



OSU FISHING FAMILIES PROJECT

Practical ways of adapting to changes in commercial fishing

Seeking Professional Help with Emotional Stress and Strain

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Introduction

These days changes in the industry and in society are occurring so fast that it's hard to keep up with them, much less adjust to them. Change, in itself, is nothing new to fishing families and businesses in the Pacific Northwest. The industry's history is one of periods of prosperous seasons alternating with poor seasons.

Fishing families and businesses traditionally have been very resilient, learning over time how to manage these cycles in addition to the day-to-day realities of family separations when the boat is at sea; erratic weather, markets, and seasons; and the need to plan for the business. But with more attention now being paid to the management and restoration of fishery resources, it has become harder for many people to bounce back when cycles are low. It's difficult to make good business and family decisions with so many unknowns.

When fishing families confront economic, personal, and social stresses, it can be a scary and painful time for *all* family members. In American culture, asking for help isn't easy. Neighbors or fellow workers seem never to talk about their

At some times in our lives, each of us may need some help in dealing with a problem—monetary or job worries, marital and family problems, illness or injury, loss of a loved one, anxiety, loneliness, depression, or an overabundance of stress. Most of the time we can work through problems ourselves or with the support of family and friends. But sometimes we need some outside assistance from a trained professional.

personal lives. And besides, most fishing families are hardworking, independent, and proud. These qualities can be useful, but they can also make it more difficult for a person to ask for help. It's easy to forget but important to remember that seeking help when you need it is a strength, not a weakness.

It helps to know where to go for help and who are the people or organizations that could lend additional support during times of transition. Across the nation, over and over, families who have sought financial, legal, emotional, or mental assistance during times of transition have expressed the feeling, "If only I had come earlier and not waited so long."

What Professional Help Might Do for You

Getting help from a trained professional (a therapist, minister, counselor, psychologist, mediator, and so on) can be a practical step toward building a better life. In a sense, it's a partnership between you (the person with the concern) and a professional (the person trained to help people change how they feel, understand their problems, and solve those problems in a timely fashion).

Support from a trained professional can help you to

- Improve your coping skills
- Improve your communication skills
- Improve the quality and cohesiveness of your relationships
- Improve your parenting skills or relationship with your kids
- Work your way through stress, grief, or depression
- Stop acting in unordinary or uncharacteristic ways (ways that are causing you or your family concern or have decreased your ability to carry out everyday activities)

Having realistic expectations is important. A professional is not going to solve your problems for you or give you solutions. Rather, he or she will help you come up with your own strategies and solutions.

Finding the Right Support Person for You

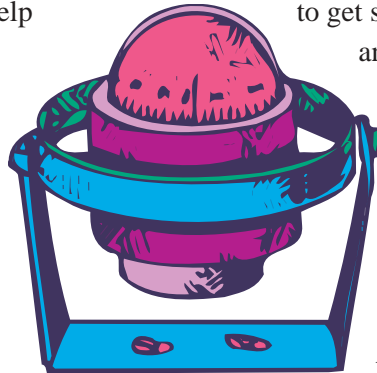
Since this is a partnership, the right match is important. If it doesn't feel right with one person, it doesn't mean support is not out there or that therapy can't work for you. Personality clashes can happen. It's like buying a car—you don't have to get stuck with a lemon. Test drive a few, and stick with the one that feels right.

Most professionals have some type of introductory session for this very reason. Feel free to interview several people by telephone or in person before making a choice.

Following the initial contact, you may want to meet two or three times before you decide to work together.

Many people find out about therapists or ministers or mediators from people they know. Whether you are referred to someone from a friend, family member, or doctor, or you look someone up in the phone book, the following sample questions may be useful when considering a particular professional:

- Are you a licensed professional?
- How many years have you been in practice?
- What kind of therapy do you do (individual, family, couple, child, etc.)?
- What are your specialty areas?
- Have you worked with other fishermen, fishing families, or other natural resource workers (loggers, farmers, and so on)?



- I've been feeling _____ (anxious, tense, depressed, etc.). I've been having problems with _____ (my job, marriage, money, eating, sleeping, etc.). What kind of experience do you have helping people with these types of problems?
- What might I expect during our sessions?
- What are your fees? Do you do 45-minute, 50-minute, or 60-minute sessions?
- Do you use a sliding-scale fee system? Please explain how this works.
- What types of insurance do you accept? How do you bill for services? Will you bill my insurance company directly or do I bill for reimbursement?

Timing Can Be Critical

Share your needs regarding time for services. Most fishermen don't have "regular hours" and as a result, need some flexibility. Setting up appointments that work for both of you *can* be done. If there is a crisis, get help immediately. Letting things hang can be really painful for you or family members. Most therapists or other support professionals can be flexible when there is a crisis.

Creating a Safe and Trusting Relationship

Reputable therapists (and other support professionals) operate in their professions under a strict code of ethics. In fact, this code should be discussed right up front. One example of professional ethics is confidentiality. What is said during the session, and the identity of you or others you discuss, is generally confidential. Have your therapist describe any limitations he or she might have to this confidentiality (for example, in cases of child abuse or danger to self or others).

Costs and Benefits

Professional help is out there for people who need it: for those who can afford it and those who can't. Most therapists will work with you to come to some sort of financial arrangement (for example, a sliding-scale fee or monthly payments).

Many professionals do some volunteer work. Some work through churches. Some do practicums at community organizations. There are three groups that might be helpful to you in making a connection with someone in your geographic area:

- The Oregon Psychological Association has a referral service for those professionals who are willing to negotiate their fees. To reach the Oregon Psychological Association, call 800-541-9798.
- The Oregon Counseling Association, the organization for licensed counselors, may also be able to provide information about counselors in your geographic area. Their number is 800-233-2547.
- The Clinical Social Workers Association in Oregon can be reached at 503-452-8420.

Remember, at some time in our lives, each of us may need help in dealing with a problem. Sometimes we can work through problems ourselves or with the support of family and friends. Other times we need outside assistance from a trained professional. When you ask yourself the question, "Can I afford this?" make sure you also ask, "Can I afford not to do this?"



References

Choosing a Therapist Who is Right for You,
American Psychological Association, 750 1st
Street NE, Washington, DC, 20036, 1-800-374-
2722

Group Therapy, Counseling and Psychological
Services, Portland State University, Portland,
OR, 503-725-4423

*Marriage and Family Therapy: Who Needs It?
Where to Find It?* John Engel and Herbert
Lingren, University of Hawaii, College of
Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources,
Research Extension Series Publication #127

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The authors would like to thank those fishing family members who provided a careful and realistic review of this publication.



This work was partially supported by grant no. NA36RG0451 (projects no. R/FDF-1 and M/A-12) from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to the Oregon State University Sea Grant College Program and by appropriations made by the Oregon State legislature. The views expressed herein are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of NOAA or any of its subagencies.

Sea Grant combines basic research, education, and technology transfer to serve the public. This national network of universities works with others in the private and public sectors to meet the changing environmental, economic, and social needs of people in the coastal, ocean, and Great Lakes regions of the U.S.

The **OSU Fishing Families Project** is funded by, and is a partnership of, Oregon Sea Grant and Oregon State University Extension Service. It serves fishing communities along the coast from northern California to southwest Washington. For more information, contact your fishing family coordinator or OSU Extension Sea Grant agent:

On the north coast: **Dyan Hartill**, 503-325-7372, or **Jim Bergeron**, 503-325-8573

On the central coast: **Connie Kennedy**, 541-574-0882, or **Ginny Goblirsch**, 541-265-3463

On the south coast: **Linda Brown**, 541-469-8890, or **Jim Waldvogel**, 707-464-4711

Other publications from the OSU Fishing Families Project include:

Family and Business Records Checklist for Fishing Families

*The Fishing Family and Business Resource Kit
Helping Persons Cope with Change, Crisis, and Loss*

Tax Information for Crewmen on Commercial Fishing Boats

Getting Unhooked from Anger and Conflict Groups That Work

Letters to Fishing Families (a series of 12 letters)

For additional copies of this and other Oregon Sea Grant publications, contact

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