



Family Therapy: A Guide for Families/Whānau

Family/Whānau play an **important role** in a person's emotional, physical & spiritual development. Each person in the family system can impact on & may also be affected by other family members; therefore, mental health problems can change the lives & interactions within families.

Family Therapy may be helpful in:

- Resolving** a specific issue
- Preparing** the family/whānau for a major life change
- Addressing** the role that family/whānau play in a person's life

The individual strengths of each family member are used collectively to address the issues.

Why Consider Family Therapy?

The clinician working with the child or young person has suggested that **Family Therapy** would be useful to address some of the child or young person's problems. It's not uncommon for family/whānau to have thoughts such as:

“Is there something wrong with me?”

“Am I going to be blamed?”

“Am I going to feel worse after Family Therapy?”

“What's going to come out of this?”

“What do we actually have to do?”

“How is this going to help my child or young person?”

These thoughts are natural considering that someone has just suggested to you that you & your family/whānau open yourselves up to others. Up until now you may have been involved with your child or young person's Assessment or Treatment primarily to provide information & offer support. You may have even looked at some new ways of managing your child or young person & their behaviour or difficulties. The idea of meeting as a family group may be somewhat daunting but most family/whānau find these sessions very rewarding once they give them a try.

What are the Common Issues that come up in Family Therapy?

- Communication** between family members – how things get said.
- Coping with change** – unexpected changes or changes that are part of growing up.
- Coping with **grief or loss** – everyone has their own way of expressing & coping with grief.
- Relationships** within family/whānau - sometimes stronger links form between certain family members that may not be helpful to the family as a whole.
- Boundaries** - parents making rules.
- The **emotional climate** within the family/whānau – positive or negative – this can effect the well being of individual members.
- Influences** from previous generations or wider family – a person's own experience of family life may affect how they parent.
- Managing conflict** within the family/whānau – different styles and responses of family members.
- New families**, two families joining to form a new household as a result of re-partnering.

What Happens during Family Therapy?

The **sessions** will be **discussed** with you & your family/whānau prior to starting. This will include:

- How many therapists will work with your family/whānau (usually one or two).
- How many sessions there will be (fixed number or ongoing).
- How the sessions will work.

At the first session you & your therapist(s) will discuss the **rules** while in a session & how they will run. This ensures everyone understands the **expectations**.

Then time will be spent on what are the **important issues** or difficulties in your family/whānau. This will involve **discussing** how these **issues** come about, looking at what is happening now & how it might be in the future.

It is important to note that this will not focus on any one person & no one person is a target.

Each session is an important time to **identify** the **strengths** already there within family/whānau & **building** on these.

Family Therapy is **solution-focused** & therefore whilst some time is spent figuring out the issues, the main focus is on **making changes** that will lead to a **strengthening** or **re-balancing** of the family/whānau system. At the completion of sessions, a **follow-up** plan will be worked out involving all the family/whānau.

Who Should Attend the Family Therapy Sessions?

This will need to be sorted out with you & your family/whānau prior to sessions starting. Often the people who come along are your **immediate family** or those people living in the **same household** as the child or young person. There can however be members of the family who are **essential** to the **family functioning** but **don't live at home** (e.g. brother or sister out flatting) or are **not immediate family** (e.g. an aunt who is very involved with the family). The **important thing** is that those people **who attend** are **part of the day to day** family/whānau **system** that your child or young person lives in.

Does Family Therapy Work?

Family Therapy has been shown to be **effective** for a range of challenges children & young people & their family/whānau face. It may not be the only **intervention** offered but it will **complement other intervention** options offered.

Some of the **benefits** that family/whānau have noted include:

- Looking** at things **differently** – seeing things from the viewpoint of other family/whānau members.
- Gaining a better **understanding** of your own needs.
- Strengthening** of own **coping abilities**.
- Making **changes** to the way you **communicate** & manage your child or young person.
- Opportunity to **talk** and **feel listened** to.

Family Therapy is **useful** in gaining a **new understanding** of how your family/whānau works & how each family member's way of doing things can influence this. It can also provide you with **new ideas** for **doing things differently**.