Something Old Something New: Substance Use Disorder and the Family
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The Impact

Behind my smile is a breaking heart, behind my laugh I’m falling apart, behind my eyes are tears at night, behind my body is a soul trying to fight.

This quote expresses what many family members feel that love someone with a substance use disorder.

The unpredictability of what will happen next become the status quo for the family.

Each family member is impacted in different ways trying to adjust to the crazy making and chaos that occurs within the family system.

Sometimes family members become vulnerable to mental health disorders, behavioral issues, diseases that are stress related, and other emotional disorders.

Stages of Change In Families

- Precontemplation: Families in this stage may think that this has to stop. They frequently resort to often used defenses such as protecting, hiding, and excusing the addict.
- Contemplation: In this stage the family wavers between “she can’t help it” to “she won’t do anything” The level of tension and threat rises.
- Preparation: One or more family member begin to look for a solution. They may seek guidance and treatment options. Here the family needs to work towards a goal.

Action: At this point the focus for change in a family reaches critical proportions. Ultimatums and professional interventions are necessary.

Maintenance: During this stage it is important to maintain contact with the family to review changes and potential obstacles to change. Reminding family members that it is a strength, not a weakness to use support to maintain changes can help them relate to the therapist’s enthusiasm for recovery for the entire family.

The Families Response

- Families that live with addictions are often traumatized in varying degrees.
- Broad swings from one end of the emotional, psychological and behavioral spectrum to the other, all to often characterize the addicted family system.
- Family member are under unusual stress, normal routines are constantly being interrupted by unexpected or even frightful events.
- The family members feel angry, frustrated, overwhelmed, and hopeless with the addict.

Family members may bend, manipulate and deny reality in their attempt to maintain a family order that is gradually slipping away.

The entire system become absorbed by a problem that is slowly spinning out of control.

Little things become big and big things get minimizes as pain is denied and slips out sideways.

Families become emotionally and psychologically constricted, where no one feels free to express their authentic self for fear of triggering disaster; their genuine feelings are often hidden under strategies to keep safe, like pleasing or withdrawing.
• The family becomes organized around trying to manage the unmanageable.
  • They yell, withdraw, criticize, try to understand and get fed up.
  • They become remarkably inventive in trying everything they can come up with to contain the problem and keep the family from blowing up.
  • The alarm bells in this system are constantly on a low hum, causing everyone to feel hyper vigilant, ready to run for emotional (or physical) shelter or to erect their defenses at the first sign of trouble.

8  □ Trauma and the Family
  • Family member avoid sharing subjects that lead to more pain.
  • They often wind up avoiding genuine connections with each other.
  • When painful feelings build and surface emotional eruptions get acted out through impulsive behaviors.
  • Trauma affects the internal world of each person, their relationships and their ability to communicate.
  • As hard as they try to keep from weakening their internal structures instead they become engaged in a losing battle.

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  • The guilt and shame that family member feel about the erratic behavior within their walls. Along with the psychological defenses against seeing the truth all to often keeps the family from getting help.
  • One of the results of being traumatized is to withdraw from authentic connections with others which can make the family feel even more isolated.
  • Having a spiritual connection with a program like Alanon can provide a sense of hope for the family.

10 □ Damaging Family Ties

  • No two families are the same in America. From single parented families, stepfamilies, foster families and multigenerational families, the family dynamic that each individual experiences is vastly different.
  • There are numerous problems that can effect the families well being such as: financial instability; isolation; enabling; codependency and continuing familial damage.
  • Helping families can be daunting at times for the professional and there is a need to be understanding and patient to break through their denial, anger and frustration towards the addict.

11 □ Models of Family Therapy
  • Structural Therapy: developed by Salvador Minuchin. Based on five principals:
    • Focuses on the interactions between people rather than their individual psyches.
    • Matric of identity based on persons interaction within the family.
    • Family structure based on social interaction.
    • Well functioning family based on how family responds and develops according to family needs.
• Goal to help the family outgrow constraining growth patterns and develop as an entity

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• Strategic Therapy: a theory that has evolved from a combined number of psychotherapy practices. There are five different parts to strategic therapy:
  • A brief social stage
  • The problem stage
  • Interactional stage
  • The stage
  • The task setting stage

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• Systemic Therapy: Rooted from family system therapy.
  • There are a number of family system therapies that contribute to the current systemic concept.
  • In recent decades systemic therapy moved away from linear causality and now approaches problems as they are created in social and linguistical reality.

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• Narrative Therapy: Encourage the person to be their own individual and to use their own self to address the problem.
  • To minimize the problems in day to day life.
  • Idea is to allow people to create personal stories that help them identify who they are and that they possess the proper tools in their life.
  • The point of narrative therapy is to help clarify, develop and support the narrator in life and help guide their journey.

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• Transgenerational Therapy: the ability for therapist to examine interactions between individuals across multiple generations.
  • Therapist’s observations and analysis of interactions helps to grasp issues within the family group in addition to current issues.
  • Can pick up on future struggles of situations
  • Used frequently with other therapies
  • Helps create a lens for situations that are being addressed in sessions

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• Communication Therapy: pertain to relationships between partners if the problem is communication.
  • Can start from different cultural backgrounds
  • Personal experiences
  • Other situations that can contribute to communication problems can be trauma, secrecy, and mental health issues.
  • Can be for individual improvement or for couples in an intimate relationship
  • Purpose is to improve lines of communication

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• Psychoeducation: To educate those with a mental health/addiction issues and their families to help empower and support them
• Tool against the stigmatization of mental health/addictions
• For families that face these challenges on a day to day basis
• Purpose of psychoeducation is to transfer information, concerning medication and treatment support; training and support in self-help; provides a safe place to vent

18 Relationship Therapy: relationships are not easy and can cause stress and strain in the relationship
• Additional problems can cause stress which can include a chronic illness, lack of communication, emotional differences, infidelity, financial problems and lack of trust
• Starts when a couple is trying to work out their problems and continue to be together
• The other option is whether they should move on or be out of the relationship.

19 Genograms
• A genogram is a graphic representation of a family tree that displays the interactions of generations within a family
• It goes beyond a traditional family tree by allowing the user to analyze the family, emotional and social relationships within a group
• It is used to identify repetitive patterns of behaviors and to recognize hereditary tendencies
• We are now going to create our own personal genogram
• Instructions are attached

20 In Conclusion
• Every generation, families pass a piece of themselves to their kin. The things that are passed down can be beautiful or valuable, like stories, culture, knowledge and belongings. Or they can mostly be insignificant, like a cowlick and green eyes as one’s grandfather. Other times, more insidious traits can be passed through generations. Sometimes there’s a genetic predisposition to addictions or depression. Other times, unhealthy ways of thinking and behaving are passed down socially, through example. Genograms provide a way for us to examine these patterns, they bring a family’s strengths and weaknesses out into the open. Genograms set the foundation for nurturing generational strengths and overcoming weaknesses. (Taken from therapy guide)

21 Someone’s Inner Thoughts

Behind my smile is a heart that is breaking, behind my laugh I’m falling apart, behind my eyes are tears at night, behind my body is a soul trying to fight
This is a mental health quote that can also apply to any family member living in a addictive system
Genograms for Psychotherapy

I. What is a Genogram?

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   a. Gender
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   e. Lifespan
   f. Additional Information
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III. Using Genograms in Psychotherapy
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IV. References

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like stories, culture, knowledge, and belongings. Or, they can be mostly insignificant, like a cowlick and green eyes as one's grandfather.

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What is a Genogram?
A genogram is structurally similar to a family tree, but serves a very different purpose. A genogram includes information about relationships and interactions between family members, while a family tree only depicts lineage.

Imagine a genogram as a family tree with much more detail about how the family members interact with one another. For example, a family tree might show us that "Emily and Kevin are married", while a genogram could tell us that "Emily and Ken are married, but they are emotionally distant from one another".
A genogram becomes most valuable when it includes information about several generations. Patterns that are usually hard to decipher seem to jump out once they've been mapped on paper. Maybe you've already noticed a trend of marital trouble in a family's history, but a genogram can highlight the pattern of aloofness and anger that's at the root of those marital problems.

Tip: It's worth noting that genograms are written through the lens of their creator. Everyone will interpret their family's relationships at least a little bit differently, and that's OK. As a clinician, this bias must be taken into account when using genograms during therapy.

How to Create a Genogram

Genograms use a combination of special rules and symbols to depict a lot of information about families as succinctly as possible. Some of these rules and practices have been standardized, and should be followed so future readers can understand your documentation.

Other rules and symbols used in genograms differ depending on who you ask, or what reference you use. It isn't a big deal what symbols you use, as long as you are consistent. This will allow you to look at a genogram from any client—even those you don't know as well—and still glean useful information about their family.

We've also created a genograms symbol sheet for you to keep handy, and to share with clients. We suggest including one of
these printouts with any copies of genograms you share with clients.

**Genogram Symbol Sheet**

*worksheet*

**Tip:** Try to include at least three generations when you create a genogram. You can include more generations if they are relevant to treatment, but any less will make the genogram significantly less helpful.

**Gender**

Men are depicted by a square and women are depicted by a circle.

![Gender Symbols]

**Family Relationships**

Family relationships are depicted by two gender symbols connected by a line beneath them. Men should always appear on the left, and women on the right.

![Family Relationship Symbols]
Descriptive symbols, which are placed on top of the family relationship line, give more detail about the relationship's status. Each of these symbols can be placed over any type of line (for example, the "separated" symbol could be placed over the "committed relationship" line or the "marriage" line).

**Emotional Relationships**

Emotional relationships are depicted with a line directly connecting two gender symbols (different from family relationship connections, where the line is beneath them). These lines can be used to connect any two people on the genogram.

https://www.therapistaid.com/therapy-guide/genograms
**Tip:** Your genograms will be very complicated if you connect every person to everyone else with emotional relationship lines. Try asking about each relationship, but only mark areas that are noteworthy or relevant to treatment.

**Children**

Children are placed beneath their parents, with a line stemming from the parents' family relationship line. Children should be listed from left to right, oldest to youngest.

**Lifespan**

Deaths are indicated with an "X" inside the person's symbol. In some cases it may be important to add extra information such as a person's age, or dates related to birth and death.
Additional Information

You can use genograms to depict just about anything that you think might be relevant to treatment. Feel free to create additional markers to fit your needs. For example, you might use an asterisk to indicate "difficulty with anger", or a squiggly line above a gender symbol to indicate "alcohol addiction".

Tip: Include a key whenever you use custom markers. Future you probably won't remember what the jumble of asterisks, squiggles, and diamonds mean.

Putting it All Together

Using the symbols and rules above, you should be able to construct a genogram that any other clinician can pick up and understand. Here's an example of completed genogram along with some commentary.
Using Genograms in Psychotherapy

Assessment
Genograms fit in naturally during the assessment portion of treatment. Not only can genograms provide great information about your client, they can also inform you about family history of mental illness, which can give insight into possible diagnoses.

During family therapy, a genogram can also be used as a way to measure progress. Completing genograms at various points throughout treatment may help you and your clients see when and where there have been improvements to relationships.

Tip: Creating a genogram doesn't have to be a chore. Many people love to talk about their family, and will jump at the opportunity to share a few stories. This is a great opportunity to build rapport and get to know your client at the beginning of treatment.

Individual Therapy
All too often the importance of family is ignored during individual therapy, and genograms are a great way to make sure that your client's roots are not forgotten. In the same way that a person's ethnic or religious culture can shape their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, so can their family culture. For this reason, clients struggling with a wide range of issues can benefit from learning about their family.

Family Therapy
The use of genograms in family therapy can be tricky because family members may see their relationships very differently from one another. However, these discrepancies can also be very telling. Consider the following example:

Example: A family consisting of two parents (Kori and Jason) and their daughter (Magnolia) come to your office for family therapy. While creating genograms, you notice that the parents both say Magnolia is distant, while Magnolia indicates that her parents are very close to one another, but distant from her.

In this example, it could be hypothesized that Magnolia and her parents both feel excluded from the other's world. Magnolia may feel that her parents care more about one another, yet the parents seem unaware of this. Kori and Jason might benefit from seeing that their daughter isn't just trying to be difficult. Instead, she might be afraid that her parents don't want her around.

Of course, these are just hypotheses. However, this example shows ways in which a genogram can act as a starting point for further exploration, and as a tool for initiating communication between family members.

Don't Forget Strengths
It's easy to get wrapped up in the negative traits that are passed down in families, so don't forget to spend some time on the strengths (especially during family therapy). If every session is spent railing on how dysfunctional a family is, why should they believe things can improve?
Sometimes, even the negative traits in a genogram can have a positive basis. Consider this example:

**Example:** Katy and her daughter Taylor both reveal through their genograms that they have an anger-fueled relationship with one another, as did Katy and her own mother. Now, Taylor is beginning to rebel.

After further exploration, Katy reveals that she rebelled against her own mother because she couldn't stand the constant lectures. However, Katy says she only lectures Taylor because she wants to help her avoid the same mistakes she made.

In this example, despite some noticeable issues with anger, we also see strengths. Katy is trying to help her daughter, although she seems to be going about it poorly. Her intentions come from a place of love. Focusing only on the anger would be likely to cause further division between Katy and Taylor.

Genograms are a great fit with many types of treatment, and many problem areas. Below, we’ve included a few references used for this guide, and further reading if you would like to continue learning about this subject.

References
Disclaimer: The resources available on Therapist Aid do not replace therapy, and are intended to be used by qualified professionals. Professionals who use the tools available on this website should not practice outside of their own areas of competency. These tools are intended to supplement treatment, and are not a replacement for appropriate training.