

Family Stressors

Therapist Helps Family Resolve Conflicts

Sara is a 15-year-old who lives with her parents, 12-year-old brother and 10-year-old sister. They live in a house in a small suburban neighborhood. Both parents work, and mom just recently started a new job after being laid off a few weeks ago from her previous job of eight years. Her dad travels a lot in his job, and Sara mostly sees him on the weekends. She has noticed her parents arguing a lot lately because dad doesn't help out much when he comes home. He says he just wants to relax when he's home and not have to work or go out. Her mom feels stressed by trying to adjust to a new job, keeping up with the chores, taking the children to their sporting events and disciplining the children without any help from Sara's dad.

Sara feels frustrated at home because mom is putting more pressure on her to cook, clean, do the laundry and look after her siblings. She doesn't have time to be with her friends or finish all of her homework and isn't getting much sleep. Mom just yells at her when Sara tries to tell her she can't get her schoolwork done and needs a break from babysitting. Sara also gets blamed whenever any conflict arises between her and her siblings because she's the oldest and should know better.

Sara has given up trying to talk to her parents and is beginning to feel hopeless about her life. She thinks there's no point to going on and can't see things getting any better. Sara is becoming irritable and depressed and may be at risk for suicide.

Fortunately, Sara's mother talked about all the stress at home to a friend, who suggested they see a family therapist to help them work out their problems. After several visits to the therapist, Sara's family members learned how to listen to each other without getting defensive. They worked out a family contract that defined each person's duties at home, which helped lighten the load for Sara. Family members also quit blaming one another and started working together to resolve conflicts. Sara began to write down her feelings. She was able to share what she wrote with her parents without everyone yelling at each other. The family now schedules weekly meetings to discuss the problems of the week and to share events in their lives. Sara is now able to spend more time with her friends and feels much better about her life.