

Ministering Principles

COUNSEL ABOUT THEIR NEEDS

You don't have to do this alone. Counseling together can provide the help you need to help others.

God has invited you to minister to an individual or family in your ward or branch according to their needs. How do you find out what those needs are? The principle of counseling, which has been such a focus in the Church, is key.

After discussing what we might consider counseling about, we will explore:

1. Counseling with Heavenly Father.
2. Counseling with the assigned individual and family.
3. Counseling with our companion.
4. And counseling with others assigned to the same individual or family.

Counseling with our leaders is also essential. A future Ministering Principles article in the *Ensign* will explore counseling with leaders as well as the role of ministering interviews in that process.

What We Counsel About

Understanding needs is essential to ministering to one another. But what forms can those needs take, and is there something more than needs that we should find out?

Needs can come in many forms. Those we serve may face challenges that are emotional, financial, physical, educational, and more. Some needs are higher priority than others. Some we will be equipped to help with; others may require us to enlist help ourselves. In our efforts to help meet temporal needs, don't forget that our call to minister includes helping others progress along the covenant path, preparing for and receiving the priesthood ordinances essential for exaltation.

In addition to counseling about an individual's or family's needs, we should seek to learn their strengths. What don't they need help with? What abilities and gifts do they have that could bless others? How are they uniquely suited to help build the kingdom of God? An individual's strengths may be as important to understand as his or her needs.

7 Counseling with Heavenly Father

One of the central tenets of our faith is that Heavenly Father speaks to His children (see Articles of Faith 1:9). When we receive a new assignment to minister to someone, we should counsel with Heavenly Father in prayer, seeking insight and understanding into their needs and strengths. That process of counseling through prayer should continue throughout our ministering assignment.



Ministering Principles articles are intended to help us learn to care for one another—not to be shared as messages during visits. As we come to know those we serve, the Holy Ghost will prompt us to know what message they might need in addition to our care and compassion.

2 Counseling with Individuals and Families

How and when we approach the individuals and families we are called to serve may vary depending on the circumstances, but counseling directly with the individual or family is essential for building relationships and understanding their needs, including how they want to be helped. Some questions may need to wait until a meaningful relationship has developed. While there's no one right way to do that, consider the following:

- Find out how and when they prefer to be contacted.
- Learn about their interests and backgrounds.
- Come with suggestions for how you could help, and ask for their suggestions.

As we build trust, consider discussing individual or family needs. Ask questions as prompted by the Holy Ghost.¹ For example:

- What are the challenges they face?
- What are their family or individual goals? For example, do they want to be better at holding regular family home evening or be more self-reliant?
- How can we help them with their goals and challenges?
- What gospel ordinances are coming up in their lives? How can we help them prepare?

Remember to offer specific help, such as, “Which night can we bring a meal to you this week?” A vague offer, like, “Let us know if there's anything we can do,” is not very helpful.

3 Counseling with Our Companion

Because you and your companion may not always be together when you interact with the individual or family, it is important to coordinate and counsel together as you seek inspiration as a companionship. Here are some questions to consider:

- How and how often will you communicate with each other as a companionship?
- How can you each use your individual strengths to minister to family or individual needs?
- What things have you learned, what experiences have you had, and what promptings have you received since the last time you spoke about the individual or family?

4 Counseling with Others Assigned

It may be good from time to time to speak with others who are assigned to minister to the same individual or family that you do.

Communicate to Solve Challenges

Elder Chi Hong (Sam) Wong of the Seventy applies an account from Mark 2 to our day to illustrate how counseling together made it possible for four people to figure out how to allow a man with palsy to be in the presence of Jesus.

“It might happen like this,” said Elder Wong. “Four people were fulfilling an assignment from their bishop to visit, at his home, a man who was sick with palsy. . . . In the most recent ward council, after counseling together about the needs in the ward, the bishop had given out ‘rescuing’ assignments. These four were assigned to help this man. . . .

“[When they arrived at the building where Jesus was,] the room was too crowded. They could not get in through the door. I am sure they tried everything they could think of, but they just could not get through. . . . They counseled together on what to do next—how they could bring the man unto Jesus Christ for healing. . . . They came up with a plan—not an easy one, but they acted on it.

“ . . . ‘They uncovered the roof where he was: and when they had broken it up, they let down the bed wherein the sick of the palsy lay’ (Mark 2:4). . . .

“ . . . ‘When Jesus saw their faith, he said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee’ (Mark 2:5).”²



Building relationships is also an important part of counseling together. See the Ministering Principles article “Building Meaningful Relationships” in the August 2018 issue on page 6.

Invitation to Act

Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles urged, “Counsel together, use all resources available, seek the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, ask the Lord for His confirmation, and then roll up your sleeves and go to work.

“I give you a promise: if you will follow this pattern, you will receive specific guidance as to the *who*, *what*, *when*, and *where* of providing in the Lord’s way.”³ ■

NOTES

1. See *Preach My Gospel: A Guide to Missionary Service* (2004), 183.
2. Chi Hong (Sam) Wong, “Rescue in Unity,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2014, 14–15.
3. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “Providing in the Lord’s Way,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2011, 55.