

**“LET’S GET IT RIGHT”:
MULTISYSTEM & MULTILEVEL
ASSESSMENTS IN FAMILY
ASSESSMENTS**

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“LET’S GET IT RIGHT”: MULTISYSTEM & MULTILEVEL ASSESSMENTS IN FAMILY ASSESSMENTS

Adoption/foster care professionals as well as protective service staff must make difficult decisions about the safety of abused and maltreated children. In an effort to increase the quality of these decisions and the consistency with which practitioners make these decisions, 42 states have adopted risk assessment models. Their adoption has not been without problems. Frequently documentation is insufficient for courts, particularly for termination of parental rights and criminal proceedings. In addition, without good quality control, these systems can be misused to support potentially poor decisions. The amount of paperwork required, a seemingly formidable quantity, can have a negative impact on job satisfaction.

Regardless of the risk assessment package utilized, there still remains a great demand for practical, efficient methods for gathering information and for making accurate and continuing child protective risk and adoption/foster family assessments. Various assessment procedures have been used to identify processes that differentiate adoptive/foster families with satisfying, healthy relationships from those with dissatisfying relationships. Some procedures, while highly informational, have developed with seemingly little attention being paid to subsequent outcome.

As a result, many new procedures and instruments have been developed in recent years. The purpose of this workshop is to give the participant an overview and skill practice in these recent developments in family assessment. The workshop is based on the premise that the point has been reached in assessment where it is necessary to take a closer look at family and husband-wife interactions as they unfold in real life behavior. This concern grows out of long term interest in assessing families and marriages and in finding more reliable data on which to base theory and practice. Presumably the higher the quality of the information the adoption/foster home care worker uses, the better will be her/his judgments related to risk assessment and service planning. Emphasis is given to decisions based on interactional data rather than relying solely on subjective judgments; and rests on **the assumption that studying what people say about themselves is no substitute for studying how they behave.**

This workshop considers the adoption/foster home care worker’s standpoint in the assessment of adoptive/foster families and will present and **demonstrate** assessment procedures that have been used primarily for assessment in clinical and research settings but show potential for adoptive/ foster home care selection and training as well. Attention will be paid to specific assessment techniques and procedures and to developing skills highly familiar to the worker that are not only behavioral in origin, but that can be used as explicit indicators of levels of family functioning.

This workshop seeks to put forth the “cutting edge” of these methodological assessment approaches to adoptive/foster home selection, development, and care. It

will first offer a conceptual framework which represents bridging of systemic and behavioral perspectives and techniques. Secondly, it will argue for the necessity of multi-method assessment procedures designed to match the particular system level of the family being assessed. The assessment procedures presented will be of special relevance to adoption and foster home care workers who must develop and empower adoptive/foster families who will be better equipped to address the special traumagenic impact and needs of neglected and abused children currently coming into foster care and adoption.

The selection of content for this workshop stems from the presenter's belief that recent developments in systems theory and cognitive-behavioral psychology need to be incorporated into adoption/foster home care, assessments and practice. The format will be both didactic and experiential, utilizing videotapes, simulations, assessment/problem solving exercises, demonstrations, role playing, and small group discussion.

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Learning Objectives:

1. To acquire knowledge in the uses of family assessment and family interviewing.
2. To acquire knowledge in a systemic conceptual framework of the family into which a wide variety of assessment techniques and procedures may be applied.
3. To gain an understanding of the family within an eclectic ecological, developmental, and historical perspective:
 - (a.) the family as a system.
 - (b.) the family and its environment.
 - (c.) the life cycle of the family.
 - (d.) the protective functions of the family.
4. To gain an appreciation of how the family’s various ethnic, social, cultural and racial factors and values influence and affect family functioning.
5. To acquire knowledge and skill in multi-method/multi-system assessment.
6. To acquire skill in selecting family assessment methodologies consistent with the system level of observation.
7. To gain skill in methods of family assessment and family interviewing.
8. To gain knowledge of and skills in various questioning formats.
9. To acquire knowledge of and skills in utilizing the recently developed wide array of instruments, interactional and behavioral assessment techniques related to family assessment and family interventions.
10. To gain knowledge and skill in developing comprehensive child risk assessment within the context of family interviewing.
11. To gain the perspective of assessment *as* intervention and skills in tying family assessments to case planning, community resource utilization and intervention activities.

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Workshop Outline

- A. Introduction: Trends, Issues, and Prospects
- B. Multi-Method/Multi-System Assessment
 - Towards a Comprehensive Assessment
 - The Functional Family/Marriage: Reality vs. Illusion (Fantasy?)
 - Typologies of Family and Marital Interaction
 - Circumplex Model of Family and Marital Systems
- C. The Family as a System
 - The Systems Exercise
 - The Family and Its Internal and External Environment
 - The Family Life Cycle
 - Diversity of Families
- D. Assessment Methods: Practical Application and Skills
 - “The Protective Service Interview”
 - The Traditional Home Study
 - Eco Maps

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Workshop Outline (Cont.)

- Genograms
 - The Structured Interview
 - Build a Dream House
 - Interactional Problem-Solving Exercises and Task Assignments
 - Marital Conflict Inventories
- E. Selected Issues in the Home Study
- Kinship Families
 - Selecting Assessment Tools
 - Sexuality Issues: Must We Ask the Difficult Questions?
- F. Discussion, Summary, and Wrap-Up

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Family Assessment Overview – The Circumplex (Olson) Model

What Is It That We Are Looking For? The Search for a Template

Throughout the history of foster care and adoptions, a great deal of time, effort and resources have been directed toward the home study with the goal of identifying suitable families for children needing placement. And while it is recognized that there are no “perfect” families, exactly what is it that the home study is attempting to accomplish? What kind or kinds of families are suitable for foster care/adoption? While the theoretical and empirical literature is rich with information about identifying dysfunctional, high-risk families, there is little attention given to identifying healthy, satisfying, functional families. In an attempt to address this gap, Lewis (1976) undertook a rigorous empirical study to tease out those factors or characteristics which were believed to be critical for healthy family functioning. He concluded that there were no single threads that separated functional families from those that were dysfunctional and published these findings with that very title, “*No single thread.*”

In the absence of established criteria for healthy functional families, foster care/adoption workers all too often fall back on their own very subjective perspectives of what constitutes a healthy family. Often these subjective appraisals are based on their own life experiences - both positive and negative - and rooted primarily in their own family of origin experiences. Again, what kind of families are foster care/adoption workers looking for? Ultimately, the purpose of the home study is to find and ensure the selection of families with that have three characteristics; **nurturing, safe and committed.**

The comprehensive review of the clinical literature and empirical research by David Olson, et al. (1989) and his group suggested and pointed the way to identifying nurturing, safe and committed families and offered a template by which information/data obtained from the applicants might be assessed. From his review, Olson (1989) concluded two factors were critical in assessing and determining family health or dysfunction - cohesion and adaptability.

Cohesion: Olson defined cohesion as the emotional bonding members have with one another and the degree of individual autonomy a person experiences in the family system. The issue of cohesion has been identified by numerous scholars from various fields as central to the understanding of family life. Family therapist Minuchin (1974) discussed “enmeshed and disengaged” families. For Minuchin (1974) the terms disengagement and enmeshment describe boundary traits or specific situational interactions of a family. When individuals are insularly with personal boundaries

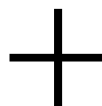
tightly drawn disengagement results. In contrast, loose and defused personal boundaries results in family enmeshment. Family researchers Kantor and Lehr (1976) viewed “distance regulation” as a major family function. They provide descriptions of the distance regulation which include the way a family handles its physical surroundings and the ways in which the members’ communication regulates their psychological distance from each other. The time dimension includes a consideration of clock time and calendar time in order to understand a family’s basic rhythmic patterns. The McMaster Family Model (Epstein, Baldwin, & Bishop, 1982) is another widely used family assessment that evolved out of clinical practice which places importance on cohesion. This model assesses whole systems functioning of the family and evaluates family structure, organizational, and transactional patterns that distinguish healthy from unhealthy families. Two assessment instruments have emerged from this work: the McMaster Clinical Rating Scale and a self report family measure, the McMaster Family Assessment Device (FAD), version three. These scales assess seven dimensions of family functioning: 1) problem solving, 2) communication, 3) roles, 4) affective responses, 5) affective involvement, 6) behavior control, and 7) overall family functioning. Sociologists Hess and Handel (1959) described the family’s need to “establish a pattern of separateness and connectedness.” Families with extremely high cohesion are often referred to as “enmeshed”. In enmeshed families, members are so closely bonded that individuals experience little autonomy or fulfillment of personal needs and goals. “Disengaged” refers to families at the other end of the continuum. In disengaged families, members experience very little closeness or family solidarity, yet each member has high autonomy and individuality. Olson concluded that healthy, functional, safe, nurturing and committed families lie somewhere in the middle of this continuum with family members neither being disengaged from one another nor enmeshed with each other. He further suggested several operational measures of cohesion - time, space, communication, and boundaries.

Adaptability: A second critical factor in assessing family functioning for Olson is adaptability, the ability of a marital/family system to change its power structure, role relationships, and rules in response to situational and developmental needs and stress. For Olson, degrees of adaptability also lie along a continuum with one extreme being chaotic and the other extreme being rigid. Again, Olson found healthy families are found somewhere in the middle range being neither chaotic nor rigid. As expected, chaotic families’ rules are either nonexistent or constantly in flux. In these families, roles are ill defined with generational blurring if not role reversal that result in children often times parenting the parents. In contrast, rigid families are characterized as having many long standing rules which are inflexible, absolute and not subject to question. Here family roles are frequently and narrowly stereotypically defined by traditional gender and age prescription. Adapting the work of Olson, we can visualize the mutual interaction of adaptability and cohesion within families by placing them on an axis (see Figure 1). By adding the extremes of cohesion (disengagement and enmeshment) and adaptability (rigidity and chaos), one can begin to picture where more or less functional families would appear on the axis. Utilizing Olson’s model as a template for assessing incoming data from the foster parent/adoptive applicant, the home study should seek to select families from the middle range of cohesion and adaptability. As a rule, the further the family falls from the center or middle range, the more likely the family will be dysfunctional presenting high risks to its members and

be unlikely to meet the nurturing and safety needs of the adoptive child. In addition to cohesion and adaptability, a third dimension that must be factored into family assessment in the home study is the identification of the developmental phase of the family unit. Just as individuals move through the various seasons of their lives, the whole family system also passes through developmental phases. Such passages will be reflected in shifts in family dynamics. Carter and McGoldrick (1980) have explicated eight developmental phases families predictably move through and have identified both the specific tasks that must be mastered and the stressors that arise within each developmental phase. While it can be anticipated that moving from one developmental phase to the next will require adaptive problem solving responses and bring additional stress to the family system, families already in the dysfunctional zones of the Olson model will be at a greater risk of being unable to meet the nurturing and protective needs of its members.

Chaotic

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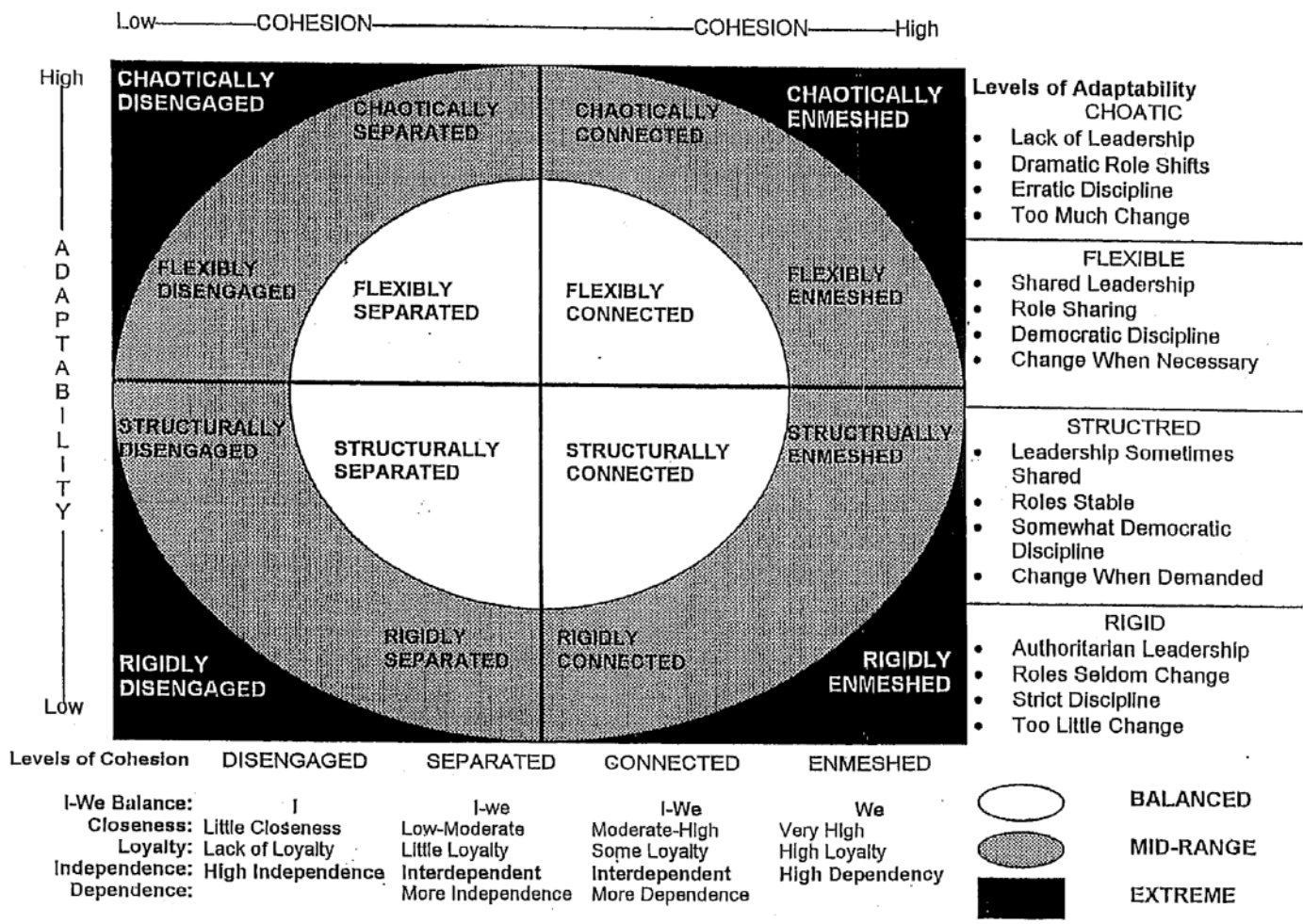
Rigid

Multisystem - Multilevel Home Study Assessments: Recent developments in family assessment have emphasized a systemic approach linking theory, research, and practice. In most cases, however, the realization of such ties is the exception rather than the rule. This is particularly the case when considering the theoretical concepts and methods of application which are components of or derived from family systems theory. Certain principles of systems theory, such as the emphasis upon the complex interdependencies and organization among system components, are particularly problematic in home study assessments. In practice, most adoption workers oversimplify the complexities of systems by focusing exclusively on only one level of the whole. For example, many workers, as previously noted, rely exclusively on individual self-reports on a higher level of the family system (marriage, parent-child relationships, or the family as a whole) and thereby ignore the very essence of systems theory. In contrast, the approach proposed here calls for multiple assessments of multiple levels of the family system to gain a more holistic view of the entire family system and the relationship among the component parts. In summary, home studies, if they are to be systemic assessments must (1) consider the concepts of wholeness and the hierarchical structure of existing subsystems and the entire system; (2) address the issues of problems of fit (or correspondence); that is the match between the phenomenon of interest at each specific level of the family and the choice of an appropriate assessment tool or technique to measure that phenomenon; and (3) focus

on multiple indicator measurement. With special emphasis on the utility of multiple assessment techniques, unique aspects of different systems levels as well as the issues that the entire family shares in common can be identified and evaluated. The use of multiple indicators therefore provides divergent information about the family's subsystem components while simultaneously converging upon the unifying elements of the family as a whole.

The above overview provides the basis and rationale for the use of multiple interactional measurements at various levels of the family system in the home study and in the delivery of post-placement services. Thus, each of the measurement tools selected in the home study and post-placement services, (e.g. genogram, the family log, ecomap, build a dream house, plan a meal together, and the structured family interview) will always be interpreted within the context of the circumplex (Olson) template.

COUPLE & FAMILY MAP



STAGES OF THE FAMILY LIFE CYCLE

FAMILY LIFE CYCLE STAGE	EMOTIONAL PROCESS OF TRANSITION: KEY PRINCIPLES	SECOND ORDER CHANGES IN FAMILY STATUS REQUIRED TO PROCEED DEVELOPMENTALLY
Between Families: The Unattached Young Adult	Accepting parent-offspring separation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Differentiation of self in relation to family of origin (b) Development of intimate peer relationships (c) Establishment of self in work
The Joining of Families Through Marriage: The Newly Married Couple	Commitment to new system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Formation of marital system (b) Realignment of relationships with extended families and friends to include spouse
The Family with Young Children	Accepting new members into the system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Adjusting marital system to make space for child(ren) (b) Taking on parenting roles (c) Realignment of relationships with extended family to include parenting and grandparenting roles
The Family with Adolescents	Increasing flexibility of family boundaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Shifting of parent-child relationships to permit adolescent to move in and out of system (b) Refocus on mid-life marital and career issues (c) Beginning shift toward concerns for older generation
Launching Children and Moving On	Accepting a multitude of exits from and entries into the family system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Renegotiation of marital system as a dyad (b) Development of adult relationships between grown children and parents (c) Realignment of relationships to include in-laws and grandchildren (d) Dealing with disabilities and death of parents (grandparents)

The Family in Later Life

Accepting the shifting of
generational roles

- (a) Maintaining own and/or couple functioning and interests in face of physiological decline: exploration of new familial and social role options
- (b) Support for a more central role for middle generation
- (c) Making room in the system for the wisdom and experience of the elderly: supporting the older generation without over functioning for them
- (d) Dealing with loss of spouse, siblings, and other peers, and preparation for own death. Life review and integration

SOURCE: *The Family Life Cycle* edited by Elizabeth A. Carter & M. McGoldrick. Copyright 1980, Gardner Press, Inc. New York, N.Y. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

REMARRIED FAMILY FORMATION: A DEVELOPMENTAL OUTLINE

STEPS	PREREQUISITE ATTITUDE	DEVELOPMENTAL ISSUES
(1) Entering the new relationship	Recovery from loss of first marriage (adequate "emotional divorce")	Recommitment to marriage and to forming a family with readiness to deal with the complexity and ambiguity
(2) Conceptualizing and planning new marriage and family	<p>Accepting one's own fears and those of a new spouse and children and remarriage and forming a stepfamily</p> <p>Accepting need for time and patience for adjustment to complexity and ambiguity of</p> <p>(a) Multiple new roles</p> <p>(b) Boundaries: space, time, membership, and authority</p> <p>(c) Affective Issues: guilt, loyalty conflicts, desire for mutuality, unresolvable past hurts</p>	<p>(a) Work on openness in the new relationships to avoid pseudo mutuality</p> <p>(b) Plan for maintenance of cooperative coparental relationships with ex-spouses</p> <p>(c) Plan to help children deal with fears, loyalty conflicts, and membership in two systems</p> <p>(d) Realignment of relationships with extended family to include new spouse and children</p> <p>(e) Plan maintenance of connections for children with extended family of ex-spouse(s)</p>
(3) Remarriage and reconstitution of family	<p>Final resolution of attachment to previous spouse and ideal of "intact" family;</p> <p>Acceptance of a different model of family with permeable boundaries</p>	<p>(a) Restructuring family boundaries to allow for inclusion of new spouse — stepparent</p> <p>(b) Realignment of relationships throughout subsystems to permit interweaving of several systems</p> <p>(c) Making room for relationships of all children with biological (noncustodial) parents, grandparents, and other extended family</p> <p>(d) Sharing memories and histories to enhance stepfamily integration</p>

SOURCE: *The Family Life Cycle* edited by Elizabeth A. Carter & M. McGoldrick. Copyright 1980, Gardner Press, Inc. New York, N.Y. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

DISLOCATIONS OF THE FAMILY CYCLE REQUIRING ADDITIONAL STEPS TO RESTABILIZE AND PROCEED DEVELOPMENTALLY

PHASE	EMOTIONAL PROCESS OF TRANSITION PREREQUISITE ATTITUDE	DEVELOPMENTAL ISSUES
DIVORCE		
(1) The decision to divorce	Accepting of inability to resolve marital tensions	Acceptance of one's own part in the failure of the marriage
(2) Planning the breakup of the system	Supporting viable arrangements for all parts of the system	(a) Working cooperatively on problems of custody, visitation, finances (b) Dealing with extended family about the divorce
(3) Separation	(a) Willingness to continue cooperative coparental relationship	(a) Mourning loss of intact family (b) Restructuring marital and parent-child relationships; adaptation to living apart (c) Realignment of relationships with extended family; staying connected with spouse's extended family
(4) The divorce	More work on emotional divorce: Overcoming hurt, anger, guilt	(a) Mourning loss of intact family: giving up fantasies of reunion (b) Retrieval of hopes, dreams, expectations from the marriage (c) Staying connected with extended families
POST-DIVORCE FAMILY		
(1) Single-parent family	Willingness to maintain parental contact with ex-spouse and support contact of children with ex-spouse and his or her family	(a) Making flexible visitation arrangements with ex-spouse and his or her family (b) Rebuilding own social network

- (2) Single-parent (Noncustodial) Willingness to maintain parental contact with ex-spouse and support custodial parent's relationship with children (a) Finding ways to continue effective parenting relationships with children

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DEVELOPMENTAL TASKS OF ADOPTIVE PARENTS REQUIRING ADDITIONAL STEPS TO RESTABILIZE AND PROCEED DEVELOPMENTALLY

PHASE	EMOTIONAL PROCESS OF TRANSITION PREREQUISITE ATTITUDE	DEVELOPMENTAL ISSUES
(1) The decision to adopt	Acceptance of one's inability to reproduce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Grieving loss of infertility (b) Working cooperatively to reorganize, approach acceptance, and resolution
(2) The adoption process	Willingness to publicly reveal the couple's failure at reproduction and preparedness for the positive and negative responses it elicits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Dealing with extended family and friends about the decision to adopt (b) Scanning community for resources (c) Obtaining possession of the child
(3) The Adoptive family is born	Acknowledgment that somewhere there are grieving birth parents who will forever a kind of presence in their household	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Responding to the demands of "instant parenthood" (b) Accepting the discrepancies between the ideal child and the real child (c) Dealing with the reactions of extended family and friends
(4) The adoptive family with a preschool child	Acknowledgment that the child's adoptive status is continuing life long process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Developing skill in communicating to the child and to others of the child's adoption
(5) The adoptive family with a school age child	An awareness that the child can now conceptualize biological and adoptive relationships and recognize he/she has two sets of parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Helping the child deal with the reality that he/she <i>does</i> have other parents, and as far as they know, agreed to give him/her away (b) accept the child and form a permanent bond
(6) The adoptive family with an adolescent	Acknowledgment that the adolescent's assertion for greater freedom and independence will evoke feelings of insecurities, rejection, and distancing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Support the adolescent's search for identity and accept that the outcome of that search may be a biological and psychological combination of both families

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| (7) The adoptive family with a young adult | An awareness that the difficult task of launching and independence may be more complex and may be repeated and occur at a latter date | (a) Reworking infertility and parenting inadequacy issues |
| (8) The adoptive family in later life | An awareness of the reluctance to ask children for help | (b) Supporting child's independence (professional, parenting, social) and accepting the pleasures of grandparenting
(a) Accepting the parent-child bond that entitles them to their children's ongoing caregiving |

SOURCE: Adapted from *The Adoption Life Cycle* by Elinor B. Rosenberg, New York: The Free Press, 1992, pp. 49-88.

A SYSTEMS APPROACH TO FAMILY ASSESSMENT AND TREATMENT

The Systems Approach to Family Assessment and Treatment is not seen as a theory but rather as a diagnostic and treatment model. The family is viewed as an open system. That is, that are certain kinds of information coming into the family and there is also a considerable amount of output generated by the family unit; consequently, the system is open. The family unit is viewed as a whole composed of various components, each component related to all other components. Inter-relationships between and among the various component parts are important in understanding the functioning of the family. Focus is on the whole; however, not at the expense of the component part. Lessor advocates that in assessing and treating a family, there are eight components of the system to be considered:

1. Persons
2. Roles
3. The Communication Process
4. Boundaries
5. Rules
6. Goals
7. Resources
8. Environment

A change in any component is considered to have an impact upon other components. Therefore, it is necessary to consider all components and their effect on family functioning. Any of the components is considered an entrance point into the family. In essence, one could enter into therapy with a family through dealing with roles. Don Jackson and Virginia Satir choose the communication process as the entrance point into families with whom they work. In many cases it is difficult to separate out the components in order to deal with them individually, however. For example, it is very difficult to deal with communication process without relating somewhat to roles.

Lessor indicates that this approach to treatment involves a client system in treatment by teaching them about family and, in particular, their family. This approach is much different than the approach that might be subscribed to by clinical therapists in that it is oriented on the "here and now" situation. The following is an outline of each of the eight components:

- I. **Persons** - first make a diagnosis of where each person is in terms of human growth and development. Lessor has defined four developmental stages of family living:
 - A. Dependency
 - B. Counter-dependency - "I don't need anybody; help me."
 - C. Independence - "I can exist on my own."
 - D. Interdependence - "I choose to live with you; I don't have to."

Many marriages haven't progressed beyond two persons living in counter-dependence. People need strokes - reinforcement through recognition. Strokes can be delivered as positive, negative or conditions; can be rendered physically or symbolically (verbally).

If you really want to confuse a child, make your love conditional. It is the objective of the family therapist to determine how the individuals in the family are receiving strokes from family members.

II. Roles: Roles are ways of summarizing what is expected of us - husband, wife, son, and daughter. Lessor suggests that roles can be viewed from at least two perspectives:

- A. *Action role* - the kind of behavior -expected of a person carrying this role. What is expected of a mother or father: The important word here is the word expected.
- B. *Identity role* - this tells you who is carrying the role - given a person is wearing a mask, what is the face on the mask - who is the person leading you to believe he is
- C. Is mother being mother - or wife being wife?

The problem is quite often that the face of the mask is very deceptive. It looks like a 100% good, dedicated mother but she comes across as a tyrant.

Some questions to ask about roles:

1. Are there conflicts between the action roles and the identity roles which would lead to confusion in the family or are the action roles congruent?
2. Is there flexibility in the roles or are the roles carried so rigidly that personal growth is hampered; i.e., to what extent is their growth built into the action role?
3. To what extent is there conflict within identity and action roles; e.g., father disciplines son but not daughter.
4. How clear is the definite of the roles - action - identity?
5. To what extent are the roles locking the persons into patterns of interaction which are destructive to the family?
6. To what extent do the masks cover fears which the individuals are avoiding . . . consider the process of scapegoating.
7. In discovering the roles, complete the sentence, "This person is living as if he were . . . "

In the family having trouble, there is destructive role interaction. Consider roles and communication - three roles:

1. Persecutor

2. Victim
3. Rescuer

These three roles operate in the triangular manner. The triangle shifts and the rescuer becomes persecutor and persecutor becomes victim. There may be rapid shifts - considerable trauma.

III. The Communication Process:

Distinguish between verbal and non-verbal communication processes in the family. It is through communication channels that two things get processed: information and Distinguish emotional disturbance; i.e., communication channels serve as vehicles for emotional nurturance.

- A. To what extent is there conflict between various members of the family which stems from the conflict between the verbal and non-verbal messages?
- B. How is this conflict felt by the various family members - e.g., confusion, frustration, rebellion, etc?
- C. To what extent is there a time lag in the channels of communication for reporting relevant data? time lag filter.
- D. Considering the reporting channels, to what extent is there an exclusion of various kinds of data; e.g., are feelings about people, events, problems freely reported: The family may have filters in the communication system which do not allow them to talk about that; emotions may be filtered out.
- E. Do the channels of communication allow for the decision-making process to occur? Or are problems never resolved, only left dangling?

Communication rules and their effect on the family:

- A. When a compliment is given simultaneously with criticism, it is the criticism that is heard: "It's so good to see you, you've been putting on weight."
- B. When a sender sends a verbal message which is in conflict with a non-verbal message, the receiver will always initially act according to the non-verbal message.

An assessment should be made of the extent to which the content of family communication is focused on "now" issues rather than "then" issues . . . this is particularly relevant as you examine subsystems (such as the marriage) within the family system.

Communication theory has focused upon the sender having impact upon the receiver - but the receiver has equal impact on the sender. This impact is accomplished through the feedback system.

Input goes through a series of processes and leaves the system as output - to function properly the system needs to know about the output - this is called feedback. Feedback represents the ability of the system to adjust behavior, to evaluate the past and correct the system. The job of the therapist is to teach the family how to adjust the system.

IV. Boundaries:

What's outside the system and what's within it? What differentiates the family from the non-family? How clear are boundaries . . . is there a clear definition of who is in the family and who is not in the family? How flexible are the boundaries . . . what is the impact when someone is added to the family . . . what is the impact when someone leaves the family?

Boundary issues arise in these conditions:

- A. When a family member is removed - death, separation, divorce, emancipation, institutionalization.
- B. When there is a shift to include a new member.

Is there gerrymandering in the family . . . are the boundaries of the family drawn such that a family member is effectively left outside the family . . . what is the effect of this process on the family, on the isolated family member?

Do boundaries exist in the home such that one family member gets excluded from emotional nurturance or perhaps decision-making?

Consider the boundaries which differentiate the subsystems within the family:

- A. What are the subsystems (marriage; boys; girls; etc.)?
- B. How clear are the boundaries around each of the subsystem?
- C. How rigid are the boundaries around the subsystems?
- D. To what extent do the boundaries cause family dysfunctioning . . . in what ways and how is this felt by the family members?

Consider the boundaries which differentiate the various individual family members:

- A. How do individuals communicate their boundaries to other family members?
- B. Consider, again, the issues of clarity, scope and rigidity.

In considering the issues of boundaries, ask yourself, "What happens in this family when boundaries are: (a) tested; (b) respected; (c) not respected; (d) modified: . . . and, as a clue to treatment process. "How are the boundaries shifted in this family to include or exclude a person?"

V. Rules:

After observing behavior long enough, you begin to see patterns developing - look long enough and you can come up with a family rule:

Rules may be thought of as summary statements which describe a family way of relating.

In looking for rules, look for patterns of action and then try to summarize the pattern in a simple statement. *Examples:* (1) men come before women; (2) we must all think, talk, feel, and act the same. We are all alike. Differences aren't tolerated; (3) one person does all the thinking in this family - all others are children (typical of the alcoholic family); (4) emotional expressions of a certain kind are taboo.

Often one of the rules in a family allows family members to save up psychological stamps until the point of explosion. For example, instead of expressing an emotion at the time the individual feels it, he saves up the emotion. In this way, the individual may have guilt-free drunks, affairs, etc., and justify them through saving his stamps.

In considering rules:

- A. Consider that rules may be explicitly understood, discussed, and followed,
or,
- B. More commonly, rules are implicitly followed but not well understood and rarely discussed openly by the family.
- C. Note the enforcement procedure on family rules - to what extent is love and emotional support used as a tool of reinforcement?
- D. Note the extent to which various family rules are conflictual . . . what is the impact of other conflictual rules?
- E. What are the family rules about fighting . . . what changes might be made in these rules?
- F. How are rules made?
- F. Does the family follow the rules on emotions which leads to saving psychological trading stamps?

VI. Goals:

Initially differentiate the family goals, determine what the family wants out of life - ask them.

There are real goals and stated goals. Most of the time there are noticeable discrepancies between what the family wants and what it says it wants. It is the role of the therapist to be the facilitator to align real and stated goals. The therapist must establish contracts around realistic, achievable goals.

Initially, differentiate the family goals:

- A. What goals are clearly stated and what goals are unspoken?
- B. To what extent are each of these kinds of goals shared by the family members as family goals and to what extent are the kinds of goals held by individuals or subsystems?

Then, explore:

- A. The goal-setting process in the family.
- B. Explore the priority of goal attainment.
- C. Explore the feasibility of attaining the various goals.
- D. Explore the costs of attaining the various goals.
- E. Explore to what extent the goals are in competition and in conflict with each other.
- G. Goals require movement . . . to what extent does this family achieve its goals?

Determine: How does a family do in terms of goal achievement?

VII. Resources:

Consider the following:

- A. Resources may be available to the family or unavailable.
- B. Resources may be utilized or unutilized.
- C. Resources include physical goods, but the family should consider other kinds of resources.

- D. For example, how is the time available to the family utilized?
- E. To what extent is the family utilizing the growth potential in the family . . . what input of resources is necessary to facilitate growth . . . what steps are necessary to obtain such resources?

What is the cost of attaining a given goal - some kind of cost is involved (not always financial but human costs), e.g., a \$50,000 home which necessitates that mother work - what is its meaning in terms of the children? If we put all of our resources into this goal, then how does this effect the attainment of other goals?

How is the distribution of cost made with respect to the family members - again, emotional cost? Father works two jobs; children are deprived of father.

Assess utilized versus unutilized resources - particularly emotions.

Note here that time is one commodity we all have and yet the one over which we have the least control.

Time

Work or activity focused ways of structuring time; e.g., play tennis together or run store together.

There are a number of options when two members are together:

- A. Withdrawal - read newspaper.
- B. Rituals - "Hi," "Hi, we're having weather today, aren't we!"
- C. Past timing - Passing the time. "Have you ever been to . . .?"
- D. Gaming (Berne) a major way that families structure time; e.g., manipulation, approach avoidance.
- E. Intimacy - free, spontaneous movement. People are extremely vulnerable here.

Families ought to have options in terms of ways of structuring time. Creative, playful rituals, greeting dad when he comes home from work. Ceremonies at Christmas. These provide stability to raising a family - rituals may blossom into intimacy.

VIII. Environment:

The essence of the environment is that the system often can do very little about it. Environment has impact on the system and the system has little impact on the environment.

Determine what is environment and what is inside the system.

Questions:

1. Can I do anything about it?
2. Does it matter relative to my goals?

If answer one is now and answer two is yes, then the problem is environment.

If answer one is yes, then it is inside the system.

Consider such issues as:

- A. The family's housing . . . what is the physical layout of the housing . . . who sleeps where . . . what elements are there for privacy . . . what elements are there for quiet play and noisy play . . . what arrangements are there for dining?
- B. What is the environment like within the housing . . . i.e., utilization of the TV set.

“LET’S GET IT RIGHT”: MULTISYSTEM & MULTILEVEL ASSESSMENTS IN FAMILY ASSESSMENTS

THE STRUCTURED FAMILY INTERVIEW

Source:

Through a series of very structured tasks (The Structured Family Interview), Paul Watzlawick (1966) instructed family members individually, the family as a whole and each of the various family subsystems to discuss and reach consensus regarding a number of questions and family issues.

How it is done and what it measures:

The format of the Structured Family Interview (SFI) includes: 1) asking each individual family member apart from the family the following question, “In all families there are problems, “What do you think is the major problem in your family?” 2) Subsequently, the entire family is brought together and asked the same question. The family is instructed to discuss and reach consensus on what the major problem of the family is. 3) The next step in the SFI is that the family is requested to plan an activity that they can all do together. 4) Upon the completion of task 3, each of the family’s subsystems is required to plan an activity together, e.g. father - children, mother - children, sibling(s), and wife – husband. 5) The parents are then asked to discuss the following question, “Of all the people in the world, why did you select each other to be partners?” 6) The final task in the SFI is that each parent is given the proverb, “A rolling stone gathers no moss”. They are to reach agreement as to its meaning, and then after the children are brought into the room, teach the meaning of the proverb to their children. Again, the Olson template is employed to evaluate their interactions, role performances, decision making skills, time and space dimensions and communication patterns. What individuals say about themselves is often very different than what other family members say about them. This provides you with insight into family relationship systems as well as each of the subsystems within the family.

How to document:

Describe the activity, your observations of the family process, and document in the appropriate section.

Example:

The Markus family consists of Dad (age 49), Mom (age 43), Misty, (age 17), Brad (age 15) and Belinda (age 11). During the individual interviews with each of the three children, each stated that the family’s major problem was that “dad was nervous”. However, during the family interview, the “consensus” was that the major problem of the Markus family was Misty’s “bad attitude” toward just about everything. When Dad was asked about this latter, he opened up about being diagnosed with an anxiety disorder. Further discussions allowed him to talk about how anxiety disorder affected his relationships at home, at work and how it impacts his parenting.

Conclusion: The Markus family is rigidly disengaged.

**“LET’S GET IT RIGHT”: MULTISYSTEM &
MULTILEVEL ASSESSMENTS IN FAMILY
ASSESSMENTS**

FAMILY SYSTEMS EXERCISE

This exercise provides an opportunity to reinforce learning regarding family systems. Select a client family that you know well. Then...

1. List the members of the family system:

2. Identify the subsystems in this family by generation, sex, interests, abilities, function, etc.

3. Evaluate the boundaries of this family system on a continuum from open (1) to closed (10):

4. Rate the functioning of this family system on a continuum ranging from disengaged (1) to enmeshed (10):

5. Rate the functioning of this family system on a continuum from rigid (1) to chaotic (10):

6. Identify the family members according to their formal and assigned roles:

7. Identify the family members according to their *in*formal and ascribed roles:

Place a “+” next to any role designation that you believe supports the growth of the family member(s) and a “-” next to any role designation that inhibits growth.

8. Are there role conflicts within this family? If so explain:

9. Is there ambiguity in any of the roles? If so explain:

10. Is role shift likely to take place in time of crisis? If so explain:

11. Are family roles congruent with social and community norms? Explain:

12. Think of ways in which cultural influences affect role performances in this family. Give examples:

13. Are there relationships in which the family projection process takes place? If so give examples:

14. How has knowledge of family systems expanded your understanding of this family? Explain:

ECOMAP

Source:

This assessment tool was developed by Ann Hartman (1975) to help public child welfare workers examine the needs of families. Foster care/adoption workers have long utilized ecomaps as an easy and effective means of learning about the family's connection with systems in its environment.

How it is done and what it measures:

This exercise is completed with the entire family together. Using the format and symbols on the following pages, the family members map out the significant connections in their lives (i.e., extended family, work, church, school, friends, etc.) and whether or not those connections are supportive and good resources, or whether they are stressful, confliction, or depleting.

Constructing an ecomap can be a dynamic way of diagramming the connections between the family and the people and institutions in its life space. The ecomap provides a visual overview of the complex ecological system of the family and shows its organizational patterns and relationships. It maps the major systems that are part of the family's environment and provides a picture of the balance between the demands and resources of the family system. In highlighting the nature of the connections between the family and its ecological system, the ecomap demonstrates the flow of resources from the environment to the family as well as deprivations and unmet needs. In terms of the Circumplex model, members of disengaged families will have many lines indicating a flow of energy and resources away from the family; enmeshed families will have few exchanges (with the exception of perhaps very strong ties to the extended family and church/synagogue) with the outside environment; and chaotic families will have many lines indicating stressful relationships with the outside world.

How to document:

Describe the activity, your observations of the family dynamics and communication processes and document in the appropriate section.

Example:

Please see the symbols, map, and sample of the Garner family on the following pages.

ECOMAP SYMBOLS

Male



Female



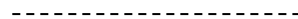
Other Systems



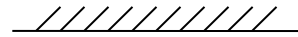
Strong Relationships



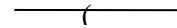
Tenuous or weak relationships



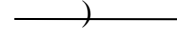
Stressful relationships



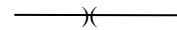
Cutoff relationship by person on the right



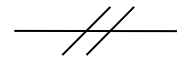
Cutoff relationship by person on the left



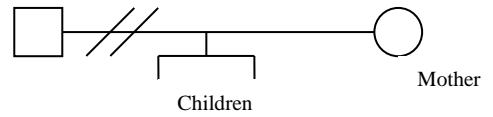
Cutoff relationship by both persons



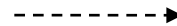
Divorce



Custodial parent in a divorce



Flow of energy, resources



Direction of movement



Person deceased

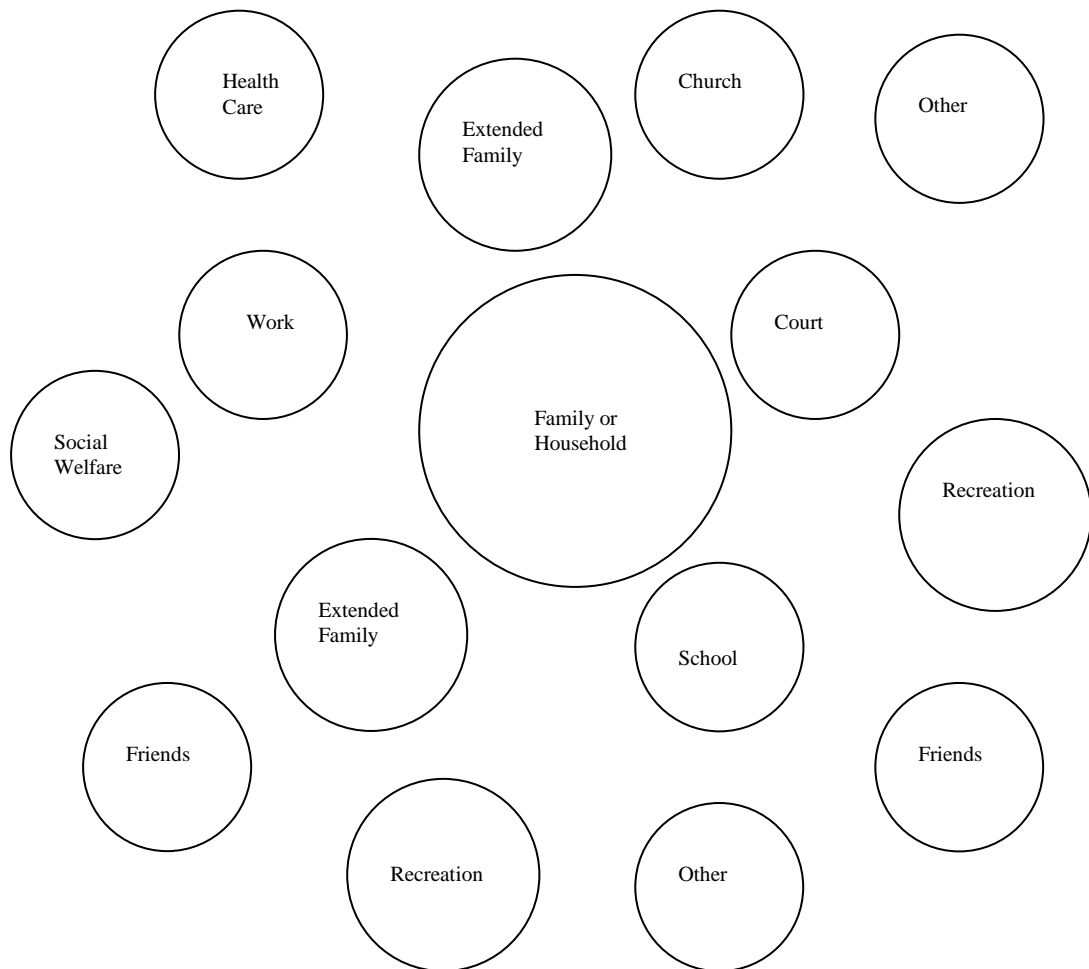


Name _____ Date _____

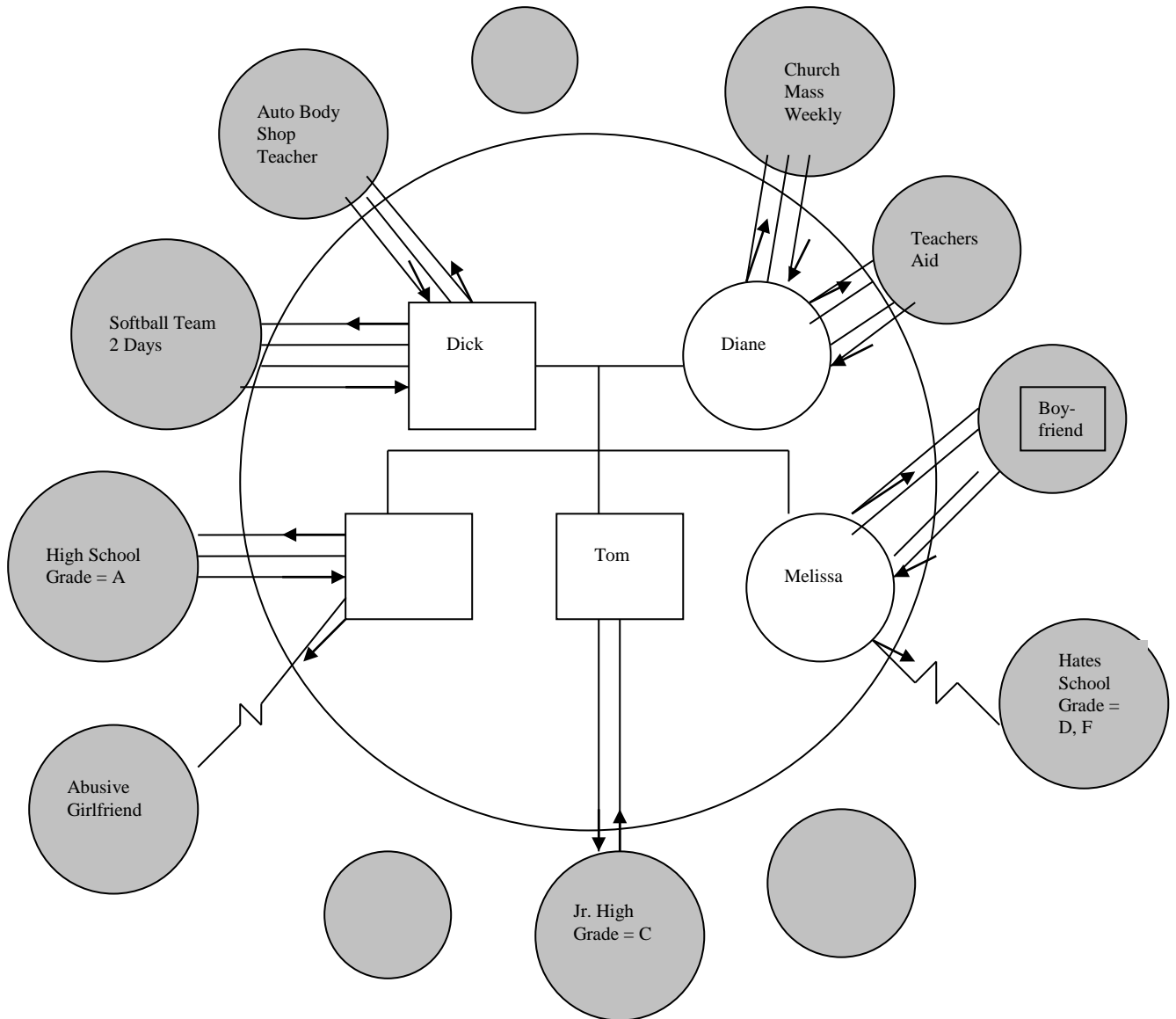
ECOMAP

Fill in connections where they exist. Indicate nature of connections with a descriptive word or by drawing different kinds of lines. Draw arrows along lines to signify flow of energy, resources, etc. Identify significant people and fill in empty circles as needed.

Strong ===== Tenuous ----- Stressful +++++



GARDNER FAMILY ECOMAP



Conclusion: The Gardner family is on the whole “balanced” both receiving and giving back in the areas of employment, church, recreational and social activities. Two stressful and problematic areas appear to be Rick’s abusive girlfriend and Melissa’s attitude towards and performance in high school.

GENOGRAM

Source:

The standardized genogram format has become a common language for tracking family history and relationships. It was worked out by a committee (American Primary Care Research Group, 1985) of leading proponents of genograms from family therapy and family medicine, including such key people as Murray Bowen, Jack Froom, Monica McGoldrick and Jack Medalie.

How it is done and what it measures:

Genogram information can be obtained by interviewing one family member, several members or the entire family together. Getting information from several family members increases reliability and provides the opportunity to compare individual perspectives and observe interactions directly. Using the format and symbols on the following pages, family members map out together (or separately) how different family members are biologically and legally related to one another from one generation to the next, critical individual and family events and changes in family functioning.

Foster care and adoption workers have long relied on the genogram as an adjunct to interviewing for learning about the family's history over a period of time. A family's genogram is a graphic longitudinal depiction of how family members are biologically and legally related to each other. Based upon the concept of a family tree, it usually includes data about three or more generations of the family, which provides a longitudinal perspective. As a diagram of the family's relationship system, the genogram provides a graphic picture of family genealogy, including significant life events (birth, marriage, separation, divorce, illness, death); identification (racial, social class, ethnic, religious); occupations; and places of family residence. Family patterns emerge, providing vital information that frequently relates to current family functioning and system composition. [For more detailed information on genograms see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genogram>] Many have stressed the usefulness of genograms for working with families at various life cycle stages, for keeping track of complex relational configurations seen in remarried families, for engaging and keeping track of complex culturally diverse families, for exploring specific issues (i.e. sexuality, alcoholism, mental illness, etc.) and for making family interventions.

Like ecomapping, it is unfortunate however, that often times this assessment tool is given as "home work" to be completed by the family at home and that no criteria or template is employed to assess the completed tasks. Much interactional data is lost and therefore cannot be included in the home study assessment. It is argued here that genogram procedures need to be presented to the family as part of the interviewing process and that the interactional process and the task outcomes or final work product be assessed in terms of the Olson template. In general, chaotic families' genograms will depict numerous relationship disruptions (separations, divorce), short-term and/or serial primary relationships; disengaged families' genograms will unlikely go beyond one or two generations and partners will know little of one another's family history or

background; enmeshed and rigid family genograms may be able to trace family ancestry and history back centuries with minute details of past and present family members life stories.

How to document:

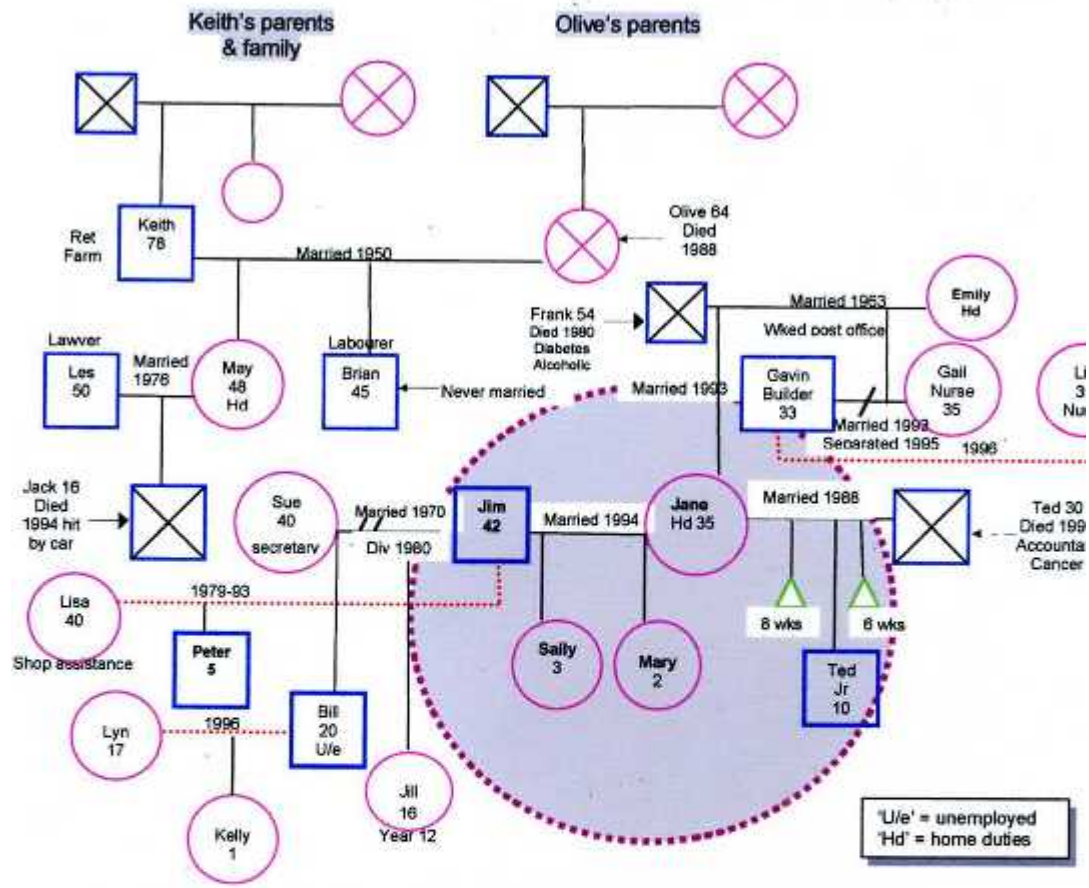
Describe the activity, your observations of the family dynamics and communication processes and document in the appropriate section.

Example:

Please see the symbols, map, and sample of the Contery family on the following pages.

EXAMPLE OF A GENOGRAM:

Family Name: _____ Date: _____



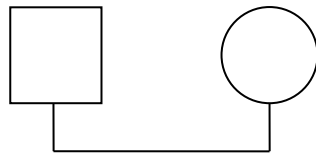
Below are some examples of the issues that need to be explored with applicant/s

1. How have the family dealt with grief and loss (miscarriages, death of a husband, separations, divorce)?
2. How did the relationships start and end?
3. How have values and beliefs been passed on (eg. work, education, divorce, money, family, religion etc)?
4. How do they support each other/ how much contact do family members have?
5. How have disputes/friction between family members been handled?
6. Which are the strong or weak relationships?
7. How important is family- is there any contact with children from previous marriages/relationships?
8. How would they describe individual family members, and who are they most similar to?
9. How would they describe relationships with father, mother, siblings, extended family, ex partners, etc?
10. Are there any patterns noted (eg. careers, illness, names, violence, alcohol)?

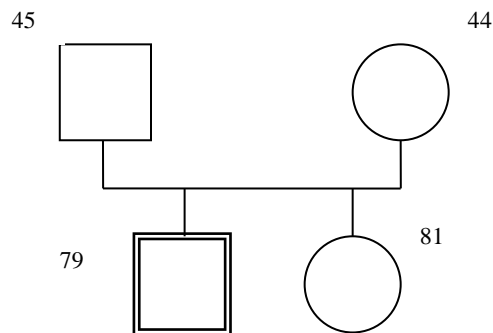
BASIC GENOGRAM COMPONENTS

Although there is general agreement on the basic genogram structure and codes, there are some variations on how to depict certain family situations, such as cutoffs, adoptions, etc. The following are the symbols that are used in genograms:

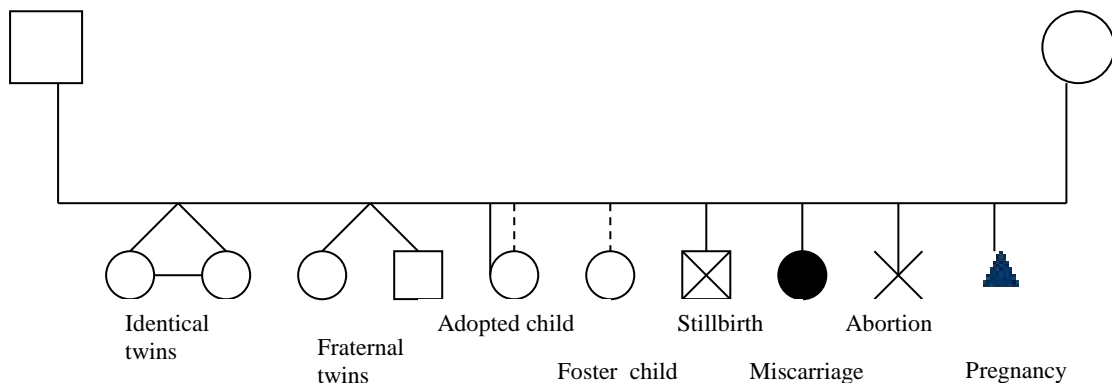
The male is noted by a square, the female by a circle. The male is placed to the left of the female in the father/mother dyad. Marriage is shown by a line connecting the two.



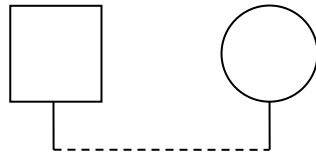
Children are noted oldest to youngest, left to right. The index person of the genogram (or person from whose perspective it is being drawn) is set off from the others and marked with double lines. Birth dates are often recorded to the upper left or right. If the first two digits of the year can't be mistaken, the last two digits of the year are often all that's needed.



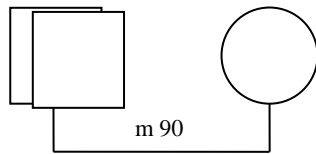
Other importation notations are shown below:



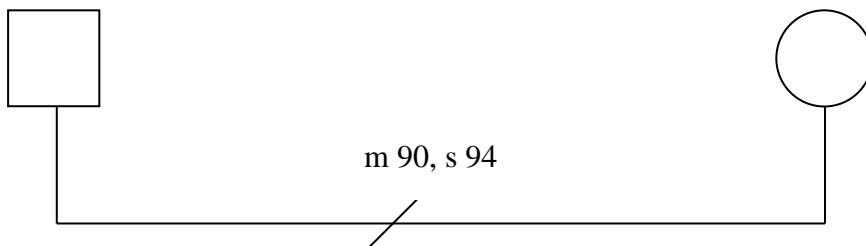
Liaisons or a couple living together are displayed similar to marriage, but with a dotted line.



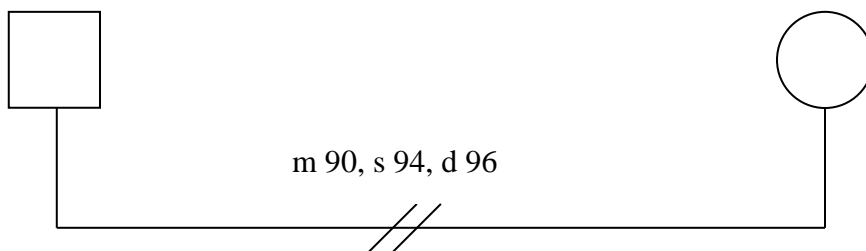
Marriage Dates are recorded above the line connecting husband and wife.



A **separation** of a couple is marked with one slashed line. The date is also usually recorded.

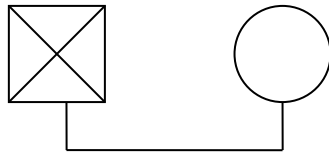


A **divorce** of a couple is marked with two slashed lines. The date is also usually recorded.

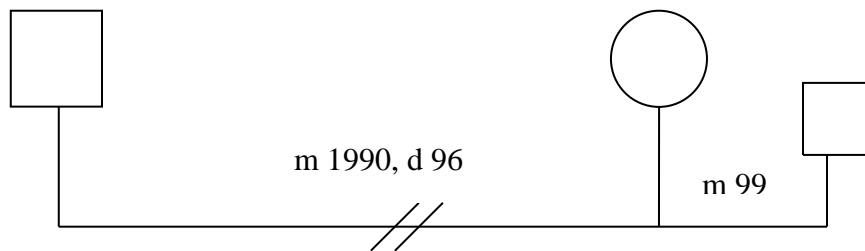


The **death** of a person is indicated by an "x" through the shape. The birth and death dates are also usually recorded.

4-5-98



A **remarriage** (or former marriage) is shown to the side with a smaller shape. The focus couple is the one in the middle with the larger shapes. *Note: If there has been more than one remarriage, the marriages are usually placed from left to right with the most recent marriage coming last.*



Closeness of relationship:

You can also depict the type of relationship of two family members with lines connecting those persons. For example, two people with a normal relationship would have one line drawn between them. Those with a close relationship would have two lines drawn between them. Those with a fused (extremely close) relationship would have three lines drawn between them.

Depictions of other types of relationships can also be shown. A dotted line between two people indicates a distant relationship. (This is different than the dotted line showing a romantic liaison or the dotted line showing a foster or adopted child.) A jagged line shows a hostile relationship. A jagged line with two straight lines shows a close, hostile relationship, and a jagged line with three straight lines shows a fused, hostile relationship.

Dysfunctional relationships:

You can depict some additional, dysfunctional relationships with genograms, also. Sexual abuse is shown by a large jagged line with an arrow from the abuser to the abused. Physical abuse is shown by a small jagged line and an arrow from the abuser to the abused. A relationship where one member is focused unhealthily on another member is depicted by a straight line with an arrow from the focused member to the member being focused upon. A relationship that is cutoff, where the two family members do not have contact, is shown with two short perpendicular lines that break up the relationship line.

Triangles:

Another pattern in family relationships is the triangle. In a family system, a triangle represents the coalition of two family members against another family member and can be represented on a genogram. Triangles are often seen among two parents and one child, where one of the parents creates an alliance with the child against the other parent. Another classic triangle involves a son, his wife and his mother. Such a triangle may play out in a variety of ways. For example, the wife may blame her mother-in-law for her frustrations with her husband, while the mother-in-law blames the wife for taking her son away.

FAMILY LOG

Source:

Unknown

How it is done and what it measures:

This assessment tool requires that the family together (or separately) track each family member's activities throughout a typical day at half hour intervals beginning with the family member who is first to arise in the morning and ending with the family member who is the last to go to bed. Using a spread sheet format, the worker fills in the entries by asking very specific concrete questions related to time, place, activity, etc. For example, parents may be asked the following of their 10 year old son, Jim. "Where is Jim at this time?" "What is Jim doing?" "Who is Jim with?" "What class is he in?" "Who is his teacher?" "Where is he in the room?" etc. Disengaged family members will not be able to answer these detailed questions or be only able to give vague and the most general responses while enmeshed families will be able to offer minute details of even the most insignificant activity. Family rules and roles within the family will emerge as various daily activities for each family member are traced.

How to document:

Describe the activity and your assessment of each family member's perception of how each family member spends a typical day in terms of the Olson template cohesion (space, time, boundaries) and adaptability (family rules and roles) and document in the appropriate section.

Example:

David (age 28) and Jenny McCall (age 24) are parents of nine month old Joshua. Below are the two family logs which David and Jenny completed separately. As indicated below, David has little if any awareness of his wife's activities during the day nor does he have the faintest idea of the daily tasks that are required in running a household and caring for a nine month old baby. In his demeaning view, his wife spends the day smoking, sleeping, watching TV and playing with Joshua. Similarly, Jenny has little awareness of where her husband is and what he is doing during the day except to say that he's "at work".

Conclusion: The McCall family is disengaged and rigidly connected.

DAD

TIM E	DAVID	JENNY	JOSHUA	CAT
6:00	Wake for work	Sleep	Sleep	Sleep
6:30	Leave for work	Sleep	Waking up	Eating
7:00	Morning meeting	Feed Joshua	Eating	Sleeping outside
7:30	FOD walk ends	Smoking	Sleeping	“
8:00	Normal work	Sleep	Sleep	“
8:30	Computer assistance	Sleep	Sleep	“
9:00	Normal work	Watch TV	Awake	“
9:30	Break	TV/Play	Play	“
10:00	Check network	TV/Play	Play	“
10:30	Normal work	Smoking	Play	“
11:00	Computer problem	Feeding Joshua	Eating	“
11:30	Lunch	Smoking	Play	“
12:00	Lunch	Soaps	Play	“
12:30	Smoking	TV/Play	Play	“
13:00	Computer problem	Feeding Joshua	Eating	“
13:30	Smoking	TV	Sleeping	“
14:00	Normal work	Smoking	Play	Eating
14:30	Break	TV	play	Sleeping outside
15:00	Network maintenance planning	Smoking	Play	“
15:30	Prepare to secure	TV/Play	Play	“
16:00	Afternoon meeting	Feeding Joshua	Eating	“
16:30	Finish up	Smoking	Play	“
17:00	Leave work	TV	Play	“
17:30	Home	Play	Play	“
18:00	Play w/Joshua	Cook dinner	Play	“
18:30	Play w/Joshua	Cook dinner	Play	“
19:00	Smoking	Finish cooking	Play	“
19:30	Eating	Eating	Eating	Eating
20:00	TV/Josh	Smoking	Play	Sleeping inside
20:30	Feed Josh	TV	Eating	“
21:00	TV	TV	Sleep	“
21:30	Smoking	Smoking	“	“
22:00	News	News	“	“
22:30	Smoking	Smoking	“	“
23:00	Sleep	Sleep	“	“

MOM

TIM E	JENNY	DAVID	JOSHUA	CAT
7:00	Wake up	At work	Waiting in crib	Wants outside
7:30	TV & coffee	At work	In my arms	Playing
8:00	Making breakfast	At work	Waiting for breakfast	Playing
8:30	Cleaning up	Working	Waiting to be cleaned	Sleeping
9:00	Daddy called	Called us	Playing in crib	Sleeping
9:30	TV & coffee	Working	Walker	Sleeping
10:00	Called my dad	Working	In my arms	Sleeping
10:30	Water man comes	Working	In walker	Sleeping
11:00	Trying to get Joshua down from excitement	Working	Getting ready for a nap	Sleeping
11:30	Still trying to get Joshua to nap	Working	Fighting nap time	Playing
12:00	Made lunch	Home for lunch	Eating daddy's sandwich	In the house
12:30	Talking & TV	Eating & talking	Playing with daddy	In the house
1:00	Having relaxation	Working	Finally napping	Eating
1:30	Did dishes	Working	Napping	Sleeping
2:00	Cleaned floor	Working	Napping	Sleeping
2:30	Trying to nap	Working	Woke up	Sleeping
3:00	Rocking Joshua	Working	Playing with cat	Playing
3:30	Chasing after Joshua	Still working	Wide awake	Playing
4:00	Changed medicine	Working	Back asleep	Playing
4:30	Watching TV	Working	Sleeping	In my lap
5:00	Wait for David to come home	Hopefully on the way home	Sleeping	Back Outside
5:30	David arrives home	Home	Playing	Outside
6:00				
6:30				
7:00				
7:30				
8:00				
8:30				
9:00				
10:00	Watch TV	Watch TV	Sleeping	Sleeping
10:30	Talking	Talking	Sleeping	Sleeping
11:00	Talking	Talking	Sleeping	Sleeping
11:30	TV & talk	TV & talk	Sleeping	Sleeping
12:00	Went to bed together & kiss each other	Went to bed together	Sleeping	Sleeping
12:30	Talk in bed	Talk in bed	Sleeping	Sleeping

BUILD A DREAM HOUSE

Source:

The “Build a Dream House” assessment tool is an adaptation of Cromwell and Peterson’s (1981) Family Interaction Game (FIG).

How it is done and what it measures:

The “Build a Dream House” exercise involves the family working together for 30 minutes on a common task. In this task, the family is given \$800,000.00 (or whatever) for the purpose of building their ideal “dream house”. Construction paper, precut rooms of varying sizes, scissors, a pen and a price list for each room are provided. The family is requested to reach consensus, make decisions and create a floor plan with these materials. Family interactions are observed in terms of cohesion (decision making processes and problem solving skills, communal and individual privacy patterns [time and space], and personal boundaries) and adaptability (role performance, and family rules). At the completion of the task, the worker debriefs the family by taking a tour of the newly created dream house. Going from room to room the family is asked the following questions: (1) “How is this room furnished?” (2) “Who spends time here and what do they do?”; and (3) “What are the rules for this room?” Responses from family members are assessed in terms of who responds. The family roles and rules which emerge both during the task observation and the debriefing are interpreted in terms of the Olson template adaptability. Similarly, patterns of communication, where individuals spend time together and apart (time and space) and individual and generational boundaries are assessed in terms of the cohesion template.

How to document:

Describe the activity, your observations of the family dynamics and communication processes and document in the appropriate section.

Example:

The Gonzalez family consists of dad (42), wife (40), two teenage daughters (16 & 14) and two foster children ages 5 and 2. The two teenage daughters are birth children of the mother by a previous marriage. The couple is trying to adopt the two younger children.

The teenage girls dominated the entire “Build a Dream House” exercise. Although Mrs. Gonzalez did organize the process when it got out of hand, she allowed them to dictate the house floor plan as well as how the rooms were furnished. Dad asked questions when clarification was needed, but did not make any requests as to how the rooms were to be arranged. He enjoyed watching the children participate in the activity. He held the 5 year old boy the entire time of the exercise. Both parents

seemed to enjoy watching the teenagers build the dream house. The girls stated that they only wanted a four or five bedroom house and that they didn't need a pool. Mother had the girls walk them through the completed house so that everyone knew where their own rooms were. The teenagers took the smaller bedrooms and immediately threw out the two largest rooms saying they were not needed. Overall, the Gonzalez's "dream" was very modest. Both parents appeared to be satisfied.

During the home visit, this worker observed the teenagers to be very polite and helpful in the house. They were very respectful to both their mother and stepfather. This worker distanced himself from the family during the activity and observed only one conflict. The 5 year old boy wanted the largest room available but was shut down by the teenagers. Dad firmly said he was just a five year old and didn't need the biggest room. After minor protestation, the 5 year old went along with the decision. He agreed and the project continued. This worker observed that the family norm in the home was to be interactive and loud. During the debriefing, the worker asked them what happens if a family member needs time to him or herself, and how the need for privacy was communicated and how it was received. The 16 year old teenager stated that when she needs time to herself, she goes in her room and shuts the door, and her family knows "not to mess with me". This interviewer asked the family what it would be like if they got a foster child who was quiet and private. They acknowledged that it would be difficult, as most of the family member's state what they are thinking and feeling, and expect the same from other family members. Some help may need to be given to this family on working with foster children who may have different personality dynamics.

Conclusion: The Gonzalez family is flexibly connected.

PLAN A FAMILY MEAL

Source:

The “Plan a Meal Together” task was developed by Salvador Minuchin (1974) at the Philadelphia Child Guidance Clinic to assess dynamics and interactions in family therapy where one of its members suffered an eating disorder. In this task, the family is requested to make decisions and reach consensus regarding a meal that they could all eat.

How it is done and what it measures:

The family is asked to plan a meal together as you observe. The meal must consist of the following ingredients: one beverage, one meat, two vegetables, and one dessert. The worker takes note of which meal is planned (breakfast, lunch, or dinner), what day of the week the meal will be held, and where the meal will take place (kitchen, dining room, picnic table in the backyard). Once the family has finished, ask them to talk about the meal they have planned. As the family goes through the process of planning a meal together, the home study worker is observing time dimensions, space factors, boundary issues and communication patterns (cohesion) and family roles and rules (adaptability) that emerge. Are family members supportive and complimentary of each other? Are they divisive? Do they respect and accept other family member’s choices? Is someone attempting to control the decisions?

How to document:

Describe the activity, your observations of the family process, and document in the appropriate section.

Example:

The Crawford family consist of foster/adoptive mom (age 38), and her two adopted sons Kenny (age 12), Alex (age 10) and two foster (in the process of being adopted by Ms. Crawford) sons Matt (age 8) and Cody (age7). Kenny and Alex are birth siblings as are Matt and Cody.

All five family members sat down together at a picnic table in the backyard. After instructing the family on the “Plan a Meal Together” task, I went to a nearby bench where I could observe and hear the families’ interactions. Mon listened to the boys for about a half a minute until they had about five choices they had narrowed down for their choice of meat. Mom chose roast beef, Matt picked hot dogs, Alex selected chicken wings, Cody wanted pizza and Kenny wanted subway sandwiches. Mom took charge and allowed each son an opportunity to select a meat and then put the choice to a vote. Kenny and Alex tried to sway the others votes. Matt kept changing his mind. The choice of chicken wings won out. They all agreed on corn on the cob which is a family favorite. Kenny and Matt wanted soda; Cody, milk; and Alex, ice tea. Mom suggested water but no one wanted that. They agreed on ice tea after about

two minutes of discussion. There was much discussion on the selection of dessert, including apple pie (mom), chocolate cake (Alex, Matt and Cody), and banana splits (Kenny). In the end, they all agreed on chocolate cake. They wanted to bake it themselves.

The menu was agreed upon in about fifteen minutes. They agreed on a meat and dessert by taking a vote. Mom was cool and calm throughout the exercise with all of the boys. She did not let them get the best of her. She did not lose patience once even with Kenny. Kenny tried to monopolize the voting but mom allowed choices to be made democratically. Majority ruled. Mom enjoyed the exercise the most. Cody expressed himself pretty well then went along with the majority. Matt was the most argumentative and kept debating the meat selection. Alex just wanted to make the meal. Mom said they would have to wait until Saturday to fix the meal. I asked what time would this meal be served. Mom said it would take too long to plan meals like this every day but the family would try to do this group planning together once a month. Kenny did not isolate this time which is unusual.

Conclusion: The Crawford family is structurally connected.

Duehn's Family Sculpting Exercise

Source:

This assessment procedure is a modification of Kvebaek Family Sculpture Technique (Cromwell, et al., 1981).

How it is done and what it measures:

In this assessment technique, family members are individually asked to select a Fisher-Price® "little people" figure to represent each family member. Then they are asked to place the figures (depicting family members) on a plain square sheet of paper (10" by 10") in a manner that represents how they view the relationship structure within their family. Additional sculptures of the extended family, family pets, and the relevant social network can be added if so desired. Individual sculptures are complete independently. Each family member is encouraged during a debriefing to explain his or her placement of the "little people". Final placements, order of placement and movement of the figures are assessed in terms of the individual explanations of the configuration. Information gathered during the debriefing and the arrangement of figures on the square sheet of paper are assessed in terms of cohesion (space, time, communication and boundaries) and adaptability.

How to document:

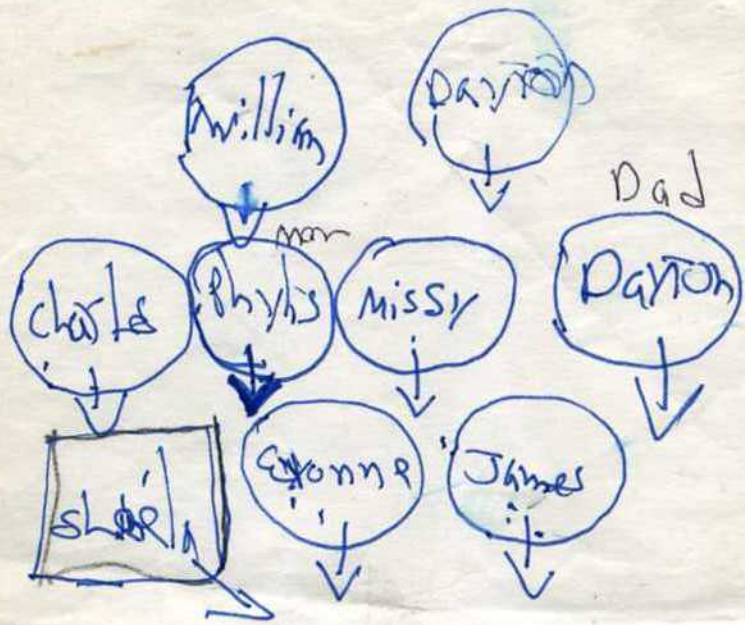
Describe the activity, your observations of each family member's placement of the "little people" and each person's explanation of the completed configuration and document in the appropriate section.

Example:

Phyllis (age 39) and Dayton (age 41) Wilson are the parents of seven children. Dayton Jr. (age 13) and James (age 12) are biological sons. William (age 11), Charles (age 11), and Sheila (age 9) are an adopted sibling group. Yvonne (age 6) and Missy (age 4) are foster daughters who the Wilsons are planning to adopt.

As indicated below, Phyllis and Dayton independently sculptured almost identical configurations. The only difference was the reversed placements of Dayton Jr. and James, understandably so since both are biological sons with only a year's difference in age. Both parents placed the figures very closely together with all figures facing in one direction as if they were having their pictures taken.

Conclusion: The Wilson family is highly connected (bordering on enmeshment) and very structured.



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