# Methods and Techniques of Family Counselling

## Prof. Filippo Aschieri

COURSE AIMS AND INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES

The course aims to introduce students to the theory and techniques of family counselling, and consists of two parts.

In the first part, some of the main theoretical models of family counselling will be presented. For each model, the following will be illustrated: a) the methods for processing the family's application; b) the logic underlying the clinical choices for the presented problem and the model's psychopathological theories; c) the intervention techniques employed. The applicative aspects will be linked back to the theories of reference through clinical cases.

The second part of the course will be dedicated to the Therapeutic Assessment (TA) of families with children and adolescents as a brief and transformative counselling model. The theoretical and applicative aspects of the TA will be presented by way of tutorials and video analyses. The techniques presented follow the theories in a coherent way and cover: how to establish the treatability or otherwise of a problem reported to the psychologist; how to build, with the family, suitable relational and psychological conditions for change, right at the start of the process; the investigative techniques for testing children and parents; the expressive techniques for direct intervention with the family; and the methods for discussing and sharing the conclusions of the process with adults, children and adolescents.

At the end of the course, students will be able to:

– identify the theoretical premises underlying the different models of family counselling intervention;

– know the overlapping areas and peculiarities of the different theoretical perspectives, both from a content and methodological point of view;

– address the difficulties complained of by families from the theoretical and interventional perspectives aimed at changing them;

– identify the techniques and procedures that may be applied to the various scenarios presented.

COURSE CONTENT

1. A number of family counselling models, different approaches and contexts of intervention.

2. Contemporary theories for thinking about the difficulties of families.

3. The Therapeutic Assessment model for families with children and adolescents.

4. Evaluating the application for family help.

5. Collecting the assessment questions.

6. Exploring family dynamics (e.g. fantasy animal, drawing, self-reporting test, performance test).

7. Intervening with the family (from joint drawing to psychodrama).

8. Discussing the results with parents.

9. Writing a report for adults and a story for children.

10. Course evaluation.

READING LIST

Aschieri, F. (2012), *Oltre il pregiudizio di non eticità dei test psicologici: assessment collaborativo e terapeutico*, in Bianciardi M.-Galvez F. (eds.), *Psicoterapia come etica* (pp. 249-259), Antigone, Turin .

Aschieri, F.-Fantini, F.-Smith, J.D. (2016), *Collaborative/Therapeutic Assessment: Procedures to enhance client outcomes*, in S. Maltzmann (ed.), *Oxford Handbook of Treatment Processes and Outcomes in Counseling Psychology* (pp. 241-269), Oxford University Press, New York, doi:10.1093/oxfordhb/ 9780199739134.013.23.

Fantini, F.-Aschieri, F.-Bertrando, P. (2013), “*Is our daughter crazy or bad*?”: *A case study of Therapeutic Assessment with children*. *Contemporary Family Therapy*, *35*(4), 731–744. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10591-013-9265-3.

Finn, S.E. (2009). *Nei panni dei nostri clienti. Teoria e tecniche dell’Assessment Terapeutico*. Giunti, Florence [Preface; Part one; Ch. 14; Ch. 16; Ch. 17].

Two articles to be chosen from:

Tharinger, D. J.-Finn, S. E.-Austin, C. A.-Gentry, L.B.-Bailey, K.E.-Parton, V.T.-Fisher, M.E. (2008), *Family sessions in psychological assessment with children: Goals, techniques, and clinical utility.* *Journal of Personality Assessment*, *90*(6), 547–558. https://doi.org/10.1080/00223890802388400.

Tharinger, D. J.-Finn, S.E.-Arora, P.-Judd-Glossy, L.-Ihorn, S. M.-Wan, J.T. (2012), *Therapeutic Assessment with children: Intervening with parents “behind the mirror*.” *Journal of Personality Assessment*, *94*(2), 111–123. https://doi.org/10.1080/00223891.2011.645932.

Tharinger, D. J.-Finn, S. E., Wilkinson-A. D., DeHay, T.-Parton, V. T.-Bailey, K.E.-Tran, A. (2008), *Providing psychological assessment feedback to children through individualized fables*, *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, *39*(6), 610–618. https://doi.org/10.1037/0735-7028.39.6.610.

TEACHING METHOD

Frontal lectures, theoretical discussions, videotape analyses of the lecturer's sessions, group work in class with role-playing, test analyses and interpretations, case discussions.

ASSESSMENT METHOD AND CRITERIA

A written exam comprising closed questions (n = 15) and open-ended questions (n = 3), in which the student's theoretical knowledge of the course subjects and ability to clinically and critically argue practical-applicative topics will be assessed. The answers to the closed-ended questions will be assessed according to the student's knowledge of the information, distinctions and key concepts of the discipline's models discussed in the course.

The relevance of the student's answers will contribute to their assessment on the open-ended questions, their appropriate use of specific terminology, the reasoned and coherent structuring of their discourse, and their ability to identify conceptual links and open questions.

A written exam, with the possibility, at the request of the Exam Commission and/or the student, of a more in-depth supplementary oral exam to be carried out according to the procedures established by the Commission.

The three open-ended questions in the written exam will carry the same weight, from 0 (in the case of no answer) to 5 (in the case of an exemplary answer). Honours are awarded when the open-ended responses demonstrate excellent competence and problem-solving skills.

NOTES AND PREREQUISITES

There are no prerequisites for attending the course. A degree of interest in the theoretical aspects and possible applications of psychology to the field of family counselling is assumed.

Further information can be found on the lecturer's webpage at http://docenti.unicatt.it/web/searchByName.do?language=ENG or on the Faculty notice board.