10 TIPS ON HOW TO CONTROL TENSION IN THE FAMILY

NOBODY WANTS TO OPEN THE DOOR WHEN STRESS IS KNOCKING ON THE OTHER SIDE. WE FEEL DEFEATED WHEN IT CREATIVELY FINDS ITS WAY INTO OUR FAMILY AND TRIES TO BECOME AN ADDITIONAL MEMBER.

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Research in 2009 by educational consultants, Deborah J. Thomas and Pamela A. Havice, highlighted that past discussions on stress have focused on a single person. When considering family stress, the focus needs to be on how stress impacts the family as a whole. They defined family stress as an imbalance between the demands of the family and the ability to cope with those demands.

These demands are also known as stressors—a life event or transition that happens in the family. Stress is the feeling. How a family copes with stressors impacts the level of stress in the family. Ineffective ways of coping can bring about a myriad of feelings and worst of all—disconnection.

Here are 10 small yet effective ways your family can use to cope with stressors and bid farewell to stress:

1. Establish Self-Care First

If the word “self-care” is not in your family dictionary, please add it now. Self-care is the simple act of attending to your own needs. Taking care of one’s self first can impact the family system tremendously as it gives permission to the other to take care of his or her own self. This applies especially for working parents.

2. Set Healthy Boundaries

There are many subsystems within the family system. It is the responsibility of the adults in the family to set boundaries between the couple, parent and sibling subsystems. Dragging your children into adult issues is not only harmful to your children’s emotional well-being but to the family system as a whole. Physically separating yourself from your children to resolve adult issues or seeking professional help is highly recommended to set healthy boundaries and reduce family stress.

3. Have an Open Family System

There is a flow of ideas in open family systems and feedback is exchanged so that members can learn and grow. In closed family systems, no new ideas are allowed and differences of opinions are shut down. If there is a member in your family that needs to be right all the time, it is a sign that you are in a closed system. Stress levels are high in closed family systems. Be open to differences and recognise that multiple ways of thinking can exist at the same time in a given space.

4. Develop a Family Management System

Families come in all shapes and sizes. Thinking about how you would like your family to function is called family management. Use a calendar. Share tasks. Have clear expectations of roles and responsibilities. Plan your budget. Intentionally developing a management system can give family members a sense of consistency and security that can help family members feel more in control of the stress levels.

5. Know When to Say “Yes” and “No”

Parenting can be very stressful especially if you’re a single parent. It is important to recognise when you need help and when you don’t in terms of raising your children. It’s alright to say “yes” to help offered, especially when you are overwhelmed. It’s a way of allowing others to love you by helping you. Learn to say “no” when you have friends or relatives who interfere too much in your parenting methods. It’s a way of being in control as a parent.

6. Validate Efforts

When was the last time you validated an effort, not just an accomplishment, but an effort made by a family member?

7. Have Non-judgemental Family Meetings

Calling for family meetings is an intentional way of saying, “We are here for each other.” However, family meetings can turn ugly when a lot of judgments are thrown at each other. Create a space for each voice in the room to feel heard. Be clear of the meeting agenda. Recognise that differences are not threats, but rather, opportunities for the family to grow.

8. Acknowledge “It”

“It” is often unspoken in many families. “It” could be the loss of a family member ten years ago and the grief that continues to linger. “It” could be an affair that is rather kept as a secret. “It” could be a past trauma. Unspoken “its” may feel safe and comfortable now but the silence could insidiously affect each member in various harmful forms—substance abuse, depression, and suicidal thoughts. Acknowledge the “it” for the long-term health of your family. Seek professional help if needed.

9. Accept That Nothing Is Permanent

Pain is temporary. Stress is temporary. Loneliness is temporary. Conflicts are temporary. Reminding each other in the family that nothing is permanent reduces the rigidity in the system. It gives the family hope to change.

10. Be Together

When a family is under stress, it is common to withdraw from each other. This may be okay if a member just needs some space for him or herself but can be problematic when members are starting to feel disconnected. Find ways to do things together. Because remember, stress is temporary.

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