



The Mulberry Report

Solutions For Life

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When Someone You Love Hurts

By Ralph Nichols, LCSW

Those of us in the mental health field see situations daily in which a person is feeling frustrated (sometimes even desperate) trying to get help for a friend, a parent, a spouse, or a son or daughter who is hurting emotionally. The signs and symptoms may be increasingly evident everyday by way of the person becoming angry, depressed, having difficulty sleeping, not wanting to go to school or work and even drinking.

For those seeking help, the situation might be the parents of a college student who is not adjusting well to being away from home and acknowledges feeling overwhelmed with studies; not adjusting to a roommate; wanting to come home; and, maybe even feeling depressed. A spouse may be concerned about the stress her husband is under working 50-60 hours weekly; or, a person may have a best friend that doesn't seem to be having fun anymore and is disconnecting from friendships. This could also be parents of a child who is becoming increasingly defiant, argumentative and oppositional in response to any attempt to apply some structure, and are desperate to get help.

The circumstances can run the gamut of difficulties ranging from a person with out-of-control addiction to someone with paranoid hallucinations convinced that everyone is out to personally attack him. Convincing the alcohol abuser to stop drinking and at least try to talk to someone can sometimes be almost impossible to accomplish. Denial is still the operative term with many individuals. The person with the developing paranoid hallucinations trusts no one and is immediately suspicious of any attempt by family or friends to seek help. A defiant teenager is not about to agree to see a counselor let alone go to a mental health clinic. After all, he's not agreeing to any rules at home much less agree to talk to someone. The person who lost a job and their source of income becomes depressed but may be too embarrassed to seek help.

For those of us with a friend or loved one with any of the difficulties noted above it can be exasperating and emotionally draining underscored by worry and the strong need to seek help. The question is, "Where do I go to see about help?" Dr. Charles Gardner, a psychiatrist, noted, "These situations are the mental illness counterparts of the heart attack, the diabetic coma, the car accident." It's simple; you call an ambulance to get the person to an emergency room for treatment. But for mental health issues, options for help can be more difficult to access. This is especially true if the loved one sees no problem or is unwilling to accept offers of help.

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“Patience and perseverance have a magical effect before which difficulties disappear and obstacles vanish.”

- John Quincy Adams

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Critical to getting the help needed is making contact with a mental health professional who has the capacity to be sensitive to the frustrations experienced by those persons trying to get help for a loved one who is breaking down. The professional must also know how to navigate through the maze of services that are available. These services can be as simple as beginning immediate outpatient treatment or as serious as moving in the direction of hospitalization. The action is a matter of being able to “get the patient’s attention.” This is not always easy to accomplish. The process may take friends, family, and even in more serious cases, specially trained law enforcement officers who understand the seriousness of mental health issues. Law enforcement officers have the means to get the help that is needed by way of getting the individual to an emergency room for an assessment by a mental health therapist.

In less serious situations, the therapist with the ability to “connect” with a troubled individual can do wonders to move that person from a state of despair and hopelessness to a state of some sense of hope and reassurance. This is a process that is never easy and sometimes not always successful. But, with most successful outcomes, regardless of the nature of the emotional crisis, the strength behind the success was the persistence and patience of a friend, a spouse, a parent, a police officer, a teacher, a minister, a family physician, a school counselor, even an employer.

In the tri-state area there are several resources available including community mental health centers, hospital emergency rooms, family physicians, and school counselors. Some of these resources have 24 hour availability for phone contacts. We are all ready to help.

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