

Family Systems Therapy and Ordinary People

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Family Systems Therapy is a form of psychotherapy that focuses on family relationships. This form of therapy focuses on the family as a unit. Family Systems therapy was introduced in the late 1960s by Murray Bowen. This theory emphasizes that individuals are inseparable from their network of relationships. People are influenced by their families and each family member also influences their family. Family is considered to be an interactional unit and change in one member affects all. This form of therapy also considers how social, community, generational and cultural factors influence individuals and families. According to Bowen, family systems theory is rooted in eight concepts; Triangulation, Differentiation of the self, Nuclear Family Emotional Process, family projection process, multigenerational transmission process, emotional cut off, sibling position and societal emotional process. Triangulation is when a third party is recruited to reduce anxiety and stabilize relationships. Differentiation of the self is a psychological separation from others. Nuclear family emotional process refers to how the family operates in their emotional interactions. Family projection process refers to how parents can transmit their issues and anxieties onto their children. Multigenerational transmission process describes how people choose partners who have similar levels of differentiation of themselves. Emotional cut off is the way in which families cut each other off in order to manage conflicts within the family. By understanding each principle, families can help establish healthier boundaries, change negative patterns and create more positive relationships. In family systems therapy, symptoms are viewed differently and as an expression of the dysfunction within the family. Problematic behaviors are viewed as a reflection of the family's inability to operate productively, unintentionally maintained by the family processes, serve as a purpose for the family and patterns that are handed down from generation to generation. Family systems theory views the family as an emotional system. People within a family tend to seek validation from one another. When

acceptance and validation is not given, it can create issues within the family members. Family systems therapy helps to address these issues and conflicts. This form of therapy can be used to help families of all types. The purpose of family systems therapy is to make sure that every voice is heard and to establish mutual understanding of differences. The goal is to help strengthen families and attempt to restore familial relationships.

In the film, *Ordinary People*, the Jarrett family appears to be a healthy happy family to the outside world. However, as the film unfolds, we begin to see that things are very different from they appear to be. The Jarrett family is struggling with the death of Buck, the eldest son who died during a boating accident. Conrad is battling with depression and the family is struggling with their relationships. I believe that Conrad and the Jarrett family as a unit could benefit from family systems therapy. There is an obvious disconnect between Conrad and his mother Beth that needs to be addressed. We also notice the tension between Beth and her husband Conrad. There are specific techniques I can use as a family systems therapist, that can help strengthen the relationships and build better connections between the Jarrett family members. One technique that can be used is marital counseling (to improve the family system and improve communication). Other techniques are structural family therapy. Structural family therapy can be effective because it focuses on a family member's role within the system and how the family interacts and communicates. It is important for the therapist to connect with all the members of the Jarrett family by accepting their understanding of events.

References:

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