Deepening our Knowledge and Skills in Family-Centered Services

Christopher Watson, PhD, IMH-E® (IV)
University of Minnesota

Strengthening Families Institute
Indianapolis—April 11, 2011

TODAY’S AGENDA

• The Perspective Pyramid
• Defining “family”
• Theoretical Underpinnings—Family Systems Theory
  – Family roles
  – Family rules
  – Homeostasis & equilibrium
  – Family patterns
  – Family subsystems

TODAY’S AGENDA

– Cohesion & adaptability
– Parent roles—historical progression
– Family Characteristics and Interactions
– Family functions
• Open to Wonder—“Skilled Dialogue”
• Walking the Talk with Mothers and Fathers and Colleagues and…

PAIR SHARE

“Your Ideal Child”

The Perspective Pyramid:
Considering multiple perspectives

MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES

• What’s it like to be this parent?
• What’s it like to be this child?
• What’s it like to be the other children and other members of the family?
• What’s it like to be the home visitor?
A home visitor is very frustrated with a mother who always seems to be preoccupied with something and frequently leaves her two-year-old son crying (seeming not to hear him) as she attends to other things.

PARALLEL PROCESS

- between you and your staff member
- your staff member and the family caregiver
- the caregiver and the children in their care.

What is a “FAMILY”?

“A family is a group of two people or more (one of whom is the householder) related by birth, marriage, or adoption and residing together.”

US Census Bureau

“The Good Old Days” of the American family… families stuck together, marriage was forever, and Father knew best…
“Marriage is a dying institution.”

Divorce rates: 1950’s = 20% today = 40+ %
But, longer life spans mean couples are more likely to reach their 40th anniversary
Spouses are more likely to share responsibilities and marital assets equitably
So, are good marriages better than they once were?

“Two-income families are something new and destructive.”

Families in which Mom is the sole child-rearing parent are rare in both human and American history—only since the 1920’s in the U.S.
Until the Industrial Revolution, fathers were much more involved
In the 50’s men saw their relationship to their children as being channeled through their wives

“The 1950’s were a better time to raise children.”

Diversity or any deviation from the norm was often met with suspicion or hostility
The 50’s were not necessarily a better time to raise kids if you were poor, or Jewish, or African-American
Children with disabilities received little serious problems were often covered up (alcoholism, child abuse)

“Society’s problems are due mainly to the breakdown of the traditional family.”

High school graduation rates are higher now than in the 50’s
Fathers in intact families spend more time with their kids
Infants today are four times less likely to die than in any time in the 50’s

FAMILY SYSTEMS

THEORY

• a body of knowledge that has arisen out of the observations of clinical & counseling psychologists

• individuals cannot be understood in isolation from one another—families are systems of interconnected and interdependent individuals
The family system is like a mobile.

“Movement” in any one part of the “system” will affect all the rest of the parts of the system.

FAMILY ROLES

what is expected of each family member

basic types of roles are “father,” “mother,” “aunt,” “daughter,” “son,” “grandmother,” etc.

FAMILY ROLES

roles beyond this most basic level:

the “clown”
the “responsible one”
the “emotional one.”
“crazy uncle Joe”

FAMILY RULES

…how the family operates: often unspoken

• When people are angry at each other, do they express this or keep it to themselves?

• How affectionate or emotional are family members expected or allowed to be with each other?

FAMILY RULES

• How do decisions get made in the family? Who has input and who is expected to “just go along”? How is the final decision made?

• Are there limits on “how much” or in what ways kids can argue with their parents?

• How much are family members “allowed” to talk to people outside the family about family problems?
FAMILY RULES

Families tend to develop patterns
Patterns become “unspoken rules.”
Family members may see these things as “just the way it is”.

HOMOESTASIS & EQUILIBRIUM

Family roles & family rules—examples of “typical ways of being.”
there is a pull from the system
NOT to CHANGE

HOMOESTASIS & EQUILIBRIUM

The mobile:
If you move one part— the other parts move.
If you let go of that one part, the whole “system” will “pull all parts back to the way they were before that one part moved.
This is homeostasis or the system’s equilibrium.

FAMILY PATTERNS

Distancer-Pursuer Dyad
one person who seeks out closeness with the other person (the pursuer)
while his/her partner (the distancer) wants more space or independence and pulls back from the relationship.

CIRCULAR CAUSALITY

a cycle can develop…
The pursuer pushes for closeness while the distancer pulls back.
The pursuer then feels “abandoned” and thus feels even more even more of a need for connection & so pushes even harder for connection.
As a result, the distancer feels “smothered” and pulls away even more…
…and so on & so forth…..a cycle!

FAMILY PATTERNS

the overfunctioner-underfunctioner dyad
the overfunctioner is very responsible
wants things to be planned out.
the underfunctioner may be less responsible, more fun-loving, more spontaneous, etc.
HOMEOSTASIS & EQUILIBRIUM

"systems" are resistant to change...

...EVEN IF the change might seem to be a desirable one!

SABOTAGE!

FAMILY SYSTEMS

sometimes our behavior may have as much to do with the "systems" (groups) of which we are a part—and the patterns that get established within these systems—as with the personality of each person within the system.

FAMILY SYSTEMS FRAMEWORK

FAMILY SUBSYSTEMS

• **Marital**: Interactions between husband and wife or same-sex partners.

• **Parental**: Interactions among parents and their children.

• **Sibling**: Interactions among the children in a family.

FAMILY SUBSYSTEMS

• **Extended Family**: Interactions among members of the nuclear family, relatives, and others who are regarded as relatives.

"Rules of Interaction": Cohesion and Adaptability

The degrees of cohesion and adaptability in a family describe:

– The ways that members of family subsystems interact;

– The nature of the boundaries among family subsystems and among family members and non-members.
COHESION

- Family cohesion refers to the close emotional bonding with each other and to the level of independence they feel within the family system.
- Cohesion exists across a continuum:
  - Highly disengaged
  - Highly enmeshed
- Most families operate in the center of the cohesion continuum.

Turnbull et al. Families, Professionals, and Exceptionality, 2e
Copyright © 2006 by Pearson Education, Inc.
Upper Saddle River, New Jersey 07458
All rights reserved.

FAMILY SYSTEMS FRAMEWORK

Good Morning America
Family Challenges

FAMILY FUNCTIONS

Barriers to efficient use of parent time, as reported by parents:
- The inability of professionals to coordinate their activities among themselves;
- The overwhelming number of tasks parents were asked by professionals to complete;
- The lack of local and accessible services;
- A lack of flexible and family-centered scheduling of services.

HISTORICAL AND CURRENT ROLES

Parents as...
- The source or cause of their child's disability
- Organization members
- Service developers
- Recipients of professionals' decisions
- Teachers
- Political advocates
- Educational decision makers
- Partners with professionals
“Refrigerator Mothers”
Dr. Bruno Bettelheim, child psychologist

Excerpt from ‘Refrigerator Mothers’ by David Simpson, JJ Harley, & Gorton Quinn. See www.pbs.org/pov/pov2002/refrigeratormothers/

---

**POLITICAL ADVOCATES**

- The parent-as-political advocate was born as a result of inadequate educational services for persons with disabilities (1950 – 1970).
- Parents became official “educational decision makers” as a result of P.L. 94-142 now IDEA.

---

**EMPOWERED PARENTS**

**FAMILIES AS PARTNERS**

“Partnerships” refer to the relationships between families and professionals in which they mutually agree to defer to each other’s judgments and expertise, to secure outcomes for the child, the other family members, and the professionals.

---

**Communication**

One way way to change people is to see them differently.

*Barry Stevens*

Reflective Practice
Open-Ended Questions
**Communication**

“Skilled Dialogue”
Isaura Barrera and Robert Corso

- Strategies for responding to cultural diversity in early childhood

  Diversity is a dynamic and relational quality, sometimes present and sometimes not, depending on the context.

  Identity can be static...whereas cultural diversity is a characteristic that resides in interactions and comparisons between persons...

  📌 RESPECT—acknowledgement and acceptance of the boundaries that exist between persons

  Parents have a right to their perception of reality, even when that differs from what practitioners might prefer.

  Identity can be static...whereas cultural diversity is a characteristic that resides in interactions and comparisons between persons...

  Respect does not mean we have to accept the status quo...

  📌 RECIPROCITY—seeks to balance power between persons in dialogue

  At the core: recognition that each person in an interaction is equally capable ("power" defined as capacity or capability)

  Doesn’t require denying one person has more expertise, knowledge or authority, but all have experience and perceptions of equal value.

  Interaction without reciprocity:
  “Oh, here’s someone who doesn’t have what I have or what I believe they need (and is somehow deficient as a result)”

  Interaction with reciprocity:
  “Oh, here’s someone who may benefit from what I have to offer and from whom I can benefit (because he or she has something new or different that can add to or extend my resources).”

  Reciprocity enriches not only the persons involved, but also the outcome of their interactions.

  📌 RESPONSIVENESS—taking the next step

  Turn all assumptions into lightly held hypotheses ("I wonder if" rather than "I know." Allow yourself to entertain a mystery. Take children and their families out of their "boxes"—Position yourself to be surprised.

  Listen with focused attention, patience and curiosity—become attuned to the family’s reality.

  Responding and responsiveness are not the same "Maybe...."

  Instead of seeing ourselves as mechanics...working to fix a broken machine ... we experience ourselves as interested people ... skilled at asking questions to bring forth the knowledge and experience ... carried in the stories of the people we work with ...

Freedman & Combs, 1996
The strategies listed in the following slides were developed as part of field-tested activities done with Dr. Rosalita Mitchell and graduate student Donna Thompson at the University of New Mexico.

Three Characteristics of Skilled Dialogue

Respect—Reciprocity—Responsiveness

RESPECT—acknowledgement and acceptance of the boundaries that exist between persons

STRATEGIES (Respect)

1. Listen mindfully to others’ comments/responses. This includes the element of TIME.
   How much time am I allowing between perceiving and interpreting content of others’ messages?

2. Get information about others’ perspectives.
   • Could you tell me more about X?
   • Could you describe to me what X means to you?
   • How would you describe what you want at this point? Could you give me a specific example?

3. Examine your own perspective.
   • What do I believe about persons who act in this way?
   • What meanings am I attaching to the behaviors?
   • How are my assumptions affecting this interaction/communication?
RECPROCITY—seeks to balance power between persons in dialogue

STRATEGIES (Reciprocity)

1. Allow yourself to believe that others’ contributions are of equal value to yours.

2. Clarify others’ understanding of you’re your perspective.
   • How do you see my actions?
   • What do you hear me saying/asking?
   • What are your thoughts when you see me do/say X?
   • What does responding to my request mean to you?

3. Recognize the value of others’ contributions.
   • What resources is X bringing to the interaction?
   • What can I learn from X?
   • What is positive about X’s behavior?

RESPONSIVENESS—taking the next step

STRATEGIES (Responsiveness)

1. Remain mindful of and open to mystery (i.e., not knowing).
   • Am I overly focused on my goals, interpretations, and judgments?
2. Keep paying attention.
   - Listen and ask questions until you can credibly communicate respect and understanding.
   - Observe how others are responding to your words and behavior.

3. Reflect understanding of others’ perspectives.
   - Let me see if I understand what you mean. Are you saying that…
   - Can I use an analogy to see if I really understand what you’re saying?
   - Is this what you’re talking about?

TODAY’S AGENDA

- The Perspective Pyramid
- Defining “family”
- Theoretical Underpinnings—Family Systems Theory
  - Family roles
  - Family rules
  - Homeostasis & equilibrium
  - Family patterns
  - Family subsystems

TODAY’S AGENDA

- Cohesion & adaptability
- Parent roles—historical progression
- Family Characteristics and Interactions
- Family functions
- Open to Wonder—“Skilled Dialogue”
- Walking the Talk with Mothers and Fathers and Colleagues and…

“Diversity challenges us to recognize that people are always more than (and perhaps radically different from) others’ ideas about who they are.”

Barrera & Corso, 2003
We have two ears and one mouth so that we can listen twice as much as we speak.

Epictetus

Thank you.
Have a great evening!