent-child relationship, it can cause conflict between siblings. This, sibling cohesion appears to be greater when they are able to see a logical reason for preferential or differential treatment received from parents. Families that have strong cohesion at other levels (e.g., parent-child) thus appear to foster bonds between siblings. Understanding the emotional connections and power dynamics between siblings, as well as the complex interactions with other family relationships, is crucial to improving our understanding of family functioning and building strong families.

Conclusion

From the study, it was obvious that conflicts in families are inevitable. However, conflicts in families can be managed when they occur or prevented in resulting to partial or total collapse of homes. This will depend largely on the family mutual understanding and handling. In order to foster family stability family should learn to be fair, objective and realistic when dealing with their members.

Recommendations

To promote counseling services for preventing conflict in the family, the following measures were recommended:

- i. Government through its stakeholders should organize school and community events to raise parent and family awareness of conflict in the family. A dialogue approach to engaging parents may be helpful in building comfort with these issues.
- ii. Develop an easy-to-use guide and other materials for parents to use as they engage their children in conversations about conflict in the family.

- iii. Focus training for parents and students on how to adopt techniques and skills (such as listening, communicating, empathizing) to prevent, conflict in the family.
- iv. Provide social, psychological, and other forms of support or opportunities for the family members of those engage in conflict.

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