

Talking Points for Brothers, Sisters, Strangers

- Sibling estrangement, one of the most painful life experiences, is an extremely prevalent phenomenon, with roughly 65 million Americans suffering from these rifts.
- Sibling relationships are usually the longest, most crucial connections in the family, more defining than even the parent/child relationship, affecting self-esteem, academic performance, and well-being.
- Estranged siblings feel stigmatized, a shame worsened by the under-acknowledgement and lack of studies of this phenomenon. My survey illuminates the experience.
- Estrangements not only hurt individuals directly involved; they cause collateral damage extending to other family members and, sometimes, these rifts deny family connections for generations.
- Sibling estrangement cuts across countries, class, and cultures, and is especially prevalent in the U.S where individuals with more education and higher social standing are more geographically mobile and less dependent on the family emotionally and financially.
- The changing nature of the American family affects estrangement, as only a minority of American households are now traditional two-parent families.
- Several risk factors drive sibling estrangement, including a chaotic family life, poor communication skills, favoritism, among others.
- Reconciliation is an arduous, daunting process that requires willingness of both siblings to commit to the process of reknitting the relationship.
- Attempted reconciliations are not linear, often lapsing back into estrangements.
- Successful reconciliation is an exhilarating experience that changes how we look at our sibling and ourselves.