

The Relevance of Systemic Practice and Family Interventions in Youth Justice

For the majority of young people, their family and how it functions mediates between them and the wider community. At their best families are protective, promoting resilience and optimizing the abilities of their individual members. If struggling, they can be unsafe, failing to equip their members to cope successfully in the outside world.

FAMILY SYSTEMS

Carr, A (2002) a family therapist and researcher describes how the components of pre-teen oppositional conduct disorder can develop in adolescence into pervasive anti-social conduct disorders involving criminality in the wider community. S/he outlines the counterproductive, coercive, parent - child interactive patterns that can gradually develop in the pre-teens years.

Within contextual stresses including, socially isolated families, low levels of mutual support between parents and high levels of family stress the child becomes increasingly oppositional, aggressively refusing to comply with what can be escalating parental demands, Parents can then withdraw temporarily, relieving the situation but leaving the core issue unresolved. As the coercive patterns increase, positive patterns decrease leading to entrenched negative positions. Unresolved they can underpin the more extreme behaviours in adolescence.

While not a definitive list Lehamann and Dangle (1998) summarise that three types of risk factors increase the likelihood of pre-teen conduct disorders becoming anti-social adolescent behaviour.

Child characteristics

- Impulsivity and inattention

Parenting styles – coercive

- Ineffective monitoring and supervision
- Inconsistent responses to rule breaking
- Failure to reward positives

Family organisation

- High level of family stress
- Parental conflict and violence
- Social isolation
- Parental psychological adjustment problem i.e. depression and substance abuse

The evidence base for systemic, family based interventions in relation to behavioural difficulties and conduct disorders in young people is strong; it forms the basis for most intensive family based interventions; Henggeler (2002).

The Scottish Government has funded a three year training programme 2012-15 to support their Whole Systems Approach. The professionally accredited Foundation and Intermediate level training in Systemic Practice and Family Interventions provided by the Family Therapy Training Network (FTTN) are available to Youth Justice practitioners throughout Scotland. The first cohort will complete in June 2013 with applications forms for the 2013-14 training being access at <http://www.cjsw.ac.uk/content/systemic-practice-and-family-interventions-training>

Or Contact the Youth Justice National Development Team on : 0141 444 8700

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Carr, A. (2009a) The effectiveness of family therapy and systemic interventions for child- focused problems. *Journal of Family Therapy*.
Lehamann,P & Dangel,R (1998) Oppositional defiant disorder, in B Thyer and J Wodarski (eds) *Handbook of empirical social work practice*, vol 1 *Mental Disorders* pp 91-116; New York Wiley
Henggeler, S. W., & Sheidow, A. J. (2002). *Conduct disorder and delinquency*. In D. H. Sprenkle (Ed.), *Effectiveness research in marriage and family therapy* (pp. 27-51).Washington, DC: AAMFT.