



2. Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979)

Case Example: Addressing External Barriers to Family Stability

Scenario:

The Johnson family is receiving in-home services because their 7-year-old son, Malik, has been frequently suspended from school for disruptive behavior. His mother, Tasha, is a single parent working two jobs, and she reports that she's constantly getting calls from the school about Malik's behavior. The school is pushing for a behavioral evaluation, but Tasha believes Malik is being unfairly targeted. During home visits, the clinician observes that Malik is energetic and responds well to structure but also seems anxious about school. Tasha expresses frustration, feeling that the school blames her for Malik's struggles.

Application of Ecological Systems Theory:

- The clinician assesses how multiple systems (school, community, economic stressors) contribute to the family's challenges.
- They recognize that school policies may be disproportionately disciplining Malik due to implicit bias and explore advocacy options.

Intervention Plan:

- Work with Tasha to request an Individualized Education Program (IEP) assessment.
- Connect the family to community-based after-school programs that support Malik's development.
- Teach Malik emotional regulation skills tailored to the school environment.

Clinician Reflection Questions:

- Am I considering external stressors, or am I overly focused on individual behavior?
- What systemic barriers might this family be facing that I need to address?

- How can I empower the caregiver to advocate for their child's needs within these systems?