

Systemic Family therapy in the Queensland Foster Care System: The implementation of Integrative Practice as a Purposeful Intervention Implemented with Complex 'Family' Systems

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Abstract : Systemic Family therapy in the Queensland Foster Care System is the implementation of Integrative Practice as a purposeful intervention implemented with complex 'family' systems (by expanding the traditional concept of family to include all relevant stakeholders for a child) and is shown to improve the overall wellbeing of children (with developmental delays and trauma) in Queensland out of home care contexts. The importance of purposeful integrative practice in the field of systemic family therapy has been highlighted in achieving change in complex family systems. Essentially, it is the purposeful use of multiple interventions designed to meet the myriad of competing needs apparent for a child (with developmental delays resulting from early traumatic experiences - both in utero and in their early years) and their family. In the out-of-home care context, integrative practice is particularly useful to promote positive change for the child and what is an extended concept of whom constitutes their family. Traditionally, a child's family may have included biological and foster care family members, but when this concept is extended to include all their relevant stakeholders (including biological family, foster carers, residential care workers, child safety, school representatives, Health and Allied Health staff, police and youth justice staff), the use of integrative family therapy can produce positive change for the child in their overall wellbeing, development, risk profile, social and emotional functioning, mental health symptoms and relationships across domains. By tailoring therapeutic interventions that draw on systemic family therapies from the first and second-order schools of family therapy, neurobiology, solution focussed, trauma-informed, play and art therapy, and narrative interventions, disability/behavioural interventions, clinicians can promote change by mixing therapeutic modalities with the individual and their stakeholders. This presentation will unpack the implementation of systemic family therapy using this integrative approach to formulation and treatment for a child in out-of-home care in Queensland (experiencing developmental delays resulting from trauma). It considers the need for intervention for the individual and in the context of the environment and relationships. By reviewing a case example, this study aims to highlight the simultaneous and successful use of pharmacological interventions, psychoeducational programs for carers and school staff, parenting programs, cognitive-behavioural and trauma-informed interventions, traditional disability approaches, play therapy, mapping genograms and meaning-making, and using family and dyadic sessions for the system associated with the foster child. These elements of integrative systemic family practice have seen success in the reduction of symptoms and improved overall well-being of foster children and their stakeholders. Accordingly, a model for best practice using this integrative systemic approach is presented for this population group and preliminary findings for this approach over four years of local data have been reviewed.

Keywords : systemic family therapy, treating families of children with delays, trauma and attachment in families systems, improving practice and functioning of children and families

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