Family Therapy with Children and Adolescents

Indications and Techniques
What is Family Therapy?

- Psychotherapy involving the family
- Individuals can be in family therapy
- Focus of examination and intervention
Why Family Therapy?

- Children live in families
- Parents are a strong influence on children
- Parents can engage in therapeutic interactions with their children
Why Family Therapy?

- Naturalistic intervention
- Independence of members and emotional involvement
- Mutual influence
Indications

- Symptomatic picture of behavior has strong family influence
- Child needs parent participation to improve
- Dysfunctional behavior maintained or facilitated by family
Conceptual Framework

- Family therapy is a “lens,” a point of view

- Family is a system with subsystems and individual members

- Intersystemic influences
Conceptual framework

- Systems theory
- Members of system influence each other
- Change in one subsystem generates changes in other subsystems
- System is in “equilibrium” even if dysfunctional
Focus of Family Therapy

- The “patient” is not an individual
- The patient is a system, e.g. a family
- Definition of family is strongly cultural: Extended, nuclear
Family is a system

- Family is a “whole.”
  How it functions or does not function

- Sub-units:
  - Parent – Child system
  - Marital subsystem
  - Sibling subsystem
  - Other functions
Systemic View of Psychopathology

- Dysfunction or disorder is not solely “within an individual”

- Even if a disorder is in an individual, its manifestation progress and course are strongly influenced by the family
Behavior/dysfunction is “maintained” or made possible by other members of the family.

Response of other members impact symptom manifestations. Severity, frequency, and context.
Family Functioning

- Family as a whole
- Can it solve problems?
- Can members belong to it, be a part, and also be an individual?
- Is there room for individuals?
Possibilities of Cohesiveness

- Disengaged
- Separated
- Connected
- Enmeshed
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family Functioning</th>
<th>Circumplex Model</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cohesiveness - Togetherness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Members care about each other</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Members are emotionally involved</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Members feel they belong with each other</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Cohesiveness

- **Extremes:**
  - Enmeshed
    - Too much consensus
    - Too little independence
  - Disengaged
    - Members do “their own thing”
    - Limited commitment
    - Limited attachment
Cohesiveness

- Committed relationship
- Emotional closeness
- Loyalty
  - Time together more important than time alone
- Separate
  - Some emotional distance
  - Separateness
Emotional Warmth

- Support toward each other and respect
  - Parents → Children
  - Children → Parents
  - Spouse → Spouse

- Encouragement
- Empathy
- Caring behaviors
Circumplex Model (Olson 1989)

II Flexibility

- Can family adjust to changes?
- Can family cope with stages?
- Amount of change in:
  - Its leadership
  - Role relationships
  - Relationship rules
Flexibility

Balance

Stability vs. Change
Flexibility Levels

- Rigid
  - Extreme Low
- Structured
- Flexible
- Chaotic
  - Extreme High
Flexibility

- Structured – Somewhat democratic leadership. Some negotiations including children.
- Flexible relationship – egalitarian
  - Leadership – democratic
  - Decision making
Circumplex Model

III Communication

- Listening skills
- Speaking skills
- Self-disclosure
- Clarity
- Continuity tracking
- Respect and mutual regard
Communication

- Speaking for oneself (and not others)
- Self disclosure – Sharing feelings about self and relationships
- Tracking – Stay on topic
- Respect and mutual regard: Affective aspects of communication
“Schools” of Family Therapy

- Parent guidance
- Psychoeducational intervention
- “Structural” family therapy (Salvador Minuchin)
- Strategic family therapy (Jay Haley)
“Schools of Family Therapy

- “Paradoxical” family therapy (Mara Palazzoli-Selvini)
- Transgenerational family therapy (Murray Bowen)
- Attachment based family therapy
- Mentalization based family therapy (P. Fonagy et. al.)
Parent Guidance

- Relatively mild problems
- Assistance in parenting
- Promote sensitivity and empathy
- Emotional support for parents
- Suggestions re: Child rearing and child development
Psychoeducational Interventions

- Assistance guided to deal with specific problems
- Parents dealing with child who has schizophrenia
- Parents dealing with child who has attention deficit disorder
Psychoeducational Interventions

- Dealing with borderline personality disorder
- Dealing with explosive and defiant child
- Dealing with child who has an eating disorder
Psychoeducational Interventions

- Provide information about a disorder
- Provide useful suggestions to deal with problem
- Assistance in “problem solving”
- Coaching model
Structural Family Therapy

Proposed by Salvador Minuchin

- Families in poverty with low organization and somewhat chaotic
- Promote organization, structure, and routine
Structural Family Therapy

- Enhance role of the parents
  - Authoritativness
  - Role definition
  - Children in their space
  - Help parents to maintain reasonable hierarchy
Structural Family Therapy

- “Sculpting technique”
- Seating arrangements
- Practicing skills
- Role play during sessions
- Empower parents
“Strategic” Family Therapy Technique

- Multiple schools
- Understand dynamic and systemic interactions
- Disbalance the system that is in equilibrium
Strategic

- “Create a crisis” in family to promote change
- Change in one member elicits change in other members
Strategic

- Prescription of actions e.g.
  - Homework
  - Measuring
  - Positive reinforcement
  - Deescalation techniques
Strategic

- Focus on marital relationship

- Tensions in marriage may manifest in problem behavior in children
Strategic

- Enhance communication
- Improve cohesiveness and individualization
- Improve emotional involvement or some distance
Improve resolution of marital conflict

Example

- Fighting and rivalry between children

  - More negotiation and agreements
Example

Father very strict and critical of spouse for being soft

Mother very empathetic and flexible. Tries to compensate children for father’s strict stance

Polarization
Transgenerational Family Therapy

Murray Bowen – Washington D.C.
Original work

- Whole family was hospitalized
- Observation of patterns of interaction – reaction – thought
- Role performance
Techniques

- Build genogram of current family
- Build genogram of family of origin of each parent
- Several generations past if possible
- Search for patterns
Techniques

- Interest in birth order
- Role of first child. Youngest child.
- Role of women
- History of losses
- Repetition: anniversaries
- Death, trauma, separations
Transgenerational Family Therapy

- Narrative of family histories
- Role of family traditions and histories
- How to change transgenerational mandates
- Change repetition patterns
Paradoxical Family Therapy

- Focus on the role that symptoms may have in family e.g. focus attention on child and deviate attention from parental conflict
Paradoxical Family Therapy

- A family member is instructed on the importance of exacerbating or maintaining the symptoms
Mentalization Based Family Therapy

- Promote mentalization of parents vis à vis child
- Promote mentalization of children vis à vis parents
- Increase self reflection and reflection about others
Mentalization Based

Increase “levels” of mentalization
Recognize failures in mentalization

Emotional reactivation

Lower Levels Of Mentalization
Mentalization Based

Framework in attachment theory

Exploration System

Stress

Secure Base Behavior
Steps to Enhance Mentalization

- Attention
  - To specific behavior
    - Elicit curiosity
      - Openness to learning from the others
Mentalization of the Child’s Mind

- Mind is opaque
- Open to possibilities
- Empathy
- Response to stress
- Security-seeking behaviors
- Not close mind
Self-Mentalization by Parents

- What does one feel and think when child shows distressing behavior?
- Self reflection
- Recognize internal states
Regulation Strategies by Parents

- Strategies to reduce stress and promote calm reassurance and regulation
- No aggressive techniques
- No distancing techniques
- No ostracism
- No rejection
- No yelling as parent is in non-mentalizing mode
Suggested Regulation

- Proximity
- Reassurance
- Validation
- “Accompanying” child
- Inquiring
- Empathy