

COMMUNITY

Family Counseling Service: Making Emotional Connections

BY LARRY DEAVERS

You just need to grow up!" "You shouldn't be so sensitive." "Just get over it!" Most of us have heard comments like these at some time in our lives. Unfortunately, these are the responses we often hear from those closest to us when we try to express our emotional needs. Many times, these are defensive responses we may hear after we have tried to explain to someone that they have said or done something that has been emotionally hurtful to us.

For many, it is easy to assume that if there is not something physically wrong, everything is just fine. And if we complain about our emotional needs not being met, we are just whining, immature, or selfish. In our fast-paced culture, we have largely lost our ability to recognize the emotional needs of others, even those closest to us.

Needs for affirmation, respect, understanding, compassion, and support may seem like luxuries, but these are basic human needs that are ingrained in us as part of our nature.

One reason for denying the emotional needs of others is that recognizing and validating these needs takes a great deal more sacrifice and energy than just focusing on concrete issues. Developing true understanding of the people around us requires that we listen, empathize and value the uniqueness of the other person. It means that we listen with the sincere intention of learning something tremendously important about someone we truly care about.

Denying these needs is really a way to avoid facing something about the other person that makes us uncomfortable. As long as we can deny the feelings of others, labeling them as weak, needy,



and demanding, we can dismiss their emotional needs, while blaming them for having those needs. This denial may also be a response to the discomfort we feel when confronted with the emotions of another person.

If the relationships we have shared, particularly as children, were intolerant of emotions or left hurtful experiences for us, then sharing another person's emotions can bring up reminders of our own painful past. Developing healthy relationships requires that we overcome our barriers to acknowledge the needs of those around us. Here are some ideas on how to begin meeting these needs:

Listen when the other person is speaking and try to remember details that are important to them.

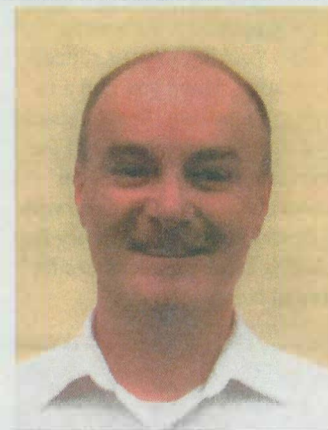
- Help them identify how they are feeling, but avoid telling them how they should feel.

- Give them the freedom to make their own decisions (and mistakes).

- Only offer advice when the other person asks for it.

- Share some of your own insight and experience, but don't allow that to become the focus of your comments. (Ask yourself, "Am I sharing this for my own benefit, or is it going to help the other person?")

Being patient while another person shares their feelings may be uncomfortable, but when you invest the time, energy, and attention into truly hearing and genuinely understanding someone



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