

Family Therapy at EDC-D

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“The opinions which we hold of one another, our relations with friends and kinsfolk are in no sense permanent, save in appearance, but are as eternally fluid as the sea itself.”

-Marcel Proust

Family Therapy is a necessary and integral part of our program's services. Studies indicate that recovery is enhanced and relapse rates are less when family and friends are included in the patient's eating disorder recovery process. Our family therapists have been trained in multiple family therapy models in order to best address the unique needs of families that come to us from various walks of life. Consistent with the rest of our program, family therapy at EDCD is based on an empowerment model. We strongly believe that families do not cause eating disorders while also recognizing that families can sometimes unintentionally create roadblocks to recovery. Our family therapists utilize a strength-based approach in helping families unlock their potential to be healthy, supportive, and recovery-focused.

The patient and family tend to blame and shame themselves for the eating disorder. Blaming and shaming are toxic to recovery and the fact is we believe families do the best that they can given the skills and awareness at the time. We also believe that everyone in the family has been in some way affected by the eating disorder and as a result, communication between family members usually breaks down. As strange as it may seem, it's not unusual for the eating disorder to serve as a positive wake-up call for other problems within the family that also deserve attention. Family therapy facilitates awareness and change to maximize family functioning and better serve its members as a viable resource for one another's growth and happiness.

Our family therapists are dedicated in providing families with current research and information on the topic of eating disorders and facilitating understanding of the function the eating disorder plays within the family. Often, the eating disorder has consumed the family and as a sad result, the vitality and strengths of the family can become derailed. In addition to recovery from the eating disorder, we encourage each family member to assess what other positive changes might be needed within the family. This helps the family shift from the all-consuming pathological focus to a more desired state of wellness, which will in turn also create a more optimum family recovery environment.

To help increase family resilience and growth-fostering connections, our families learn effective communication skills that include increased empathy, reflective listening, mutuality, conflict-resolution, anger management, healthy boundaries, interpersonal risk-taking, authenticity, and emotional regulation. Through the process of learning new and more adaptive communication skills, mobilizing the strengths that are already existent within the family, and increasing mutual respect and empathy the emotionally malnourished family becomes invigorated and can better nourish the needs of the individuals within the family structure.

As in all of our creative therapies that are offered at EDCD, family therapy is a process of gradually widening the lens through which the patient and family members experience one another in an atmosphere that feels safe, non-judgmental, respectful, compassionate, and genuine. Where there are no words to describe various emotions, when the tendency is to “put up and shut up,” or act out in hurtful ways, and when people within the family isolate their authentic selves from one another the eating disorder thrives and becomes a maladaptive way to cope. In family therapy, difficult emotions such as anger are expressed in a more adaptive way that enables increased connection to one another rather than destructive distancing. Through weekly family sessions and weekly multi-family group sessions, families become clear on the “do's and

don'ts" in being the best support for recovery. The patient gradually becomes the author of the healthy life he or she wants to live within the context of a more positive family experience.

With a more cohesive and flexible family unit combined with increased personal efficacy the patient can gradually replace the eating disorder with new and more adaptive life skills. Core values are more sharply defined and the patient becomes clear and accountable to whether or not one's day-to-day actions are consistent with those core values. As your loved one with the eating disorder begins to make healthy changes, the family unit also begins to change to accommodate growth and wellness for all its members. The oppressive sick blanket that once covered the family is replaced with a free healthy interdependence where people are both connected and more defined as individuals. There becomes a noticeable positive connection between family members that is not tense, aloof, enmeshed, or smothering.

Through the process of family therapy, individuals become more aware and curious about the intergenerational family roles and rules they learned that were passed on, often with very little mindfulness whether those rules and roles are still relevant. Family members become more conscious about whether to continue following those historical scripts, modify them, or throw them out. It becomes increasingly more important for family members to offer support and respect for each of their core values, growth, and development. Through the process of learning and practicing more gratifying and liberating styles of being with one another, family members often feel much more connected, while also becoming more differentiated.

During treatment at EDCD, families are encouraged to value their imperfections, their strengths, weaknesses and develop healthy distress tolerance skills for human mistakes and errors. In a healthy family, mistakes or errors are seen in the spirit of "teachable moments" with no shame or blame which could cause low self-esteem, humiliation and the desire to cover up and hide. In healthy families, genuine gestures to repair ruptured relationships with one another are graciously received and forgiveness is the norm rather than an exception. Families are encouraged to learn how to become flexible and acceptant while people within the family grow, change and practice how to be in the larger world. In healthy families, individuals are mirrored and validated, not just for their appearances and performances in life but mostly for their values, vulnerabilities, dreams, fears, emotions, and needs.

Transitions can often be challenging for our patients and families, even when the transition is from illness to wellness. Human beings tend towards homeostasis which, in a nutshell means we are creatures of habit, (even "bad" habits). Until healthy changes are practiced over time, those changes can feel unnatural and difficult to sustain. Our family therapists are sensitive to this tendency and make a special effort to help normalize and facilitate families making these challenging changes. Families are encouraged to develop a more inclusive style of communicating that allows for multiple alternative ways of looking at situations and making choices in living and problem-solving. It's important to experience one's life and one's family as a living and breathing organism that is in the constant state of flux. To stay stuck or rigid greatly interferes with the natural evolution of life's transitions that are necessary in adapting to the constantly changing world-at-large, maturation, and learning adaptive skills.

It is with great respect and reverence for the sanctity of each and every family that walks through our doors, that we at EDCD offer our invitation to use this opportunity to take an adventure into change, recovery, and wellness. As family therapists, we will develop family goals WITH you that are consistent with increasing function, mutual empathy, compassion, freedom, safety, authentic connection, and recovery. It is our sincere hope that the family therapy experience will provide a corrective emotional experience that increases deeper and more gratifying connections during treatment and throughout your loved one's recovery.