

An Introduction to Family Systems Theory

Adult Formation: In Relationship

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What is Family Systems Theory?

- A theory of human behavior that views the family as a cohesive emotional unit. It uses systems thinking to describe the complex interactions in the unit. In other words, each member plays a specific role and must follow certain rules, based on the roles within the system.
- *Even when people may feel they are disconnected from members of their family, the family still has a profound impact on their emotions and actions.
- Knowledge of how the emotional system operates in one's family, work, and social systems reveals new and more effective options for solving problems in each of these areas.

Who is Murray Bowen?

- Born 1913, died 1990; a psychiatrist and professor at Georgetown University; developed theory in 1950s
- Originated this theory and its eight interlocking concepts by using systems thinking to integrate knowledge of the human species as a product of evolution with knowledge from family research

Key Words

Family of Origin

Family of origin refers to the significant caretakers and siblings that a person grows up with, or the first social group a person belongs to, which is often a person's biological family or an adoptive family.

Anxiety

Distress or uneasiness of mind caused by fear of danger or misfortune; a state of apprehension and psychic tension. It is your body's natural response to stress. Anxiety can motivate you to work harder and do a better job, but it can also take over and be debilitating, especially in the case of an anxiety disorder. Feelings can range from butterflies in your stomach to a racing heart, rapid breathing, restlessness, trouble concentrating, and difficulty falling asleep.

Togetherness vs. Separateness

Separateness is the need to be an autonomous self in control of one's own life and togetherness is the need to be emotionally connected to another person. In other words, togetherness is the force that pulls the family together while separateness is the force that pushes individual members to be independent and unique

Self-Differentiation

The need for members of a family or system to be together yet separate: it allows parents and children to maintain their own sense of self separate from the identity of the family as a whole.