

FAMILY THERAPY – CONCEPTS AND METHODS

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Abstract: There are happy families, as there are families in which misery is the watchword. Every unhappy family, however, 'stumbles' over the same life difficulties: learning to live together, dealing with difficult relatives, bringing up kids and so on.

A relatively small number of dynamic systems enlighten these difficulties and give power to the families to successfully overcome the predictable dilemmas of life. Family therapists meet bizarre or unusual cases, but the most part of their work is with normal beings, who learn the painful lessons of life.

The family is the context in which the individual evolves throughout his life, and the consequences of a malfunction always reflects negatively on their mental and somatic health, but also on social imbalances and suffering. In this respect, family therapies try to teach people to interact responsible in the most important structure of their life - intimacy and family solidarity – in order to be able to maintain their health and harmony.

Among the elements of conflict in the family we find the power within the couple, a phenomenon that is the cause of many disagreements, because the two partners share power in several ways. Problems arising in particular from ignoring the idea that the modern relationship of partnership requires reciprocity of power and authority on different levels of power. Equality within the couple is possible without meaning that differences will be eliminated, but balancing areas and levels in which the two partners exercise their authority and power by a complementarity of roles.

Keywords: family therapy, power within the couple, social imbalance, family solidarity, reciprocity of power.

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Family therapies are viable models for assisting and facilitating the balance of the family system in trouble, modern tools of action, preventive and curative equally in the service of dysfunctional families.

The therapist is the one who offers the couple in trouble a neutral and objective perspective on the existing situation. He is the one who can reveal the two partners' real alternatives to solve problems, with advantages and disadvantages for each one, without imposing any choice. Also, the therapist is the one who can help both partners to know each other better, to be able to detach from certain problems or even avoid them.

1. Elements generating tensions and conflicts in the family

1.1. Power within couple

The power within the couple is the cause of many disagreements, because the two partners share power in several ways. Problems arise in particular from ignoring the idea that the modern relationship of partnership requires *reciprocity* of power and authority on different levels. Equality within the couple is possible without being necessary to eliminate differences, but only to balance areas and levels in which the two partners exercise their authority and power by a complementarity of roles.

One of the main indicators that define the authority and power balance is the concept of "decision making". Decision making is not synonymous with authority, and neither is power, because it is possible that a decision to be made by a member of the couple, either because one partner has delegated the other or because the other is not interested. However, in the

contemporary society, authority and power relationships tend to become *negotiable* and are extremely changeable, depending on the appearance, disappearance or modification of factors with an important role in influencing the causes that generate these ratios.

1.2. *Sexual problems* also generate, a lot of anxiety in married life. Symbolic meanings the two partners assign to intercourse are very different. These differences create dysfunction and dissatisfaction. Experts say that sexual problems occur only when there is a bad communication between partners. Many individuals who say they love their partner have expectations in their intimate life they prefer not to discuss about with their partners, which is a paradox, since the expression of wishes should be carried out more easily in an intimate relationship.

1.3. *Mutual negative behaviors*. In a dysfunctional couple, if one partner is behaving negatively, his/her spouse thinks he/she is entitled to respond in a similar manner, thereby triggering a chain of negative interactions. This perpetuation of the state of disharmony leads to the accumulation of unresolved conflicts and strengthen a negative context, where it is unlikely to solve problems constructively.

1.4. *Identifying and negotiating rules*. Each individual lives according to certain *rules*. These were either imposed by others or by the wish to make order into an existence that without these rules could get out of control. Rules have a fundamental role in the proper functioning of family life. One of the most effective ways is to identify, using communication, rules that guide our lives, keeping those that are validated at the family level and reformulating others that find justification only in the selfishness or prejudices of family members.

1.5. *Family mechanism*. In every family there are interactions and activities that do not occur at random. Each family member has their time, the ability to think and feel, physical and emotional energy, and a previous experience. All these represent the raw material that supports *the family mechanism*. The most important issue for a family is related to choosing ineffective ways to manage the resources of their members.

2. Methods of family therapy

2.1. *Problem-centered therapy*

This alternative therapy begins by presenting to the therapist the problem that the couple goes through, problem that spouses claim they try to overcome in order to be able to stay together. Many of the dissensions a couple have rooted in the absence of flexibility, therapists often noting that the reasons of misunderstandings are based on rules set between the two partners. There are situations where the problem occurs only once and marriages where the crises succeed cyclical. The therapist must interrupt this cycle and bring the two members of the couple in a harmonious continuous direction. Throughout this process, the therapist plays a role similar to the role of a *negotiator* whose involvement with one of the partners complicates the solving of the problem.

2.2. Therapy focused on communication

Good communication involves a message correctly received. For this to be achievable the transmitter of the message must be precise in speech, but also he has to ensure that the information has been correctly understood by the other. Also, the one that receives the message must ensure that his perception is correct.

Distortions in communication can occur because of the two components of communication, namely:

- Content component (which refers to what you want to transmit);
- Feeling - component (which refers to how a message is spoken).

Flexible, tolerant and empathic people have chances to achieve a good communication with their partners, while rigid and intolerant people, who consider a waste of time understanding the other's messages have far less chances.

Clinical and psychological studies have shown that marital problems are due mainly to communication deficiencies. Also, marital satisfaction appears to be directly proportional to the ability to speak frankly with each other. Among the sources that raise communication barriers between partners we should list the following: cultural differences, unexpressed to the partner and as a result, differences of gender-role, indirect communication, using words differently, incorrect assumptions and generalizations, contradictory communication, monologue or defensive communication.

The therapeutic process promotes behavior change by helping family members to speak openly and presenting each member in a new light, which allows others to relate to him in new ways.

Communication family therapy techniques are similar to those of analytical and support group therapy. The therapist's role is to conduct the process, the family model being that of a democratic group. The therapist also relates, in a democratic manner to family members, as they expect to do amongst themselves.

2.3. Psychoanalytic family therapy

This therapy aims to release family members of unconscious restrictions, so they can interact with each other based on the current reality, not based on unconscious images of the past. Psychoanalytic therapy tries to achieve a personality change while growing from within.

This insight is achieved by penetrating behind attitudes and trying to find hidden reasons that determine these attitudes. *Listening* is a silent but concentrated activity. But to establish an analytical atmosphere, it is necessary for the therapist to listen and understand, without worrying about what happens (ensuring analytical neutrality). When, however, psychoanalysts therapists interfere, they do it to express an empathic understanding in order to make family members to open. Also, *interpretations* are made to clarify the hidden and confusing aspects of the experience. Psychoanalytically treated patients are taught to express their thoughts spontaneously, without censorship, this being the most effective way to bring unconscious thoughts to the surface. The marital relationship will be considered at three levels, namely: cultural values and norms, central egos and unconscious repressed forces.

2.4. Multiple family therapy

Multiple family therapy aims to model the support behavior and to solve problems within families with difficulties through a communication experience where families share their problems, offer models and suggestions and support each other in a co-therapeutic manner. Changing family interactions is based on modeling by analogy, based on the comparison, experimentation, correction and optimization of their behavior in the family.

A family therapy group comprises 5-6 families, almost about 20-25 people, this group including parents, grandparents or children. The criterion is that of non-homogeneity in terms of socio-economic, ethnic, religious, age, intelligence, special interests or economic level . They are encouraged to join the group and they are explained that a difficulty of a family member is a difficulty for all.

Authors of multiple family therapy start from the assumption that regardless of culture, social background or life cycle in which the families live, what unites or dissipates their differences, are *specific patterns of basic human behavior* that can either help people to "grow" and to live healthy and creative, or to maintain intimacy crisis, mutual fear, lack of communication or evasive, ambiguous actions, depression or illness.

The main advantage of this type of therapy would be that if in what concerns the normal group therapy, the family of each participating member is present only in terms of imagination, in this situation they may face and compare all the personal feelings and perceptions to the behavioral reality of family members, to which they are felt or assigned.

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