

Family Therapy

The Framework:

Family relationships are the most important relationships we have in life. When emotional and behavioral problems emerge in children, they often develop within a context of family relationships and communication patterns, and the family context typically influences how these problems are expressed.

The solutions to family issues being expressed through child emotional and behavioral problems are often found in developing supportive family relationships and communications that create effective parenting and dialogue in which affectionate bonding within the family can develop.

The Goal:

The goal of family therapy is to improve the communication and quality of family relationships to achieve emotionally, socially, and psychologically healthy personal and interpersonal development with all family members.

The Client System, Confidentiality, & Privacy:

In family therapy, the client is the family and each member within the family, so that family therapy embraces the inter-related relationships, affectionate bonding, and communication patterns of the family's members. As such, confidentiality is kept within the family. Dr. Childress does not keep secrets within a family. All family members should be aware that any information shared with Dr. Childress becomes available to all family members.

Dr. Childress also recognizes the importance of personal privacy, particularly regarding marital information that may not be appropriate for children to learn. Dr. Childress will use his professional judgment regarding the sharing of private information within the family, and he will not automatically share all information with all family members. At the same time, Dr. Childress will not keep secrets that would be important for other family members to know (such as hiding marital infidelity of one spouse from the other spouse).

The client is the family system, and confidentiality is kept within the family. A healthy family should have a degree of personal privacy, because a family is made up of individuals, but a healthy family should not have secrets.

Dr. Childress maintains the confidentiality of family discussions relative to persons outside the family, and Dr. Childress will not disclose information about the family without the documented permission of all adult members of the client family system.

However, Dr. Childress is also required by law to sometimes disclose confidential information if the disclosure of this information is necessary to protect someone's safety, such as in situations of child or elder abuse, suicidality, or dangerousness to others. You should discuss these limits of confidentiality with Dr. Childress as part of the informed consent process for agreeing to family therapy.

Session Structures:

A family has many different components, including the individuals, the marital unit that serves as the organizing foundation for the family, the various parent-child subsystems, as well as potential sibling sub-systems. Sometimes extended family members are also important contributors to the interpersonal atmosphere of the family. As a family therapist, Dr. Childress works with all of these various component parts of the family, as well as with the family as a whole, to achieve the desired results of healthy and affectionally bonded family relationships. Sometimes one subsystem or family member needs support, at other times a different family subsystem may need attention.

Dr. Childress varies his involvement and session structures to the emerging needs of the family as a whole. In some circumstances or at some points in time Dr. Childress may work with the marital unit, or with a particular parent-child unit, with an individual family member, or with the sibling sub-system. Yet in this sub-system work the client remains the family. Any work with a particular subsystem maintains as its goal the development of healthy and affectionally bonded family relationships. Depending on the issues involved, some elements of the family system may require greater focus and attention at some points in time than other elements of the family system.

The Separating Family:

When there are no children involved, a divorce brings the family to an end.

However, when there are children, the family does not necessarily end with divorce. In healthy family structures, divorce simply transforms the family into a new structural phase, that of the separated family structure. Children love their parents. Both parents. Children's love for their parents will forever unite the family.

An intact family structure is united by the marital bond, a separated family structure is united by the children, and by the continuing parental roles of both parents with the children. The children are the uniting force within a separated family structure. It therefore becomes essential for the emotional and psychological well being of the children that their parents manage their separation in as peaceful and as respectful a way as possible.

Loss and change always involves grief and sadness. Even if the marriage wasn't a happy one, still there is grief and sadness at the loss of the "family dream," the hopes that both the husband and wife had for a stable and affectionate family (that prompted their marriage in the first place), but that did not emerge. Anger is common. Blame is common. Grief and sadness are natural by-products of a separating family.

However, blame regarding separation is not helpful for the children, whose love for both parents continues to bond the family structure. Blaming within the marital structure rips children apart emotionally and psychologically. Children love their parents. **Both parents.** In the transition from an intact family structure to a separated family structure, the less blame occurs in the marital sub-system, the healthier it is for the uniting sub-system of the children, whose love for both parents continues to unite and bond the family.

Children flourish best in a healthy intact family, and Dr. Childress prefers this treatment goal as long as there are children within the family.