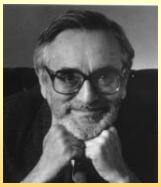
Healthy Marriages, Relationships and Families: Interventions, Research and Policies

Week _____

Structural Family Therapy
- Salvador Minuchin



As of May 19, 2008, video of Salvador Minuchin on You Tube at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yorKLGegpS0

Promoting Child Welfare: Training Professionals to Support Healthy Marriages, Relationships and Families Project.

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Project Mission: To develop curricula and provide training for students and professionals that enhance their ability to facilitate healthy marriages, relationship and families in the child welfare population, with the end goal of promoting and improving the well-being of children.

Project funded by the US Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families.
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Interview with Salvador Minuchin

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yorKLGegpS0

8 minute interview

Right click on "http" and click on "open link" to open. Must be connected to internet.

What is It?

Structural family therapy is a model of treatment based on systems theory that was developed by Salvador Minuchin.

The model's distinctive features are

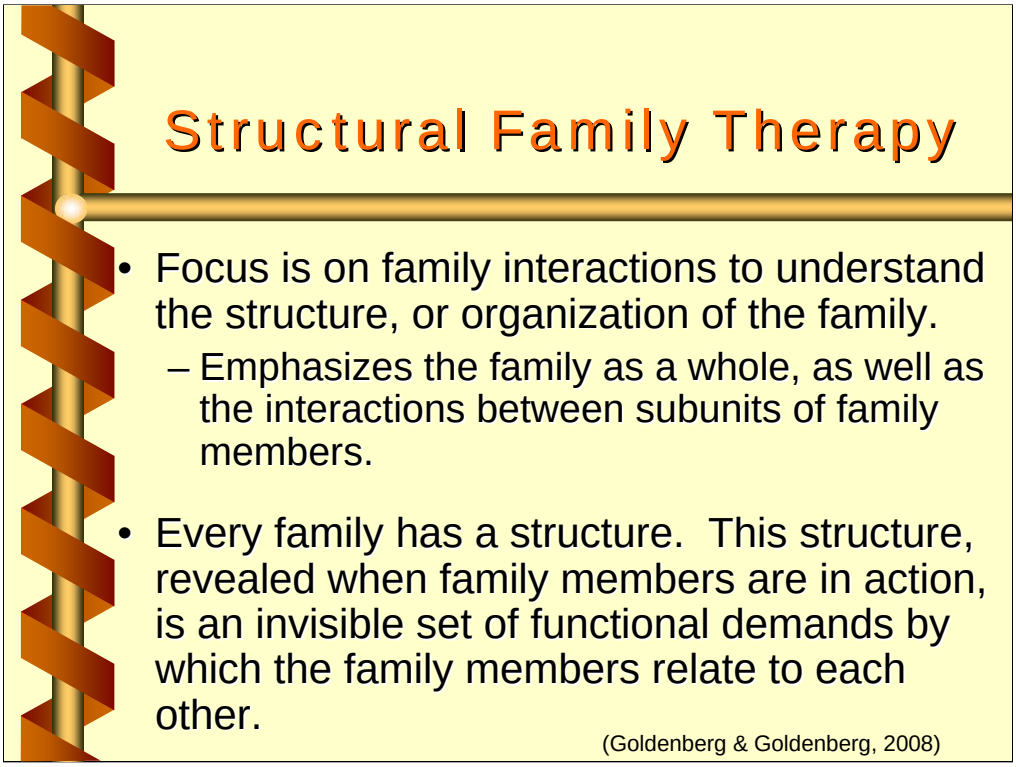
- its emphasis on structural change as the main goal of therapy, which acquires preeminence over the details of individual change, and
- the attention paid to the therapist as an active agent in the process of restructuring the family.

(Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2008)

Well suited to Working with Low-Resource Couples and Families

- Was initially developed to meet the needs of poor inner city youth and their families.
- Family-oriented, current experience, outcome approach.

(Aponte and Dicesare, 2002)



Every family has a structure. This structure, revealed when family members are in action, is an invisible set of functional demands by which family members relate to each other.

continued

- Symptoms are a by-product of structural failings. A person's symptoms are best understood in the family context
- Structural changes must occur in a family before an individual's symptoms can be reduced. The family is the client.
- Techniques are active, directive, and well thought-out.

(Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2008)

Theoretical Tenets:

1. Family Structure
2. Subsystems
3. Boundaries
4. Developmental Family Life Stages

(Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2008)

1. Family Structure

- Invisible web of complementary demands and expectations that organize the way family members relate to one another. The structure includes
  - Ways of relating
  - Rules
  - Roles
  - Boundaries
  - Hierarchy
  - Power

(Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2008)

2. Family Subsystems

- Subsystems are the components of the family's structure that exist to carry out various family tasks. Examples:
  - Adult subsystems – spousal or include other adult members.
    - Spousal subsystem – works best when there is complementarity of functions. They operate as team and accept their interdependence.
  - Parental – those responsible for the care, protection and socialization of children.
  - Sibling or child

(Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2008)

Complementarity = is the defining principle of every relationship, in that one person's behavior is co-determined by another's behavior.

Spousal or Adult Couple Subsystem is Characterized by

- Complementarity & accommodation.
- It is a boundary within a boundary.
  - *The inner boundary maintains the individuality of each member, while the outer boundary defines the subsystem and protects it from intrusion of outside forces, such as jobs, external family, etc.*

Most important task is the creation of boundaries to protect the subsystem's domain from intrusion from other subsystem such as children or in-laws.

Problems in this subsystems spill over to the rest of the family.

(Sexton et al. 2003)

Spousal and Adult couple subsystems work best when there is a complementarity of functions. The operate as a team and accept their interdependence.

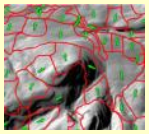
The Spousal or Couple subsystem models intimate relationships for children.

Subsystems continued

- Family members play a different role in each of the subsystems they belong.
- Structural difficulty occurs when one subsystem takes over or intrudes into another.

(Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2008)

3. Boundaries



- *Physical and psychological factors that separate people from one another and organize them.*
- *Sets of rules that define who participates and how they participate in systems and subsystems.*

(Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2008)

Boundaries continued

- Emotional barriers that protect & enhance the integrity of individuals, subsystems & families. Issues arise when
  - Extremes of boundaries
  - Disengagement-overly detached-rigid
  - Enmeshment-very involved as one-diffuse-fosters dependency on parents

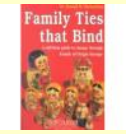
(Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2008)

Proper Family Functioning = Clear Boundaries

- Consist of rules and habits that allow family members to enhance their communication and relationships with one another because they encourage dialogue.
- Allow an individual family member to attain a *sense of personal identity yet allow sense of belongingness* within family system.
- Promotes open communication and privacy.
- Parental role is to define appropriate, clear and permeable boundaries that help members gain access to each other in a healthy way.

(Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2008)

Rigid Boundaries



- Permit minimal interaction or communication with other subsystems or systems.
- Are inflexible and keep people separated from each other.
  - In such families, members experience difficulty relating in an intimate way to one another, and therefore, individuals become emotionally detached or cut off.
- Individuals may be isolated and forced to function autonomously.
- Rigid boundaries provide maximum privacy.

(Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2008)

Diffuse (fused) Boundaries

- Characterized by poorly defined membership and functions of subsystems or systems.
- Task completion is very difficult.
- Provides minimal privacy and maximum interaction.
- When there is not enough separation between family members.
- Lines of authority and responsibility are not clearly drawn.
- Members are said to be fused or enmeshed.

(Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2008)

4. Developmental Family Life Stages

- The family evolves in stages of increasing complexity
- Family's overarching task throughout life stages is to blend the diversity of individual growth with the unity of membership in the system.

(Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2008)

Developmental Tasks of the Family

By Salvador Minuchin

Foster Parent Manual: Session One

Family Studies; 1990

Families with Infants (Ages 0-1)	Families with Toddlers (Ages 1-3)	Families with Preschoolers (Ages 3 -5)	Families with School-Age Children (Ages 6-12)	Families with Adolescents (Ages 13-18)	Families with Adults	Families with Elderly Relatives
Ensure Survival (feeding & caring)	Encourage Exploration (movement, imitation, trial & error)	Encourage Competence (skills & self-directed play)	Support School Experience (praise, help & contact with school)	Recognize Biological and Social Change (sex, privacy, autonomy)	Support Relationships (partners, kin, neighbors)	Monitor Health Needs (attention and care)
Connect the Infant to People (dependable contacts)	Help Speech Development (listening, talk, reading)	Establish Controls (clarity, patience, fairness)	Increase Responsibility (household chores & following rules)	Establish Mutual Rule-Making (negotiation, conflict resolution)	Organize Work Life (income, timing, responsibility)	Respect Independence and Experience (consult and give space)
Provide Stimulation (people, objects, play)	Protect and Control (limits, guidance, praise)	Coordinate Adult Authorities (agreement about rules)	Allow More Autonomy (privacy & privileges)	Clarify Role In the Family (balance autonomy & responsibility)	Clarify Family Roles (child rearing, decision making authority)	Include in the Family (contact, access to grandchildren)
Ensure a Sense of Security (predictability, affection, meeting needs)	Expect Individual Differences (variations as normal)	Encourage Relationships with Children (opportunities, settling conflicts)	Encourage Peer Group Activities (friends, visits, activities)	Clarify Firm Family Values (drugs, safe sex, school, future)	Organize Contacts with Extended Family (closeness and boundaries for privacy)	Negotiate Rules of Contact (closeness, distance, authority)
Help Older Children Connect To The Baby (supervised involvement)	Encourage Relationship Among Siblings (autonomy & supervision)	Maintain Relations with Day Care or Preschool (frequent contact)	Discuss Values & Social Behavior (drugs, sex & safety)	Recognize Power of the Peer Group (acknowledge, partial control)	Relate with the Larger Community (health, religion, education agencies)	Employ Community Resources (as needed)

Structural Family Therapy Goals

- Develop alliances, cultivate new alliances, or strengthen underdeveloped relationships.
- Reinforce alliances by acting to maintain alliance or amplifying its scope and/or strength.
- Differentiate individuals and subsystems.

(Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2008)

Goals cont.

- Increase family interactions in disengaged families to make boundaries more permeable by changing the way in which members relate to one another.
- Help family members accommodate changing circumstances or transitions by decreasing rigid structures or rules that are no longer viable.

(Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2008)

(Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2008)

Goals Continued

- Reduce symptoms of dysfunction
- Bring about structural change by:
  - Modifying the family's transactional rules
  - Developing more appropriate boundaries
  - Creation of an effective hierarchical structure
  - It is assumed that faulty family structures have:
    - Boundaries that are rigid or diffuse
    - Subsystems that have inappropriate tasks and functions
    - Intrafamilial relationships are not healthy alliances. Example: Scapegoat or an inappropriate cross-generational coalition

Cross-generational alliance – in a family that contains members of two different generations within it. For example, if a parent and a child collude to obtain certain objectives or needs, such as love or power, there is a cross-generational alliance.

Structural Family Therapist Function

To actively engage family as a unit to initiate structural change by:

1. Joining the family in a position of leadership to facilitate change.
2. Mapping its underlying structure
3. Intervening in ways designed to transform an ineffective structure

(Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2008)

Therapist Function continued

- The Therapeutic Endeavor is to challenge rigid transactional patterns -
  1. Pushing for clearer boundaries
  2. Increasing degree of flexibility in family interactions
  3. Modifying dysfunctional family structures

(Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2008)

Change

- Structural family therapists use direction, confrontation, interpretation, reframing and feedback, among other techniques to help families make constructive change.
- May choreograph a session by physically rearranging the members, reinforcing or reorganizing family structure, or constructing new interactional patterns.

(Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2008)

Assessment Information is gathered in 5 areas

1. The family structure – transactional patterns and alternative patterns.
2. System's flexibility and capacity for elaboration and restructuring.
3. The family context, including the sources of stress and support.

(Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2008)

Assessment continued

4. Family system's resonance, reflecting its sensitivity to individual member's input. High sensitivity reflects an enmeshed system. Low – disengaged.

5. The family's developmental stage and its performance of the tasks appropriate to that stage.

(Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2008)

Stages of Treatment

- Joining/Accommodating –Therapist adjusts to the communication style and perceptions of the family members to “join” the system.
  - Establish effective therapeutic relationship.

(Gladding, 1998)

Stages of Treatment

- Structural Diagnosis –
  - Therapist carries out a continuous process of observation, hypothesis testing, and reformulation regarding family structure and interactions.
  - Goal is to develop a framework of information on the problem in the family system that is amenable to structural intervention.

(Gladding, 1998)

Stages of Treatment

- Restructuring
  - Therapist uses interventions that bring about change through modification in the family structure.

(Gladding, 1998)

Can end at this point or go on to explain techniques in more detail

Structural Family Techniques

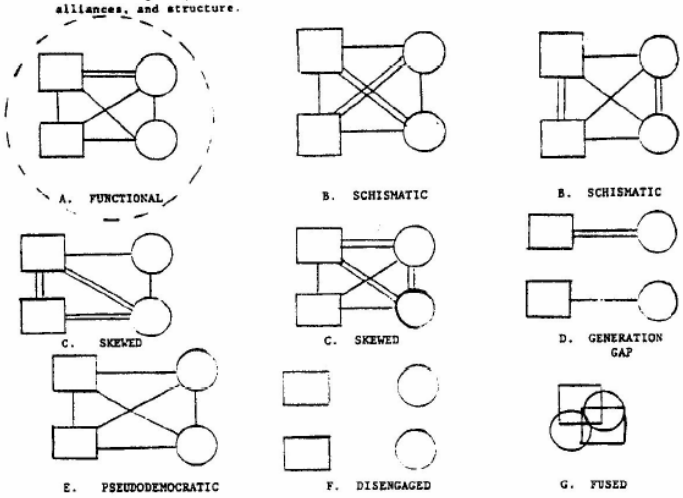
- Family Mapping: draw map to identify boundaries , transactional styles

(Gladding, 1998)

Adapted from Glick, J. and Kessler, D., Marital and Family Therapy, NY:Grune and Stratton

Family Mapping

The following diagrams provide a visual example of family coalitions, alliances, and structure.



Technique: Elements of Joining

- Build & maintain therapeutic alliance with family
  - Tracking – use of words, symbols, history and values of the family in communicating with them.
    - Two Goals
      - Therapist to think and feel like a family member.
      - For the family to feel more understood.

(Gladding, 1998)

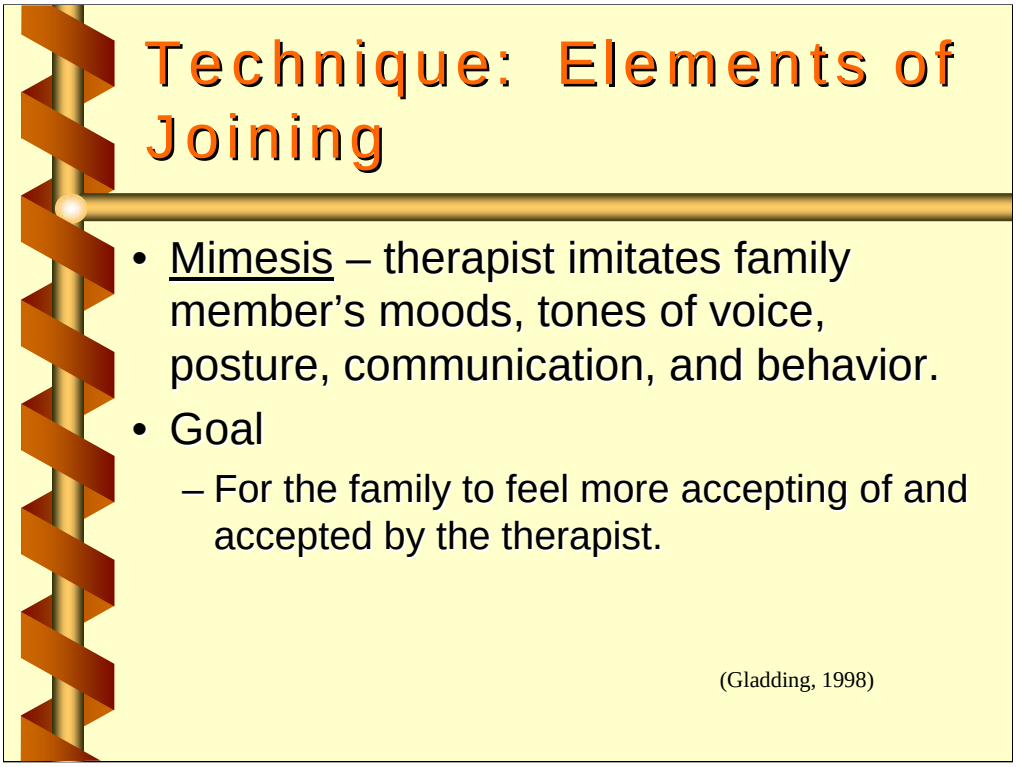
Tracking example – Therapist might use the pet names of family members during sessions.

Technique: Elements of Joining

- Maintenance – therapist shows respect for the family by acknowledging their current rules and roles.
- Goal
  - Help the family feel respected and therefore more willing to participate in therapy and move toward change.

(Gladding, 1998)

Maintenance example: It the father is believed to be the head of the household and in charge, the therapist may speak to him first.



Mimesis example: The therapist might talk slowly or more animatedly, depending on the style of the family.

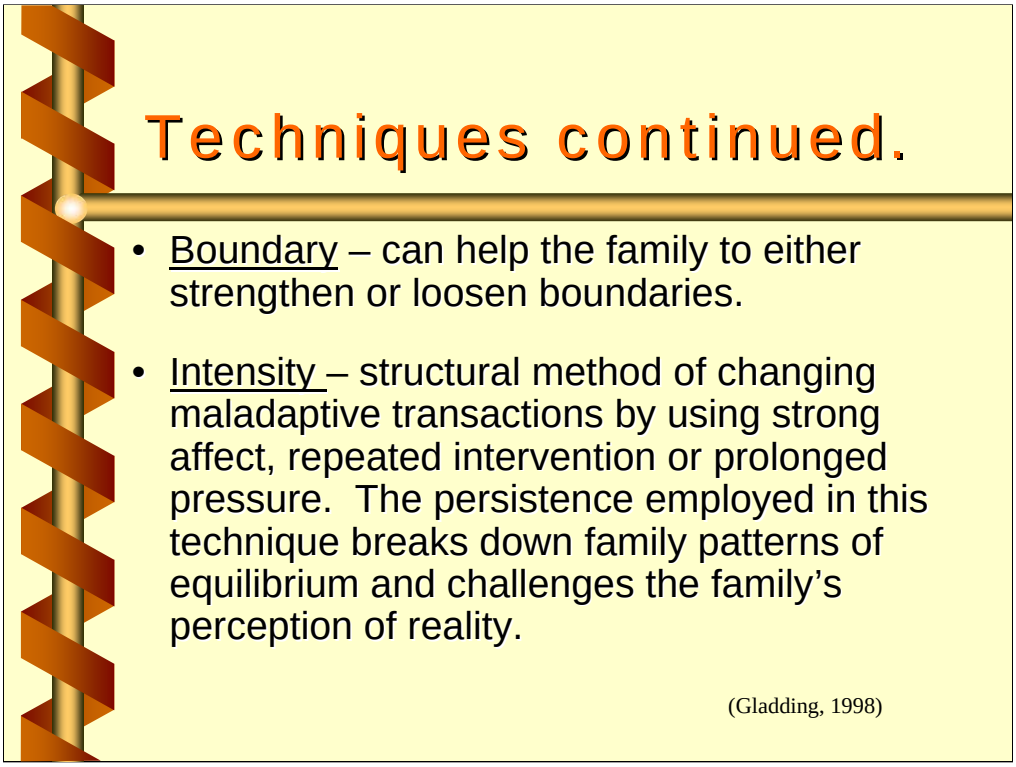
Techniques continued.

- Enactments: family engages in conflict situation that would happen at home bringing problematic behavioral sequences into treatment to show therapist.
- Reframing: new light or different interpretation on problem situation in family. Involves changing a perception by explaining a situation from a different context. A negative situation can sometimes be viewed in a more favorable light.

(Gladding, 1998)

Enactment Example: A family may be asked to argue in front of the therapist as they have previously done at home.

Reframing: Facts do not change but the meaning of the situation is examined from a new perspective.



Boundary Example: In times of crisis, families may need more rigid boundaries in order to make sure that everyone works together as a team.

Intensity – tone, volume, pacing and choice of words can be used to raise the affective intensity of statements.

Techniques continued.

- Unbalancing –
  - Or allying with a system.
  - A procedure wherein the therapist supports an individual or subsystem against the rest of the family.
- Working with spontaneous interactions
  - when members display behaviors in session that are dysfunctional, therapist can help family to recognize patterns of interaction and pays the way for changes to be made.

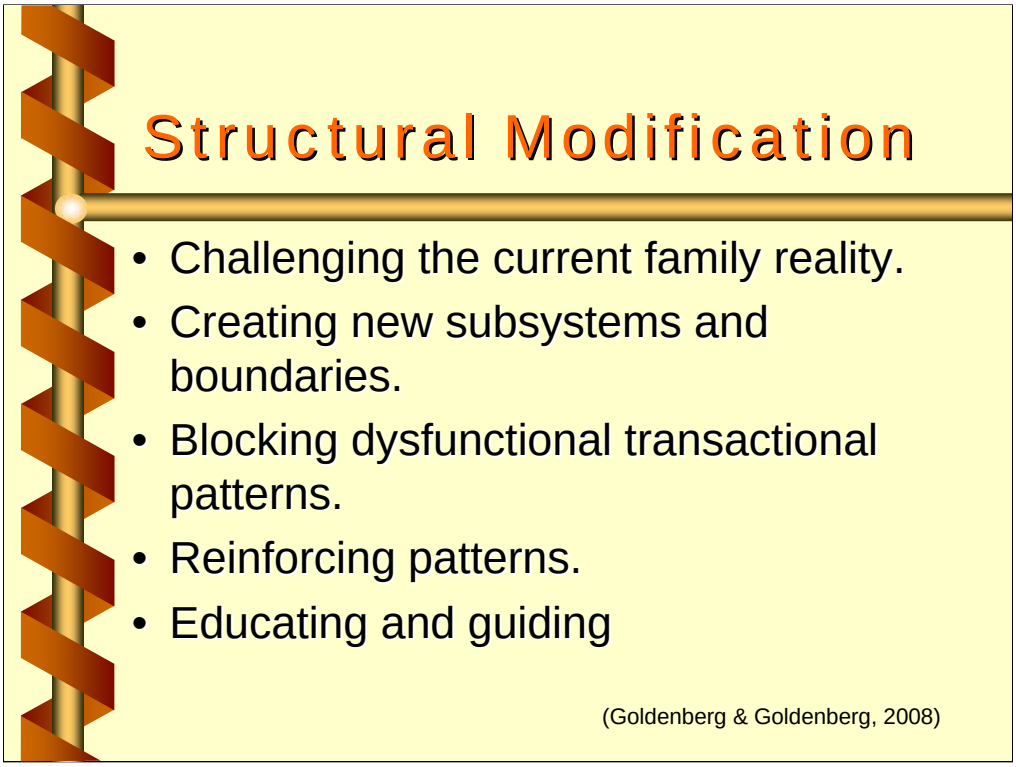
(Gladding, 1998)

Unbalancing Example: a therapist may sit next to a daughter who is being accused of not living up to the family's tradition.

Techniques continued.

- Restructuring
  - A procedure at the heart of the structural approach.
  - Involves changing the structure of the family in an effort to make it more functional by altering the existing hierarchy and interaction patterns.

(Gladding, 1998)



Challenging Current Reality – family's reality can be explored by encouraging the members to look at alternative explanations that challenge their rigid thinking about a problem.

Creating new subsystem and bound: creating new structures may help the family function more appropriately. Therapist may assign homework to encourage new healthy alliances. Ex: father and son may be instructed to go bowling together regularly.

Blocking - Therapist blocks dysfunctional patterns by preventing the family from interacting in their typical fashion. Ex: Therapist may stop an emotional interchange in process.

Reinforcing – reinforcing healthy interactional patterns of family members. An enmeshed family may be reinforced for their love and support for each other as they are being taught new, more appropriate ways to be independent.

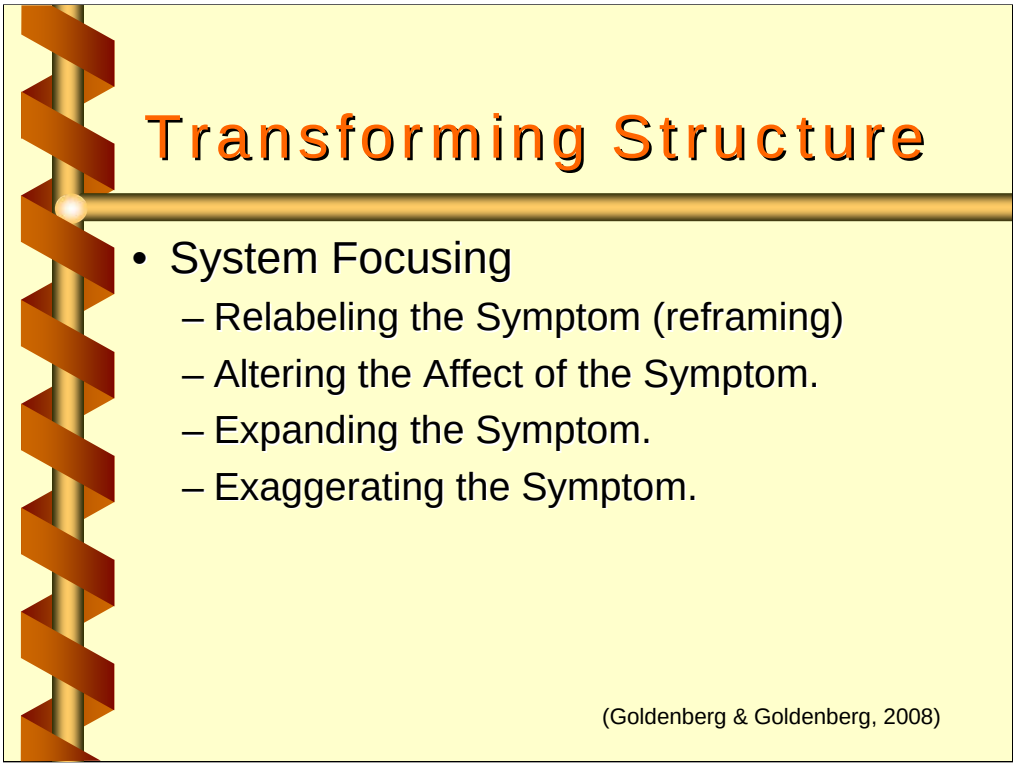
Educating – used by the therapist to teach the family members how to maintain and support each other, as well as how to maintain the positive gains of therapy. Ex: the therapist may teach the parents more effective ways to communicate or to parent their children.

Transforming Structure

- System Recomposition
  - Occurs when the therapist chooses to add or eliminate a subsystem.
  - May be helpful if existing subsystems do not meet needs of family.

(Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2008)

Example: Is a mother-daughter alliance that excludes the father. Therapist may give the parents a homework assignment to go on a date together alone. The goal being to create a parental subsystem. The daughter may be assigned to go shopping with both parents together or to go with peers to the movie.



Relabeling – in reframing, the therapist redefines the symptom. The new definition should be one that helps the family have a new or more positive understanding of the behavior. Ex: Rebellious child is relabeld as seeking autonomy.

Altering Affect – alters the feeling associated with the symptom. Angry feelings may be relabeled as feelings of sadness, or even fear.

Expanding – therapist identifies family member's symptom-maintenance behaviors. EX: Mom role in overprotecting the child and contributing to the child's fear of new situations. This helps family members recognize their contributions to the problems

Exaggerating – Increasing the intensity of or exaggerating the symptom is a paradoxical technique used to emphasize the undue attention given to the symptom. Ex: The therapist might suggest that all the family gather to watch specifically at 6:00 every evening as the teenage daughter throws a tantrum.

Adding to the Assessment Map

- Observe family to see the structure:
  - who says what to whom,
  - in what way,
  - with what result
- Based on my observations, what is my working hypotheses regarding the family structure?
- Have I defined the problem in such a way that it makes the problem amenable to change?

Case Study

- The Copeland Family

Rated as an Effective Practice in Working with Families Involved in the Juvenile Justice System

- **Brief Strategic Family Therapy (BSFT)** adopts a ***structural family systems framework*** to improve youth's behavior problems by improving family interactions that are presumed to be directly related to the child's symptoms.

(Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2007)

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