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LEADER'S GUIDE:

Help for the Whole Family by Debbie Echevarria
My son's learning disability affects us all.

DISCUSSION FOCUS:

Getting professional help.

ACTIVITY GOAL:

Participants will define behaviors they are concerned about and reflect on their own attitudes toward counseling.

STORY SUMMARY

When Debbie's son begins to struggle in school and at home, everyone in her family ends up angry at each other. Debbie searches for supports that will help her son, who turns out to have a disability that's making it hard for him to pay attention in school.

Debbie finds the treatment her son needs and brings her children to family therapy in order to put her family back on track.

DISCUSSION GUIDE

GROUP INTRODUCTION: 10 minutes

Today we'll talk about getting professional help when your children need more help than you can give them. When children are having serious behavioral problems in school or at home, it may be that they are suffering from a learning disability, mental illness, or medical problem that is interfering with their ability to learn or behave appropriately. Children's disabilities affect a whole family. Siblings can feel jealous of the attention and parents may feel exhausted. In addition to treatment that a child needs to help with the disability, parents or families may need family therapy or counseling.

- How do you feel about this topic?
- Do you have experiences related to this topic that you'd like to share before we get started?

READ AND DISCUSS STORY: 15 + 30 minutes

Read the story out loud as a group. Help participants recognize the writer's emotions and coping mechanisms and their own. Go back over important moments in the story and ask the participants about how they've handled similar experiences:

STORY MOMENT	DISCUSSION QUESTION
Everyone was affected by stress because Eric was having trouble doing his homework and chores.	How have you seen in your own families that a problem facing one person can affect everyone?
At first, Debbie felt that everyone was working against her as she tried to help Eric succeed in school.	When have you felt alone with a family problem?
Debbie found support by going to family therapy.	How do you think a counselor or therapist could help your family during a crisis?
Debbie was persistent in looking for help for Eric and her family.	How have you advocated—or could you advocate—for yourself and your family?
Debbie says, "I am not feeling as stressed, frustrated and angry now that I better understand Eric's behavior."	How did you get help when you couldn't understand your child's behavior?

JOURNAL TIME: 15-30 minutes

By writing in their journals, participants can more deeply reflect on their experiences and the steps they can take to strengthen themselves and their families. Hand out the "Journal Reflections" worksheet and give participants 15-30 minutes to write. They can share their responses with the group or in pairs, or after the workshop with a counselor, therapist, or peer.

NAME:

DATE:

JOURNAL REFLECTIONS: Help for the Whole Family by Debbie Echevarria

Debbie feels happier as a mother after she finds the right treatment for her son, who has a disability. Take time to reflect on the concerns you have about your children and whether a family therapist could help you or your child with difficult behaviors. Use the questions below to guide your reflections.

1. What concerns do you have about your children's behavior or schoolwork?

2. How do you think your family life is affected by these issues?

3. How do you feel about seeking professional help for your child?

OVER 

4. How might family counseling help you as well as your children?

ACTION STEPS

Many parents have fears about seeing a counselor. Your peers or someone you trust at a religious or community organization or at your child's school can help you find family supports you can trust. Write down 2-3 steps you can take if your family could use additional help.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

A SUPPORTIVE CONNECTION

I plan to get support and encouragement by talking about my reflections and action steps with:
