

Seeking help for the first time

Arguably, the modern day citizens are more conscious about health and are ready to consult a doctor anytime a problem arises. However, the scene is entirely different in the case of mental health. Even though we are far from the days of lobotomising and isolating anyone we suspected of having gone 'insane' (which, unfortunately, often included thinkers and romantics), the stigmas related to seeking help for a troubled mind are still persistent in us.

When life seems a little overwhelming to cope with, we often don't consider going to a counsellor or psychotherapist. As the social beings that we are, we stay forever in denial that we might need any kind of help due to the worry that our peers, society and even the counsellor will judge us. However, going to a counsellor does not entail that you are unable to fit in or carry on with your life. It just shows that you care about your physical and mental well-being, you are brave enough to confront your fears and that you are putting in an effort to become more emotionally intelligent. Here, we have discussed a few issues related to seeking help from a counsellor to get you or someone you know started on the way of well-being.

WHEN TO GO TO A COUNSELLOR:

As opposed to the popular belief, you don't have to go to a counsellor only after a nervous breakdown or when on the verge of one. Whenever things seem a little bit off, you feel like there is a sadness or anxiety that won't go away, your general attitude towards everyday situations seem changed, or you are just agitated for no apparent reason for a prolonged period, talking to a professional

will help you identify the problem and a solution. There are usually signs of a troubled mind in the everyday things that we do. Look for these signs in yourself and your loved ones so that you can solve a problem before it becomes unmanageable.

1. There are intense feelings of sadness, anger or anxiety. Even though all of these are common in any intelligent being, getting blindingly angry at the slightest issue or feeling extremely anxious about things as simple as ordering a pizza means that the problem lies elsewhere.

2. You have had a traumatic experience that feels hard to let go. Be that the pain of losing a dear one, losing a job or even of witnessing something traumatising (which soldiers returning from war frequently experience), grief sometimes shakes us to the core. If such grief starts to stop you from moving on with your life, do talk to someone who is trained to help you handle such situations.

3. The eating and sleeping patterns are disrupted or different from what it used to be. Both sleeping and eating a lot more or a lot less may be indicating that your mind may be a bit troubled.

4. Your friends notice something off about you. If your friends are saying that you are acting different and they are worried about you, consider looking deep into yourself and see whether there is something that keeps bothering you.

5. You have frequent complaints of headaches, neck strains or other such problems that seem to have no basis. This may be your body's way of telling you to reduce the stress or emotional distress. Do listen to that calling because our bodies are almost never wrong with these sorts of things.

6. Your relationships are strained. If you are having problems coping with the people around you and especially with your significant other, consider getting help as an individual or as a couple.

HOW TO GO TO A COUNSELLOR:

Realising that you will be benefitted from a counselling session takes you a few steps further in the process of healing. However, the scenario may be a lot difficult when someone you know may need help and you find it difficult to tell them. Find the right moment to talk to them about it (a.k.a. not when they are on a fit of rage) and show them that you are truly concerned about them. Try not to get offensive or force them into counselling because that will further hinder them from getting any benefit out of it.

We usually go to any professional based on the reviews from our peers and people who have been through the same situations. You can easily do that in case of choosing a counsellor as well. The initial session would be mostly about having an

idea of your problem and deciding whether you need short-term counselling or long term therapy so try not to worry about that.

WHAT TO EXPECT ON YOUR FIRST SESSION:

Expect open ended questions on the issue that took you there or that might be bothering you. We have an image drawn in our mind from movies that people have a heart to heart crying session on the first day of counselling and start feeling better right afterwards. In reality, the first session ends up to be more about looking at the apparent problem through having a conversation. Look at the counsellor as a person who is better at listening than most other people and just wants to have a free talk with you. However, you might want to talk about something in particular. In that case, write those thoughts down beforehand.

Do not worry about being shy or too outspoken because the counsellor is trained to suit the session to your individual need. Anything you say will be kept confidential (unless it may cause harm to you or the others). So, just go with an open mind and the will to cooperate. There is a high chance that afterwards you will be able to handle the problems better and lead a healthier and happier life.

By Afsin Ahmed

Bonding with in-laws

Marriage is the union of two souls, but in our culture, it is the coming together of two families too. While it is very essential to have compatibility between the partners, it is also mandatory that they share respect and responsibilities towards their in-laws. But often we see that the responsibilities are imposed on the wife only, who not only has to compromise at every step after leaving her father's house, but also has to take the initiative to make every relationship successful. When the pressure befalls her, she can only expect the husband to be understanding and compassionate because only the better half can become the bridge that connects you to your in-laws, and supports you to fight every battle with peace. But what happens when there is no bridge?

Due to generation gap, priorities have changed and so has the ways of doing things. Things are not done the way they used to be and choices vary to a great extent. Having in-laws are mostly enjoyed by the children who are pampered and given the share of affection and memories of their grandparents, but there are drawbacks too.

When a girl is married she dreams of doing things her way, from the interior décor to the lifestyle, she hopes to give a personal touch to every corner of the house. But to make a bridge between the choices of the generations is what seems to be riotous, and the elders often seem to express their inconvenience.

They have memories attached to every piece of furniture, and it is not easy to let go at this age, sometimes not even their son.

Apart from simple matters like that, there are times they would want to decide which career should suit you better to even when you should take your baby. Most of the women have also experienced their mother-in-laws' witheringly critical remarks on how the daughter-in-law is failing to bring up her child properly. After getting bitter criticisms there comes a point when one tends to lose interest to impress or compromise. And that is when the real rifts begin.

In such cases, the in-laws should be more compassionate towards the new member of the family. The new couple needs space and time together. Let them go out and enjoy their life, and suggest options to help them, but do not impose decisions on them. It is important to understand that the new generation also needs to learn, even at the expense of making mistakes.

In-laws are a second pair of parents you get blessed with, and no matter what, they have made your soulmate who he is. Give them priority so they do not feel insecure about their importance. Ask them for help,

include them in daily activities and ask for suggestions. Ask them what they used to do to bring their children up. If you have a better technique, introduce your idea to them. The guessing game only creates distance and misunderstanding, and so things have to be clearly explained, because when we were young our parents had to explain everything to us in detail for us to know. If you disagree with your in-laws then be firm and expressive about your likes and preferences so they just don't assume that you don't know. Be warm enough to melt them.

If you live separately and your in-laws give you a frequent or irregular visit, then take good care of them. Occasionally gift them something you think they would like, and talk to them about topics that would render closeness.

There will always be rifts in every relationship- parents, siblings, children, husband and in-laws. It has to be sorted out and an act of maturity from both can bring forth peace. In the end, you have to do it, you have to get things done, and you have to fix it all, so do it with a smile.

By Sonya Soheli