

Family Communication – CLASS 1

Introduction: Communication Patterns and Families

I. INTRODUCTION

"Family is the care-giving and the life-giving fabric which patterns, binds, and weaves each of us into a history and a future." — Kenneth Vaux

This lesson opens the window to the whole area of family communication. During the introduction you will encounter my philosophy of the course and an exploration of the concept of family. The class will discuss what is a family and what are characteristics of different family types. This segment is followed by an exploration of what is communication. Finally, I close the class with four assumptions which will guide the content and discussion throughout the course.

II. BEFORE YOU WATCH THE VIDEOTAPE



- * In *Family Communication* read Chapter 1, pages 1-21.
- * Write draft definitions of the concepts "family" and "communication" in your journal.

III. ROLL-IN OR STUDIO GUEST

William Pinsof, Ph.D., President and CEO of The Family Institute at Northwestern University and Professor, Northwestern University, Evanston, IL

IV. GRAPHICS

At this stage we suggest you watch the videotape. The graphics you will see on the screen are reproduced below. You might like to add your own comments as you watch the tape.

Family is the care-giving
and the life-giving fabric
which patterns, binds,
and weaves each of
us into a history
and a future.

Kenneth Vaux

Family Forms

- Two parent biological
- Single parent
- Blended
- Extended
- Partners without children

Course Assumptions

- No one right way to be a family
- Family is a system
- Reflective and constitutive
- Relationships take effort

V. JOURNAL ASSIGNMENT

1) *Family Definition*

Develop your own definition of family which reflects your personal beliefs about what constitutes a family. Also, define your conception of a “functional” family.

2) *Family Change*

Search for current literature describing family demographics. Pick an article and answer the following questions:

- a) What did I learn from this article about the structures and functions of American families?
- b) How might these different structures affect communication behaviors within these families?
- c) How is my current or future family likely to differ from my parents’ families when they were children? How did their communication patterns differ from the patterns found in today’s families?

3) *Belief Identification*

With a partner discuss the beliefs you hold about families, e.g., “I believe...the family is the place to go if you are hurting” or “...families serve as models for future relationships.” Start with the phrase “I believe...” and identify five of your beliefs as a result of your discussion. Try to include one belief about the role of communication in families. Note 2-3 beliefs in your journal.

4) *Full Name Exercise*

With a partner share your full name, the background of that name and how you feel about it. Usually the sharing reveals information about the time period in which you were born (“My parents named me after a famous movie star”) or family heritage (“I had to have the first initial of my grandmother’s name B, so I’m Beth”). It also indicates how you feel about your name (“I was supposed to be Laurencia, but my aunt said they should name me Laura. Thank goodness.”). Discussion of last names usually reveals some information about ethnic/cultural heritage. Record your name's story in your journal.

VI. BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Coontz, S. (1992). *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap*. New York: Harper Collins.
- Gilbert, K. (Ed.) (2003) *The Family: 03/04* (29th Edition) Guilford, CN: McGraw Hill/Dushkin
- Satir, V. (1988). *The New Peoplemaking*. Mountain View: Science and Behavior Books.
- Stone, E. (1988). *Black Sheep and Kissing Cousins*. New York: Penguin Books.

Family Communication – CLASS 2

Family Communication Framework: Part I

I. INTRODUCTION

Imagine you are spending the weekend with a family which is unfamiliar to you. How do you make sense out of all the messages which seem to fly around you and have meaning for family members? Who is really angry, sad, kidding? During this lesson you will explore material which demonstrates the power of patterns in family life. You will understand patterns to be verbal and nonverbal, habitual, and often relationship-defining. You will also be introduced to part one of a model used to analyze family life, including interaction patterns. You will begin to see the importance of understanding the role of cohesion, or emotional connectedness, and adaptability, or change, in family life. Finally, you will encounter the concept of dialectical tensions, or the points of struggle family members encounter as they try to maintain relationships among very different individuals.

II. BEFORE YOU WATCH THE VIDEOTAPE



* In *Family Communication* read Chapter 2, pages 22-38.

* Think about the struggle you may have experienced in a close relationship as one person seemed to push for more independence and the other pushed for more connectedness.

III. ROLL-IN OR STUDIO GUEST

Douglas Kelley, Professor, Arizona State University-West, Phoenix, AZ

Dr. Charles Wilkinson, Marriage and Family Therapist, North Shore Center for Counseling and Therapy, Northbrook, IL

IV. GRAPHICS

At this stage we suggest you watch the videotape. The graphics you will see on the screen are reproduced below. You might like to add your own comments as you watch the tape.

Primary Functions

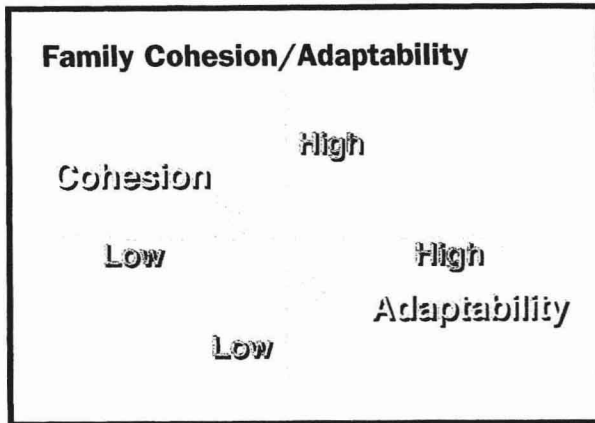
- Establishing a pattern of cohesion
- Establishing a pattern of adaptability

Cohesion



Adaptability





V. JOURNAL ASSIGNMENTS

1) *Pattern Analysis*

Watch a series of interactions between two or three family members and try to identify some predictable patterns in their interactions. For example, when X says “_____”, Y almost always (looks away, snaps back, etc.). You may use a real or media family.

2) *Cohesion/Adaptability Axis Explanation*

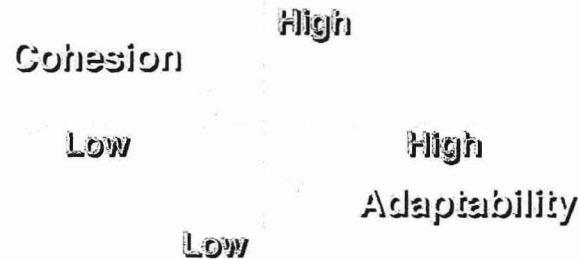
Since the cohesion-adaptability axis serves as the core concept for understanding family communication, create examples to ensure that you grasp these primary functions. Draw the axis in your journal and place letters of the alphabet in various sections of the quadrant. Hypothesize what a family might be like that would be found at each particular point and what behaviors would characterize communication within each family. Write down your ideas. For example, if family B is found at a high cohesion and high rigidity point, one might hypothesize that they had recently undergone some trauma which made the members cling together and resulted in the parent(s) setting very rigid or strict rules for behavior as a way of coping with the trauma.

3) *Altering Patterns*

Discuss the role of patterns in family relationships and how you believe they are formed and to what extent they can be changed. Try to come up with two or three examples of what you have witnessed as family interaction patterns, such as “Jim always changes the subject when Mike tries to joke about the trouble they got into as kids.” Note these in your journal.

4) Cohesion/Adaptability Application

Using a real or fictional family discuss how that family faced a tragedy or crisis. Using the chart below indicate where you think the family was on the cohesion/adaptability axis before the crisis (mark with X) and then where you think they were a year after the crisis (mark with Y). Discuss and list your reasons in your journal.

**VI. BIBLIOGRAPHY**

- Hess, R., and G. Handel (1959). *Family Worlds*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Olson, D., Russell, C., and D. Sprenkle. Eds. (1983). *Circumplex Model: Systematic Assessment and Treatment of Families*. New York: Haworth Press.

Family Communication – CLASS 3

Family Communication Framework: Part II

I. INTRODUCTION

This lesson continues the process of creating a framework for understanding family relationships. In this lesson you will encounter part two of the framework for analysis and develop a sense of how all six parts interrelate. Part two includes the supporting or secondary functions of family image or metaphor, family themes, internal and external family boundaries, and biosocial issues of age, gender and power. You will realize that this six-point model provides a window into understanding families and their communication patterns.

II. BEFORE YOU WATCH THE VIDEOTAPE



* In *Family Communication* read Chapter 2, pages 38-51.

* Think about a major family motto or belief which influences how people in a particular family live their everyday life.

III. ROLL-IN OR STUDIO GUEST

Dr. Charles Wilkinson, Marriage and Family Therapist, North Shore Center for Counseling and Therapy, Northbrook, IL

IV. GRAPHICS

At this stage we suggest you watch the videotape. The graphics you will see on the screen are reproduced below. You might like to add your own comments as you watch the tape.

Primary Functions

- Establishing a pattern of cohesion
- Establishing a pattern of adaptability

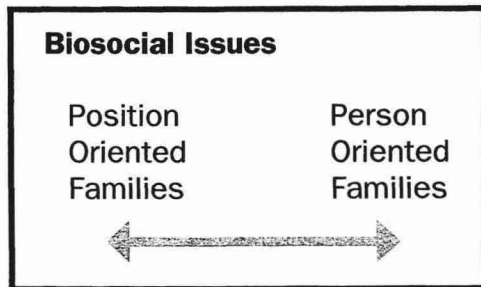
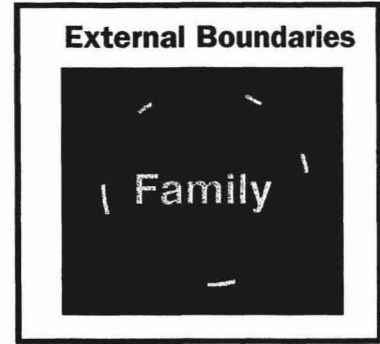
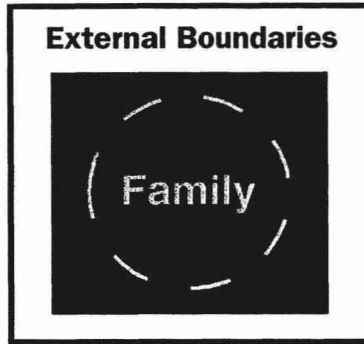
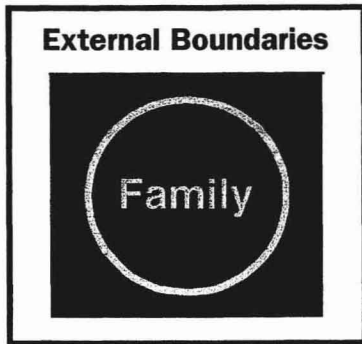
Supporting Functions

- Congruent images
- Central family themes
- Managed boundaries
- Meaningful biosocial issues

Themes

- You can only depend on your family
- You can always depend on your family
- The Warners play to win
- You can always do better

Class 3



Framework
The family is a system
constituted and managed
through its communication.

Framework
Family members regulate
cohesion and adaptability and
develop a collective identity . . .
. . . through the patterned flow
of meaningful messages within
a network . . .
. . . of evolving interdependent
relationships . . .
. . . located within a defined
cultural context.

V. JOURNAL ASSIGNMENT

1) *Family Interview*

Interview an older person about his or her family, focusing specifically on the images, themes, boundaries, and biosocial beliefs experienced within that person's family-of-origin. Include a paragraph about each in your journal. Decide if they reinforce each other or if they seem to contradict each other.

2) Metaphor Development

Develop a metaphor or image for a family you know. Explain the metaphor by giving examples of how the metaphor is played out in family life. For example, "I see the Jones family as a basketball team because..." or "I see my family as a courtroom because. . ."

3) Family Themes

Generate a sample of 5-6 family themes. Discuss with a partner ways these themes might play out in an individual's life outside the family. Questions might include: Why might a teacher think a student came from a family with X theme? How might people with X family theme approach life at college? What might be the effects of growing up with theme X on developing friendships? Note your conclusions in your journal.

4) Patterns of Communication

Based on the predictability of patterns of communication within your own family, provide answers for the following hypothetical situations. Describe how your family might handle the following situations:

How would your family typically respond if...

- a) you forgot a parent's birthday?
- b) you told your parents or your family that you were flunking out of college?
- c) you began dating a person of another race?
- d) you became distraught and depressed over the death of a friend or family member?

VI. BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Hess, R., and G. Handel (1959). *Family Worlds*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Olson, D., Russell, C., and D. Sprenkle (Eds.). (1983). *Circumplex Model: Systematic Assessment and Treatment of Families*. New York: Haworth Press.

Family Communication – CLASS 4

The Family as a Communication System

I. INTRODUCTION

Imagine a decorative mobile with people hanging from each of the strings and imagine that they are all members of a family. What does this image show you about family relationships? This is a pivotal lesson because it provides an overview of systems theory as it applies to families. This perspective suggests that persons are fully understood only when they are seen in context and that when individuals are part of a system, they affect and are affected by the behavior of others. In other words, to understand family members one must observe their interaction patterns with other members. During the lesson you will learn about family systems and encounter the mobile as a way to visualize a family system. Four core concepts of interdependence, patterns, interactive complexity/punctuation and structural complexity are briefly described. The limitations of the systems perspective are briefly noted. You may need to struggle with some of the content in the text and tape, but the systems concepts are central to understanding family dynamics.

II. BEFORE YOU WATCH THE VIDEOTAPE

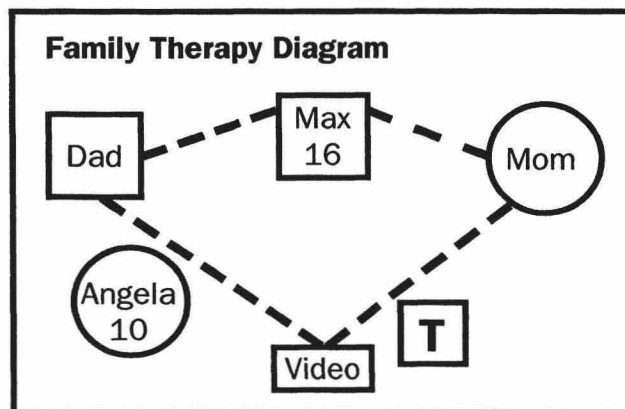


* In *Family Communication* read Chapter 3, pages 52-68.

* Think about how something that happened to one member of your family affected the other members of the family.

III. GRAPHICS

At this stage we suggest you watch the videotape. The graphics you will see on the screen are reproduced below. You might like to add your own comments as you watch the tape.



Selected Systems Concepts

- Interdependence
- Patterns/Self-regulation
- Interactive complexity/Punctuation
- Structural complexity

IV. JOURNAL ASSIGNMENT

1) *Complex Relationships*

Using a real or fictional three-generation family, create a diagram of its organizational complexity. First develop the formal skeleton of the relationships among the people. Then by heavy or thin lines, draw in the major interpersonal alliances that exist between or among specific individual members. Develop a description of the informal complexities of the system.

2) *Interdependence*

Analyze a family situation in which something that affected one person initially affected the whole family eventually in some way. How does the family tend to respond when their “mobile” becomes unbalanced? Describe this in two or three paragraphs.

3) *Boundary Issues*

With a partner, describe how your family regulates information (values, beliefs, knowledge, news, reading material, ideas, attitudes, etc.) that comes in and out of the family. What kind of information is encouraged to enter the family, for instance? What kind of information is discouraged? How would you describe the family’s relationship to the community (isolated, taking in support, giving out support)? Note your conclusions in your journal.

4) *Hold a Systems Perspective*

With a partner, discuss how taking a systems perspective might affect how you manage certain situations at work. For example, how would holding a systems perspective affect your role as a classroom teacher or an office manager? What would you tend to do? What would you be less likely to do if you held this perspective? Note your ideas in your journal.

V. BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bavelas, J., and L. Segal (1982). Family systems theory: Background and implications. *Journal of Communication*, 32: 99-107.

Broderick, C. (1993). *Understanding Family Process*. Newbury Park: Sage.

Duncan, B., and J. Rock (1993). Saving relationships: The power of the unpredictable. *Psychology Today*, January/February: 46-51, 86, 95.

Minuchin, S. (1984). *Family Kaleidoscope*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Satir, V. (1988). *The New Peoplemaking*. Mountain View, CA: Science and Behavior Books.

Family Communication – CLASS 5

Multigenerational Influences: Family-of-Origin Patterns

I. INTRODUCTION

If life is a braided cord of humanity stretching across generations, what does that mean for communication patterns? Now you will begin to explore the connection between the experiences of previous generations and life in the current generation. This lesson introduces the concept of multigenerational patterns and the twin forces of family-of-origin and culture which affect family patterns across generations. Specifically, I develop in detail the concept of family-of-origin and explore how communication patterns and other areas of family functioning are passed from generation to generation, often unwittingly. I then demonstrate the transmission of patterns through the use of genograms, or a type of family tree which records information about relationships among family members. This lesson reminds you that we all have ties to previous generations.

II. BEFORE YOU WATCH THE VIDEOTAPE



* In *Family Communication* read Chapter 4, pages 75-85.

* Look over the genogram format on page 15. Think about some patterns of handling conflict or sharing affection which appear to have been passed across generations in a family with which you are familiar.

III. ROLL-IN OR STUDIO GUEST

Dr. Charles Wilkinson, Marriage and Family Therapist, North Shore Center for Counseling and Therapy, Northbrook, IL

IV. GRAPHICS

At this stage we suggest you watch the videotape. The graphics you will see on the screen are reproduced below. You might like to add your own comments as you watch the tape.

We all come from the
past, and children ought
to know . . .
that life is a braided cord
of humanity stretching up
from time long gone,
and that it cannot be
defined by the span of a
single journey from diaper
to shroud.

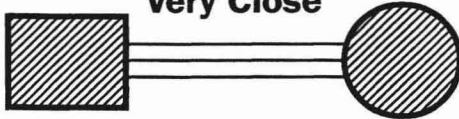
Russell Baker

A genogram is a format for drawing a family tree that records information about family members and their relationships over at least three generations.

(McGoldrick) (Kramer)

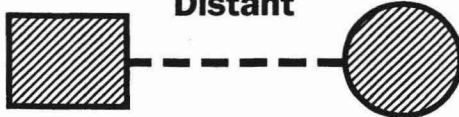
Family Interaction Patterns

Very Close



Family Interaction Patterns

Distant



Family Interaction Patterns

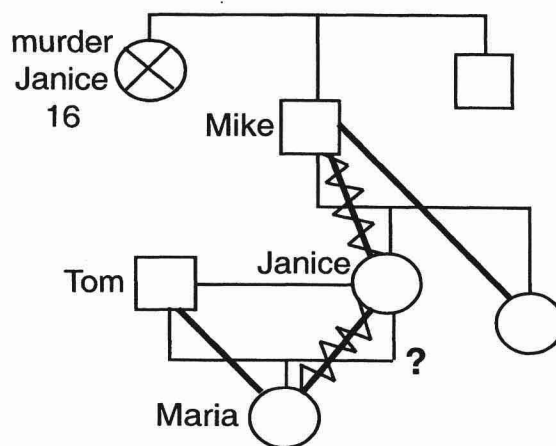
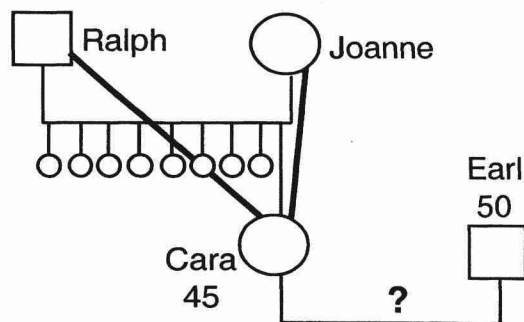
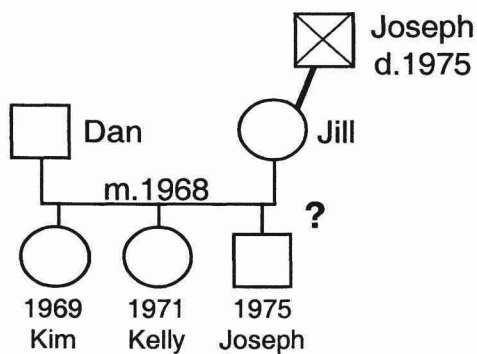
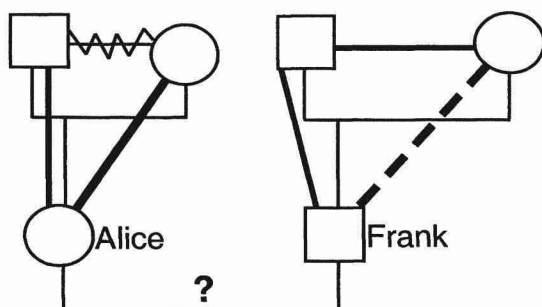
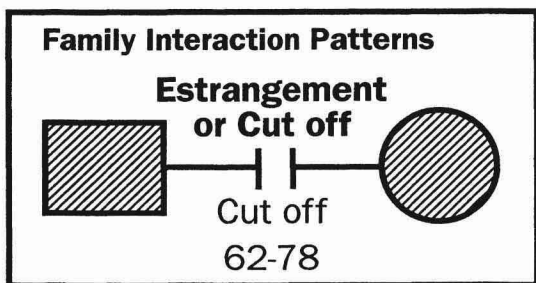
Conflictual



Family Interaction Patterns

Fused and Conflictual





It's easy to duplicate in your family the same thing that happened in your growing up. This is true whether your family was a nurturing or a troubled one.

Virginia Satir

V. JOURNAL ASSIGNMENT

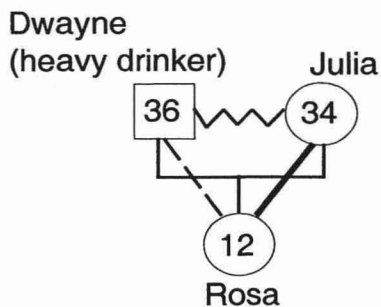
1) Genogram Creation

Prepare a small genogram using the relevant symbol codes. Identify such concepts as transmission of themes, images, expectations, beliefs, and values. Create this genogram for a small segment of a real or fictional family.

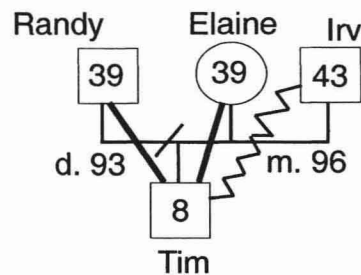
2) Genogram Analysis

Analyze the following genograms and identify any issues you believe would be faced by the family members.

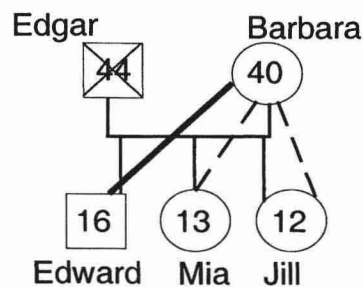
A.



B.



C.



3) Family-of-Origin Interface

Answer the following questions, using your own family or a literary or media family as an example. Compare and discuss your answers with a partner and note them in your journal.

- What are some characteristics of the nuclear family system which appear to be related to one or both parent(s) family-of-origin?
- What are some characteristics of the family which appear to have been developed through the interaction of these immediate family members?

4) Pattern Recognition

Watch a film which involves interaction among two adult generations and try to identify certain patterns of behavior exhibited by a member or members of the older generation which appear(s) to influence the younger generation. Discuss your perceptions with a partner and note them in your journal.

VI. BIBLIOGRAPHY

Brown, F.H. (Ed.). (1991). *Reweaving the Family Tapestry: A Multigenerational Approach to Families*. New York: W.W. Norton.

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Satir, V. (1988). *The New Peoplemaking*. Mountain View, CA: Science and Behavior Books.