Family Systems Intervention: Improving Outcomes for our Children

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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 & Epson – 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\(^1\)
    - Multisystemic Family Therapy
    - Decrease in oppositional behaviors, legal problems, recidivism
  - Drug Abuse/Alcoholism\(^2\)
    - Brief Strategic Family Therapy

\(^1\)(Henggler, et al, 1995, 2011) \(^2\)(Henggler, et al., 2006; Rowe, et al., 2010)
What does the Data Say?

Pediatric Illnesses

- **Eating Disorders**\(^1\)
  - 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**\(^2\)
  - Behavioral-Family Systems therapy (BFST)
  - Increase in family communication & problem solving

- **HIV adherence**\(^3\)

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?
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


Resources

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