

# Chapter Seven

**Couples, Family, and Group Helping**

# Learning Objectives

- LO 1: Learn about general systems theory and cybernetics and how they both are applied to the understanding of groups, couples, and families
- LO 2: Explore the history of couples and family counseling, the difference between healthy and unhealthy couples and families, how stress impacts families, the role of the human service professional in family guidance and family counseling, and when to refer to family counseling
- LO 3: Discover how groups are impacted by systems, the history of group work, the importance of group membership behavior, the role of good group leadership skills, the stages of group development, and when to refer to individual or group counseling
- LO 4: Examine ethical and professional issues of confidentiality in couples, family, and group counseling as well as the importance of obtaining appropriate training to be competent in couples, family, and group counseling
- LO 5: Consider how knowledge of systems and the complexity of interrelationships adds to a deeper understanding of the individual

# General Systems Theory

- ✧ Explains the interactions of all types of systems: living systems, family systems, community systems, and even solar systems 😊
- ✧ Each system has a boundary that defines it. Boundaries can be rigid, permeable, or semi-permeable.
- ✧ A healthy system has semi-permeable boundaries.
- ✧ Boundaries help a system define how it interacts with other systems.
- ✧ All systems develop a steady state called homeostasis, and the study of the typical ways in which a system maintains that balance is called cybernetics.
- ✧ Some systems have scapegoats, or identified patients (IPs) who exhibit atypical behavior.
- ✧ Discuss Jim Jones in Reflection Exercise 7.2

# Families and Groups

- ✧ Key rules that govern families and groups:
  1. Interactions are complex.
  2. Overt and covert rules
  3. Important to understand who is “in charge” and what that means for group communication
  4. Understanding boundaries and subsystems is critical.
  5. Rigidity or permeability of boundaries shapes families.
  6. Communication in couples, families, and groups shapes functioning.
  7. Each couple, family, or group has unique homeostasis.
  8. Language used in these groups affects individual self-definitions.
  9. Stress from various sources can seriously disrupt stable systems.
  10. Cultural influences have conscious and unconscious impacts.
  11. The past affects the present; may need to be a focus of intervention.
  12. Change is possible if there is a clear, desired path.

# A Brief History of Family Counseling and Family Therapy

- ✧ Late 1800s-Early 1900s
  - ✧ Charity Organization Societies (COSs), called friendly visitors, assisted families with education, advice, moral support, and necessities
  - ✧ Settlement movement (Jane Addams and Hull House)
  - ✧ Alfred Adler – His work with children was a model upon which family therapy models are built
- ✧ Mid-1950s
  - ✧ Various family therapy models developed, many in Palo Alto, California
  - ✧ Jay Haley and Cloe Madanes – Strategic Family Therapy
  - ✧ Satir – communication approach
  - ✧ Salvador Minuchin – Structural Family Therapy
  - ✧ Steve de Shazer and Insoo Kim Berg – Solution Focused Brief Therapy
- ✧ Later 1900s
  - ✧ Carl Whitaker – Experiential-Humanistic approach
  - ✧ Murray Bowen – Multigenerational approach
  - ✧ Michael White and David Epston – Narrative approach

# Couples and Families

## ✧ **Healthy couples and families:**

- ✧ Semi-permeable boundaries
- ✧ Good communication
- ✧ Aware of own feelings and take ownership of them
- ✧ Parents/Guardians main rule makers
- ✧ Hierarchies are clear and established

## ✧ **Dysfunctional couples and families:**

- ✧ Do not take responsibility for own feelings or actions, and scapegoat others
- ✧ Might be unaware of or unwilling to address unfinished business

## ✧ **Stress can have a large effect on families (Minuchin):**

- ✧ Stress in families is caused by situational (unexpected) problems (e.g. illness) and predictable developmental issues (e.g. birth).
- ✧ Healthy families have the mechanisms to successfully deal with such stressors.

# Family Guidance, Family Counseling and the Role of the Human Service Professional

- ✧ Many different approaches to family (and couple) counseling
- ✧ Human service professionals are trained to do family guidance, not family counseling.
- ✧ Family counseling/therapy is usually at master's or doctoral level.
- ✧ Human service professional can help clients recognize when they have couples and family problems and make referral for counseling.
- ✧ Some believe people should always have individual counseling—others believe it's always important to have couples/family counseling.
  - ✧ What do you think?
  - ✧ Under what circumstances would you suggest that a couple seek individual counseling or that individuals seek couple or family therapy?

# Groups

- ✧ Groups, like families, are systems.
- ✧ Thus, many of the same dynamics are in place (boundaries, power dynamics, hierarchies, homeostasis, etc.).
- ✧ Groups will build their own homeostasis, and it's up to the leader to help the new system function in a healthy manner.
  - ✧ Important not to let individual members become scapegoats of the system's problems



# A Brief History of Group Work

- ✧ Prior to 1900, groups were developed to assist people in functional and pragmatic ways.
- ✧ 1900: Jane Addams (Hull House) and the Social Group Work Movement—to help with daily living
- ✧ Dr. Joseph Pratt applied group work, emphasizing psychoeducation, to patients with tuberculosis
- ✧ Early 1900s: Vocational and moral guidance groups in high schools
- ✧ 1940s: Carl Rogers and the Encounter group—working with war veterans
- ✧ 1940s: Kurt Lewin and National Training Laboratory (NTL) to look at group dynamics
- ✧ 1960s and 1970s—increased popularity of groups—(e.g. Esalen in California)
- ✧ Today
  - ✧ Self-help Groups
  - ✧ Psychoeducational
  - ✧ Counseling and Therapy Groups

# Defining Different Types of Groups (slide 1 of 2)

## ✧ **Self-help Groups**

- ✧ Usually, nonpaid volunteer acts as leader; not trained as a therapist
- ✧ Usually free or ask for a nominal contribution
- ✧ Tend to be open groups, but this makes it hard to build cohesion
- ✧ Share only what feels comfortable
- ✧ See Reflection Exercise 7.5

## ✧ **Psychoeducational Groups** (formerly called “guidance groups”)

- ✧ Mental health education dissemination
- ✧ Purpose: prevent future problems and promote personal and interpersonal growth and self-understanding
- ✧ Designated, well-trained leader; often gives a didactic presentation
- ✧ Can vary in number of people and in length of time
- ✧ See Reflection Exercise 7.6

# Defining Different Types of Groups (slide 2 of 2)

## ✧ **Counseling and Therapy Groups**

- ✧ Smaller number of people (between 4 and 12)
- ✧ Usually meet at least once a week for 1-3 hours
- ✧ Confidentiality is essential, both with the therapist and with other group members
- ✧ Expression of feeling and change encouraged
- ✧ See Reflection Exercise 7.7

# Group Details

## ✧ **Group Membership Behavior**

- ✧ Groups are minilabs of our world, often reflecting parallel processes.
- ✧ A chance to get feedback and examine our own behavior
- ✧ We generally take on our “typical ways of behaving’ in groups, and we can experiment with new ways in the group.

## ✧ **Group Leadership Styles**

- ✧ Varies based on personality and theoretical orientation of leader
- ✧ Certain styles fit certain types of groups better
- ✧ Generally, however, good leadership “fosters cohesion with regard to warmth, trust, safety, confidentiality, and a commitment to honor the work and self-disclosure of each member of the group” (Leszcz, 2015, p. 366).

# Stages of Group Development

- ✧ The Pregroup Stage: Forming
- ✧ The Initial Stage: Forming
- ✧ The Transition Stage: Storming-Norming
- ✧ The Work Stage: Performing
- ✧ The Closure Stage: Adjourning

# Individual Counseling Versus Group Counseling

## ✧ **When is group counseling a better choice?**

- ✧ Financial considerations
- ✧ Individual counseling is no longer providing significant benefits
- ✧ Issues related to interpersonal functioning that can be addressed in a group
- ✧ Extra support, share experiences with other people in the same situation
- ✧ Test new behaviors in a “safe” place
- ✧ Learning from the experiences of others with similar challenges

# Ethical, Professional, and Legal Issues

## ✧ Confidentiality in Couples, Families, and Groups

- ✧ Ethical code of NOHS suggests the helper has responsibility to protect the confidentiality of the client whether the client is seen in an individual, couple, group, or family setting.
- ✧ HS professionals can ensure they will not break confidentiality, but they cannot ensure a group or family member won't.
- ✧ Consider what to do if confidentiality is broken.

## ✧ Training and Competence

- ✧ Know the limits of your professional competence.
- ✧ Seek additional training when needed, and refer to a properly trained helper when the situation calls for it.

# The Effective Human Service Professional

- ✧ The effective human service professional will understand that a client cannot be viewed in a vacuum but must be seen as part of a complex system of interactions.
- ✧ Understanding these interactions can be an essential part of helping the individual.



# Summary

- ✧ General systems theory
- ✧ Characteristics of a healthy system
- ✧ Couples and families
- ✧ Groups and their specific homeostasis
- ✧ Importance of good leadership
- ✧ Five stages of group development
- ✧ Ethical and professional issues