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General Principles and Values of CFFT

In **Core Focused Family Therapy (CFFT)** a context is created wherein family members' **core interpersonal truths** can be discovered and communicated to other members of their family. This method attempts to combine **individual, interpersonal, and systemic** growth and healing in family sessions.

The CFFT therapist begins to work with **individual** family members in the context of the family setting to help each of them to reach clarity about their own **core** feelings and thoughts, and subsequently to express these **interpersonal truths** to other family members. As one family member gets in touch with his frustrated desires, deep resentments, jealousies, and disappointments, as well as with his love and longing for connection with another member,

he is helped by the therapist to communicate these feelings directly to that person from a place of openness and authenticity. Upon hearing this, the receiving person is typically inspired by the honesty and vulnerability in the communication, and is then helped by the therapist to respond in a similar fashion. This kind of **direct interaction** between the two family members results in a change in the **interpersonal** connection between them, as they become more empathic about one another's joy, pain, and perspective. The authenticity that is fostered by this process allows for the development of safety and mutual understanding among family members that is crucial in rebuilding the trust that has often been sacrificed over years of pain and misunderstanding.

Any change in the relationship between two family members will affect the other members of the group who have been observing the interactions in an emotionally engaged manner. Subsequently, the other members become inspired to take their own risks in **directly interacting** with family members about their own **core issues** until the whole system has taken on a new dynamic, thus inducing **systemic** change.

When a person is in contact with his core truths about who he is and what he wants and needs, he is in a much better position to make healthy decisions about the kinds of relationships he wants to have with other people in his life, including his family members. So often, one's psyche is burdened by the early childhood roles taken on to allow oneself and one's family to survive. Many children become the caretakers of parents that need their help and sacrifice their own needs in the process. Years later, they find themselves continuing this caretaker role in their own intimate

relationships and even seeking out mates who need care-taking. Furthermore, as adults, they are still fearful of “rocking the boat” with a family member whom they and other members have labeled as “fragile” or “explosive.” They fear that if they were to confront such an individual, that person might “fall apart” and they would wind up with a much worse relationship and be burdened by feelings of guilt. So they continue to suppress their feelings in that person’s presence, as well as in similar situations outside the family circle and, in doing so, give up an important part of themselves.

In CFFT, however, with the aid of the therapist, family members can learn to tell their **core truths** to other members in a non-defensive, non-blaming, heartfelt way including the use of “I” statements and with an attempt to take responsibility for their share of the difficulties. This allows for the creation and expression of more compassion between the family members, and greatly reduces the amount of guilt and shame.

When the communication goes beyond blaming and complaining and becomes softer and deeper, it also becomes more real and authentic. In effect, the therapist helps to bridge the chasms that have built up through many years of hurt and misunderstanding in the entire family. Family members are given the opportunity to get to know each other in a new way, based on who each one is when they allow themselves to be fully in contact with self and other. Healing and growth can then begin to progress in an upward spiral rather than continue the negative spiral that has resulted in so much pain and distance over the years.

As people begin to share their core truths with one another, not only do their interpersonal relationships change, but major shifts also begin to filter through to their own sense of **personal identity**. Thus, one discovers important things about oneself through one's interactions with others. As Harry Stack Sullivan pointed out in his Interpersonal Theory (1), so much of who we are is a consequence of who we are with other people. Nowhere is this more pronounced than with one's family members. When a person is courageous enough to finally speak his truth to his family members, he can also see who he is when he is not giving up a part of himself to protect other family members. Consequently, he becomes freer from the entanglement with his family, less tied to old roles and patterns, and more able to make healthy decisions about the kind and extent of emotional involvement he wants to have with them.

In cases of severe emotional, physical, and sexual abuse by parents, an adult child may realize the wisdom of setting and/or keeping appropriate boundaries around time and place and frequency of meetings with the parent(s), while not cutting off from them entirely. Rather than striving for "increased togetherness" in every family, the goal of CFFT is for members to be more honest with one another, letting each other know where they stand in relation to one another, and defining a structure for the continuing relationship.

Learning these skills of deep and honest communication within one's own family of origin also allows family members to have more insight and clarity in their other relationships outside the family, as well as with their own partners and offspring. In this way, CFFT allows for **intergenerational** healing to occur. Insights

gained in CFFT sessions are easily transferable to situations involving friends, work associates and other people who enter our lives.