



1. Family Systems Theory (Bowen, Minuchin, & Haley)

Case Example: Addressing Parent-Child Conflict through Family Roles

Scenario:

The Martinez family is referred for in-home therapy due to 14-year-old Diego's increasing defiance, school avoidance, and conflicts with his mother, Elena. Since Diego's father left a year ago, his behavior has worsened. Elena describes him as "out of control" and worries he will drop out of school. She also struggles to discipline him while managing two younger children. When the clinician visits the home, they notice Diego frequently steps in to discipline his siblings, sometimes yelling at them in frustration. Elena doesn't intervene, appearing exhausted and overwhelmed. Diego also avoids direct conversations about his feelings, expressing anger instead.

Application of Family Systems Theory:

The clinician identifies enmeshment (blurred parent-child roles) and triangulation (the younger siblings being drawn into Diego and Elena's conflicts). Instead of focusing only on Diego's behavior, the clinician helps restructure the family dynamic, guiding Elena to reclaim parental authority in a supportive way.

Intervention Plan:

- Encourage Diego to express his frustrations without taking on a parental role.
- Teach Elena strategies to reassert her role as the authority figure while maintaining warmth and support.
- Introduce structured family time to reinforce positive interactions.

Clinician Reflection Questions:

- How might my own assumptions about parenting roles influence how I approach this case?
- What patterns of interaction am I noticing within the family? Are they reinforcing unhealthy dynamics?
- How can I help the family shift these dynamics in a way that feels natural and sustainable for them?