



Therapy

Family Therapy for Everyone

HOW TO GET THE BEST OUT OF LIVING TOGETHER

Stephen Bray

"When we meet new people accompanied by partners, parents or children, we are likely to refer to them as a family. We might afterwards describe them as a really nice family, or a dreadful family. Even though we may know the family members as individuals, with their own specific characteristics, we still tend to give them some sort of family identity, writes Consultant Child Psychiatrist, Dr Eia Asen in the popular BBC book, Family Therapy for Everyone". Love them or hate them we all belong to families, we all had parents, we probably have partners and we may have children.

Increasingly families are not simply 2 adults and 2.4 children as we believed would always be the case in the 1960s and 70s. In fact this myth was never really true, but today the organisation of family systems is becoming increasingly complex.

Marriages and partnerships are tending more and more to cross ethnic and cultural boundaries. Children being brought up in gay partnerships is no longer an unusual phenomenon. One in four marriages end in divorce (the statistics for partnerships floundering are not available). People come together to constitute families, sometimes a parent brings children into a home where other children are already present. All the time people are having to learn to live together and adapt to these new structures.

Contrary to popular prejudice an unfamiliar or different family structure does not automatically denote the presence of problems.

Problems occur across all class and ethnic divides. A therapist must be sensitive to structural issues such as gender, race and family composition, but in general people do

their best to resolve difficulties and keep together, indeed many models of family therapy suggest that a symptom may be an attempted solution to a problem at a deeper level.

Family therapy has developed from a number of different roots during the 1950s up to the present day. During the 1980s it was seen by some as part of the human potential movement. Eastern, constructivist and post-modern influences have been debated.

The early and still important theories include attachment and communication theories. Attachment refers to the bonding between parents and children during the early months of the infants life . Communication theory is about the ways in which information is transmitted from one individual to another, and the sort of feedback that is received through the transaction. Repeating patterns are referred to as a transactional style .

It was once thought that families could simply be fixed, like a car engine if communication broke down. In fact human beings are much more complex than machines and family therapy is not about fixing something that is wrong with the family out there. Rather it is about entering into a relationship with the family members whilst co-operatively experimenting to improve the organisation of the family system. It is not always necessary for all family members to attend for treatment to enable this to happen. To some extent all psychotherapies are about family therapy, for we do not escape from our family relationships by moving away from other members, nor do family members cease to influence us when they die.

In his book Dr Asen writes of a young person who attempted to escape from the influence of her parents by emigrating to Australia. As a result she became very sick and it was not until she was able to return to the UK and be helped to confront them that she improved .

Family Therapy can be applied to individuals, couples as well as complete family units. The experience varies but in addition to counselling family members are often asked to complete tasks between sessions. These may be simple, such as parents finding time to get baby-sitters and go out for a meal together, to quite complex rituals or experiments. Some of these may be found in Dr Asens book which is available from all good bookshops price 9.99. It is a thoroughly understandable text packed with helpful information.

Stephen Bray became a UKCP Registered Psychotherapist in 1995. He trained in Family Therapy with the Greater Manchester Family therapy Association in the early

1980s and more recently at The University of London, Institute of Psychiatry. He held an honorary post within the Department of Psychotherapy, Maudsley Hospital, London and was part of a Family Therapy team there with Dr. Eia Asen for over five years. His studies of Neuro-linguistic Programming have taken him to the University of California, Santa Cruz the birthplace of NLP. He extensively revised Joe Sinclair's book: An ABC of NLP, Stephen now lives in Istanbul, Turkey but consults to businesses, families and individuals across Europe.

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