

"I CAN'T STAND IT ANYMORE" ... A LOOK AT FAMILY CONFLICT

by **Linda Pounds, LMFT**

Have conflicts in your family become more frequent? Do your arguments "go nowhere?" Can you remember a time when that was not so? Sit down. Let's talk. We should begin by examining what is creating most of the conflict. This can be difficult. The source of conflict is sometimes apparent, sometimes not. Is it increased drug or alcohol use, birth of a child, increased job responsibilities, death in the family, children leaving home, in-law, or adolescent issues? Frequently, conflict stems from more illusive sources such as developmental stages, past grief, childhood, or trauma issues. All of these concerns are typical in families and all result in added stress to a family system.

When you feel stressed and unable to cope with issues at home or work, most likely your behaviors are different. Your spouse knows this, your children sense this, your friends may even tell you so. Pay attention. When your coping mechanisms falter you may be quick to get angry but slow to realize it. What are your non-verbal behaviors in the family at this time? Are you silent? Do you slam the door as you walk out of the house? Are you avoiding family members? Certainly, when behaviors change, reactions from spouse and children change as well. If you walk into the house after work and silently walk past your spouse instead of greeting him/her with your typical, "hi, how was your day?" question, the reaction you receive will be different. Your spouse may feel neglected instead of cared for. Later in the evening when you argue (about something completely unrelated to the earlier behavior) the feelings of neglect surface when your spouse yells, "you don't care about me!" Instead of hearing this, you may verbally attack in return. "All you ever do is complain, I get enough of that at work!" The cycle of nonproductive communication begins. Both parties are talking but no one is listening. Children often make themselves "scarce" to avoid parental arguments. They may try to intervene by yelling at their parents, "quit fighting!". They may begin to act out in aggressive ways, skip school or have multiple physical complaints. The ways in which a family member reacts to behavior change will differ, however, each member **will** react.

If you have difficulty ending nonproductive arguments, if you notice increased anger or hostility from your spouse or children and find you are unable to cope with issues at work as well as you once did; it may be time to schedule an appointment with a counselor at your Employee Assistance Program (C-SEAP). C-SEAP offers six counseling sessions per family per year for state employees, their spouses and dependents (aged 15 and older).

We can help. Call us.303-866-4314 or 1-800-821-8154.