

PRT019: Family Counselling

Session 2



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Topics

- ❑ Family projection process: symptoms in children or adult family members within the family system
- ❑ The symptomatic cycle
- ❑ Father's role in the family system
- ❑ Extrafamilial triangles
- ❑ Divorce
- ❑ Characteristics of blended families
- ❑ Influences of disease and bereavement on family processes
- ❑ Helper as an instrument: possibilities and limitations, possible confusion of roles; self-analysis

Family Projection Process: Symptoms in Children



Family Projection Process

- ❑ Family Projection Process – undifferentiated parents cause symptoms in one or more children. To a certain extent, projections happen in every family.
- ❑ Most families have three stress management mechanisms:
 - 1) conflict between partners,
 - 2) dysfunction of one of the spouses, and
 - 3) projection to children.
- ❑ Parents' conflict or one parent dysfunction does not necessarily cause symptoms in children. When the family is in stress, but parent's conflicts are rare and parents are well, it is more likely that one or several kids develop symptoms.

The Influence of Undifferentiation on Kids

- ❑ Undifferentiation is usually focused on one of the kids who then develops a lower differentiation level compared to the parents (other kids develop the same or even a little higher level). When the levels of undifferentiation are high, other kids are drawn in. The emotional processes in any family do not affect all siblings equally.
- ❑ Involving the kids: Emotional affection or alienation that one parent (mother) feels for the child is an automatic process that cannot be changed by acting the opposite way.

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- The projection process is related to the parents' beliefs and actions. NB! What parents say they believe or do, might not be what they actually do.
 - The level of projection depends on the parents' level of differentiation, the levels of anxiety at the moment of conception, and parents' orientation towards marriage and children.

Girls who dream...

- ❑ According to Bowen, girls dream of marriage and having children more often than boys.
- ❑ A girl who mostly dreams of a husband is most likely to focus on her partner in her future relationship. The stress in their relationship is expressed by conflicts and may result in one partner's dysfunction.
- ❑ Girls who mostly dream of having kids, are more likely to become mothers of sick children. The process can even be so tense that the partner does not have any role at all.

Description of the Projection Process

- ❑ The projection is related to maternal instinct, and the way by which anxiety influences that instinct during the pregnancy and infancy. The father has a supportive role in the projection process. He is sensitive towards the mother's anxiety, supports the mother's opinion and parenting.
- ❑ 1) Mother's anxiety – 2) child's anxious response - 3) mother's wrong interpretations – 4) mother becomes even more anxious – 5) anxious mother becomes overly protective, concerned, empathetic – 6) child's abilities are underestimated – 7) child's symptoms become more serious, the child becomes more demanding/helpless/sick.
- ❑ The process carries on due to the mother's or child's anxiety.
- ❑ E.g. The mother is insecure in interpersonal relationships and therefore looks for signs of insecurity in the child. When noticing something that could be interpreted that way, it becomes a fact for her, and her attitude and behaviour start to communicate to the child that they are insecure.
- ❑ The mother's focus (on either physical or mental health, behavioural patterns) is the projection from her family of origin.

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- Overreaction by parents can be either positive, negative, or causing conflicts. The positive can turn into a negative when the child reaches adolescence. **The formation of symptoms depends on two factors: the family's anxiety levels, and the child's degree of differentiation.** In childhood, there may be some symptomatic episodes at the times of anxiety. The episodes can develop into serious symptoms during the adolescence, or even later. When the mother and the child have great emotional fusion, the relationship can be positive until adolescence when the child attempts to become independent. Then the child's relationship with the mother or with both parents can become negative and the child may develop serious symptoms. The more intense the fusion, the fewer symptoms in childhood, but as a young adult, they may develop psychosis.
 - As a result of projection, the child may behave differently: be lonely or a good socialiser; overachiever or underachiever; obedient or rebellious.

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- ❑ The main projection patterns are the same in all families, variations come in forms of manifestation and intensity.
 - ❑ In one extreme, the child's symptoms can develop into a lifelong dysfunction; in the other extreme, the child never develops serious symptoms.
 - ❑ Most individuals, who have been the objects of projection, do not do as well in life as their siblings and they have a lower degree of differentiation compared to their siblings.

Children who Become the Objects of Family Projection

- ❑ Children who are conceived and born when the mother was stressed out; the first child; the eldest son or daughter; the only child of the opposite gender (some mothers have gender preference that comes from their family of origin); emotionally especial child for the mother, or the child who, in mother's opinion, is special to the father.
- ❑ Special children: disabled, babies with colics, timid, unyielding and non-responsive to the mother. These children are emotionally very demanding.

Emotional Cutoff

- ❑ **The amount of unresolved emotional attachment (dependency) to parents is equal to the degree of undifferentiation.**
- ❑ The person tries to manage the unresolved emotional attachment within themselves by denial and by psychical isolation even when living side by side with parents.
- ❑ Everyone has some unresolved emotional attachment issues with their parents.
- ❑ The concept of **emotional cutoff** describes people managing their unresolved **emotional** issues with parents by reducing or totally cutting off **emotional** contact with them. The lower the levels of differentiation, the more intense the unresolved emotional attachment.
- ❑ Managing emotional attachment with parents helps to see how people differentiate themselves from the past in order to live their lives as a present generation.

Cutoff...

- ❑ Unresolved emotional attachment issues are sometimes solved by running away from home for good or by creating a combination of emotional and physical distance. The middle way would be to live away and pay short irregular visits to the family of origin.
- ❑ If the cutoff with the past is very intense, the person is much more likely to develop exaggerated imagination, that their parents' problems are now their problems and their children may be the next to cut themselves off.
- ❑ Cutoff reflects the problem, „solves“ the problem, and creates a new problem. The person running away from their family of origin is emotionally as dependent as the one who remains home.

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- ❑ In the case of unresolved attachment the person feels the need for intimacy at the same time being allergic to it.
 - ❑ The one who remains home deals with these issues at the intrapsychic level will probably experience supportive contact with parents; the process is less intense. In the case of stress, they may develop symptoms – physical illness or depression.
 - ❑ Those who run away physically, are more likely to have impulsive behaviour. See the parents as the source of the problem, and running away gives them a sense of independence. This usually happens with teenagers who have intense emotional fusion with parents. In the case of very intense cutoff, there is the risk that they repeat the same pattern with the first possible person. They enter a relationship, and when the first problems arise, they run away and repeat that pattern again and again.
 - ❑ In extreme cases, the person may spend their whole life going in and out of relationships, or decide to live alone.

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- ❑ People whose family of origin has had high levels of fusion, describe it either being ideal or dreadful.
 - ❑ Although it is noticed with those who had problems with parents that after moving out or after the birth of the child the problems disappeared – what happened was that anxiety dropped, not fusion.
 - ❑ Bowen: the number of cutoffs has increased over the years and the number of people who live in a commune has also increased. Family substitutes are instable for they are made up of people who have run away from their families when tensions got worse, and are likely to repeat that pattern.

Relationships with the Family of Origin Influence the Well-Being of the Nuclear Family

- The better the nuclear family parents maintain contacts with their families of origin, the more ordered and symptom-free are the lives of both generations.
- Comparing two families with similar degrees of differentiation where one keeps contact with their families of origin and the other does not, then those who keep contact maintain their level of differentiation and do not develop any symptoms. Those who cut the contact develop symptoms/dysfunctions and the level of differentiation of the next generation is going to be lower.
- A symptomatic nuclear family who has a cutoff family of origin can have long-term family therapy without results. When one or both nuclear family parents manage to restore the relationship with their family of origin, the levels of anxiety are reduced, the symptoms are alleviated and therapy starts to show results.

Nuclear Family Emotional Processes: Marital Conflict and Symptoms in Partners



Development of Symptoms

- When two people get married, they are fused into an emotional „us“. Fusion is uncomfortable and there are ways to alleviate it. Usually, partners become emotionally distanced, or they have marital conflicts which, after reconciliation, are again followed by times of intense closeness.
- **Marital conflict** offers a stable „solution“ when on one hand there is a need for closeness and on the other hand, they are „allergic“ to closeness. This kind of partnership is very intense. The emotional cycle: intense closeness – intense conflict – reconciliation and closeness. A new series of conflicts can be ignited by a mere glance, remark, or tone of voice. NB! The main issue to be addressed is not the topic of conflict, but the emotional intensity of the relationship.
- Intense marital conflict can protect children from becoming involved. At the same time, there is no warranty as the family may need more than one coping mechanism at the times of high anxiety. Children are in danger when, in addition to conflict, partners project their problems on children.

Symptoms in Partners

- ❑ Partnership tensions can be alleviated when one of the partners makes compromises. The pressure may come from one or both partners; one does not want to take responsibility, the other feels that they know how things should be. Both may think that they make more effort than the other one. Under moderate stress, this may work, but under intense and lasting stress, one of the partners starts to lose functionality. This can manifest either in physical or mental illness or problematic social behaviour. The partner more prone to develop symptoms, is the one who has been more submissive to keep up a functioning relationship. Symptoms can appear in the partner who either over- or underfunctions. Over- and underfunctioning differ by their intensity. This may last for a short period of time. When over- or underfunctioning becomes the main coping mechanism for managing non-differentiation, the disease can become chronic and very difficult to overcome.

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- ❑ The better the partners are differentiated, the more realistic are their expectations for each other and for themselves. If one partner has unrealistic expectations, it may mean that one of the partners has the responsibility of keeping harmony, or take responsibility for the other partner. If they take responsibility for the other partner, it may mean that they follow carefully that the partner would follow the expected track.
 - ❑ Symptoms that develop are the manifestations of systemic anxiety.
 - ❑ As time passes, an individual or nuclear family can either during their own lifespan or over several generations become more and more forced to fit into a specific mold which is, in turn, increasingly difficult to break.
 - ❑ No-one intends to disable anyone. Both partners lose out in the process.
 - ❑ When an illness becomes chronic, it can reduce the general anxiety level in the family. At this stage, divorce is rare (the one who needs care is thankful and the caregiver does not complain). Divorce happens only when there are conflicts in addition to the symptoms.

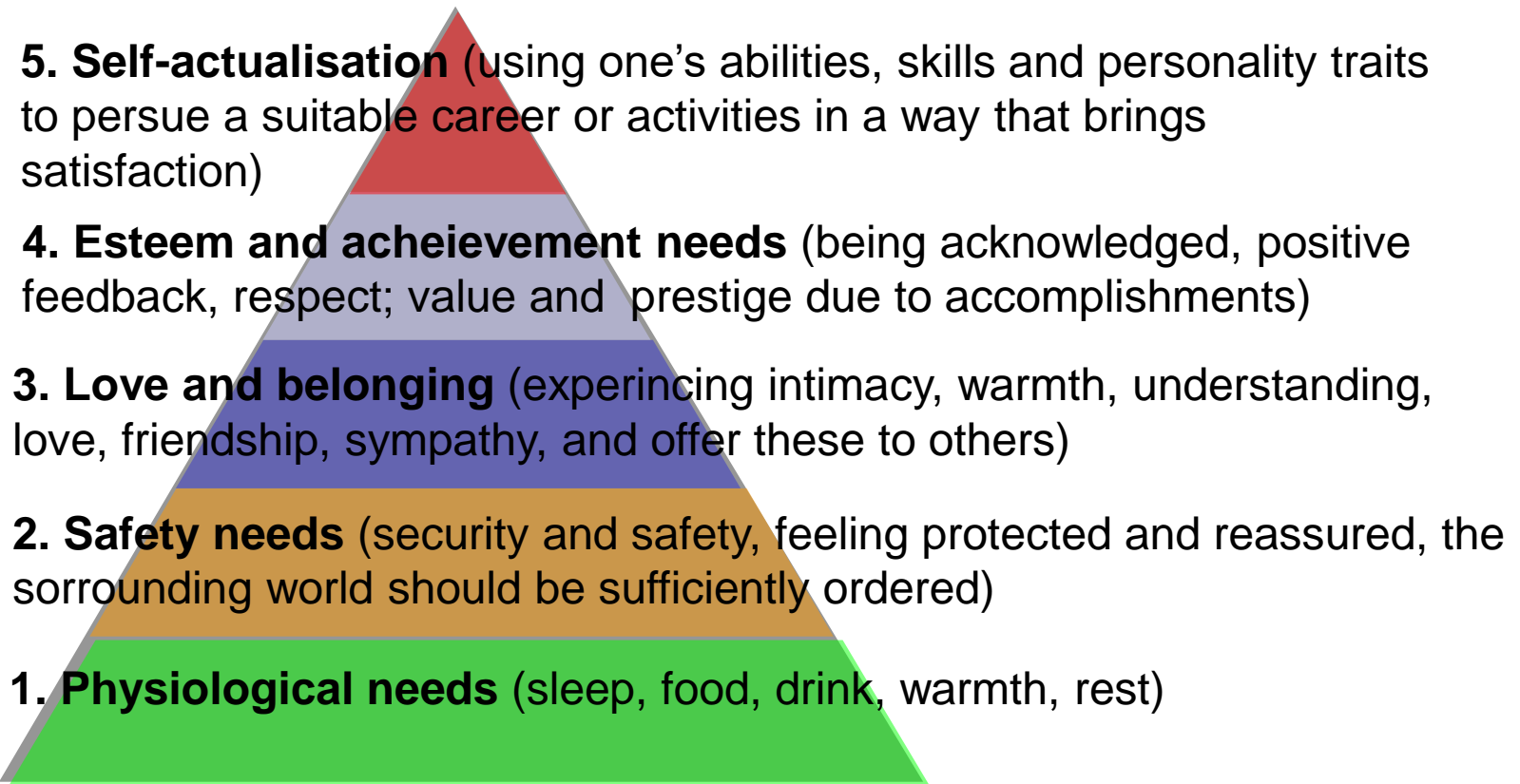
Summary

- ❑ Families do not make conscious decisions about the patterns they use to cope with anxiety. Partners use patterns that are pre-programmed by their families of origin.
- ❑ Those families that have a wider range of anxiety management patterns at their disposal do better than those who have less.
- ❑ Another important factor is the depth and quality of emotional contact that partners have with their families of origin. The risk of developing problems and symptoms is higher in those nuclear families where partners' emotional cutoff from their families of origin is more serious.

The Symptomatic Cycle



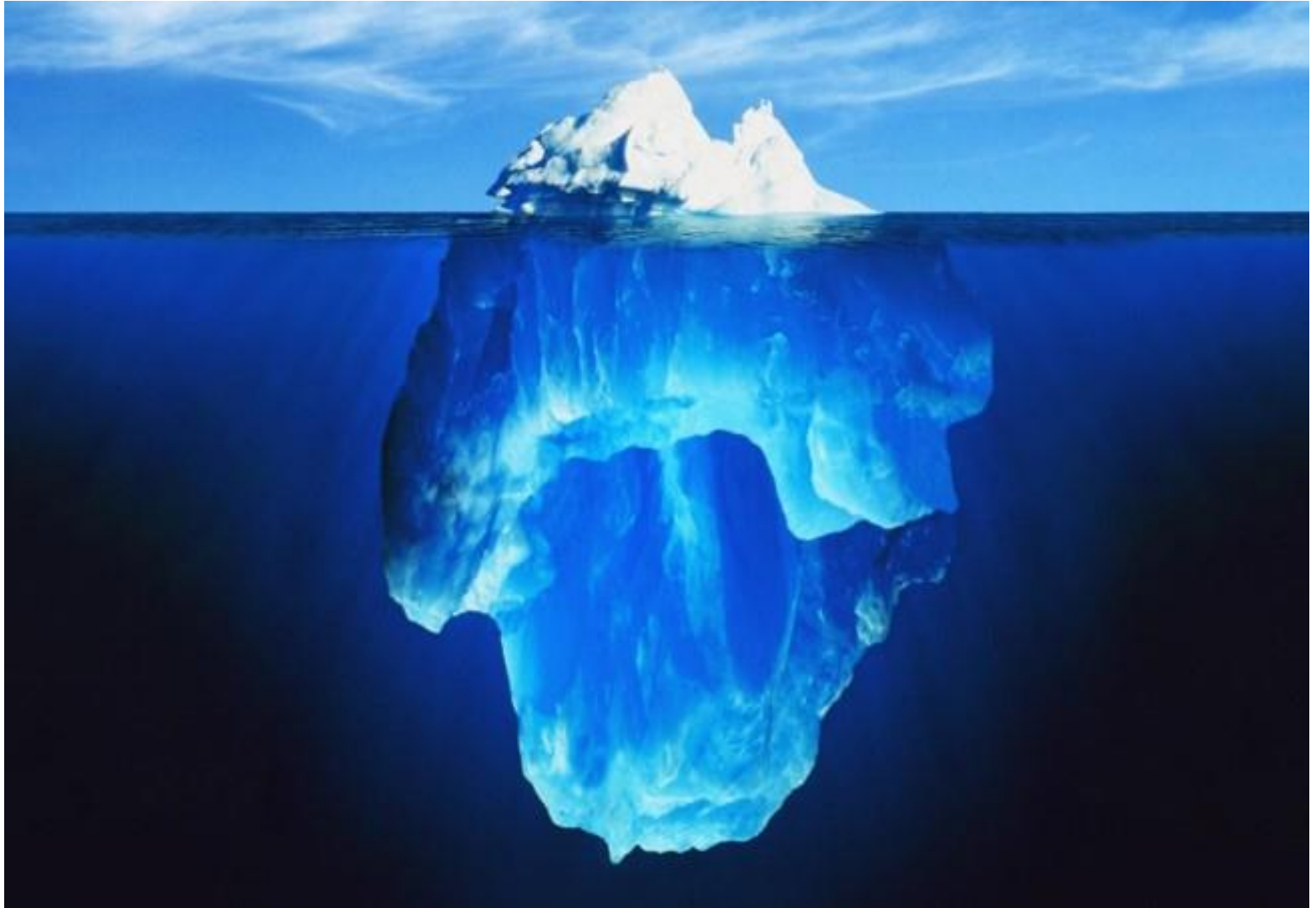
Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs



How to Become Aware and Express Your Needs



An Iceberg of Emotions



What is behind the feelings of anger and love?

| ANGER | LOVE |
|-------------------|---------------|
| Fear | Joy |
| Disappointment | Tenderness |
| Pain | Contentment |
| Guilt | Peace |
| Regret | Safety |
| Discomfort | Being relaxed |
| Loneliness | Trust |
| Anxiety | Acceptance |
| Worry | Hope |
| Fatigue | Belonging |
| Disgust | Balance |
| Rejection | Rest |
| Exhaustion | Affection |
| Vulnerability | Forgiveness |
| Being traumatised | Energy |

How does irritation escalate?



Imago Dialogue

- ❑ The partner who is speaking, speaks only about him/herself, what they feel and need using „I“ statements. Does not blame. Uses short sentences.
- ❑ The listening partner listens and mirrors, “Let me see if I’ve got you. You said”
- ❑ The speaker can correct/repeat when the listener did not mirror exactly what they said. The listener mirrors again. The listener asks: „Is there more about that?“
- ❑ The speaker continues; the listener mirrors. To summarise, the listener may say, “What you’re saying makes sense”/“I imagine you might be feeling sad, mad, glad, happy...” (express empathy)
- ❑ Change roles.

Father's Role in the Family



Marital Conflict and Relationship with the Father

- ❑ Mothers tend to counterbalance marital distress with the mother-child relationship.
- ❑ Why? Some hypotheses:
 1. Women are better at separating the roles of being a partner and being a parent than men.
 2. Women hold on to classical gender roles so that the father does not get involved with kids during the relationship conflict.
 3. Motherhood is fundamental to women whereas fatherhood is not so fundamental to men.
 4. Fathers who are more withdrawn distance themselves from the partner and also from kids when problems arise.
 5. Men are much more likely to withdraw from the partner and kids than women.

Marital Conflict and Relationship with the Mother

- ❑ Marital distress is harder on the mother-son relationship than to the mother-daughter relationship.
- ❑ The reason could be that when the partnership tensions rise, mothers expect their sons to be more mature and express more negativity in front of them.
- ❑ Fathers who were more content with their marital relationship, have a better relationship with their firstborn daughter compared to the firstborn son, and the daughters were more obedient to the father. The father-son relationship does not necessarily worsen even when divorce happens.
- ❑ As a result of marital conflict, the children become more aggressive. The study of 2-year-old children showed that when children witnessed a pretended conflict and its resolution, their aggressiveness during the conflict increased and after the resolution, they calmed down. Kids' reactions were very different depending on whether they saw the reconciliation or not. Yet, even partial reconciliation, or making peace behind closed doors, influenced the behaviour of the kids in a positive way. It is beneficial for kids to see parents' conflicts if resolved constructively, for this is how they learn to resolve conflicts.

Father's Role

- ❑ The cultural concept of fatherhood prevalent before the 1970's has some influence even today.
- ❑ It was believed that:
 1. Fathers are incompetent and biologically unfit for raising children, while women are genetically programmed for motherhood.
 2. Father's influence on children's development is insignificant and mother's care is sufficient to ensure the child's normal and holistic development.

Father's Role...

- ❑ Fathers teach children to discover the world through action, how to be a man in the (marital) relationship, and they help the child to understand how to grow up as a boy or a girl.
- ❑ Involvement with kids helps fathers to see that they can influence their children's lives and makes them feel close to them.
- ❑ NB! The higher the education level of the wife, the more involved is her husband in raising the children. The better the father's relationship with his own father, the better his relationship with kids.
- ❑ Good relationship with kids is also influenced by the father's liberal understanding of gender roles.

Gender Roles

- ❑ The understanding of gender roles is a combination of cultural, social and family heritage.
- ❑ How are boys and girls raised? Girls are allowed soft emotions, but boys are not? If boys are denied soft emotions, they will not learn to express themselves and as grownup men, they will not be able to talk about how they feel. The result is alienation.
- ❑ Many men have not had a good father's role model. Men often feel distanced from their families.
- ❑ How does a distanced father influence the son/adult man?

How to Involve Fathers

- ❑ Mother does not involve the father in caring for the baby (changing nappies, comforting, putting to bed, going to the doctor, etc.).
- ❑ Doctors, teachers, psychologists, child-welfare workers, judges, etc. usually prefer to contact mothers. Men's restrooms usually do not have baby changing facilities/baby potties.

Intrafamilial Triangles



Marriage Triangles

- ❑ **The couple and one family of origin.** Marriage implies that the primary affectionate relationship is between the partners. At the beginning of marriage the affection shifts from parents to the partner. Whose family traditions shall we take on? Whom do we remain loyal to in our families of origin?
- ❑ Sometimes both partners want to get away from overpowering parents and form their own strong „cocoon“, which keeps the parents out. In this case, the relationship is under too strong emotional pressure and the cocoon becomes oppressive. If the relationship does not work out (not because of an affair) the partners move back to their families of origin.
- ❑ **One partner, their parent, and the spouse.** If a young adult has an unresolved conflict with their parents, it can manifest in the relationship with the in-laws. (Husband allows his mother instead of his wife to take care of him).

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- ❑ **Parents from the family of origin, one nuclear family partner, and the other partner.** A reactive process within the parents' triangle influences the nuclear family relationship in various ways. The more one nuclear family partner turns attention to their parents, the less attention they have for their spouse.
 - ❑ **The wedding gift triangle. The husband hands the role to care for his parents over to his wife** (gifts, cards, communication). After the wedding the mother-in-law either becomes an ally or a foe, the husband avoids any true contact with his mother. Mother-in-law and daughter-in-law collaborate to „fix the husband“ or raising the kids thus allowing the husband to remain distant. In those cases, the wife is usually distanced from her family and becomes part of the husband's family. This triangle becomes problematic when the husband develops a disfunction (an affair, alcoholism or the like). For the husband, the initial contentment of drawing away may become irritating, especially when he feels that his wife and mother-in-law are trying to fix him (symptoms aggravate).

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- Another wedding gift triangle version: The wife suffers from depression and the husband and his mother criticise her.
 - **Loyalty triangle.** One partner remains close to their parents while the other partner is distanced. The triangle is formed when one or both partners do not emotionally leave their family of origin in order to form a new alliance.
 - **Dominating father-in-law triangle. The wife and her idealised father unite to criticise the husband.** This triangle can happen even when the father has passed away.

The Therapist's Approach to Intrafamilial Triangles

- Start with the closest symptomatic triangle, then proceed with the triangles involving the parents of both partners.

- Goals:

The nuclear family partners start to see how the triangles with their own parents influence their partnership; non-reactive involvement with the families of origin; coping with bitterness by identifying the sources of it: which comes from the relationship with the partner and which comes from the relationship with their own parents.

- Help the partners to prioritise their mutual relationship without spoiling their relationship with their own parents.
- Help the partners to see what influences their relationship and help the partners to reach a point where they are able to act without distancing from their other relationships.

Extrafamilial Triangles (Affairs)

- People usually do not plan to have an affair. It usually happens to husbands who are distanced due to the very close wife-children bond, or wives who are criticised by their husbands and mothers-in-law. Affairs can be short-term and soothe the discomfort between partners and stabilise the marriage, or when found out, become the central issue between the partners overshadowing the initial conflict that caused the affair in the first place.

When Found Out

- ❑ Help the partners maintain respect for each other. Listen, help them calm down.
- ❑ If they want to continue the relationship, the partner who had an affair has to finish it. The one who was betrayed has to stop checking and extracting details.
- ❑ Both partners have had their own share for creating a background for the affair to develop. The betrayed one is not equally guilty, yet both are responsible for the atmosphere prior to the affair.
- ❑ Identify intrafamilial triangles. These usually precede the affair and now add fuel to the fire.
- ❑ Restore trust. The betrayed partner has to deal with their fears and needs, ask questions. The infidel partner's fears and needs also need to be addressed, ask questions. The infidel partner has to take responsibility for their actions and express remorse.
- ❑ Oftentimes the betrayed partner blames the mistress/lover and does not ascribe any guilt on their own partner – it is unrealistic as if the partner would be completely helpless against seduction. Blaming the mistress/lover subconsciously ensures their place in the triangle.

Separation, Divorce



Separation

- ❑ It could be an attempt to save the relationship when the stress levels are high.
- ❑ If there is a willingness to continue with the relationship and neither of the partners has an affair, it would be beneficial to use the time of trial separation for going to therapy. Still, it is better to avoid separation, therapy is more efficient when the partners live together.
- ❑ Separations may be necessary or unavoidable when there is a constant risk of conflict, violence or alcoholism, or when a young newly married person needs time to find themselves.
- ❑ **It is easier to restore an existing relationship than to start a completely new one.**

Factors Leading to Divorce

- ❑ The probability of divorce is influenced by the length of the courting period and the way the couple reached the decision to get married. Also, different expectations for marriage could be the source of conflict. The divorce is more likely to happen when the couple married during the time of bereavement (soon after the death of a close person, or after the breakdown of a previous relationship) because there was no time to deal with the pain of loss, and this makes the divorce even more painful. Marrying due to pregnancy is yet another foreseeable factor for divorce.
- ❑ **One partner dominates, the other adapts.** The dominating partner is career-oriented, the adaptive partner becomes anxious and depressive. The anxious partner undergoes treatment and the dominator is free to move on in their career and, as the partner „has a disease“, does not carry any guilt.
- ❑ **Both partners are dominators and are not ready to give in** concerning emotional decisions. When anxiety levels rise neither partner pulls back, both behave reactively. As a result, partners move away from each other.

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- ❑ **Both partners are adaptive.** Rising anxiety levels can lead to paralysis or symptoms on both partners. This can happen in case of a long-term conflicting relationship where no good solution can be found.
 - ❑ **Spouses have become emotionally distanced, but one of them is preoccupied with kids.** This pattern is most likely to reduce the child's emotional independence. Child and parent may swap roles where the child has to start to care for the parent.
 - ❑ Divorce illustrates high emotional fusion between the dyad. The fusion may be so extensive that the partners feel they cannot maintain their individuality if they continue in the relationship.
 - ❑ Divorce involves emotional un-plugging, but only a few succeed in this.

Divorce becomes harder than expected when

- ❑ ...the partners believe that the problem is in their current relationship and is not going to be repeated in another relationship.
- ❑ ...they believe that they lose their identity for a long (and not for a short) period of time.
- ❑ ...they deny that the divorce process is a real loss.
- ❑ ...they believe that the only thing they want is to get away from their partner.
- ❑ ...the decision is made on the basis of what feels right, or what is achievable by the law.
- ❑ ...they believe that they make an effort only for the sake of their partner.
- ❑ ...they forget that somatic symptoms are related only to the marital relationship.
- ❑ Divorce is less painful for those who make the decision in a more flexible way, focus on the consequences, and work towards solving the emotional fusion. Amicable relationships after the divorce also reduce the pain.

Divorce at Different Points in Family Life-Span

- ❑ Childless couple – lesser consequences compared to those with children.
- ❑ Families with little children have the highest divorce rate. Under-5-year-olds have more difficulties in adapting to the parents' divorce. During the divorce period, children develop symptoms of regression and a sense of guilt. Also, the observations show that as a result of the child's disturbed emotional functioning, the mother-child relationship quality goes down after the divorce. Over-5-year-olds experience anxiety, tantrums, provocative behaviour, but do not necessarily have developmental delays. Children who are at the focus of marital disputes experience developmental problems, phobias, depressions, and prolonged Oedipus complex.

Divorce in a Family with Small Children

- ❑ Fathers tend to experience depression, anxiety, anger, rejection, and incompetence. If they had a good relationship with kids, they try to meet them often, but this usually lasts for two years after which the meetings become rare. The kids are important for them and therefore the rare contacts are more painful and they opt for not seeing them at all rather than feeling the pain. Fathers become more socially involved with other things to reduce loneliness.
- ❑ Both parents think about the kids and the relationship with their ex. Conflicts continue over kids, money, benefits. Conflicts and contacts are reduced.
- ❑ A year later $\frac{2}{3}$ of husbands and $\frac{3}{4}$ of wives accept that divorce might have been a mistake. 2 years later only $\frac{1}{4}$ think that the divorce might have been a mistake.
- ❑ Finding a new partner helps one partner, but may activate the conflicts with the lone partner, especially with the ex-wife.
- ❑ Within the first two months after the divorce, the fathers' involvement is about the same as in the families living together. Two years later only $\frac{1}{4}$ of fathers and half of mothers say their relationship with kids is better than before the divorce. Other fathers have generally less contact with kids.

Divorce in a Family with Grown-Up Children

- ❑ The partnership was stable when the children were still at home. When the children leave, the stability is also lost.
- ❑ If the couple has been together for a long time, then at the divorce, children are forced to choose sides thus creating a distance with the other parent.
- ❑ Divorce can lead to an emotional cut-off from the family of origin and from friends. Divorce later in life can leave people completely alone.
- ❑ After 30-40 years of marriage, it is often hard to think about a new relationship.

How To Consider Children in the Midst of a Divorce

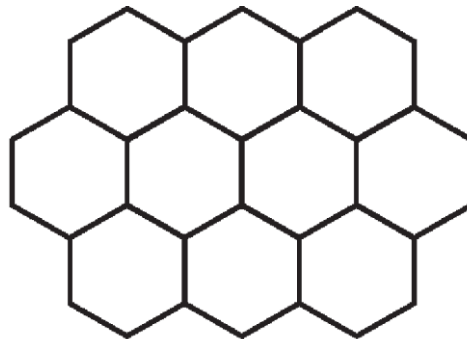


- ❑ It is important to maintain parental cooperation. The child needs both parents. Compromise or cooperation – the story of two cooks and two lemons.
- ❑ The child should not get into the midst of manipulations, also by parents.
- ❑ Where is the child going to live? How is it going to work out? Parents have to reach an agreement and explain it to the child. Two homes, or one nest where parents take turns?
- ❑ Provided the other parent is not irresponsible, inadequate or violent and the child has had with them an affectionate relationship, the child should spend equal time with both parents, but minimum 35% of time (the scientific advise of 111 researchers, in Katrin Saali Saul, „Eluterve käreperre käsiraamat“, p. 68).
- ❑ The child needs clear explanations about what happened/is going to happen. The parents need to explain to the child that he/she is not guilty.

Divorce in Families with Adolescents

- ❑ The family has been together for a long time.
- ❑ Adolescents are able to keep themselves emotionally distant from their parents' conflict. They have the right to say with which parent they want to stay with, and they are presumably able to keep independent contact with the other parent. Young people who have been at the focus of their parents' conflicts, have lower adaptability levels.
- ❑ A teenage son may find himself filling the role of an emotional partner to his mother. A daughter may become the „housewife“ for the father.
- ❑ Unresolved emotional issues in adolescence can cause complications in the relationship with their own partner later on in life.
- ❑ The adolescent might not adjust to the mother's/father's new partner.

Blended Families



Characteristics of Blended Families

- In the case of the first marriage, two families are united, in the case of a second marriage, 3 or 4 or even more families get blended. Every following relationship carries the hurts and memories from the previous one. Tiredness from previous fights can lead to the denial of problems and idealisation of the new relationship.
- Parents feel guilt towards their own children, compassion towards stepchildren – danger to overreact.
- Children remain loyal to both biological parents. They need to be able to express their feelings.
- New relationships are formed at the background of intense feelings. Typical phases: 1) decision to split, 2) actual separation, 3) legal divorce, 4) one or both ex-partners remarry, 5) death of one or both ex-partners, 6) changes in children's lives (graduation, marriage, illness, etc.).
- Some old emotions carry over to the new relationship. The better the previous stages have been managed the better the success in every next stage.

Problems can appear in the new relationship when...

- ...previous families have been dealing with a very different stage in the family life cycle.
- ...partners deny the loss and/or have a very short break between the marriages.
- ...intense relationship problems with the previous family have not been resolved (family members still angered or bitter).
- ...the partners expect that children approve the new marriage and forget how many emotional issues it raises for kids.
- ...partners are not able to give up the ideals that come from the previous marriage and accept the new reality that comes with the new marriage.
- ...partners attempt to draw a circle around the new family and demand that everyone would hold their primary loyalty to this new entity.
- ...the biological parents and grandparents are left out, or there is a power struggle with them.
- ...the partners deny problems and pretend it to be an ordinary family.
- ...the children's' custody is changed right before the new marriage.

Characteristics of Blended Families, an example

- The greater the difference in the partners' previous family life cycle, the harder the changes and the longer it takes to adjust.
- The new relationship interrupts normal family life cycle phases and repeats some of them. Going again through the same phase reactivates the topics that were poorly handled in the previous family.
- For example: A man with late teenagers or very young children, marries a young woman with now children and no earlier partnership experience: wife expects romance, husband expects the wife to immediately take up the major role in caring for kids, or that she would always give in, where her interests deviate from the kids' or husband's interests. The problems arise because for the husband developing a new relationship is of secondary importance. Also, when the wife expects that the husband would not continue the relationship with his kids in the same way as before, and her interests would be more important than the kids' interests, the family life cycle with kids loses out and problems are bound to rise.

Children in Blended Families

- Why do teenagers find it difficult to adjust?
 1. The stepfamily demands collaboration while the teenager needs to work on greater independence.
 2. Failure to agree upon how much parental care the teenager needs or can accept.
 3. Teenagers tend to solve the loyalty conflict by choosing sides.
 4. Teenager resists big changes or refuses to take up new roles in the new family when they in fact need to fulfil the developmental task of becoming more independent from the family.
 5. Stress-related to sexuality: sexual attraction to the stepparent or a stepsibling; coming to terms with the sexuality of the biological parents.
- Although it is generally understood that kids cope better with parents' divorce than with the death of a parent, they find it easier to accept when the widowed parent remarries than when the divorced parent remarries.

Blended Family Triangles

- **Husband – wife - wife.** The emotional separation probably has not happened. The need: finish the previous relationship. Reducing contact with the ex-wife: need to develop respect. The new wife has to accept, that the previous relationship was important and that there will always be a certain amount of care that remains between the previous partners (especially when they have kids as the uniting factor). The new wife has to be aware that if the husband does not deal with the emotional issues (guilt) from the previous relationship, there will be no resolution.
- **2. „Congenial“ new couple – previous spouse – child/children.** The issue often lies in the problematic behaviour of the child/children or problems at school. The new couple says they have no disagreements and accuse the ex-partner or the child (or both). Most likely there has been intense conflict between the ex-partners. Parental Control should be exercised by the biological parents and the new partner should take a neutral position. This can take tensions down for a while. Yet when the pseudo-congeniality is not addressed, the peace will not last. The new couple has to bring out differences and disagreements. The previous couple also needs to complete the emotional separation.

Blended Family Triangles...

- **Husband – husband's children – new wife.** The Cinderella story. If the stepmother had not been married before and the mother of the children is alive but does not get on well with her ex-husband, the situation is very complicated. Though the stepmother may be at home while the father has long days at work, she cannot fill the role of the biological mother for the children. Solution: The stepmother is allowed to stay in the background so that everyone would come to a realisation what her role could be in real terms. The stepmother has a hard time being the primary carer for the children for she cannot replace the biological mother. Similarly, she cannot fill the task when the husband openly or secretly criticises her. The new wife can use fewer regulations and the husband has to help to implement them. When things get more balanced the husband has to cooperate with the biological mother on issues concerning the kids.

Blended Family Triangles...

- ❑ **Wife – wife’s children – new husband.** The new husband is seen as the saviour and an interferer. He should help with raising the kids, but he is not given the chance to properly enter the system.
- ❑ **New couple – wife’s children – husband’s children.** It might seem that the couple is happy to start with if only the partners’ children did not have constant arguments. Kids have arguments on issues that the couple claims they have neither between them nor in the relationships with the ex-partners. Solution: Start with strengthening the relationship between the children and their biological parents. After the relationships with the ex-partners have improved, the pseudo-congeniality in the new relationship falls apart and the problems can then be addressed.

Blended Family Triangles

- ❑ **Parent – biological children – stepchildren.** It does not matter whether the new couple has a seemingly good relationship or not, there is always a danger of comparing the biological and stepchildren. It is important to find out the roots of the problem (partners emotional fusion with the ex-partners, etc.)
- ❑ **Husband of the new relationship – wife of the new relationship – parents of one partner.** Parents come into play when they did not approve of the divorce and new marriage and/or when they have actively been involved with grandchildren either before the new relationship or during it. It is important to allow the grandparents-grandchildren relationship to continue. Each partner has to deal with the issues concerning their families of origin.

Influences of Illness and Bereavement on Family Life



Timing

- ❑ The higher the person's age, the more likely they are to die as a result of serious and long-term illness. The death of an older person is seen as a natural part of the family life span.
- ❑ The death of a younger person is not taken a natural thing. It is disruptive, especially when they are responsible for the family.
- ❑ When a child dies they do not leave behind responsibilities that others have to take over. The death of a child is hard to bear because the parents perceive the child as their extension. The fusion between the child and parent is the decisive factor that determines how much the family is disrupted. The parents are very disturbed, and 70-90% of bereaved parents divorce. It is very usual to have marital conflicts.

Timing

- If a teenager dies, it is usually caused by an accident, or it was a suicide. It adds extra stress to the family, as the teenagers have been gaining independence anyway. A seriously ill adolescent is not able to gain independence as appropriate to the age – the family takes care of them and holds on to them. The teenager can start fighting (does not take the medication, eats forbidden food), or can become the „patient“ of the family. Some diseases are life-long conditions (mental disabilities, arthritis) and do allow the adolescent to fly out of the nest.

Manner of Death

- ❑ Sudden death is a shock for the family – no chance to say goodbye and come to terms with the prospect. If the person did not leave a will, it may raise the succession issues. After an initial intense reaction, the topic becomes a taboo. If the topic is never discussed, family members may develop symptoms that no-one is able to see as a result of bereavement.
- ❑ In the case of suicide the family may carry the guilt: could it have been avoided.
- ❑ The positive side of sudden death – no preceding period of stress.
- ❑ Long-term illnesses cause stress that is hard to cope with. In this case, the family and the ill person want to protect each other and they do not talk about death. NB! Family members have to honour persons' willingness to talk about death. It is better not to hide the serious diagnosis from them.
- ❑ Still-birth, abortion, and miscarriage. Parents bereave their unfulfilled expectations and imaginations they had for the child. The more expected the child was the more ambivalence one or both parents experience; in later stages of pregnancy the stress is also higher.

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- When family members cannot openly discuss hard topics between themselves, there is a risk of that some family members develop symptoms.
 - The family finds it difficult to maintain open relationships if the stress is long-lasting and intense, and the risk that someone will develop symptoms becomes higher.

The Position of the Deceased in the Family

- ❑ The higher the emotional importance of the deceased person for family, the higher the risk of being hit by a shock wave.
- ❑ Two reasons: the family is thrown out of balance and the tendency to deny dependency, especially when it was very strong.
- ❑ The importance of the family member can be described by their functional role and the family's emotional fusion with them. E.g. The parent of a small child. The loss might not involve death. Functional loss can happen when someone becomes ill and others have to take over their responsibilities. Parents feel the emotional loss even when a happy young person enters university and leaves home.

Emotional Shock Wave

- A series of aftershocks that occur after serious life events can touch anyone in the extended family. This happens after the loss of an important family member or after a life-threatening situation but can occur after other types of losses. It is not directly connected to the ordinary bereavement reaction that the immediate family experiences, but is the result of hidden fusions. The emotional fusion is denied, inability to relate it to serious life events, the family tries to hide the connection to serious life events and there is strong emotional denial when someone attempts to allude to the connection.
- Bowen discovered, that a certain time after a serious illness or death, several extended family members started to face a series of difficult life events, for example developing a serious disease or worsening of the existing condition, behavioural disorders, etc.
- For example, the daughter grieves the loss of her mother, her own son may develop behavioural problems.
- Aftermath of WWII: the current generation has not experienced this, but many people then were traumatised, irritable and had anger attacks, etc.

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- ❑ The shock wave is caused by the loss of the person who was important for the family: breadwinner, decision-maker, „head of the clan“. The high stress levels cause symptoms to manifest in one part of the family system because they were poorly handled in another part of the family system. The side-symptoms can easily distract the family therapist.
 - ❑ The shock wave will not follow when a dysfunctional person is lost, except when the dysfunction kept the family together. After a suicide, the bereavement period is long, but the shock wave will not follow, unless it was an attempt to draw back from an important role in the family system.
 - ❑ PTSD develops usually after direct contact with a traumatic event, but can also happen as an emotional shock wave hitting an unexpected family member in the family system.

How to Support

- ❑ Do not avoid a bereaving/worried person!
- ❑ Help in practical ways (documents, organising the funeral, cooking meals, etc.).
- ❑ Be there and listen. Do not avoid the topic of bereavement. Allow to talk about the deceased person, it is good for them. At the same time remain sensitive to their needs.
- ❑ Do not presume that they experience the bereavement the same way than you did.
- ❑ The bereavement lasts one year , it will at the least, it does not finish with the funeral! The support is needed over much longer period of time.

Child's Bereavement

- ❑ Bereavement interrupts the child's natural developmental phase. If a parent dies, the child's sense of security is significantly shaken, there are also changes in practical life (change of carers, income, home, etc.).
- ❑ The death of siblings or a friend makes the child realise that they are also going to die.
- ❑ The influence of the loss of a pet should not be underestimated.

How to Help the Bereaved Child

- Support the family – take them food, help to clean, babysit.
- Depending on the child's age, express in simple words what happened. Avoid euphemisms and figurative speech („went on a trip“).
- Open atmosphere. All emotions are allowed. Do not pressurise.
- Physical activities.
- Rituals, making handicrafts
- Go to the funeral.
- Help them to see that behavioural problems and problems at school are related to the bereavement.
- Storytelling and reading on the topic of bereavement or illness –be sensitive to the situation.
- Church can offer the message of hope.

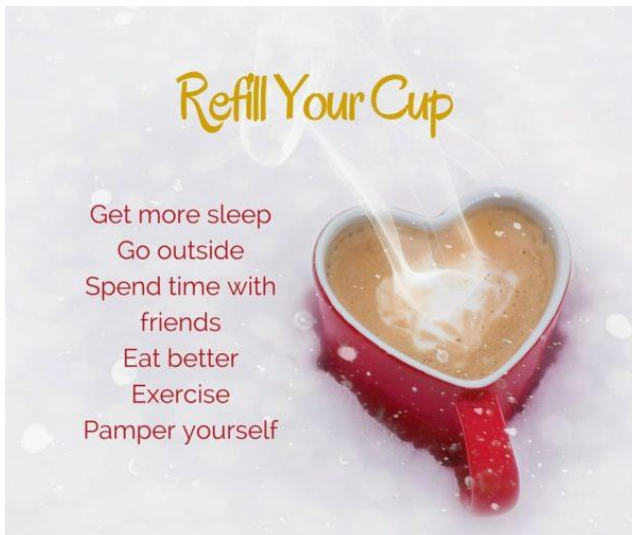
Helper as a Tool. Possibilities and Limits. Possible
Confusion of Roles. Self-Analysis.



How to be a good helper?

- Awareness of your own story, family of origin, family patterns.
- Where am I in the process of differentiation from my family of origin? How much emotional independence do I have? Financial independence? Functional fusion (practical help before leaving home, also after the birth of children).
- What is my place/role in my family system? What are the rules and the role distribution in my family tradition?

Prerequisites to Become a Helper



- ❑ Personal balance, order in personal life, awareness of your own discords.
- ❑ You can help others only in those areas when you do not currently have problems.
- ❑ Take care of your own and your family's well-being!

Prerequisites to Become a Helper

- Empathy. You do not need to have experienced everything yourself. Sometimes it is enough to provide a supportive presence.
- Develop yourself (books, training, etc.).
- **Confidentiality!**
- Awareness of possible role conflict (in the church, in the wider Christian community). Pastor and neighbour. Preacher and friend. Pastoral carer and birthday guest among Christian friends. Awareness of limits.

Helping Helpers

- ❑ Pastors, their spouses, and lay workers need special attention. Pastors' experience: who would offer pastoral care for me? Whom can I trust?
- ❑ Internal barriers to seeking help.
- ❑ Pastors' marriages often look good, but it does not always mean, that there is inner contentment.
- ❑ Thinking point: Which specialist would I be ready to go to? (Doctor, psychologist, counsellor, family therapist, psychiatrist)

Do not forget the relationship with God!

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.
You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.
Psalm 23:5

