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## Guidelines For Making Referrals To Counseling



APOSTOLIC CHRISTIAN

**Counseling and Family Services**

*Helping the hurting. Nurturing hope. Encouraging growth.*

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# Guidelines For Making Referrals To Counseling

Elders and ministers are often called on to help individuals, couples and families who are dealing with mental health issues and/or relationship problems. Below are some general guidelines for determining when to refer individuals to counseling, some general information on the referral process, and how Apostolic Christian Counseling and Family Services can assist you in helping others.

## **A. A referral should always be made in the following situations:**

1. When an individual expresses suicidal intent, thoughts, or plans.
2. When the neglect or abuse (sexual, physical, and/or emotional) of a minor is discovered. (Note: In these circumstances a report to child protective services may also be required by law)
3. When domestic violence is occurring or someone is threatening to become violent.
4. When the person's behavior and mental state has become irrational (e.g. hearing voices, paranoia) and/or the person has become extremely erratic (e.g. person buys three cars in one day and hasn't slept for several days).

## **B. A referral should be strongly considered in the following circumstances:**

1. When the person has demonstrated aggressive behavior or loses control when angry.
2. When the person's issues involve abuse of alcohol or drugs (illegal or prescription).
3. When the person is experiencing distress from a traumatic experience (e.g. sexual or physical abuse, victim of a violence, in an accident).
4. When a person that you have been working with is not showing signs of improvement (e.g. the person's compulsive use of pornography, etc. does not subside).
5. When the person's spiritual concerns do not resolve even after they have followed Scriptural truths and your counsel (e.g., a person confesses the same sin several times and still feels the need to confess, the person is convinced s/he has committed the unpardonable sin, or the person believes that s/he cannot be forgiven even after they have repented).
6. When the person's mood, appearance, relationships, and behavior have changed significantly.
7. When the person has experienced a significant loss (e.g. death of a spouse, child, etc.) and is having difficulty moving through the grieving process.
8. When a struggling couple's marital issues are outside of your experience to counsel (e.g. sexual dysfunction, threats of violence, etc.)
9. Developmental issues for children and adolescents (e.g., school behavior problems, attention problems, etc.)
10. When the person's struggles need ongoing "case management" that requires a significant amount of individualized attention and follow-up.
11. When you believe that the person is seeking help for something that you cannot provide.
12. When the person requests specific advice outside of your legal and ethical responsibilities (e.g. legal advice, prescription medication, etc.), referrals should be made to the appropriate professionals.

## **C. Considerations for Elders/Ministers Making Referrals to Counseling:**

1. Most importantly: Know your referral source or obtain recommendation from a credible source.
2. If you do not know which counselor to someone to, don't hesitate to call ACCFS.
  - o We maintain a referral directory of mental health professionals located near all of our churches.
  - o If we don't someone in our directory that meets the needs of the situation, we will help you find and interview a counselor that would be a good match for the situation.

# Guidelines For Making Referrals To Counseling

3. When possible, we encourage you to make contact (by phone or meeting) with the counselor so that you get to know his/her perspective on counseling and so s/he knows you and your perspective.
4. Remember: if you wonder if someone you are working with should see a counselor, there is a good chance that he/she should.
5. Remember that making a referral to a counselor does not mean that you have not done your job. Making a referral is simply being part of a treatment team. Your role as an Elder/Minister is an important part of that team and it doesn't end when a referral is made.
6. Your input and assistance is very important to the overall success of the counseling!

## **D. When Talking to a Struggling Person about Referring them to Counseling:**

1. When talking to a person you think would benefit from counseling ask, "Do you think that talking with a counselor would be helpful? I have found that others in similar situations have found it beneficial. I would be glad to help you find a counselor who could help."
2. Explain your reasoning for making a referral factually; not apologetically.
3. Take time to discuss fears/concerns they may have about counseling.
4. Assure the person you will stay involved as much as necessary.
5. Ask the person to sign a release of information (a document that gives the counselor legal permission from the client to talk with you about confidential client information) so that you can discuss the case with the counselor as the need arises.
6. When a person you think needs counseling refuses to go, consider recommending that his or her spouse (possibly children as well) go to counseling by himself or herself for the time being (e.g. alcohol or marital problem).

## **E. Some Important Warning Signs:**

1. Common Symptoms of Depression
  1. Sad or depressed mood
  2. Diminished interest or pleasure from activities that were once enjoyed
  3. Significant change in appetite (either increase or decrease)
  4. Problems sleeping (over sleeping or insomnia)
  5. Feeling agitated or feeling slowed down
  6. Fatigue and lack of energy
  7. Feelings of worthlessness, inappropriate guilt
  8. Difficulty concentrating
  9. Recurrent thoughts of death or suicidal ideation

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## 2. Common Symptoms of Anxiety

1. Excessive worry and apprehension
2. Irrational fears, thoughts, and ideas that the person cannot control
3. Intrusive thoughts and mental images
4. Recurrent distressing memories
5. Panic attacks
6. Restlessness or feeling keyed up or on edge
7. Being easily fatigued
8. Difficulty concentrating or mind going blank
9. Irritability
10. Muscle Tension
11. Difficulty falling to sleep or restless, unsatisfying sleep

