

Introduction to Family and Relationship

Introduction to Family and Relationship Counselling

(A concise, structured guide for students and practitioners)

1. What Is Family & Relationship Counselling?

Aspect	Description
Definition	A therapeutic process that helps families or couples improve communication, resolve conflicts, and strengthen emotional bonds. • Marital/partner relationships • Parent-child dynamics
Scope	• Sibling relationships • Extended family (grandparents, in-laws, blended families) • Same-sex and non-traditional relationships
Goal	Promote healthier interaction patterns, increase understanding, and support adaptive coping with life stressors.

2. Core Theoretical Foundations

Theory	Key Concepts	Practical Implications
Systems Theory	Families are interdependent systems; change in one part affects the whole.	Look for patterns, boundaries, and feedback loops.
Bowenian Family Therapy	Differentiation of self, multigenerational transmission, emotional triangles.	Explore family-of-origin influences and anxiety management.
Structural Family Therapy (Minuchin)	Family organization, subsystems, hierarchy, boundaries.	Re-structure interactions; strengthen parental leadership.
Strategic/Brief Therapy (Haley, Madanes)	Problem-solving through paradoxical interventions and directives.	Use targeted tasks to disrupt maladaptive cycles quickly.
Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT)	Attachment needs, bond formation, cycles of negative interaction.	Identify and reshape attachment injuries in couples.

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Theory

Key Concepts

Practical Implications

Counselling

Narrative Therapy

Stories shape identity and meaning problems.

Help clients rewrite dominant narratives to empower change.

Solution-Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT)

Emphasis on strengths, future goals, and small steps.

Build hope by highlighting exceptions and resources.

3. Common Issues Addressed

Category

Typical Problems

Communication

Misunderstandings, hostile or passive-aggressive styles, lack of active listening.

Conflict

Power struggles, recurrent arguments, unresolved past grievances.

Parenting

Discipline disagreements, blended-family adjustment, developmental challenges.

Life Transitions

Marriage, divorce, remarriage, relocation, retirement, illness, bereavement.

Sexual & Intimacy Concerns

Mismatched desire, infidelity, sexual dysfunction, trauma.

Mental Health Co-occurrence

Depression, anxiety, substance use, trauma within the family system.

Cultural & Diversity Factors

Intercultural marriages, LGBTQ+ issues, religious expectations, socioeconomic stressors.

4. The Counselling Process

1. Initial Contact & Intake

- Gather demographic data, presenting concerns, referral source.
- Assess safety (e.g., domestic violence, child abuse).
- Explain confidentiality limits and therapeutic framework.

2. Assessment & Formulation

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- Use genograms, ecomaps, and systemic questionnaires.

- Identify patterns, boundaries, rules, and strengths

- Develop a **case formulation** linking problem behaviors to systemic dynamics.

Counseling

3. Goal Setting

- Collaborative, specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, time-bound (SMART).
- Prioritize safety, communication, and relationship satisfaction.

4. Intervention

- Choose techniques aligned with the theoretical model (e.g., restructuring, enactments, scaling questions).
- Apply **homework assignments** (communication drills, journaling, behavioral experiments).

5. **Evaluation