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any kind of close relationship. A number of people I know, looking back on their parents, felt manipulated or even betrayed by their fathers or mothers. Others I know were forced to “grow up” at a very young age because of addiction, divorce or economic circumstances in their family. That responsibility hardened into resentment in adulthood.

PARENTAL DISAPPROVAL. Parents can also harbor resentment. I recall a family situation in which the parents were terribly upset with the way their son was conducting business. They felt his ethics and integrity were so different than theirs that they could not be associated with him in any capacity. Beyond disapproval, they were deeply saddened and questioned their ability to raise children with particular virtues. They felt their only recourse was to break off all contact.

AN EITHER/OR CHOICE. A frequent reason for severed ties in the family is because a family member feels a relationship with another relative must be mutually exclusive.

For example, if a daughter’s husband and her own father are in conflict, then she must choose between one of the men; she cannot have a relationship with both. Sometimes, this choice is even made explicit. I know of several in-laws who have been so frustrated with their spouses’ family that they issued an ultimatum: “It’s them, or it’s me.”

Healing Wounds. Childhood trauma, ongoing parental disappointment or the influence of family members or spouses are wounds that are difficult to overcome. Asking people to talk about the past, about conflict and about deep-seated feelings of maltreatment or regret, is a tall order. But, all is not lost. Two strategies are particularly helpful to begin to heal the wounds of family trauma.

► **FUTURE TALK.** Talking about the future is something in which everyone likely has some interest. For the sake of future generations and their relationships, for the sake of succession and estate planning, or simply to move past the resentment, asking to have a discussion about the future might help to reestablish a connection.

► **SHARING PERSPECTIVES.** Another strategy is to approach a family member simply with a desire to understand their perspective or to share your own. This requires a commitment to ask and to listen, to suspend our defenses and to understand how we’ve hurt another, or to say plainly how we feel others have hurt us.

Discussions about the future and basic attempts to understand one another may not lead to forgiveness, but they are surely waypoints on the journey to personal resolution and potential healing. ●

Breaking Ties, HEALING WOUNDS

Family members may have severed connections, but they can attempt strategies to move forward.

Family members don’t often talk about why they are estranged from one another. Perhaps they are ashamed to admit they can’t get along with a relative, or maybe they feel they have failed at being a family. Some may not understand why their siblings or children or parents have disowned them. Regardless of the reasons, it is unfortunate but not uncommon to see family members working hard to avoid any and all contact with one another. The intimate ties of family can become severely frayed or broken.

In a December 2017 *New York Times* article, Catherine Saint Louis summarized several recent academic studies on family estrangement. She describes estrangement as a family member “choosing to end contact because of an ongoing negative relationship” and points to common elements of the condition. Estrangement happens over time to many people for lots of different but very clear reasons in the mind of the person breaking off the relationship. Consider the following explanations for why people might want to end a relationship.

A DIFFICULT CHILDHOOD. Life can be tough for children. Their parents may be physically or verbally abusive. One or both parents may be distant—never around or lacking

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