Systemic Therapy

The focus of investigation is on the interaction within and among individuals and systems.
Systemic Concepts

- We mutually influence (and change) each other via:
  - Patterns of Interaction
- Interactive partners’ characteristic ways of behaving
  - Patterns of Communication
- Patterns of interaction are expressed both verbally and non-verbally
Internal Working Models

“The representation of how things happen”  D. Stern

- Beliefs and expectations about ourselves and others
- Views of the SELF
- Views of OTHERS
- Views of RELATIONSHIPS
- Views of the WORLD
Internal Working Models

- These models or beliefs continue to guide our actions, thoughts and feelings through life
- We will keep ourselves SAFE:
  by staying close to and being loved by others, or by being distant from and protecting ourselves from others
Early Interactions

Video Interactions

- E & D
- L & N
- K & K
- M & N
Attachment

- Attachment refers to the infant’s choice of a preferred relationship and his/her use of that relationship to regulate his/her emotional state and his/her exploration of the world

Bowlby (1988)
Miscuing

- A “miscuing behavior” happens when defensive maneuvers on the part of one of the interactive partner may result in a behavior (communication) that expresses the contrary of the felt need.

- That creates a loop of interactions that encourage distance when comfort is needed or closeness when exploration is needed.

What you may see in the therapy room

- Affect regulation: can safely express a range of emotions.
- Less reactivity: partner’s communication does not cause mobilization of defences, attack or withdrawal
- Support seeking: can ask for what is needed
- Flexible stance: curiosity, can tolerate ambiguity
- Communication is collaborative, can assert own needs and be empathic towards partner
- The sense of self is not threatened by the other
Or...

- Affect regulation: range of emotions is constricted or expression of emotion is distorted
- High reactivity: partner's communication causes mobilization of defences, attack or withdrawal
- Support seeking: unable to ask for what is needed
- Rigid stance: cannot tolerate ambiguity, only one interpretation allowed
- Communication is antagonistic, there is only space for my needs or your needs
- The sense of self is constantly threatened by the other
Application to Systems

- These stances of Felt Safety or Felt Insecurity can be observed:
  - Among individuals
  - Between individuals and systems
  - Among Systems
Role of the Therapist: Providing a Bridge

- Where is the gap, where is the disconnection?
- What is the most effective way of providing a bridge?
- Therapy as scaffolding
  Vetere, White
- What will be the consequences of my intervention for all parties?
Role of the Therapist: Acting as a Conduit

- Acting as a translator
- People’s behaviors and interactions have meanings
- Consider how each party will respond to the intervention
- Opening the space to allow for different experiences

Alicia Lieberman
Clinical Examples

- John
- Christopher
- Francis, Elsie and Samantha
- Amy
Role of the Therapist: other considerations

- “the work of psychotherapists is to become full human beings and to inspire full human-beingness in people who feel starved about their lives.”
  Johanson and Kurtz (1994)

- As therapists, we are responsible for the consequences of what we do, say, and think
  Michael White (2007)

- We take full accountability for the work, and give full credit for the change
  Jon Connelly
What gets in the way

- Not being present
- Feeling rushed
- Reaching conclusions
- Espousing our theories
- Any new idea, once it becomes a theory, becomes oppressive
  
  Michael White