

TURNING POINTS FOR FAMILIES

Reunification therapy for severe parental alienation or the disruption of a parent-child relationship

with

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Program Requirements for Admission

Stipulations of a Court Order:

Transfer of temporary or permanent legal and physical custody to the alienated parent.

A stipulation for a sequestration period of at least 90 days during which time there can be **no contact** of any kind between the child and alienating parent.

Lifting of the sequestration is at the discretion of the treatment program and will be dependent upon the alienating parent's support for the reunification.

Stipulations of a Court Order:

Q: HOW DO I KNOW IF THE
SEQUESTRATION STIPULATION IS
BEING VIOLATED?

Stipulations of a Court Order:

A: BY THE WAY THE KIDS ARE
TREATING THE ALIENATED
PARENT!

Stipulations of a Court Order cont.

The alienating parent must be assessed for a personality disorder and/or other diagnosis and accept appropriate treatment.

I must approve the alienating parents' therapist.

Alienating parent must accept parent education services from me.

Stipulation for A LETTER, which I must approve

*The
Scarlet
Letter*



WHO PARTICIPATES?

WHERE DO THEY STAY?

Focus of the letter—written by the alienating parent to the child:

Expresses genuine support for the reunification with reasons **why**.

Identifies qualities of the alienated parent

Identifies what the alienated parent has to offer the child based on the individuality of the child.

Planning, according to Minuchin (1981):

“It is always a mistake, Sherlock Holmes warned, to theorize ahead of data.

Planning treatment is an activity that can be engaged in only with an awareness of its limitation. Family therapists learn, in effect, to theorize ahead of their data about a family, but always with awareness that a family’s structure is never immediately available to a therapist....

Planning, according to Minuchin (1981):

Only in a process of joining a family, probing its interactions and experiencing its governing structure, can a therapist get to know the transactions of that family. Any initial hypothesis will have to be tested in joining, and they may be all quickly discarded.” p. 50

(this is particularly true in severe alienation cases.)

Planning, according to Minuchin (1981):

“The therapist will explore cross-generational coalitions that may be scapegoating one family member or rendering certain individuals dysfunctional.” (p.53)

“The therapist must never forget that in actually gathering data, she is inside the system she is studying. Furthermore, the family is never a static entity. Formulating the family shape from initial data is a useful step, but it is only a first step. The therapist must move beyond it almost immediately, to the actual dance of therapy.” (p. 63).

Travel to Turning Points for Families

What to tell the child

or

Correcting what the child had been told

JOINING:

Connecting emotionally with each family member so that each feels understood enough to be motivated to change.

"Joining is the glue that holds the system together" (Minuchin, 1981, p. 32).

ENACTMENT:

Encouraging family members to talk with each other in order to observe and explore how the family is interacting. Noting the alienated child's treatment of the alienated parent, and this data will be soon used to challenge the child.

Creating intensity:

Allowing the family's full-blown conflicts to surface. Only by absorbing the family's complete drama, will the therapist truly experience all the plots and sub-plots. The therapist then induces discomfort about the dysfunctional interactional patterns.

People don't change out of complacency; they change out of crisis.

Creating intensity:

People don't change out of complacency; they change out of crisis.

Throw in the hand-grenade to create chaos; let the family “re-arrange the furniture.”

Creating intensity:

“Achieving intensity pertains particularly to supporting the experience of a new, therapeutic reality, where the symptom and the symptom bearer’s position in the family are challenged.” (p. 77)

Creating intensity:

“Family members have a discriminating sense of hearing, with areas of selective deafness...As a result the therapist’s message may never register, or it may be blunted. The therapist must make the family ‘hear,’ and this requires that his message go above the family’s threshold of deafness.... Family members may not assimilate it [*the therapist’s message*] into their cognitive schema as new information.”

Creating intensity:

“Cognitive constructions per se are rarely powerful enough to spark family change.

The question is how to make the family ‘hear’ the message. There are many techniques for making oneself heard.

At the lower end of involvement are the interventions having to do with a therapy of cognitive constructions....”

Creating intensity:

At the higher end of involvement are the interventions in which the therapist competes for power in the family...The middle levels of involvement are the techniques of creating scenarios that increase the affective component of the transaction.” (118)

e. g. You don't address the content until the process is appropriate!

reframing:

SFT starts with a clash regarding the problem and the family history. And if ever there is a clash, it is with an alienated child.

REFRAMING:

The rewriting of the child's narrow, self-defeating, myths about each parent and which maintains the alienation.

CHALLENGING:

The therapist creates doubt about each member's way of thinking, about how each perceives reality and the presenting problem. The therapist intervenes to undermine each member's participation in maintaining the homeostasis of the family system.

3 major techniques challenge the structure of the family:

Boundary marking

Unbalancing

Complementarity

Establishing appropriate boundaries:

Creating psychological distance between the alienated child and alienating parent and rebuilding boundary connection between the alienated parent and child.

Unbalancing: changing the hierarchical relationship between the parent-child.

The therapist forms a coalition with the alienated parent and affirms the parent's parental status.

COMPLEMENTARITY:

How are these family members going to change each other?

FOCUS:

Staying on the path upon which the therapist wants to lead the family and combating the family's pull to go off the path in order to maintain their homeostasis

**What is your most effective
intervention Tool?**

Gottlieb (2012) The Parental Alienation Syndrome:

“It seems so marvelously simple to appreciate that we are most likely to change for someone whom we love and who loves us. I have found in my 43 years of practice that no quantity or quality of words between an individual and the therapist—who is nonetheless stranger—can possibly have as powerful and as meaningful an impact as when the therapist provides, instead, an environment in which emotions and experiences are released among family members. (P. 143)

It seems so evident, then, that the crucial player to assume the re-education role of the child is the "formerly" loved and loving alienated parent. Indeed I assert that the deprogrammer who has the greatest potential for success is the alienated parent—who is not only the holder of the family's truths but who has had the loving relationship with the child. The role then for the therapist is to serve as a catalyst who encourages and guides the creation of healthy, corrective transactions between the alienated parent and the child as well as among all the family members.



FST, SFT capitalizes on the instinctive and deeply entrenched love that parents and children have for each other and which will likely surface in face-to-face, experiential contact. Dyadic interaction between the therapist and the child in individual treatment models does not afford this opportunity.

FST nominates the denigrated alienated parent to the position to reeducate the child and therefore elevates the alienated parent to a respected status in the family system with the recognition afforded to her/him by the therapist, as an esteemed authority.

FST negates the need to assume the impossible task of becoming a "Ph.D. historian" of the family's experience, which can never be known well enough to respond to all the curve balls that will inevitably be thrown at the therapist by the alienated child in the dyadic therapy when the therapist assumes the role of the deprogrammer. Of course, the targeted parent has all this information at her/his fingertips.

FST avoids the trap of becoming co-opted by the alienating parent, which generally occurs in individual treatment modalities because most individual therapists do not interview the targeted parent. These therapists obtain information from only the alienating parent, and the information is then corroborated by the brainwashed child.

FST relies upon objective observations of the family by the therapist rather than upon unreliable, subjective client/patient self-reporting, which is characteristic of individual treatment models.

FST avoids the trap of providing sympathy and validation to the child upon hearing the child's "heartbreaking" yet distorted, malicious stories about her/his relationship with the targeted parent.

FST, SFT does not blame the child for the family's problems, which is the inevitable interpretation the child makes when labeled as the IP. The individual model inadvertently normalizes the immoral, deceptive, and deceitful behaviors of the alienating parent because that parent is not in the therapy room.

DESCRIPTION OF THE FOUR DAYS