## CHAPTER 1

Adopting a Family

Relationship Framework

CHAPTER OBJECTIVES

1. Understand “family” as a social system each with its unique rules, roles, structures of power, covert and overt forms of communication, and means of negotiating problems.

2. Illustrate the differences between social groups (a collection of individuals) and families (a particular type of social group).

3. Underscore the importance of adopting a family relationship framework in a counseling environment.

4. Define “family” as a social system and provide key dimensions that are included in this approach— such as the multigenerational nature of families, displaying a recurring pattern of interactional sequences (including rules and roles unique to family life), and noting the balancing of needs of members and the family system as a whole.

5. Evaluate the appropriateness of defining “family” as consisting of a mother, father, and biologically created children. Understand that families come in many forms and fashions and labeling one form of family “pathological” and another “optimal” or “healthy” can inhibit a clinician from working with a family’s strengths to effect change.

6. Identify the differences between an enabling and a disabling family system and how the family system adapts, or fails to adapt, to each member’s needs and their external network. Understand the role that stress and poverty can play in disabling a family system.

7. Understand the “pluralistic” nature of today’s families.

8. Understand that families are organizationally complex emotional systems. Implicit and explicit rules define appropriate and inappropriate behaviors in the family. Once interactional patterns are established it is difficult to make changes in them without significant effort. Families tend to be resistant to change. Nodal life-cycle events promote change as members come and go.

9. Consider gender and cultural factors that contribute to the distinct features of the family’s developmental pattern (this includes the role of sexual orientation, social class, and immigration status).

10. Discuss the importance of cultural factors in influencing what we believe are static gender roles. Also, highlight the fact that in addition to racial or ethnic identities that contribute to family and individual identity formation, each family develops its own cultural identity as typified by communication and other transactional patterns.

11. Learn to identify the family’s narratives and assumptions that help shape a “world view” thereby understanding the family social constructions about reality.

12. Recognize the fact that families evolve a developmental resiliency in spite of the fact that dysfunctional patterns may occur during times of stress, and, therefore, it is useful to adopt a resiliency-based approach. Help the class articulate the family strengths on which they see people needing to call in cases of extreme emergency.

13. Define the role of spirituality in family resiliency.

14. Contrast the perspective of family therapy (including the importance of an interpersonal and interrelation approach) to the traditional intrapersonal approach based on Freudian (psychoanalytic) theories.

15. Assist learners to make a paradigm shift in their overall way of thinking about human behavior within the family and its interaction with internal reality.

16. Provide definitions such as “paradigm” and “epistemology” and help the class connect with their understanding of how they see the world. Encourage discussion on a variety of different epistemological positions within the class.

17. Facilitate the adoption of a “cybernetic epistemology” which is a way of incorporating information processing and feedback mechanisms to control simple and complex systems especially as applied to the family system.

18. Clearly delineate the differences between first order (system can be observed from an objective position) and second order (including the observer and his or her influence in the system) cybernetics.

19. Introduce the concept of the double-bind theory of schizophrenia.

20. Recognize the importance of reciprocal determinism which shifts perspective from the “content” of linear causality to the “process” of circular causality.

21. Define and explore the related terms “postmodernism,” “second order cybernetics,” and “constructivism.”

22. Highlight the significance of the “identified patient” (IP) and the appearance of symptoms.

KEYWORDS/FILL IN THE BLANK

1. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ A set of interacting units or component parts that together make up a whole arrangement or organization.

2. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ A set of assumptions, delimiting an area to be investigated scientifically and specifying the methods to be used to collect and interpret the forthcoming data.