

# Family Systems Intervention: Improving Outcomes for our Children

Robyn Mehlenbeck, PhD, ABPP

Director, Center for Psychological Services

Clinical Associate Professor, Dept of Psychology

George Mason University

# How do you define your family?

- **Who is your family?**
- Think of a time when a family member had a significant positive effect on you



- Think of a time when a family member had a significant negative effect on you

# Overview

- Cases
- Brief theoretical introduction
- Brief review of evidence for Family Systems Treatment in pediatric illness
- What is interventive interviewing?
- Modeling – linear interview vs circular interview
- Application to everyday practice

# Cases

- Jack is a 10 yo male who is an only child. He has a history of medical issues that do not respond to treatment. He also has developed anxiety around medical procedures. He lives with his mother and father.
- Mary is a 16 yo female with a history of depression, including one suicide attempt at age 13 that resulted in hospitalization. She lives with her mother, father and twin sister.

# What is Family Treatment?

- Treatment where the unit of concern and intervention is the family and its relationships
- What does this really mean? What is actually done with a family?

# History of Family Treatment

- Full review – see Cottrell & Boston (2002)
- Historical & Contemporary Models:
  - Minuchin – Structural Family Therapy
  - Milan/post-Milan – Strategic Family Therapy
  - Erikson & all – Brief Solution Focused Therapy
  - White & Epsen – Narrative Therapy
  - Psychoanalytic – Fairburn (Object Relations) & Bowlby (Attachment theory)

# What is a Family System?

## Family System

a collection of individuals in relationship to one another  
such that if any single individual changes significantly  
all others change

# Cultural differences in a Family System?

- Eastern families vs Western families
- Religious families vs non-religious families
- Patriarchal families vs matriarchal families
  - And so forth.... Yes, we can give some information, but each family is unique

# All kinds of families...

- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O5uuMr1YEyE> (modern family)

# Why use family systems treatment?

- Can be applied across family differences
  - Family intervention is reality based
  - Strength based vs deficit based
  - Takes blame away and focuses on family as the source of healing
  - Help family solve issues within their belief system

**Therapist is coach, not “expert”**

# Core assumptions – FST

- REALITY BASED
  - Do you live with the families you treat?
  - Do you know what really goes on in their homes?
- One view = one perspective

# Core assumptions – FST

- STRENGTH BASED

- What strengths do each family member bring to the table?
- What other strengths in the system can be maximized?
- Does not focus on deficits

# Core assumptions – FST

- Takes blame away and focuses on family as the source of healing
  - Parents often feel blamed, feel guilty
  - Identified problem child often gets targeted
  - Empowers parents to take care of their children

# Core assumptions – FST

- Help family solve issues within their belief system
  - What works needs to be consistent with family beliefs
  - Each family brings different history, beliefs, customs, styles of interaction

# Core assumptions – FST

## Therapist is coach, not “expert”

- Pros – Family is the expert, parents know their children
- Cons – Cultural, families seek answers “medical model”

# Let's take a look...

- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bwpHXtwjP-8> (simpsons)

# What does the Data Say?

- More recent data with randomized trials
  - Adolescent Conduct/Oppositional Defiant Disorders<sup>1</sup>
    - Multisystemic Family Therapy
    - Decrease in oppositional behaviors, legal problems, recidivism
  - Drug Abuse/Alcoholism<sup>2</sup>
    - Brief Strategic Family Therapy

<sup>1</sup>(Henggler, et al, 1995, 2011) <sup>2</sup>(Henggler, et al., 2006; Rowe, et al., 2010)

# What does the Data Say?

- Pediatric Illnesses

- Eating Disorders<sup>1</sup>

- Family Systems Treatment (based on Maudsley Method)
- Family therapy > individual therapy for younger patients
- Family therapy > inpatient treatment
- Improvements in body mass index, eating attitudes, body shape concerns, eating related family conflicts

- Diabetes<sup>2</sup>

- Behavioral-Family Systems therapy (BFST)
- Increase in family communication & problem solving

- HIV adherence<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>(Russell, et al, 1987; Eisler et al, 1997; Robin et al, 1994, 1999; Locke et al, 2001, Locke, et al., 2015) <sup>2</sup>(Wysocki, et al., 2000, 2001) <sup>3</sup>(Gray, Janicke, et.al., 2011)

# Family System Treatment - Example

- Case – Jack
  - Family history
  - Medical history
  - Engaging both parents & extended system
- Ultimately – FST conceptualization:  
medical issues keeping parents who hate  
each other together

# Techniques used in family systems treatment

- Linear vs Circular concept of causation
  - What maintains a behavior?
  - What is the function of a behavior?
- Questions as Interventions
  - Intake is intervention

# Elements of a Question

- How you ask a question matters
- Your intentions and assumptions
  - Interviewer
  - Person question is directed to
  - Content
  - Context (relationship)

# Interventive Interviewing

- Interventive Interviewing = Content and context (relationship) are embedded in each question
  - Therapeutic intent
  - Impact on “neutrality”
  - The family is the center of focus rather than the therapist
    - Who is the family looking at?

# Examples of Interventive Interviewing Techniques

- Circular vs Linear questions
  - “Mary, what are some things that make you feel depressed?”
  - “Mary, who understands most what makes you feel more depressed?”

# Linear to Circular questions

- Tell me what brought you in today?
  - Why did your mother decide to bring you in today?
- What are you most upset about?
  - Who understands most what upsets you?

# Linear to Circular questions

- When did you last cut yourself?
  - Do your parents know when you last cut yourself?
- Have you ever been physically abused?
  - Do your parents worry that you have ever been abused?

# The “Perfect” Question

- When you get stuck, this is a good one:
- If X gets WORSE, what happens to the relationship between Y & Z?

If Mary’s depression gets worse, will it bring you (mom & dad) closer or make you argue more?

# Cases

- Mary
  - Who do you want to include?
  - How do you set that up?
  - What other factors do we need to consider?
  - How do we best get that information?

Let's see this in action!

# Family Systems Treatment

- What did you observe?
  - Family relationships
  - Using family strengths
  - Therapist neutrality
  - Talking to each other instead of you

# CBT & FST

- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy
  - Evidenced based intervention for many issues at this point
  - Compatible with Family Systems Treatment
  - Use skills taught to increase family communication
    - Relaxation
    - Cognitive Restructuring
    - Behavioral Activation
    - Problem Solving

# Apply FST to your practice

- Who to include?
- What order?
- How do I ask my questions?
  - Write down 5 sample questions prior to the start of the session
- Try one or two questions to see how it goes
- Observe – is it working?

# Reference Articles

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# Resources

- <http://effectivechildtherapy.com/content/professionals-educators>
  - Manuals, Evidence based treatments including family therapy for acting out disorders

# Contact Info

Robyn Mehlenbeck

703-993-1371

Rmehlenb@gmu.edu

