Peeling The Onion:
Peeling The Onion:
Using Family Systems Theory
to better engage families and understand child development
Once upon a time...

...there was a beautiful village nestled in a peaceful valley.
The valley was...

...surrounded by rolling hills.
The hills were covered with...

...bountiful crops and beautiful flowers.
The crops and flowers...

...kept the villagers happy and healthy.
Then one day something very bad happened!
A huge boulder...

...rolled down the hill and smashed into the village!
A great deal of damage was done...

...and several people were badly hurt.
Immediately, the good people of the village came to help.
They comforted the frightened children.
They bandaged the wounded people.
They repaired the damaged buildings.
And soon everything returned to normal.
One day, when the tragedy was a memory, it happened again!
Another boulder...

rolled down the hill & smashed right into the peaceful village.
A great deal of damage was done...

... and more people got hurt.
Again, the good people of the village came to help.
They comforted the frightened.
They bandaged the wounded.
The repaired the damage.
And soon almost everything returned to
Not long after, the whole thing happened yet again!
Another bolder,
new damage,
more wounded,
but this time was
different.
This time one villager stood up and cried out:

I’m going up that hill and find out where the hell all these boulders are coming from!
...and that was how Family Systems Theory was born!
Family Systems Theory was born out of a dissatisfaction with the “diagnose and prescribe” criterion promoted by the Medical Model. This practice was so prevalent during the 2nd half of the 20th century that it produced a national Valium epidemic.
Mick Jager
Valium
The Medical Model *describes* the behavior (e.g. depression, addiction, acting out) in an intra-personal way.

Family Systems Theory *accounts for* the behavior in a systemic way (i.e. where the boulders are coming from).
Medical Model
Systems

Family

Sigmund Freud, MD

Murray Bowen, MD
“The child is a barometer for what is happening at home. When there’s stormy weather, we see a change in the barometer. It’s helpful to have information so that we can provide appropriate support or be sensitive to issues.”
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Family Systems Theory...

...is not an instant cure.
Family Systems Theory...

...is not a quick fix.
Family Systems Theory...

...is not a magic bullet
Family Systems Theory...

...is not the flavour du jour
Family Systems Theory is...

...the *science* of human behavior that is rooted in *evolutionary biology* and can be applied to any network of interlocking relationships (e.g. a *family*, a school, a work place, a community-of-faith, or even a country).
The shortest distance between a human being and the truth is a story.
Composite Case Study

William

40

Suzy

5

Willie

1/12

Mary

35

Identified patient: Oppositional bed wetting biting

Diagnosed patient: Imperforated anus Neuroblastoma Stage 3 Neuro muscular Myelin sheath Nemaline myopahty
Summary:

The best thing a father can do for his children is to love their mother and vice versa.
William
Full time job
Part-time job
Insufficient $ “Absent”

Suzy

Willie
Mary
Quit job
FT care

5

1/12
William 40
Full time job
Part-time job
Insufficient $“Absent”

Suzy

Willie 35
Quit job
FT care

Mary

5

1/12
William: Full time job
Part-time job
Insufficient $ “Absent”

Suzy

Willie

Mary: Quit job
FT care
d.1989

5

1/12
William: Full time job
Part-time job
Insufficient $ “Absent”
William: Full time job
Part-time job
Insufficient $ “Absent”

Suzy

Willie

Mary
Quit job
FT care

Refugees Culture

5

35

1
Enter: Help Me Grow
HelpMeGrow

Parenting Resilience

Social and Emotional Competence of Children

Concrete Support In Times of Need

Social Connections

Knowledge of Parenting And Child Development
Suzy
5

40
William: Full time job
Part-time job
Insufficient $ “Absent”

35
Mary
Quit job
FT care

Refugees Culture

Willie
1
8 Interlocking Principles:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Medical Model Systems</th>
<th>Family Systems</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Was developed through the study of <em>individual</em> patients with the family as a collection of relatively autonomous people each motivated by his/her own particular psychological mechanisms and conflicts.</td>
<td>Was developed through a study of the <em>family as the emotional unit</em>, a network of interlocking relationships in which personal psychology is put in the larger context of the family and traditional psychological concepts are used to <em>describe</em> rather than <em>account for</em> human function.</td>
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Medical Model Systems

A symptom is an imbalance in the individual
Understands behavior by looking at what is going on inside a person
Wants to describe human functioning with terms like depression or anxiety

Family Systems

A symptom is an imbalance in the relationship system
Understands behavior by looking at what is going on around a person
Wants to account for human functioning not just describe it
Medical Model Systems

The functioning of the relationship systems is based on a *rational* process.

Lacks a theory and therefore provides a less comprehensive view of the symptom.

Family Systems

The functioning of the relationship system is based on an *emotional* process.

Provides a theory that allows for a more comprehensive view of the symptom.
<table>
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<td>More <strong>content</strong> oriented (content = pieces of information)</td>
<td>More <strong>process</strong> oriented (process = the way that pieces of information are related, e.g. a pattern)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Content</strong> guides psychotherapy</td>
<td><strong>Process</strong> guides psychotherapy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Linear Thinking Systems Thinking

A → B → C → D = E

Diagram with arrows connecting A, B, C, D, and E.
Linear Thinking

An unhappy mother creates sick children.