

**Family Systems Ordinary People Paper**

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Family systems therapy is a recent approach to therapy that developed in the mid-1900s. This type of therapy is commonly known as the “fourth force” in therapeutic approaches, after humanistic, behavioral and psychodynamics being known as the first three “forces.” According to Gerald Corey, author of *Theory and Practice of Counseling and Psychotherapy*, the systems perspective believes that individuals are best understood through assessing the interaction between and among family members; it also believes that the development and behavior of one family members is interconnected with others in the family (Corey, 2015, p. 404). A person’s symptoms and feelings are usually viewed as an expression resulting from observing habits and patterns within a family.

In a movie directed by Robert Redford, called *Ordinary People*, Conrad Jarrett is a teenager who is facing the grief caused by his older brother dying, recovering from an attempted suicide, and dealing with the coldness of his mother as a result of these two incidents. His father wanted to get closer to him after the unfortunate events, but soon realized that he was the only parent with this desire. Redford’s film ends with Conrad’s mother leaving her family after a confrontation from her husband and not saying goodbye to her son. Family systems therapy could be modality used to help Conrad and his parents.

Family systems therapy has a range of techniques to help their clients. Hypothesizing and sharing meaning and facilitating change would be appropriate for Conrad and his parents. Hypothesizing and sharing meaning focus on what was generated from the assessment process (2015, p. 414). Therapists cannot impose their own views and feelings on a family, so understanding what the family members think and their perspectives would help gain understanding across the board. Facilitating change is what happens when family therapy is

viewed as a collaborative process (2015, p. 415). These techniques have the goal of bringing understanding and change to the family dynamics.

Family systems therapy would be extremely useful for Conrad and his parents. After the death of Buck, it seemed that each member of the family was grieving in the way they knew how: the father was focusing on Conrad, the mother was distant, cold and cruel towards her son and husband, and Conrad was...lost. Conrad's mother could have blamed Conrad for what happened to her first son. Conrad's father could have been jealous of Buck. Conrad could have felt less than Buck and does not know who he is or who he should be for his parents. Grief counseling would probably come first for each client, but family therapy would help them at least hear the perspective of the other family member and communicate how they would like to move forward. They each would be discovering more about themselves while simultaneously discovering more about each other.

### References

Corey, G. (2015). *Theory and Practice of Counseling and Psychotherapy 10th Edition*.

Redford, R. (Director). (1980). *Ordinary People* [Film]. Paramount Pictures.