

Chapter 8

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Open-Forum Family Counseling: An Interview With a Child Diagnosis with ADHD

In 1922, Alfred Adler began the first child guidance clinic in Vienna, Austria. Instead of helping individuals in the seclusion of a private office, Adler adopted the daring practice of counseling families in public demonstrations. These sessions were called public because he conducted them in front of an audience consisting of his students, parents, members of the community, and other professionals. By involving the audience in the counseling session, Adler emphasized helping the family through education. These became the first open-forum family counseling sessions, and Adler's efforts pioneered the way for modern family and group therapy.

Adler's public counseling demonstrations challenged the then-traditional practices of individual therapy. Adler violated Freud's conviction that it was counterproductive, even dangerous, to deal with more than one member of a family. By interviewing the entire family in public, Adler challenged the concepts of the isolated individual, transference, and unconscious motivation and the mystery that surrounded client confidentiality. Instead, he offered a hopeful view of human nature and behavior that was based on choices and observable interactions within the family.

Adler's goal was to create a commonsense psychology that would help all of humankind. "Adler viewed man as worthwhile, socially motivated, and capable of creative, independent action" (Sweeney, 1989, p.2). This was in sharp contrast to Freud, who was primarily interested in solving the "riddles" of life (Progoff, 1969). Adler's concern was for humankind, as a whole, and his theory became oriented to helping people understand and improve their lot in life (Manaster & Corsini, 1982). He believed that therapy was not for an elite but should be made available to everyone. His public demonstrations reflected this desire to make psychology available to what Adler considered the "common man."

Adler's first centers were called Erziehungberatungsstellen, which translates as "advice centers for bringing up children." By 1930, there were 32 community child guidance centers throughout Vienna. In his demonstrations, Adler emphasized the social embeddedness of human problems. Problems arise not from internal psychodynamic or genetic deficits but from problematic interactions originating in one's social context. Problem behavior is viewed as changeable when provided with proper information or education. Therefore, the "problem" child is not a victim of heredity or environment (disorder or deficits) but selects behaviors in response to his or her relationships with siblings and parents. The child's behavior, despite how "disturbed" it appears, is a logical answer to the situation in which he or she exists. As individual disturbance is a by-product of family conflict, it seems logical, then, that counseling be concerned with providing concrete guidance for parents (Sonstegard & Dreikurs, 1975). In 1934, Fascism took hold Austria. Remarkably, Adler maintained an optimistic view of human nature even in the face of human tragedy. Nazism finally forced the Vienna clinics to close, and many prominent Adlerians fled Europe, carrying with them the ideas and practices they had learned

from Adler. After much difficulty, some of these Adlerians made their way to the United States, including Adler's children Alexandra and Kurt, both of whom have contributed to the development of Adlerian psychology in the United States. The best known and most prolific of Adler's students was Rudolf Dreikurs, who also immigrated to the United States. Dreikurs played a major role in popularizing Adlerian psychology in the United States. In 1939, Dreikurs opened the first child guidance center and Family Education association center at the Abraham Lincoln Center in Chicago. This effort launched the open-forum family counseling and parent education model in the United States.

The necessity of doing educational and preventive work in the family education has never been more evident. With the increase in the divorce rate, delinquency, juvenile crime and gang involvement, child abuse, and school-related problems; with increasing numbers of dual-career parents, single parents, and blended families; and with the overextension of our school systems with more students and fewer resources, the value of Adler's educational approach to family life becomes even more significant (Dinkmeyer & Dinkmeyer, 1981). This approach is efficient and effective, yet is both rehabilitative and preventative. Currently, open-forum family counseling is being used in cooperation with schools, universities, institutes, community groups, public agencies, child care facilities, Adlerian organizations, and churches. Adler may be pleased that his model continues to train professionals and, most of all, the "common man."

A Case Example

With this background and the theme of the "common man" in mind, we begin an interview with parents that volunteered for family counseling in order to help their son who had been diagnosed with attention deficit-hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). This interview took place in front of an audience of over 200 people. The interview begins with the parents speaking to the counselor, Frank Walton, while the children are being supervised in the playroom (Walton, 1996, used by permission). At the beginning of the interview, it is important for the counselor to explain several routine procedures to the parents and audience. This introduction sets the tone for the entire interview. The counselor creates a relaxed and friendly atmosphere with the parents by explaining the nature of the family education process to the audience. In some cases, the counselor may explain to the audience and family the ground rules for the session.

Ground Rules

There are three essential ground rules for open-forum family counseling. First, the counselor explains that the process is educational and not therapy. Open-forum family counseling is made up of parents, teachers, and counselors interested in learning about families. This is best accomplished by interviewing families in front of an audience. The counselor may ask the audience, "Where do we learn to be parents? Most of us learn how to parent by the role modeling provided by our parents. At best, this was autocratic, resulted in conflict, and did not create friendly relations." Another question the counselor can ask the audience is "Does anyone here have a problem child?" This is usually met with laughter and a feeling of everyone needing help. The counselor wants to create an atmosphere where everyone participates as a colearner. This places the parents in focus in the position of helping those in the audience rather than being the troubled family there to receive help. As a result, the parents are more open about their concerns and willing to discuss what goes on at home.

Second, the counselor wants to establish that the information gathered during the interview does not pertain to pathology but to observable interpersonal relationships known as public behavior. The counselor is interested in the family's interpersonal dynamics. These dynamics may be observed in public. During the interview, the counselor wants to expose, explain, and suggest changes in this observable behavior. For instance, if we go to the grocery store, we could observe the annoyance a mother displays as her child demands candy. The mother's annoyance and the child's tears are public behavior. This information would be pertinent to the counseling demonstration.

Third, the counselor wants to give a brief explanation on the commonality of problems experienced by families. The counselor may explain how Adler believed all problems are social problems and that the purpose of open-forum family counseling is to educate a large group of parents having similar child-rearing problems. Again, the parents in focus are put at ease when they realize that by discussing their problem they may help parents in the audience (Christensen & Marchant, 1983).

The Family Constellation

After the counselor has established the ground rules, the interview begins. The first phase of the interview involves formulation the problem and establishing rapport. This is achieved by the counselor, parents, and audience discussing the family constellation. The counselor begins by asking for the names and ages of the children in the family. The counselor also asks if there were any miscarriages, deaths of siblings, childhood illnesses, and grandparents, relative, or other adults living in the home. All of this affects the way parents respond to a child and the child's view of the world.

Some counselors involve the audience in the interview by asking them to make guesses regarding each child's behavioral characteristics based on their birth order. The counselor also develops some hypotheses as to the behavioral characteristics of each child. Guesses that are accurate tend to build counselor credibility and rapport with the focus parents and the audience. The counselor immediately develops tentative hypotheses about the relationships that exist based on the family constellation. The parents are given the opportunity to modify the audience's and the counselor's guesses regarding the behavioral characteristics of each child.

Our session begins after Walton has reviewed the ground rules and is establishing the family constellation with the parents.

Counselor: My objective is to first be a help to Mom and Dad, then the audience. I appreciate your helping us and the audience today. Please tell us the name and ages of the youngsters in your home?

Mom: There is Rebecca, 10, and Darrel, 7.

Counselor: Are you working outside the home, and in what field?

Mom: I am in the medical field.

Dad: I manage a restaurant.

Counselor: Do you have any youngsters that have died? And if so where would they be in the family constellation.

Mom: Yes. Before Rebecca, I had a miscarriage at 26.5 weeks. Darrel was premature at 35 weeks.

Counselor: How far ahead of Rebecca was the miscarriage?

Mom: Around 15 months.

Counselor: (Talking to audience.) I want to put myself in the position of these parents. They had an experience of losing something precious. (To the parents.) How did you handle the loss?

Mom: We were very pleased when Rebecca came along.

Counselor: Was Darrel's pregnancy a concern?

Mom: No, I was comfortable because Rebecca was not a problem, but then, Darrel turned out to be a problem.

Counselor: Anyone else missing? Aunt? Grandmother that lives in the house or down the street? Someone who would have a prominent influence on your home?

Mom: No.

Counselor: Could you tell me about Rebecca?

Mom: She is happy, gifted, and shy to begin with.

Counselor: Anything else, Dad?

Dad: She likes to help people. Is very sensitive and gifted in music.

Counselor: Perhaps you have already answered this...but how would you complete this statement: Rebecca is the kid who always?

Mom: Is very helpful, and gifted in music.

Counselor: Is Darrel substantially different from Rebecca?

Dad: Oh, yes!

(Laughter from the audience.)

Counselor: How is he different?

Dad: Do you have an hour? He won't sit still, does not like to listen, but likes to take control, very affectionate.

Counselor: Is being affectionate different from Rebecca?

Mom: Rebecca is more so than Darrel.

Counselor: So affection is something of a family value for you both. Both of you are affectionate?

Dad: Yes.

Counselor: Anything else you would like to add?

Dad: He is very rambunctious, very, very smart. You will see this when you talk with him. He is not afraid to tell you what he feels.

Counselor: This is also different from Rebecca.

Counselor: (*Turning to the audience.*) What is going through my mind is the effort we all make to find our place in the family. We scout around to find our place. Rebecca finds for some reason to be shy, helpful, sensitive, reclusive, and still the affection comes through. She had 3 years to secure her place without Darrel. Darrel comes in, the second child, and needs to find a place for himself, like we all do. Our tendency is to be substantially different from the person with whom we are in competition. This does not mean we will be unkind, although that may take place. The point is, he is not going to be like Rebecca. He will be substantially different. He will maximize other things that are different from Rebecca. You can ask yourself, "among those siblings close to me in age, who is most different from me?" You will find there are areas of difference that are important to you. It may be hard to believe that decisions like this are being made so early in life, but I propose to you they are.

Problem Formation and Goal Alignment

Once the family constellation has been established along with some tentative hypotheses, the counselor will ask the parents for a specific concern. Parents usually identify this concern as the child with whom they have the most problems. This concern is often expressed as a generalized and diagnosis, such as my child has ADHD, is depressed, has dyslexia, or will not obey me. We look on these statements as expressions of discouragement and bankruptcy by the parents and professional community. Diagnostic evaluations do nothing for the child or the family.

During the interview process, the counselor's job is to elicit specific examples of problem behavior from the parents so that patterns of interactions can emerge. The counselor must not allow the parents to be vague when describing these interactions. The success of counseling depends on the counselor's ability to recognize and define the problem in solvable terms and establish the terms for counseling based on specific patterns of interaction (Papp, 1984). This is facilitated when parents are required to report specific behavior that is observably going on in the present. Consequently, the counselor knows how to interview the parents so actual behavior is described—what family members are doing and saying. The counselor might ask the parents, “What would I see if I were there observing your family?”

The counselor will also inquire as to how the parents specifically respond to the problem situation. Because the session does not focus on the identified “problem child,” but on the primary social context of the family, the counselor asks the parents, “And what did you do when your child misbehaved?” This question emphasizes the interpersonal nature of conflict between the parent and the child. Establishing how the parent responds is essential to understanding how the problem is maintained and identifying the pattern of relations that exist in the family.

The interview continues with Walton focusing on problem formation and goal alignment.

Counselor: How could I be of help to you? That may sound like a strange question since you volunteered to do this demonstration. You may be surprised I asked you since your son has been diagnosed with ADHD. However, if you forgot the ADHD diagnosis and wanted to change behavior, what things would you want to change, what do you want to be different?

Mom: Just that he was easier to control in school situations, or when we are out and other people find his behavior distracting or unacceptable, that he would be easier to control. I would like it so the teachers find him to be controllable without placing him on medication, and are willing to work with him.

Counselor: Can you give me an example, in the home or when he is with you and he is difficult to control or distracted by other things that are troublesome?

Mom: When something does not interest him. If you are at church, or at a restaurant, and ask him to sit still, and it is something he does not want to do, he does not sit still.

Counselor: Okay, if I were there at church or at the restaurant, and I were watching, what would I see going on?

Mom: He may get up and go to the bathroom, walk around, talk, when he shouldn't be talking.

Counselor: If I were there watching, again what would I see Mom and Dad saying or doing? What do you do?

Mom: I would tell him to sit down. And he is doing what he wants. I may be coercive, to get him to do something. He is involved with the martial arts, and it is very disciplined. I may warn him first, and, if he continues with his misbehavior, he

will get an “x” if he does not respect or follow directions. He needs to do something and so I warn him at first, and, if he continues with his behavior, he gets an “x” in this area.

Counselor: You provide some rating, then, that you pass on to his instructor?

Dad: No, to his master!

(Audience laughs)

Counselor: You threaten that you will do that?

Dad: No, we will do that!

Counselor: If I were watching, what I see him doing?

Dad: He would start behaving better.

Counselor: So this is something that is of help to you.

Both

Parents: Oh yeah!

Counselor: But if that were the answer, I guess you might not need to be here.

(Audience laughter.)

Mom: No it doesn't always work.

Counselor: Most the time he gets up anyway.

Mom: Most times depend on if he is on his medication. On weekends I do not put him on his medication. I put him on medication for the teachers and the school. They, the psychiatrist, requested he be on medication after school, which I do not give him. I use the medication as I see fit, and as it's prescribed. So, when he is medicated, he is a lot easier to control and ...

Counselor: Whether or not he is on medication,...let's just see. When he is distracted, he says, “I want to get out of here.” And you say, “No, I don't want you to go. I want you to sit here. Come back and sit down.” If I were watching, he would then do what?

Dad: Just take off.

Counselor: Take off? And, then finally, what happens?

Dad: We chase him.

(Audience laughter.)

Counselor: You chase him. Who is most likely to be the chaser?

(Mom points to Dad.)

Dad: Some of the time, he knows better. If I go outside, he knows if I say stop to stop.

Counselor: He knows better? Why is that?

Dad: Out of fear he is going to stop. We don't spank that much, but he stops because he's afraid we will spank him.

Counselor: You do not spank much but you do occasionally?

Dad: Oh, yeah!

(Audience laughter.)

Counselor: And the spanking *has* to occur only occasionally for people to live with the idea that they could be spanked. He, by and large, adheres when he hears your voice or sees you; he stops. But then again, nevertheless, he will still take off?

Dad: Yes, he will take off.

Counselor: So, is there something in your voice that when you say stop he will?

Dad: Yes.

Counselor: And, what about you, Mom?

Mom: He tends to listen better with dad. He has a deeper, rougher voice.

Counselor: So, you get him to stop,...and take him by the hand? What are you likely to do after you get him to stop?

Dad: We will talk to him, ask him why he did this, and he usually answers, "I don't know."

Counselor: And he probably doesn't know. And so you ask him why you do this, and he says, "I don't know," and what finally happens?

Mom: Usually, he needs to stay in and is not allowed to go to a friend's house.

Counselor: If I were watching you bring him in the house, what do I see? How is he looking?

Mom: Angry.

Counselor: What will he do then? Sit down? Go to his room? Agitate?

Mom: Sometimes agitate and have a temper tantrum.

Counselor: And what do you do, Mom?

Mom: Tell him to go to his room and ignore him.

Counselor: And will he go?

Mom: Yeah, eventually I ignore him and he will stop.

Counselor: When you say go off to his room, I am trying my best to be in the house with you and observe it. So when he is going off to his room, when you say, "Go to your room," how does he look?

Mom: He is still angry.

Counselor: And how do you feel, Mom?

Mom: Frustrated.

Walton's next step is to further examine the family atmosphere, values, and interactions by exploring a typical day. However, before we move on to that aspect of the interview let us take a moment and examine the different kinds of family atmospheres and their effects on human development.

A Democratic Psychology of Individuals

As demonstrated in this interview, most parents have little training or education in family relations or democratic living. Those who have discover that traditional parent education has little relevance for the improvement of parent-child relationships. Consequently, parents must rely on what they were taught by their parents, and this is usually autocratic, doing little to develop friendly and helpful relationships in a democratically oriented society (Meredith, 1986). Some parents, in an attempt to be democratic, merely stop being autocratic. This results in anarchy and, ultimately, a shift back to an autocratic approach. This constant shifting back and forth from autocracy to permissiveness in human relations is part of our current dilemma in defining democracy (Dreikurs, 1971).

From an Adlerian viewpoint, family conflicts are related to inequality resulting in a vertical hierarchy. The superiors are pushing the inferiors around, and the inferiors are finding ways to push back. This is illustrated in the interview with the parents and in the son's

uncontrollable behavior. As with the parents in the interview, when operating in a vertical hierarchy, we stimulate the opposite of the very behaviors we intended to bring about. Instead of trust and honesty, we breed distrust and dishonesty; instead of compliance, we create rebellion or subversion; instead of openness, people become guarded; instead of satisfaction, people become dissatisfied; instead of cooperation, a competitive atmosphere develops. When family members are treated as if they are inferior, they soon resent the inequality and either fight back or behave helplessly. As we move to develop relationships of equals based on mutual trust and respect, we can no longer hold anyone's head higher or lower than our own.

Psychology has provided little leadership for parents in resolving family conflicts and creating democratic households. Adlerian psychology is one psychology that addresses the issue of democracy. Second-force psychology (behaviorism) has done little to address the issues of democracy in the family. Its system of token economy, rewards, and punishment creates a system of inequality. Those in a position of authority reward or punish those in a position of inferiority. A reward-and-punishment approach to children puts them in an inferior position and creates power struggles between those who are in control and those being rewarded. First force psychology (psychoanalysis) has been too busy searching for the causes of behavior. By looking to one's past, it was hoped that explanations could be found for the person's behavior and personality. "Through reduction of guilt and by developing an ability to redirect or sublimate his repressed desire, the patient was to conquer his mental disturbance" (Goble, 1970, p. 6). Freud seemed to have had little interest in the social application of his theories and, thus has had little influence on parent education or democratic processes in the family (Evans & Meredith, 1991).

Adlerian psychology is willing to wrestle with the ideal of equality and has provided a model of counseling (open-forum family counseling) based on democratic principles. Democracy is usually characterized by some aspect of equality and fundamental human rights. Democracy only becomes problematic in human relationships when we associate equality with sameness. How can we treat a person as equal if that person is not the same but has inherent differences? Can an adult deal with a child based on equality if that child is not the same age or size? The answer is "yes" if equality does not mean sameness but equal worth (Cassel & Corsini, 1990). Although there are inherent differences among people, mutual respect, value, and dignity are the essential elements for democratic relationships.

The open-forum family counseling model is designed to create social equality within the family, where all members of a family and, consequently, society are recognized and treated as worthwhile human beings. Open-forum family counseling recognizes that the family, more than any other institution in our society, provides the opportunity for self-fulfillment and the development of social interest, Adler's criterion of good mental health (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956; Mosak, 1995). For Adler, the demands of social living required that one develop the capacity to cooperate and contribute. Each of us has the innate potential for social interest and the function of education and training is converting the aptitude into an ability and skill. Social interest must be consciously developed until, as Bottomore (1957) quoted Adler as stating, it becomes "as natural as breathing or the upright gait" (p. 168).

Thanks to the pioneering efforts of Adler and Dreikurs, we have the beginnings of effective principles and practices for creating democratic families and improving family living. We are also discovering a variety of methods for nurturing courage and social interest and creating mutual respect and dignity in the home, school, and work-place. However, much work still needs to be done—not only in terms of developing techniques for improving human relationships but in terms of communicating these to parents, teachers, and employers. The roots

of social living are embedded in the concept of cooperation. To function adequately in a democratic setting, each person must develop those skills and attitudes appropriate to a give and take among equals (Milliren, Taylor, & Meredith, 1979). In accord with Adler's goal of creating a psychology for the common man, we must continue to find and define those practices that allow each of us to develop the skills for living in a democratic society. Of paramount importance within this goal is the need to help children develop the "psychological hardiness" required for effectively responding to the issues of life and living.

Four Styles of Family Relationships

There are four basic styles of family relationships that promote or inhibit respect in the family. These four patterns of parent-child relations are the following:

- Democratic—Everyone is considered a full-fledged human being and is given mutual respect and dignity in spite of differences in his or her inherent attributes.
- Authoritarianism—Some people have an inherent superiority and control and dictate what others, deemed inferior, will do.
- Indulgence—Those who are older and wiser must indulge those who are younger and weaker to show their love.
- Indifference—Everyone is an individual and must show their independence (Cassel & Corsini, 1990).

Democratic households require freedom with order and cannot function when one or the other of these qualities does not exist. Parents who are respectful of their children provide reasonable guidelines (order) while involving the children in the decision-making process (freedom). In democratic households, children share in decision making and through this involvement become responsible human beings. The family atmosphere is friendly and cooperative. Rewards and punishment are replaced with trust and hope in one's ability to learn from life's experiences. Parents are concerned with order but do not subdue, regiment, indulge, or control their children. They allow freedom, but not license. There is the existence of cooperation and routine in order for the family to function. Democratic families develop children who are problem solvers, have initiative, demonstrate emotional self-reliance, and are considerate of other human beings (Bettner & Lew, 1996).

For example, a child spills a glass of milk on the living room rug. A parent can scold or punish (order without freedom) the child by saying, "I told you to be careful; you never listen to me, now go to your room!" The parent could also say (freedom with order), "What do you need to do to solve this problem?" To be asked to restore the original condition is respectful and more conducive to the child's being careful and thoughtful the next time than if the child were punished or scolded. This type of question allows the child to make decisions and take responsibility for his or her behavior. It also invites an exchange of viewpoints, which trains the child to become morally autonomous (Kamii, 1948).

Autocratic households are based on *order without freedom*. Parents in this household demand compliance, and children are not involved in the decision-making process and have no power or right over your destiny. In this style of parenting, a responsible child is one who is an obedient child. Children are to obey their parents because parents are the authorities—"Do what I tell you because I am bigger, stronger, older, and wiser than you." It is a strict and coercive

household that requires immediate obedience to parental authority. The story line is “So long as you live in our house, you will do just what we tell you. We are your parents, and we know what is best.” Coercion thrives on inequality and is based on the belief that there are superiors who know what is best for those who are inferior and know very little. These parents believe they are superior to children and, therefore, have the right to control children through rewards and punishment (stimulus-response psychology). The evidence is overwhelming, however, that rewards and punishment are detrimental to children (Kohn, 1993, 1996).

Children who grow up in autocratic or coercive households have three courses of action. The first is blind conformity, to go along with the demands and rules. These compliant children find that by obeying the demands and rules, they never have to make decisions. Through their compliance, they are given a false sense of security and respect. The second course of action is to go along on the surface but to maintain dignity by doing as one pleases. Given this course of action, it becomes extremely important to not get caught. These children grow up not knowing how to be forthright and learn to excuse or blame others for their behavior and problems. The third choice is open rebellion. The choice with this course of action is to revolt and do the opposite of what the authority demands. In these households, there is often open warfare between the parents and child(ren). This open revolt is often identified as delinquency, and we then label these children as emotionally or behaviorally disturbed.

Indulgent and indifferent households are based on *freedom without order*. Indulgent parents mistake pampering for love. Unfortunately, pampering emotionally handicaps children and prevents them from learning how to solve problems. Pampering parents are ruled by children who force their parents to do everything for them. These parents help their children with homework, drive them to a different activity every night, play with them, and worry about them constantly. These parents might say, “My life is my kids; I do everything for them,” and hey do. Pampered children are free to do as they please, and there is no order. If the 2-year-old does not like her cheese sandwich for lunch, mom will provide a variety of choices and food until the youngster is satisfied. If the toddler returns home from child care with a cold, the parent is ready to quit work and protect the child from such inconvenience. Instead of being family centered, these parents are child centered. However, if these parents truly want to help their children, they must become family centered by making other life activities, including their marriage, a number-one priority.

The pampering approach is devastating for a child. It robs the child of initiative and self-confidence. In effect, it creates a vote of “no confidence” in the child’s ability to solve life’s problems. These children grow up expecting service from others, and because they believe they cannot handle life on their own, the world becomes a frightening place. Such children learn to avoid responsibility and develop few skills for cooperating with others. They approach life as if others are there to make things work for them, and they are experts at placing others at their service.

The indifferent household does not indulge the child; however, freedom without order prevails. Parents in the indifferent household disregard their children, allowing them to be free to do whatever they please as long as no demands are placed on the parents. Often these parents are preoccupied with their careers—their life is work. The family’s motto might be “Do your own thing” or “Each person for him- or herself.” No one ever eats together unless by accident, and the kitchen serves as a 24-hour snack bar. These parents have a distorted view of independence and for them cooperation means weakness, conformity, and inferiority. Cooperation is viewed as being bossed around by others, so in this family, Dad may be off to a board meeting, Mom may

be going to school or to work, and each child is busy doing something different (Cassel & Corsini, 1990). The home serves more as a hotel rather than a place to nurture relationships and foster development.

Open-forum family counseling provides the parents (and audience) the opportunity to experience these differing family atmospheres while demonstrating more effective approaches to parenting. In addition, through the interview process, the counselor displays how an exchange of viewpoints with children encourages their development. The audience may observe how a 5-year-old who governs herself with respect to small decisions will become more capable in dealing with bigger issues and handling life challenges. Instead of giving 10 choices of food to a 2-year-old until she is satisfied, the parents and audience learn how offering limited choices creates freedom with order and responsibility taking. Here the parent may ask, “Do you want a cheese or peanut butter sandwich for lunch?” The child is involved in the decision making over food (freedom) and has the option not to choose or eat anything (order). Consequently, the interview provides a role model for parents, demonstrating how children learn to be responsible by making choices for themselves.

A Typical Day

As the interview continues, Walton proceeds to explore the specific family interactions and dynamics by obtaining information regarding the nature of a typical day from the parents. Walton has the parents describe a typical day in their household. This technique is called *tracking* in the marriage and family literature. Tracking is a way for the family counselor to interact with the family members from a position of neutrality, primarily as a listener in search of information. The goal is to investigate the family atmosphere (as described above) and gain clarity on family interactions. Tracking allows the family themes and content to emerge, which verifies the counselor’s earlier definition of the problem (Sherman, Oresky, & Rountree, 1991). Tracking a typical day is a safe way for the counselor and parents to discuss the interactions in the family and pinpoint the positive and negative patterns of interactions occurring between the children and the parents. This also helps the audience understand the dynamics of the parent-child relationship.

Now let us return to the interview:

Counselor: Let’s got o your daily routine.

Dad: Talk to my wife.

Counselor: So, Mom, how does the day begin?

Mom: Usually I wake the kids up, between 6:30 and 6:45. They are supposed to lay things out the night before, so when they get up they can get dressed and eat breakfast. But it’s a battle every morning. I am constantly nagging—hurry up, get dressed—because we have to leave by a certain time.

Counselor: (*To the audience.*) Does this also sound like your home on a typical morning?

(Audience laughs, and most people agree by raising their hands.)

Counselor: And what happens to Darrel and Rebecca?

Mom: Darrel gets out of bed and wants to play. He does what he wants but does not get dressed.

Counselor: So he wants to play, and you say, "Come on, we are going to be late"; and if I were watching what would I see him doing?

Mom: He keeps playing.

Counselor: And you are seeing some similar thing in Rebecca? What does she say or do?

Mom: If she gets out of bed, she does fairly well. Whereas Darrel likes to play, she tends to sleep. After maybe telling her once or twice she will get moving.

Counselor: If I were watching her, she would tend not to be so resistant or angry as Darrel?

Mom: She may make a face at you, but for the most part she would comply.

Counselor: So Darrel is playing and not coming along; how do you get him to comply? How do you get him to move?

Mom: I keep nagging him until he finally moves.

Counselor: Dad, from what you are hearing, does any of this surprise you?

Mom: No, because it wakes him up in the morning.

Counselor: What, do you put another pillow over your head or what?

Dad: Sometimes I get up and the room starts to shake.

Counselor: Mom can be a major league nagger, but you can be the heavy. When heavy artillery is needed to be called, it's Dad. So then people jump?

Mom: Yes, they know Dad's mad.

Counselor: Anything you want to add, Dad?

Dad: No.

Counselor: Now I want to be a help to the parents and myself, and to illustrate for the audience what is going through my mind. Early on we had a family with a

compliant girl. Correct me if I am wrong. We had a family with a compliant girl, who received affection and went along with the program. But, what I did not know at first, was she may have been afraid not to go along with the program. Darrel is different. He is not going to be Rebecca. Part of how he is not going to be Rebecca is how he sizes up the situation. He can find his place by not going along with the program. We are dealing with some determined people, some forces to be reckoned with. Does that make sense? So it's not uncommon for someone in the family, especially a second born, someone behind a compliant sister, to say, "Maybe you are pretty controlling and forceful, but I bet I can show you that you can't make me do it your way." That is what I think is happening in your family. Dad and Mom come from this position for some good reason. I don't know what these reasons are, but I'd like to find out and help them find out.

Along with tracking, Walton wants to further understand the family dynamics by understanding how the parents arrive at their current positions in the family. He does this through their "most memorable observation."

Most Memorable Observation

The most memorable observation is a new Adlerian technique developed by Walton. This technique is an effective and efficient method of assessing the parents' hidden reasons found in their private logic. Adler's term *private logic* refers to the individual's cognitive constructs that are not in line with reality but that subjectively guide the individual. Our private logic contains hidden reasons that justify our thoughts and deeds for violating social interest ((Evans & Kane, 1996). The most memorable observation allows the counselor and parents to understand their hidden reasons for maintaining ineffective parenting styles. The technique examines the conclusion each parent made about family life, whether that was positive or negative. This conclusion reveals what they each regard as a state of inferiority. The parents then compensate to avoid this imagined state in a way that contributes to the current family problem.

As the interview proceeds, Walton explores with the parents their most memorable observation in an effort to further understand the dynamics of the family.

Counselor: So Mom, somewhere between the ages of 12-15, you looked around your family life and drew some conclusion about it. The conclusion may have been positive, and you decided this is important. So when you become an adult you will do everything you can to make it this way in your family. Or, more commonly, it could have been distasteful. You may have thought that "when I become an adult, I am going to do everything I can to not have this happen in my family." What do you think you came up with?

Mom: I was a pretty compliant child. My father was controlling, and I was afraid of my father. Whereas my mother was a very affectionate person. Nothing sticks out in my mind about back then, although my mother was nagging, and I did not want to be nagging. Rebecca says she is not going to be nagging like me when she is an adult. But I find myself doing the same thing as my mother.

Counselor: You correct me if I am wrong; so your father could come on strong.

Mom: Very strong.

Counselor: What does that mean?

Mom: He used a belt.

Counselor: You did what you could to avoid it, or you took the belt?

Mom: Tried to avoid it.

Counselor: So that was a position of inferiority. You live life out of control. It was a position of inferiority that was there to be dealt with. You live life out of control.

Mom: Trying to please him.

Counselor: That can be seen as a minus. You live life as though you are renting space in a world run by other people. Now, as an adult, you are in control, you are not in a position of powerlessness. I propose to you that your memorable observation is “I don’t have to feel like I am in a situation that I am out of control or other people are calling the shots.” This would be a sensible position with a father who was overly controlling. You spent too much time pleasing people and being pushed around. So now you are going to prove that you are no longer going to be placed in that position. You have grown to be more assertive. That is a plus.

Mom: I agree.

Counselor: Except with children, I suspect it is overdone. You overcompensate. Yet it seems reasonable to you because you are not nearly as coercive as your father. Now, Dad, let me ask you the same question and what do you recall?

Dad: I did not see my mom and dad much because they were always working. So I had a babysitter or my brother babysat. So the power was in his hands.

Counselor: Tell us how he used his power.

Dad: He smacked me around a lot.

Counselor: He really punched you and beat you up.

Dad: Oh, yeah.

Counselor: He was how much older than you?

Dad: Five years older.

Counselor: So he was substantially older, and your effort was not to give up. Although he could overpower you.

Dad: Oh, yeah. I'd keep coming back at him.

Counselor: Does it make sense to you? That significant state of inferiority, the minus in this thread, to have someone else control you, to be out of control, is something you don't want to have in your life anymore?

Dad: That's correct. My family is nothing like how I was raised.

Counselor: That may be. But I propose to you that it is, in some significant ways. And when you talk about spanking, threaten to spank, that you have mastered or developed techniques to overcome your sense of inferiority and being out of control. Where people are going to dominate, you'll be damned if your kid is going to dominate you. It's not going to be that way. I see the fire in your eyes when you think about it.

Dad: *(Laughs)*

Counselor: Interesting that they have a lot of affection in the family. We have seen that.

Dad: Yes.

Counselor: So the resistance in this kind of situation is not direct, but your son is in a position to say no to you. He is in a stronger position. You're wanting him to say yes, and he is in a stronger position by denying you his cooperation. You walk slow when I want you to walk fast. You run out of the room when I want you to sit. I want you to get dressed for school and you stop and play. Darrel does anything to say "I will decide for me and you will not." Yet, if he could find out that no one is against him, if you could win him over, he may cooperate. We are not going to refine this now because I want some time to interview the kids. However, when you work with adults and kids, the ones mostly likely to make the first steps in change are the adults. I hope this makes sense to you. See, when you come on strong with Darrel, he feels duty bound to put his foot across the line. If you could back off and he could see that Mom and Dad like me, and the nagging stops, then some possible guidelines could be worked out. Choices are important to Darrel. More choices or limited choices would be of use to him. Encouragement would also be important. Maybe both of you could have a moment together where you could encourage him. Have a conversation with him, and if this rings true you could encourage him. You could say, "Son, I think we have made some mistakes and we would like to have your company in the living room so we can sit down and talk together." You could shock him by telling him how you have made the mistake of acting as if he would not be helpful unless you kept nagging, shouting,

and even spanking him. You could tell him how you don't want to be so bossy. This has not been of help; and explain him how you are going to work on that. Or, you may even want to pick a specific area like the morning routine where you are nagging, and you may want to pull back on the nagging. In the case where he runs out, I would suggest the value of letting him go. The running out is to get you to chase him, to get you angry and to defeat you. You're the parents, and if you're concerned about safety, you could go after him. But if it's a situation of who is the boss, you could realize the purpose is to defeat you. If you don't chase him, he is inclined to walk back in because it is not useful to him. So check yourself out. See if you call upon your anger and recognize when you use it as a weapon to hammer him in place. This is a violation of respect. It sets up a power relationship, and you are not winning his cooperation. You are forcing him to behave, and both of you have good reason to do this. You both don't want to be in a weak position, yet you are both out of control and both are losing control. So less is more, and that means less nagging, shouting, threatening, and he will test you. He will have to find out, "I don't feel like a guy who is at war with Mom and Dad. They treat me well, and I have choices and make input into the family."

At this time, Walton had the family and audience take a 10-minute break. He will begin the second half of the interview with the children. Before we present the interview with children, it would be beneficial to describe how and where the open-forum counseling demonstration takes place. In so doing, we describe what is known as the family education center.

Family Education Centers

Family education centers are basic to the Adlerian family education model. A family education center consists of three primary components: volunteers, parent study groups, and open-forum counseling interviews. Most family education centers operate by voluntary support. A group of parents, graduate students, mental health counselors, guidance counselors, or educators sponsor a center. These volunteers organize the center, providing a meeting room for the counseling demonstration and a separate supervised playroom for children.

The main function of the family education center is to provide opportunities for parent education. Parents involved in a family education center have the option of participating in a parent study group, being involved with the open-forum family counseling demonstrations, or both. Open-forum family counseling and parent study groups can operate independently and effectively; however, when combined they enhance the educational experience. For instance, the best way to find a family for the counseling demonstration is to select one from a parent study group and one that has already observed a family counseling demonstration.

It is recommended that parents who volunteer to be the family in focus observe other families being interviewed before they take their turn. This allows them to become acquainted with the procedures and observe the educational process that takes place. Consequently, parents feel more relaxed and in control and are not threatened by the upcoming experience.

Parent Study Groups

Parent study groups often form the nucleus of the center. The goal of a parent study is to discuss and understand Adlerian psychology so it can be applied at home. Adlerian parent study groups emphasize purposive behavior, family constellation, logical and natural consequences, conflict resolution, and encouragement. The group helps parents develop an encouraging and cooperative family atmosphere.

Adlerian parents study groups may use books such as *Children: The Challenge* (Dreikurs & Soltz, 1964), *The Practical Parent* (Corsini & Painter, 1975), *Redirecting Children's Behavior* (Kohls, 1993), or *Positive Discipline* (Nelson, 1981) or they may use educational programs such as *Raising Kids Who Can* (Bettner & Lew, 1996), *Systematic Training for Effective Parenting* (STEP; Dinkmeyer, McKay, & Dinkmeyer, 1997), *Systematic Training for Effective Parenting of Teens* (STEP/Teen; Dinkmeyer & McKay, 1990), *Active Parenting* (Popkin, 1987), or *Active Parenting of Teens* (Popkin, 1990). All of these are excellent materials for conducting parent study groups and include a manual or study guide that can provide the group leader considerable direction for conducting the group. In addition, some of these programs provide in-depth training in both the course content and leadership skills for study group facilitators. (For more in-depth information on parent study groups, please see Chapter 10.)

It is believed that the effect of parent study groups extends beyond the immediate group. The sessions have an influence on the participant's spouse, children, in-laws, and teachers. It is estimated that the direct or indirect influence of a parent study group that meets for 90 minutes each week can easily reach 50 outside people. Furthermore, research on Adlerian parent training has found that parental attitudes became more democratic and less restrictive and authoritarian through application of Adlerian principles and the STEP program (Mooney, 1995).

Parent study groups also provide excellent training for graduate students preparing to become family and school counselors. A prerequisite to doing any family counseling is to have graduate students conduct a parent study group. As group leaders, students learn how family systems operate and to field difficult questions asked by parents. This experience is excellent preparation for leading an open-forum family counseling session.

The Meeting Room

A family education center needs a meeting room, where the open-forum family counseling demonstrations can take place in front of an audience. In our case demonstration, the family was interviewed in a large auditorium. An empty classroom beside the auditorium was used as a playroom. To create a group atmosphere and avoid members of the audience acting like spectators, it is important to have a seating arrangement in which all participants sit close together. Where the audience sits influences their involvement in the interview. The interview works best when the family and counselor sit on a portable platform or stage that is only slightly elevated. When this arrangement is not possible, having the counselor and family sit on stools is a workable alternative. No member of the audience is allowed to sit in the back of the room and observe the interview. This is accomplished by arranging the chairs in a semicircle no more than four rows deep. The counselor and family are seated at the open end of the semicircle.

With a large group 200 to 300, it is still best to use a modified version of this arrangement. If the interview takes place in an auditorium with fixed seating and a traditional stage, the group effect is lost and the quality of the interview is reduced.

Perhaps even more important than seating is sound. It is essential that each participant in the interview has a microphone, including the counselors, parents, and children. Taking turns and passing microphones during the interview becomes annoying and ineffective. Everyone should have a microphone so time is not wasted passing the microphone from person to person. Interviews that go poorly often occur because members of the audience cannot hear.

We recommend that a backup microphone system be available. Once, during a family interview with an audience of several hundred people, the microphone system blew a fuse. The fuse could not be replaced. The large audience had difficulty hearing, and people became impatient. The counselor could do nothing more than continue the interview. After this incident, the agency sponsoring the program bought its own portable microphone system. Many things can go wrong with the microphones, so it is best to have an alternative sound system.

The Playroom

There needs to be a playroom near the room which the family interview takes place. While the parents are being interviewed, the children are in the playroom. This room is supervised by the playroom director and staff. The playroom director is trained in Adlerian principles, and the staff members are volunteers.

The playroom director needs to be creative and flexible as most open-forum counseling sessions take place in churches, school buildings, libraries, or community mental health facilities where there are no specifically designed playrooms. Often, the playroom director faces unexpected challenges that require problem-solving skills. For example, office space converted into a playroom may be difficult to control. In addition, the equipment available for a playroom may vary from toys, games, books, videos, computers, and puzzles to small amounts of paper and pencils provided by the playroom director.

The playroom serves two purposes. First, it provides a place for members of the audience to leave their children while they observe the interview. The playroom is designed to provide these children with interesting activities. The organization of the playroom is based on the same democratic principles presented in the parent study groups and the open-forum counseling demonstration. Children may participate in individual or group activities. The child is treated in a friendly manner and free to choose what he or she wants to do. Children are encouraged to be spontaneous and creative. The emphasis is on democratic responsibility through shared decision-making and choices. Order is created by logic of social living and natural consequences.

Second, the playroom is a place where children participating in the open-forum counseling interview are observed in a relationship to their siblings and other children. The behavior of a child during the counseling interview may differ considerably from that displayed in the playroom. The counseling that takes place in front of the audience creates a controlled atmosphere for a child. The playroom is an open atmosphere where the child is free to express his or her attitude and behavior. The playroom director's job is to observe the children who are participating in the interview and report this information to the counselor. The playroom director has been trained to recognize who takes a leadership role, plays inadequate, acts charming, has social skills, bullies, withdraws, or shows an interest in the other children.

Before the children enter the counseling room, the counselor and playroom director exchange observations in the presence of the audience and parents. This information is used to confirm and develop the basic dynamics of each child, identify how the family operates, and assess the child's attitudes and behavior in the playroom as compared with what the counselor has been told by the parents (Dreikurs, Corsini, Lowe, & Sonstegard, 1959).

Let us return to our case example. Walton's interview focuses on goal disclosure with the children.

□ Interview with the Children: Goal Disclosure

One of the purposes for interviewing the children is to establish goal disclosure. By tracking the patterns of interaction (problem formation, typical day, memorable observation) with the parents, the Adlerian-trained counselor will pinpoint the child's goal of misbehavior (attention, power, revenge, inadequacy, or fun and excitement). The four goals of misbehavior are credited to Rudolf Dreikurs and have been described in the Adlerian literature (Dreikurs, 1964). The fifth goal—fun and excitement—was identified by Frank Walton in his work with adolescents (Walton, 1980). Children who behave unacceptably and pursue one or more of the goals of misbehavior are attempting to find their place of significance within the family or group in which they are functioning. Although children are not always aware of this purpose for their behavior, they often recognize it when it is disclosed to them. Children also have socially useful goals such as cooperation, friendship, autonomy, or contribution. However, the counselor is interested in the child's mistaken goals and how the parents maintain these goals with their responses to the child's behavior. By pinpointing the child's goal(s) of misbehavior, the counselor will suggest changes in the parent's responses.

Along with detailed descriptions of behavior, the counselor may ask the parents how the child's actions made them feel. Knowing the feelings generated on the part of the parents in response to the misbehavior offers significant clues as to the goal of misbehavior.

If we are annoyed by the behavior or if we feel like we have to remind and coax the child to get things done, the goal is probably attention getting. It is also attention getting if we feel we must constantly help him or her or if we are "delighted" by such a good child. When the goal is power, we feel provoked and generally engage in a power struggle with the child. We feel challenged by the power-oriented child and respond with "I'll show you" or "You can't get away with this!" The child whose goal is revenge usually affects us by making us feel hurt, and we react with comparable feelings of retaliation—"How can you do this to me? I'll get you for this!" Finally, the child who has given up leads us to feelings of despair and hopelessness so we give up with a "What's the use? I just don't know what to do" (Milliren et. al., 1979, p.140).

Sometimes parents report a state of being like "nothing," "I did not feel anything," or "I did not do anything." The skilled counselor must train the parents to pinpoint their emotional response, such as they felt annoyed, angry, mad, vengeful, sad, or frustrated. Awareness of the goals of misbehavior allows the counselor to develop hypotheses with the family and the audience early in the interview. This adds to the anticipation that occurs during the interview with the children. When the counselor does goal disclosure with the children, everyone is interested in seeing if the counselor's hypotheses were correct.

While interviewing the children, the counselor is not conducting an inquisition or detecting who is correct. Instead, the counselor is attempting to understand each individual's perception of the present situation and how everyone contributes to the problem. The process of disclosing the goal to the child is always conducted in a tentative, questioning manner—"Could it be that you don't mind Mother and do what she asks because you want to be the boss and show her that you are in charge?"

We must be careful not to confront the child with an accusation such as "You do it to get attention," because the child will only resent this and deny it. "Could it be...?" is not an accusation; it is only a guess that may be correct or incorrect. If this is incorrect, we should guess again. (Dreikurs et. al., 1959)

Goal disclosure occurs with the children once the parents leave and a brief playroom report has been given by the playroom director. In the case scenario presented, after the break the playroom director confirmed Rebecca's willingness to please and Darrel's unwillingness to cooperate. However, she noted that, when given a limited choice, Darrel was cooperative and pleasant.

We begin the second half of the interview with the children seated next to the counselor and the parents having left the room. Walton proceeded with the interview by moving toward the activity of goal disclosure with the children:

Counselor: We are teaching people about some ideas young people have. Rebecca, you have experience as a 10-year-old, and Darrel, you are how old?

Darrel: Seven.

Counselor: So you know how it is to be 7 in your family, and these people are interested in how children look at life. Did you ever think you would be a teacher?

Children: No.

Counselor: Is there something that goes on in your family you wish was different? Any problem at home you wish you could change?

Rebecca: My brother hitting and kicking me.

Counselor: Darrel, do you recognize this problem?

Darrel: I am just hitting her back.

Counselor: What happens when you two punch and hit one another?

Darrel: We both get into trouble with Mom. We can't play with our friends for a week.

Counselor: Does that make you feel mad?

Darrel: *(Nods in agreement.)*

Counselor: And what do you do about it?

Darrel: *(Smiles.)*

Counselor: Can I tell you what I think you do, Darrel?

Darrel: Yes.

Counselor: Could it be you go and play with your friends anyway?

Darrel: *(Smiles.)*

Counselor: I talked with your folks and we had a friendly conversation, but I need your help. It seems to me you do not always feel Mom and Dad are friendly.

Darrel: No.

Counselor: I know you love Mom and Dad a lot. But at times you both get mad at them. What do you get mad about?

Darrel: When I get put into timeout for an hour.

Counselor: Rebecca, does that happen?

Rebecca: Yes.

Counselor: And what do you do?

Darrel: I sit there and “plays” with my toys.

Counselor: It’s hard to imagine you sit there. Darrel, it seems when someone tells you to do something you are determined that no one is going to boss you around. What do you think?

Darrel: Yeah.

Counselor: Could it be you hate to have people boss you around?

Darrel: *(Smiling.)* Yes.

Counselor: So when someone tells you to sit still you feel like not sitting still?

Darrel: Ask my sister.

Counselor: I wonder if you know you are both intelligent. Do you know that? I think you could have some good ideas, but I don't know if people ask you for your ideas.

Darrel: Nope. (*Laughter from audience.*)

Counselor: So people just tell you what they think?

Darrel: (*Shakes head in agreement.*)

Counselor: And you hate that. Would you like it if Mom and dad ask you for your ideas more?

Darrel: Yes, but what do you mean?

Counselor: Your parents want to be good parents but get bossy sometimes and shout.

Darrel: Oh yeah, I hate that.

Counselor: I thought that, maybe, Darrel, you do not like them shouting and being bossy.

Rebecca: I do not like that.

Counselor: Well, we are going to work on Mom and Dad to see if they can stop being bossy and have them ask you for your ideas. What do you think will happen? I believe you are going to get a chance. What do you think?

Darrel: Be great.

Counselor: What do you think, Rebecca?

Rebecca: Yeah.

Counselor: Rebecca, what do you do when they are bossy and yelling?

Rebecca: I do my work or what they want me to do and then go off to my room.

Counselor: So even though you do not like being bossed, you don't rebel; you do your stuff and go off to your room.

Rebecca: Yes.

Counselor: Okay. We are now going to send for Mom and Dad and have them join us. Could someone bring in Mom and Dad?

Parent Education and Recommendations

Typically, the children go back to the playroom and the parents return for the parent education and recommendation. This is the time when all the information is brought together and the parents gain a new understanding of the family. During this time, the counselor fine tunes his or her recommendations and asks for feedback from the audience. The counselor wants to give only one or two tasks for the family to work on during the next several weeks. In our case scenario, the counselor had the children stay when he brought the parents back in. Thus, the counselor made his recommendations to the entire family. With older children and adolescents, making recommendations to the entire family is often more effective.

In the concluding phase of the interview, the counselor shares his recommendations with the family.

Counselor: Mom and Dad, I think we are on the right track. During the interview Rebecca confirmed that she feels pushed around but that she goes along. She does not like it and would like to have something more to say about what happens to her. Darrel, go ahead and tell us how you feel. You told us pretty clearly that...

Darrel: Mad!

Counselor: Maybe enough said on that! (*Audience laughs.*)

Dad: Darrel, what are you mad about?

Counselor: I want you to sidestep some trouble here and say there is a sense of restraint. You now have the opportunity to allow your children to make choices and take responsibility for what they do. You have the opportunity for them to be a part of the family through shared decision making and limited choices. The more involved they become in the decision making, the more responsible they will become. I will mention one powerful technique that could be of help to you when you get started. It will be your decision to do this. You can remove yourself from the power struggle with Darrel. When you feel yourself get angry or wanting to make Darrel do something, you can remove yourself. This requires an attitude that says, "Wild horses could not make me respond if I did not want to." This is not unkind. It is being able to move off into the distance when someone is trying to defeat you. I would like to thank you very much for helping us. We had a good conversation with the kids. Parents, do you feel this makes sense to you?

Mom: Yes.

Counselor: We would like to stay in touch with you. I can do it by phone, but you have many folks trained in these ideas and there are resources here that you could use. I would now like to respond to questions from the audience for 5 to 10 minutes. Thanks, Rebecca and Darrel.

Conclusion

The counselor conducting the open-forum family counseling session is trained in Adlerian psychology and considered a family educator. The emphasis is on creating a positive climate in which problem solving can be facilitated. The model does not view parents as abnormal or children as having disorders or deficits. Instead, the view is that the interpersonal nature of relationships creates problems within the family. Problems that exist in families are due to the dynamics of what goes on between the family members rather than the result of an individual deficit, disease, or addiction. Parents are viewed only as lacking the information they need to make appropriate changes in their behavior. Therefore, the family counselor educates the family. The counselor provides the information and experiences that create changes in how family members relate to one another. The emphasis is not on better ways to control children but on education for change in attitudes and behavior.

Counselors conducting open-forum family counseling are skilled group leaders. The counselor is sensitive to the dynamics of the family system while developing and attending to the group atmosphere created by the audience. The counselor does not treat members of the audience as passive spectators. Instead, the counselor involves the audience as helpers in the interview. For instance, the counselor may involve members of the audience by having them make guesses about the children's personalities based on the family constellation.

The counselor must also know when to use the audience to encourage the family while studying the interactions between family members. If done correctly, the counselor will create a supportive group atmosphere, an advantage not available in private counseling. During the demonstration, the counselor may even talk to the parents through the audience, especially if the parents are arguing or too stressed. The parents can listen and learn as observers while the counselor instructs and discusses a particular principle with the audience.

The open nature of the interviews and interaction between the audience and the family creates a sense of community. The interview brings out the commonality of problems among all participants. By focusing in observable interaction among family members (mealtimes, bedtime, homework, or sibling fighting), 80% to 90% of the audience identifies with the family's problem. This recognition of shared similarities, despite the complexity of human problems, is called universality. When common denominators among people become evident, and the similarities are perceived by group members, universality occurs.

Universality pulls a group together and creates a feeling of belonging and cohesiveness. Universality and cohesiveness are recognized as two important curative factors in group dynamics (Yalom, 1995). When universality occurs, the family in focus and the audience move from a sense of isolation to connectedness. Group cohesion is formed, and parents learn they are not alone with their concerns for their children. The information provided for the family in focus is also of value to the audience as they share in the family's concerns. Consequently, almost everyone attending the open-forum family counseling demonstration benefits from the educational process (Christensen & Marchant, 1983).

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