# Psychology of Family, Adoption and Foster Care

## Prof. Rosa Rosnati; Prof. Marta Bonadonna

***COURSE AIMS AND INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES***

The course aims to provide students with a theoretical framework for the social psychology of the family according to the symbolic relational model. First of all, the course will present a general framework of reference, and then it will explore some normative and non-normative family transitions, with a focus on separation, adoption, and foster care. It will highlight the key implications for professional practice and present methodologies and tools for supporting families through the various family transitions. It aims to emphasise the importance of the issues presented during the course for practising social work and, in particular, for social workers themselves, called upon daily to accommodate and intervene in family situations characterised by a high degree of complexity and multiform vulnerability.

At the end of the course, students must be able to: understand the complexity of family relationships; recognise specific family transitions and identify relevant objectives and challenges; frame and map available resources and elements of vulnerability and risk, both within the family and in its social context; apply this knowledge in designing preventative and promotional measures for and with families, to send to other operators; and work towards activating networks.

***COURSE CONTENT***

The course will begin by presenting the fundamental characteristics of the identity of the family and the changes associated with family transitions. The following subjects will be examined in depth: family transmission, the symbolic exchange, the conjugal covenant, the parenthood bond and transitions, the last transition.

It will analyse the following areas particularly closely:

* adoption and fostering, by means of a brief introduction to the legal framework and procedures; presentation of the theoretical perspectives and overview of international research on the adaptation of children and adolescents and on family relations; intercultural dimensions; communicating adoption history and seeking of parentage by adopted individuals.
* certain tools for understanding family relationships and for supporting adoptive and foster families through different stages of their journey.

One module will explore the topics of separation and divorce and interventions to support this specific family transition (Family Mediation and *Gruppi di parola* i.e. peer support groups for children of separating parents), highlighting the different perspectives of the many figures involved and drawing on research findings.

***READING LIST***

E. Scabini-V. Cigoli, Il famigliare. Legami simboli e transizioni, R. Cortina, Milan, 2000.

Only selected chapters from the following volumes:

C. Marzotto-P. Farinacci-M. Bonadonna (2021) (ed. by), *La mediazione familiare. Indicazioni e strumenti per accompagnare la transizione del divorzio*. FrancoAngeli, Milan. (Chapters 1, 2, 3, 4, 5)

M. Bonadonna-P. Farinacci (2018) *Strumenti di sostegno a genitori e figli: mediazione familiare e gruppi di parola, in “MinoriGiustizia” (numero speciale: Figli minorenni e genitori in conflitto)*, 2, p. 156-166, Franco Angeli, Milan.

E. Scabini-G. Rossi (2014), *Allargare lo spazio familiare: adozione e affido, Studi interdisciplinari sulla famiglia*, n.27, Vita e Pensiero, Milan: chapp 3 (p. 43-72), 7 (p.129-146), 10, 11, 12, 13, 14 (p. 189-276).

R. Rosnati (2010) (ed. by), *Il legame adottivo. Contributi internazionali per la ricerca e l’intervento,* Unicopli, Milano: chapp. 2, 3, 8, 11.

Lecture slides are an integral part of the exam syllabus and are available on Blackboard.

***TEACHING METHOD***

Frontal lectures presenting the various course topics, and a number of practical activities in small groups. Students will watch a number of videos and learn about direct experience in the field, through testimonials from visiting experts working in the sector, for example.

***ASSESSMENT METHOD AND CRITERIA***

The final assessment is an oral exam during which students will be assessed on their knowledge of the subject, their ability to understand cases whilst bearing in mind their complexity, and their ability to locate resources and design suitable interventions.

Assessment criteria include: appropriate use of specific terminology; coherently structured argumentation; ability to identify relationships between theoretical aspects learned and concrete cases proposed; and ability to design interventions consistent with needs and resources available.

***NOTES AND PREREQUISITES***

Students require basic knowledge of family psychology: those whose undergraduate degree programme did not include any general psychology, social psychology or family psychology (or similar) courses will be provided with a specific supplementary reading list.

In case the current Covid-19 health emergency does not allow frontal teaching, remote teaching and assessment will be carried out following procedures that will be promptly notified to students.

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.