



Systemic Social Work with Children  
and Families:  
Foundation Year

# Course Curriculum

## Day 1: Welcome, Historical Overview & Context Setting

### Welcome:

- Introductions of learners and tutors, exploring expectations and aspirations
- Review of course handbook, course requirements and learning support
- Setting dates for feedback meetings
- Setting the context for reading groups

### Learning Outcomes

- Placing systemic theory in a historical context
- Origins of systemic thinking - introduction to Bateson's idea of cybernetics
- What do we mean by a systemic approach, and what does it look like in a safeguarding context?
- Systemic theory of change
- Introduction to John Burnham's 'social grrraaacceeeesss'
- Power in relationships and in organisations
- Introduction to the concept of reflexivity

### READING:

Burnham, J. (2011) Developments in Social GRRRAAACCEEESSS. In: Krauss, I. (Ed) *Culture and Reflexivity in Systemic Psychotherapy*, pp139-160. London: Karnac

Daniel, G. (2004) Celebrating Complexity. *Context AFT*, pp 22-24

Pendry, N.(2008) What's Class Got to do with It? *Context AFT*. 95. pp 4-5

Hedges, F. (2005) *An Introduction to Systemic Therapy with Individuals: A Social Constructionist Approach*. Palgrave

## Day 2: Uncertainty & the Assessment of Risk to Children

### Learning Outcomes

- Barry Mason's model of 'safe uncertainty' as a way of applying systemic ideas when working with risk in a safeguarding context
- Application of the 'Domains of Action' model to child protection risk assessment
- Creating a therapeutic context for change within a statutory framework
- Consideration of ethical dilemmas faced by social care professionals (review of AFT ethical statement)

### READING:

Bosanquet, L. (2015) Can You be 'Systemic' in a Social Work Crisis? *Context AFT*. **137**, pp. 14-16

Lang, P.W., Little, M. & Cronen, V. (1990) The Systemic Professional: Domains of Action and the Question of Neutrality. *Human Systems: The Journal of Systemic Management and Consultation*. **1**, pp 39-55

Mason, B. (1993) Towards Positions of Safe Uncertainty. *Human Systems: The Journal of Systemic Management and Consultation*. **4**, pp. 189– 200

Robinson, G. Whitney, L. (1999) Working Systemically Following Abuse: Exploring Safe Uncertainty. *Child Abuse Review* **8**, pp. 264-274

## Day 3: Relationships Throughout the Life Cycle: Family Scripts, Genograms, Transitions

### Learning outcomes

- Attachment as a systemic concept, not just a biological one
- Introducing three generational thinking through genograms and family scripts
- Using the genogram as a systemic tool *and* as an intervention
- Appreciating the use of cultural and family genograms to develop self-reflexivity
- Exploration and critique of the normative view of the family life cycle

### READING:

Byng Hall, J. (1995) Secure Enough to Improvise (pp 3-22) and The Nature of Scripts (pp 23-40). *Rewriting Family Scripts*. NY: Guilford Press

Carter, B. & Mc Goldrick, M. (2005) Overview – The Changing Family Life Cycle: A Framework for Family Therapy. In *The Expanded Family Life Cycle: Individual, Family, and Social Perspectives*, pp.3-28. Boston: Allyn & Bacon

Hardy, K. & Laszlovy, T. (1995) The Cultural Genogram: Key to Training Culturally Competent Family Therapists. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy* **21** (3), pp 227-237

## Day 4: Family Structure and Functioning: How Boundaries and Hierarchies Influence Family Relationships

### Learning outcomes

- Introduction to key principles from Minuchin's structural family therapy (hierarchies, boundaries, sub-systems)
- Understanding how problematic family structure may hinder capacities to adapt to life cycle changes and experiences of adversity
- Consideration of how structural ideas can help to contribute to the formulation of systemic hypotheses
- Making links between structural therapy, attachment ideas and parenting training programmes
- Exploring 'first order' ideas with a 'second order' mind

### READING:

Minuchin, S. & Fishman, C. (1981) Enactment. *Family Therapy Techniques*. pp 78-97. Boston: HUP

Scott, S. & Dadds, M.R. (2009) Practitioner Review: When Parent Training Doesn't Work: Theory-Driven Clinical Strategies. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* **50** (12), pp.141-50

Simon, G. M. (1995) A Revisionist Rendering of Structural Family Therapy. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy* **21**(1), pp.17-26

Vetere, A. (2001) Structural Family Therapy. *Child Psychology and Psychiatry Review* **6** (3), pp.133-139

## Day 5: Milan Theory and Practice

### Learning outcomes

- Exploration of key concepts from the Milan model: hypothesising, circularity, neutrality
- The move from first to second order - invitation to curiosity
- Introduction to circular questions as helpful interventions
- Consideration of the relationship between hypothesising and formulation of questions
- Using hypothesising and questions in case work - application to practice

### READING:

Cecchin, G. (1987) Hypothesising, Circularity and Neutrality Revisited: An Invitation to Curiosity. *Family Process* **26** (4), pp. 405-413

Selvini.M.P., Boscolo,L., Cecchin, G. & Prata, G. (1980) Hypothesizing-Circularity-Neutrality: Three Guidelines for the Conductor of the Session. *Family Process* **19** (1), pp. 3-12

## Day 6: Post-Milan / Karl Tomm

### Learning Outcomes

- The move from 'first order' approaches towards 'second order'/social constructionism
- Reflexivity as a theory of change
- Introduction to Karl Tomm's ideas as a means to consider questions as therapeutic interventions
- Using curiosity and circular/reflexive questions to manage complexity rather than going for 'quick fixes' in practice
- Application of Karl Tomm's questions to case work in order to develop skills of being able to ask systemic questions

### READING:

Tomm, K. (1987) Interventive Interviewing: Part II. Reflexive Questioning as a Means to Enable Self-Healing. *Family Process* **26** (2), pp.167-183

Tomm, K. (1988) Interventive Interviewing: Part III. Intending to ask Lineal, Circular, Strategic, or Reflexive Questions? *Family Process* **27** (1), pp.1-15

### LISTEN:

Ken Hardy: Privileged self vs. subjugated self

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=i26A5oecUWM>

## Day 7: Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM)

### Learning Outcomes

- Situating CMM within the social constructionist era
- Exploring how power and relationships are established and maintained through language - and the meanings people make together
- Critical moments and their 'afterlife'
- The hierarchical model as a reflexive tool and introduction to other CMM tools such as LUUUT and daisy model
- How social ggrraaacceesss and systemic questions can be used within CMM

### READING:

Pearce, B. (2007) Critical Moments that Shape our Social Worlds. In: *Making Social Worlds – A Communication Perspective*. 1st ed. NY: John Wiley & Sons

Campbell, D et al. (2003) Family Therapy for Childhood Depression: Researching Significant Moments. The Association for Family Therapy. Oxford: Blackwell

Afuape, T. (2011) Communication/ Social Context Approaches to liberation. In: *Power, Resistance and Liberation in Therapy with Survivors of Trauma*. Hove: Routledge

[http://www.pearceassociates.com/essays/cmm\\_seminar.pdf](http://www.pearceassociates.com/essays/cmm_seminar.pdf)



## Day 8: Narrative Ideas for Children and Families

### Learning Outcomes

- The power of language, dominant discourses, social constructionism
- Origins of narrative therapy
- Stories as a developmentally appropriate intervention with children
- Skills for mapping the relative influence of problems in preparation for externalising conversations
- Limits and uses of narrative ideas in a safeguarding context

### READING:

Cooklin, A. (2001) Eliciting Children's Thinking in Families and Family Therapy. *Family Process* **40** (3), pp 293–312

White, M. (1989) The Externalizing of the Problem and the Re-Authoring of Lives and Relationships. *Dulwich Centre Newsletter. Summer*, pp 3-21

### LISTEN:

Chiminamda Ngozi Adichie: The danger of a Single Story

[https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda\\_ngozi\\_adichie\\_the\\_danger\\_of\\_a\\_single\\_story?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_ngozi_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story?language=en)

## Day 9: Theory to Practice

### Learning Outcomes

- Deepening understanding of theory and approaches covered to date via learning review
- Connecting theories and ideas together to form interventions which fit the systemic formulation of family need
- Practice based learning to develop systemic skills in direct work with children and families

### READING:

Malik, R. and Mandin, P. (2012) Engaging within and across cultures. In: *Culture and Reflexivity in Systemic Psychotherapy: mutual perspectives*. Krause I-B. (ed) London. Karnac Books

Burnham, J. (2005) Relational Reflexivity: A Tool for Socially Constructing Therapeutic Relationships, pp 1-17. In: Flaskas, C. (Ed) *The Space Between*. London: Karnac

Eddo-Lodge, Reni. (2018) The System. In *Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People about Race*. London. Bloomsbury

## Day 10: Whose Reluctance?

### Learning outcomes

- Maintaining curiosity in the face of 'stuckness'
- Consideration of power where relationships are challenging
- Understanding the logic of client beliefs and behaviours
- Highlighting the importance of placing one's own value systems alongside those of the clients we are working with
- Permission seeking collaborative practice as a useful tool for working with 'hard to reach' families

### READING:

Aggett, P., Swainson, M. & Tapsell D. (2015) Seeking Permission: An Interviewing Stance for Finding Connection with Hard to Reach Families. *Journal of Family Therapy* **37** pp 190-209

Daniel, G. (2005). Thinking In and Out of the Frame; Applying Systemic Ideas to Social Work with Children. In: Bower, M. (ed) *Psychoanalytic Theory for Social Work Practice*. London: Routledge

Jenkins, A. (2009) Enabling Ethical Practice. In: *Becoming Ethical: A Parallel, Political Journey with Men who Have Abused*. Lyme Regis: Russell House Publishing, pp. 39-47

Mason, B. (2005) Relational Risk Taking and the Therapeutic Relationship. In: Flaskas, C. (Ed) *The Space Between*, pp 157-170. London: Karnac

## Learning Outcomes

- Exploration of systemic ideas as both an intervention and as an approach which develops a richer understanding of social work theory and practice
- Use of GGRAACCESS to inform formulation
- Use of evidence based practice and practice based evidence in planning and reviewing interventions
- Use of systemic questions to test out and inform interventions
- Critique and development of social work assessment using systemic ideas

## READING:

Hurst, M. (2011) Professional Judgement in the Assessment of Risk: Is There a Role for Systemic Practice? *Journal of Family Therapy* **33** (2), pp.168–180

Vetere, A. & Dallos, R. (2003) Systemic Formulation. In: *Working Systemically with Families: Formulation Intervention and Evaluation*, pp59-86. London: Karnac

Sissay, L. (2019) Chapter 11. In: *My Name is Why*. Edinburgh: Canongate Books Ltd

## Day 12: Endings

### Learning Outcomes

- How to support and influence the practice of systemic social work in your organisation.
- Consideration of our relationship to having challenging conversations with families and with those in authority.
- What is 'system blindness' and how does it affect the conversations we have in the organisation?
- How can CMM help us to better 'see' and 'understand' systems?
- Considering 'critical incidents' as a 'speech acts' and the effect upon organisations
- What is the effect of safety and uncertainty in the organization
- Using the one down position to stimulate curiosity and develop shared understanding and goals.

### Afternoon

- Reflecting upon learning journey
- Thinking about different types of endings that happen within Children's Social Care and how systemic ideas can help us construct useful endings
- Asking for feedback upon our own practice from families as part of our continuous professional development

Fredman, G. and Dalal, C.(1998) Ending Discourses: Implications for Relationships and Action in Therapy. *Human Systems: The Journal of Systemic Consultation & Management*, 9(1): 1-13

Hammond, H and Nasser D. (2020) Engaging clients through re-engaging ourselves. *Context AFT*. **169**, pp19- 23