

THE COUNSELOR

A PUBLICATION FOR PARENTS, COUNSELORS & EDUCATORS • PROVIDED BY: STEPHEN ROSSI, M.A., L.P.C.

March 6, 2008

Black Sheep in Families



The term 'black sheep' is usually associated with negative connotations. It typically describes a person who does not fit the norm; they are not like those around them. Black sheep are looked down upon by their family and society in general because they do not conform. Aunt Susie was the black sheep in her family. She always got in trouble and just wouldn't fall in with the rest of the family. Susie tried everyone's patience and seemed to enjoy bringing heartache, stress, and trouble wherever she went. She experimented with drugs, dressed outrageously, drawing even more attention to herself, and expressed radical views on every subject. Black sheep beat to a different drum. There are problems with this label. Sometimes kids are defined by their behaviors and struggle to break free from the negative label. They are misunderstood and mistreated which makes things worse. They are penalized for their differences. In some cases, kids are tagged black sheep in their families because they inherited physical characteristics not favored by the parents; i.e. the color of their eyes or skin. Prejudice can play a large part in labeling a family member black sheep. Maybe *you* were the black sheep in your family...but you are not condemned to a life of ruin. You can change. There are many stories of people who were the black sheep of their families but they turned completely around. It's important to

understand how kids get labeled as black sheep, look at the different types of black sheep, the underlying individual and family issues, restoration, and how the black sheep and his family can reconcile.

Troubles

Black sheep can get into all kinds of trouble. It's okay to be different, but they haven't learned to apply or channel their differences into positive results for themselves. They create



problems. They have the reputation for "rocking the boat", and anything is possible. They defy and resist the herd from small and subtle to huge blatant ways. Some dress differently, a little more colorful or darker than the norm. Some will lie and bend the rules perpetually while others just barely, but consistently challenge the rules. Some have negative, defiant attitudes, while others rebel quietly. All black sheep, no matter how mildly or strongly they push their families "buttons," create some form of turmoil. The stereotypical black sheep gets in trouble with the law, pursues negative habits like drugs and alcohol, and drops out of high school or college. This is more like the extreme. There are adults in prison today who were described as black sheep growing up. Black sheep typically generate a lot of stress for their families. Parents prefer the well-behaved, compliant child over the stubborn, strong willed, vocal child; they don't like dealing with all the rebuttals. Parents don't want to argue, they just want their children to behave. Most black sheep know their behavior generates tension and

conflict but they still refuse to fit in. They choose to go their own way. They choose to disobey. They may be very intelligent but they choose to fulfill the black sheep label. Black sheep can go to great lengths to maintain their "image." They will cause grief to teachers, parents, siblings, and their peers. Some can be pretty hard headed. Some push until they alienate everyone around them. Their radical behavior can make them very unpopular.

Family Issues

What do the families of black sheep look like? They usually appear ordinary on the surface until you dig a little deeper. Each family member except the black sheep usually leads a quiet uneventful life. They go about their daily routines of work, school and recreational activities with very few problems. There doesn't appear to be much "drama" in their lives. They strive to do what's right and get along. Most families fall in the ordinary range of healthy functioning. Some don't. A closer look at these



families can reveal all kinds of issues like intense sibling rivalry, marital tension, father wounds, very strict or lax parenting, and very high

parental expectations. The rivalry can be so intense in some families that