

PSYCHOTHERAPY:

Can it help you or your loved ones?

By Karen K. Kimball

“I just feel unhappy a lot of the time, but I don't know why.”

“My marriage is dead. I want out!”

“My kid is out-of-control and causes big fights in the family.”

Even though these are common and universal complaints, they can be overwhelming. We often feel we should “tough it out” or solve our problems by ourselves. However, psychotherapy can be very effective in helping us and our families resolve our dilemmas more easily.

When is it the right time to seek therapy? How do we know if we truly need professional help? Aren't friends just as helpful, and cheaper?

Psychotherapy can help us deal with personal problems, especially when we need an objective viewpoint and strategies for coping, which may be hard for our friends or

family to give us. Finding the appropriate type of therapy is essential. We can choose from individual, couples, family, drug and alcohol, group therapy or hypnotherapy. For example, individual therapy is indicated when we have a problem within ourselves, such as when we feel “blah,” anxious, sad or lost, or when we need to change careers, change partners, or grieve a major loss (or all of these).

On the other hand, if we are stuck in a dead-end marriage but do not want a divorce (especially if we have children), then couples therapy is advised. Problems in our families, such as repetitive conflict, can probably diminish with family therapy. Alcohol or drug abuse usually requires specially-trained therapists.

Psychotherapy today is used not only to treat more serious mental illnesses, but also for personal growth and “existential” issues

(ie, finding meaning and purpose in life). In fact, a new movement in the field of psychology called “Positive Psychology” focuses on finding happiness and enjoyment in our lives even when we have serious problems. It's not just for “cleaning up the messes.”

What if it isn't you but a friend or family member who needs psychotherapy? How do you bring up this subject, which is potentially embarrassing or awkward? It is a good idea to gauge how open the person is to talking about therapy or personal problems. You might try the classic question: “Have you thought about talking to someone?” Or you can be more direct. For example, when one of my current clients observed her colleague's sad demeanor, she assertively suggested that her colleague might benefit from talking to a therapist and to give me a call. Her colleague was grateful my client took the risk to reach out and encourage her to get help.

Direct referrals for therapy also are made by other professionals such as family physicians, clergy or attorneys. Because they are in a position of authority and are credible resources, they may better be able to encourage someone to seek therapy when they are resistant to hearing it from you. As a therapist, I often hear from people who say their physician urged them to call me to see if I can help them deal with specific problems such as weight control, a difficult marriage, or depression and anxiety. Physicians often



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refer patients who are on medications because therapy plus medication usually insures the best outcome.

The process of deciding to seek therapy and finding a compatible and competent therapist can seem daunting. However, it is well worth the effort, because the results can make you happier, more satisfied with your significant relationships, and help strengthen your family.



This is the first in a two-part series. Next month's article will talk about how to find the right therapist. Dr. Karen Kimball, PhD, has practiced as a licensed psychologist in Madison for 24 years doing individual and couples therapy and hypnosis. She can be reached at 663-5435.

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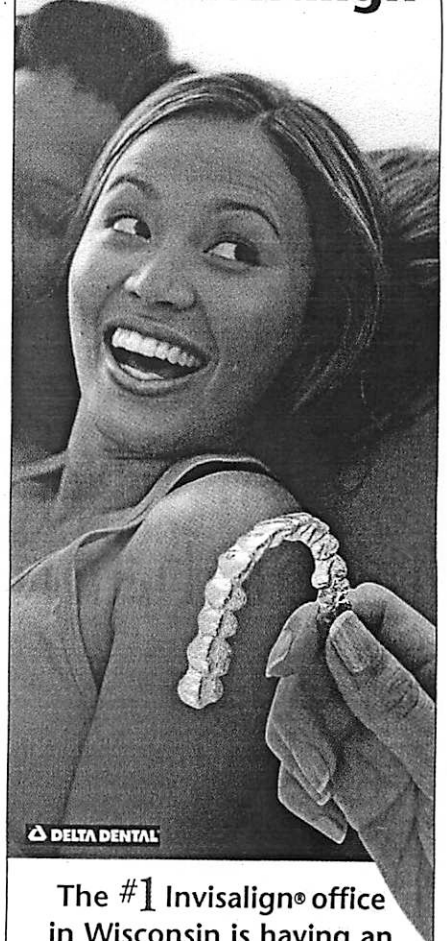
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