

## Family Mental Health

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We now live in the time we need to pay close attention to the mental health of our family. When one of our family members suffer, often the whole family suffers together. Just as an early diagnosis of illness can cure many diseases, the timing of diagnosis is important. Although there are cases of diseases with rapid progression, there are also many diseases that develop quite gradually that we cannot detect them until visible symptoms appear suddenly. In such case, it sometimes becomes too late to treat. Likewise, the state of our mental health may only be detected when it becomes too late. Sometimes, our psychological illness reaches a chronic level that we may have to live with it for the rest of our lives. In that case, even professional counsellors can only rely on the help of medical treatments and family members.

Although there are many different lifestyles, I cannot help myself wonder: How wonderful would it be to lead a physically, mentally and socially healthy life while feeling happy and fulfilled and maintain one's own uniqueness, values, and positive prospect for life? How do we live? What would make our family healthy and happy? Why do people immigrate to Canada? Wouldn't it be nice to adapt and follow healthy trends of today? Could we build a lasting healthy legacy for the third, fourth, or even fifth generations? How can we envision and build a healthy and happy immigrant family?

Yet in our present moment we cannot help but notice that many immigrant families suffer from anger and anxiety that take away happiness. We all have a moment of crisis. How we overcome our crisis may have a great impact not only on our psychological health but also on our life journey. In the lyrics of the song, 'When Sorrow Pass', sung by Lee Mun-Sae, there is a phrase: "How far have I come; I look back; The memories afar whisper back to my heart." Like the lyrics, families live on memories and when we get older, we live by looking back at the life journey we made. So, families must not disengage from growth through understanding others and through self-discovery.

Family psychological health does not just happen. Because two very different people build new stronghold based in the name of love. In that household, anything can be hidden since only two people know the truth. Also, the household must be renovated when children enter the space. However, there are many cases, even when the household is damaged, people wish to maintain status quo, rather than repair, renew, re-build, or renovate it.

Sometimes, familial tragedy suddenly finds us in the most unfortunate time due to our obsession for status and indifference to changes in our lives. Such obsession and unrealistic expectations on other family members may not only develop into violence but also hinder and/or pause growth. On one hand, such situation may trap oneself in one's own stronghold by isolating oneself from the network of other people, and on the other hand, it may signal the beginning of a tragedy when selfishness and disinterest dominate one's life.

Here I would like to emphasize the importance of people network because I am sure that no one can be happy by bringing unhappiness in someone else's life. In case of a student, high performance in school work may be a condition for happiness, but in my opinion emotional stability is more important. If such high-performing student does not do

well in a relationship, s/he would often be unhappy. Therefore, building a network of support and solidarity is an essential condition. In order to lead a healthy happy life, we need to build a network of sharing. Perhaps, we can be happy by pursuing to be a hungry Socrates rather than a well-fed swine, and by pursuing psychological health and values.

If we can live with others by sharing our emotions, conversations about our inner thoughts and desires, we may be able to build a network of solidarity and expand happiness with others. I wish that people may be able to understand and experience many different emotions behind our daily expressions, even if it means to explore a negative one such as anger. Anger may be viewed as evil but it can also reveal our inner emotions when paired with repressed emotions. If such emotions can be constructively delivered and shared, the Korean relational culture may become more beautiful. In order to achieve this, it is important to establish a value system and express emotions. When a family can co-own emotions of each member through unobstructed and yet positive mode of expression, it not only prevents communication disruption, but also lessen the psychological pain.

A primary communication disruption may be attributed to loneliness. Loneliness may not be attributed to the absence of people nearby, but it is more relevant to think of it as having close people to communicate one's emotions and thoughts. In other words, it is the loss of communication. Loss of communication can mean loss of emotional connection. When a married person is still lonely and unhappy, one-sided attempts for communication often lead to betrayal and violence.

In order to pay more attention on the psychological health of families, it would be good to have a regular checkup by looking into personality, habits, and family values. Through education and training, or through professional counsellor, it would be recommended to look into one's own psychological health. I also recommend to reduce one's own stereotypical perception on mental diseases. For example, mental health professionals look at depression as catching a cold for the contemporary people. Yet, when people visit a psychiatry or a counselling session, they may be unfairly viewed as having a big problem. This is a social stereotype. People become worried that such visits may leave a mental health record that may scar them for life.

One may say that 'when you are diagnosis with a mental illness, you would always have problems' or 'people with mental issues would be more likely to be dangerous' or 'it would be uncomfortable to have a conversation with people with metal illness.' These are all negative stereotypes which have reduced over the years, but they remain as large hurdles to overcome.

In our day and age, families always face hard issues and obstacles such as isolation, relational cut-off, or immobilization that hinder them from growing. Also they face psychological issues such as depression, obsession, insomnia, and panic disorder which are commonly found among many people. Allow me to suggest to you, my readers, that we let these issues be spoken and communicated to a professional counsellor, rather than growing the issues. It may provide us with a relief and important channel to today's stressful life we may lead.