

## ~ Broken Families ~

**Before, during, or after a child has left home these thoughts and approaches may help you lessen tensions and improve your communications; they are no substitute for proper counseling.**

Families in trouble are always messy and exaggerated with high emotions. To improve them may require more emotional maturity than you have been demonstrating in the past, so you will need to be humble and at your best to get the result that will be best for all parties.

This topic is intended to make sure that both parents and kids hear and understand each other and to open minds to new perspectives, approaches and appreciation for each other. The attitudes and postures that follow will help you create the most neutral environment possible.

Keep everything positive, lead with example, celebrate your progress and the behaviors of you and your kids that aren't so good will cure them self.

When a loved one is on the verge of leaving or has already left home, emotions have usually overwhelmed the reasoning powers of both sides. A child could be leaving because of what appears to be his hatred for his parents when his misbehavior comes from not feeling loved. The parents could bear down on the kid because his misbehavior never stops and they feel unloved. The problem can't be solved without knowing the underlying causes.

It may be good to have every mature member of the family read this and send a copy to the person who has left. It implies that you don't think that you have all the answers, your child does not have all the blame, and that the relationship is so valuable to you that you are going to do your best to fix it and your communication style.

A child's departure is not always a reflection on the parents' care. A certain percentage of all children will be dysfunctional, irrational, difficult or unable to make good decisions. Your child could have a Bubble (Topic F-7) in some aspect of his life, or in his entire explanation-making process. He could be scared to death, feeling unloved, unworthy, ashamed, have sexuality issues or think he is letting you down. He could have a bipolar disorder, behavioral disorder or learning disabilities that require the proper diagnosis to be treated effectively.

Your approval may be more important to your child than anything; but because he is embarrassed to ask for it or doesn't know how to get through to you, he could be living in frustration. He may act mad and think he's mad, but actually he's sad because he feels unloved. He is probably inept, naive, confused about what is owed him or doesn't know how to explain or deal with his emotions.

How you can help: work on making him feel good about himself and have him checked out for any medical or psychological problems that may be causing his difficulties.

If you prevent your child from doing something he wants to do—especially in front of his peers—it embarrasses him. The easiest way for him to show his resentment is to stonewall you and make you the enemy. Once he chooses that course of action, it will be hard for him to stop.

Some children have to leave home to find themselves, to save themselves from you, the neighborhood influences, emotional trauma or problems they have caused or couldn't avoid. Be patient. Many grow up or return home better for their experiences.

**You can be a fan for the future of your child without approving how he is living at the moment.**

**When my child is threatening to leave, how should I think and be?**

- Stop dealing in what's gone before, and choose your words as if they could be the last words your child will ever hear from you.
- Comments suggesting that your child will fail, that he is bad, that you don't want him in your life or that he is "out of the will" are counter-productive, self-indulgent and add to the evidence the child needed to support his decision to leave.
- For a time, everything about you will be overridden by some combination of teen and young adult issues: peers, hormones, stupidity, anger, resentment, bitterness, gangs, drugs, young love, hatred for your rules and perceived or real lack of love and attention.
- It is always hard to know what the pressures and torments were that caused your child to leave home. He could have learning disabilities, medical issues or insecurities.
- Forget about selling your child on how you want him to be. Even though a child is acting hostile on a series of unrelated issues, his underlying problem could be that he doesn't feel loved or lovable. His behavior could be his way of punishing you. To change your child's perception of you, you will have to change.
- To improve your skills at dealing with someone who is leaving, read and understand the Topics in this book about Valuing Yourself (B), Hidden Abilities (C), Social Skills (E) and Relationships (F).
- Being weepy, needy, and angry, falling apart, or wanting to fix, save, lecture, caution, or say, "I told you so" will not build closeness.
- The explanations you have already given your child (that he can believe in) will be what he has to return to, and your parting words

will set the tone for his return.

- Start setting the stage for him or her to return comfortably without having to take abuse or "eat crow."

### **Ideas for What to Say**

1. "We would prefer you were better prepared for life."
2. "Leaving will expose you to risks beyond any you have experienced."
3. "We know you are capable, and you will become good at making decisions, finding good friends and lead a good life."
4. Describe the life you want him to have without dealing with anything that has been causing the strife.
5. "Aside from drugs and risky behavior that can kill you, the greatest damage you can cause is to make babies that neither you nor the other parent can care for. Abortions make many people sad for their entire lives."
6. "Our parenting doesn't seem to be what you needed; we will be looking for ways to improve, and we welcome your input on the subject. We hope you find what you need."
7. "We will be rooting for you in this adventure. Please keep in touch. We love you, and will help you in any way we can. The balance is between accommodation and "tough love". He will miss the lessons to be learned if you are too helpful.
8. "You are not burning this bridge; you can always come home."
9. For daughters: "The risks for girls are far greater than those for guys. A single mistake can cost you your youth and confine you while you are raising your child by yourself."

### **Begin Preparations for your Child's Return**

- Show interest in helping your child wherever he is. Be careful not to diminish his plans or experiences.
- Chasing him and begging him to return can drive him farther away.
- Turn this negative into a positive by improving the family dynamics so much so that your child is drawn back; let him know he helped make it happen. Your other kids may be able to reach your runaway in ways that you can't, but it is unfair to rely on them to be your go-between.
- Your new approach will have to be genuine, open, objective, less parental, less judgmental, better at listening and more proactive.
- Admit your mistakes readily (and maybe he'll admit his), but don't expect him to come around right away.

- When your child explains his thinking, listen and show him that you hear what he's saying. If you disagree with his ideas, consider responding to them later. It will show that you have given them considerable thought—and it gives you more time to prepare.
- After your child comes home and you celebrate his return, it will be time to discuss your new arrangement. Unless your child has emotional or developmental problems that will require long-term solutions, let him know—in a friendly tone—that he has to be cooperative and move deliberately in a constructive direction if he wants to stay.
- Caution: If your child has a substance abuse problem, don't leave your wallet or car keys where he can find them—you might enable him to bolt and "puke" (that's slang for "returning to your habit").
- As your adult child ages, he or she may begin to feel useless and those feelings can become debilitating. Make it your purpose to help him find his purpose. Expose him to possibilities without any expectations.
- A child's long-term misbehavior could train him for his purpose in life. Example: a child who has spent a lot of time in prison can get the highest return on his experience by helping others in prison or on parole. His fulfillment in life might come from helping others, which he could not have done without those negative early experiences.

Often the only relief a parent can get from the trauma and sadness of a child who has left is the saying, "Let go and let God."

The world is good at teaching people how to learn from their mistakes. Over time, children tend to adopt the values they were raised with, so keep your hope up and the welcome mat out.

### **How to Act Around the Person Who Left**

Don't try to right any wrongs, unload, fix or inquire; just listen and be a fan. Let him choose how much he will reveal, and be happy with whatever you get. Let your issues go. No matter what you think he owes you or what you'd like to get off your chest—including how much you have been hurt—forget it. You and he will be better off starting with a clean slate.

If the breach in your relationship was caused by a misunderstanding—even if you are positive you can explain your side of the issue and clear it up—it may be better for you to wait for him to open the subject. To a person who is touchy on a subject, your logic will seem more like you trying to deny your part of the problem. Listen intently for a long time before you try to explain or defend yourself. If the conversation goes well, you may never have to.

### **Ideas for Dealing**

## with Children You Rarely See

Communicate lightly: don't caution, scold, plead, or be mushy or sad. No more than twice a month, send a postcard with no more than two short sentences that are warm, familiar and neutral. Don't comment on the status of your separation; don't ask probing questions about his or her life; don't ask—or expect—him to respond. Use statements like: "We are thinking about you," or "You are loved," or just a happy face :o). Buy a subscription to a magazine about his/her primary interest, or subjects that glorify wholesome pursuits like photography, adventure, sports, vacations or *Popular Science* or *National Geographic Adventure*. If you send a compact point-and-shoot camera and note that it is "to record your adventure," it signals your love and suggests you are not going to be judgmental or parental upon his return.

If you have no way to contact your child, keep a journal and every time you think of him, write down your thoughts and the date. You could also send letters or cards to him in care of yourself at your home address; leave them unopened, so the dates you wrote will show on the postmarks. On these or your journals, write as often as you want and everything you feel that is positive. When you finally get to see your child, give him the journal or stack of letters. They are concrete proof that you thought about him often. This is particularly important if your ex-wife is hiding your kids from you, won't forward your cards to them, claims that you have had no interest in them, or is poisoning them against you.

## Reuniting

If you respond to a returning family member the way you did before he left, you'll never bridge the gap. Work on your own shortcomings and relationship skills so you can change the tone and direction of your communications whether he comes back for good or just touches base from time to time.

### Thoughts about Returning to Your Home or Reopening Communications

Even if your bad behavior was the reason for the separation, returning home or reopening communications can be the greatest gift you can give a parent or family member. With a few of the right words, you can change the way a person feels about the effort they put into you as a child.

- Go home if you need help. A medical condition that can only be managed with a doctor's care could have been the cause of your problems.
- Let your parents know that you appreciate all of their efforts and concern and that you are changing for the good. Try to give them some indication of how you plan to live your life productively and give them periodic updates.

- Surprise them by asking for their input or help.
- Assume that you are responsible for your own problems and you have to fix your own mistakes. But if your departure was due to your parents' shortcomings, they will probably have problems in other parts of their personal lives as well. They may need your help more than you need theirs, and you may be the only person who can help them. Lead them with your example and be patient. Endure their shortcomings while they mend, but if they remain unhealthy, help them from a distance.
- Being resentful, bitter or ashamed is not productive. Imagine the future you want and head there in a hurry.

### **Last Thoughts**

Kids, you may have to leave to escape unwarranted criticism or an environment that is damaging you. Try not to go until you are absolutely proud of your motivation, your plan for survival and your decision to leave.

It is common for everyone, especially young people, to read the motivation of others completely backward then use all their strength to perpetuate that misread. Don't think of leaving until you consider the probability that you could be 100 percent wrong and stick with that analysis for a long time.

If you have a good Plan for life explain it to your parents and tell them how you are working on it. Ask them for their help and to value your effort. If you don't have a plan now, you won't have a plan for being on the street.

There are people who prey on runaways who could make your life so ugly that your recollections of home will seem like a picnic.

Your family was doing what they were doing because you were doing what you were doing. (Dr. Phil).

Even if it turns out that you were almost entirely to blame, make the most of what you are doing.

Concentrate on learning and getting strong. Your past will lose power over you faster if you can shed your anger or bitterness quickly.

It may be easier to build a family relationship with others than to rebuild a relationship with your own family.

You may have been put on earth to save your family at some point in your life. They are as much your responsibility as you are theirs.

Any family member could die at any time. If you don't mend your fences before they do, you could have that regret for life. Remain open and friendly toward your family. Keep in touch. Your well being is your

family's biggest concern.

When you share this Topic with your kids you are showing them that you recognize that you have fault, and you are open to change.

What can I change about myself to improve my communications with my child?

If my child feels unloved in spite of everything I have done for him maybe I have to change the way I show it.

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