Communication in Families

Focus on

- Definition of family
- Types of families
- Functions of family
- Communication skills common to families
- Communication issues in families
- Improving family communication
- Two models:
  - Circumplex model of family interaction
  - Family Communication Patterns model

A family is....

- a self-defined unit
- made up of any number of persons
- who live (or have lived) in a relationship with one another
- over time
- in a common living space, and
- who are usually (but not always) united by marriage and kinship
### Types of Families

- **Family of origin** - The family in which one grows up (often consisting of one's parents and siblings)

- **Family of procreation** - The family one starts as an adult (often consisting of one's spouse and children)

### Types of Families

- Traditional family (AKA "nuclear family")
- Single-parent family
- Blended family
- Extended family
- Foster family
- Shared-custody family
- Common-law family
- Conditionally-separated family
- Gay and lesbian family
- Communal family

*"fictive" kin – people who are considered family members even though there is no genetic or marital tie.*

### Characteristics of Families

- Defined roles
- Recognition of Responsibilities
- Shared History and Future
- Shared Living Space
- Established Rules
Functions of Families

- Sexual
- Reproductive
- Economic
  - Offer support
  - Influence personality & identity
  - Instill values
  - Teach communication skills

Families Model Communication Skills

- Realize that family communication is
  - Formative
  - Involuntary
  - Role-Driven
- Parental communication “Modeling”: provides a working model of communication
  - Intentional (direct teaching)
  - Unintentional

Families deal with communication issues:

- Family Roles
  - Different from family positions
  - In conflict (Satir, 1972)

- Family Rituals

- Family Stories
  - Told & retold: family collective knowledge
  - Convey an underlying message about the family

- Family Secrets
  - Told & retold: family collective knowledge
Improving Family Communication

- Create opportunities for intimate communication
- Spend time communicating (verbally and nonverbally)
- Develop speaker and listener roles
- Respect individuals
- Share (and show appreciation for) feelings (joys, sorrows, hopes, dreams, etc.)
- Recognize change is inevitable
- Use productive strategies for managing conflict
  - Face conflict honestly and openly, striving for collaboration (Look for the W/W)
  - State individual needs and wants
  - Don’t focus on finding fault

Two models related to Family Communication

- Family Communication Patterns Model

- Circumplex Model of Family Interaction

Family Communication Patterns Model

- Two dimensions:
  - Level of Conversation - The degree to which family members are encouraged to discuss any topic
  - Level of Conformity - The degree to which the family emphasizes embracing the same values, attitudes, and beliefs

Fitzpatrick, Ritchie, Koerner (1994)
Circumplex Model of family interaction

- Explains the dynamics of both effective function and dysfunction within family systems
- Includes three dimensions
  - Adaptability: family's ability to modify & respond to changes in the family's power structure & roles
  - Cohesion: emotional bonding and feelings of togetherness that families experience
  - Communication

Olson, Russell, Sprenkle, 1989

Adaptability A=2

1. There are few rules about how to behave at the dinner table. My parents don't have a particular role at dinner. Family members come and go as they see fit.
2. There are few rules that govern dinner table behavior. My mom and dad are about equal in terms of who says what the kids should do, but the kids get a lot of say in what happens and how things are done. Both parents play a similar role.
3. In my family, usually one parent makes most of the decisions and the other parent goes along with that. The kids get to have some input about what happens. We usually get together for dinner and have a set of rules to follow.
4. Only one parent in my family makes the decisions and the other parent follows along. There are a lot of rules about how the kids should behave. At dinner, there are a number of rules that we follow and roles that we play—谁 clears the dishes, asking for things, etc.
1. There is little closeness in my family. We are all pretty independent of each other. None of us have any real strong feelings of commitment to the family and, once the kids get to move out, there's not much drive to stay connected to the family.

2. There is some closeness in my family and some interdependence, but not much—mainly we each do our own thing. The family usually gets together just for special occasions.

3. My family is connected to each other, but we also have our independence. There are feelings of loyalty to the family and we are pretty close to each other.

4. My family is very close-knit and tight. We are always doing things together. There is nothing family members wouldn't do for each other. My family members feel a need for each other.

The third element: Communication

- Most critical
- **Everything** in the circumplex model of family interaction is influenced by communication
  - Determines cohesiveness
  - Determines adaptability
- Remember: There is no single best way to be a family