

THE FILIAL PROGRAM: FOSTERING IMPROVED CLOSENESS AND PARENTING SKILL IN FATHER-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS THROUGH PLAY

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OVERVIEW & BIBLIOGRAPHY

Child-Centered Filial Relationship Enhancement Therapy/Enrichment (herein called the Filial Program) has had a long history and application to intervention with young children and their families. Beginning with the major NIMH sponsored research program in the 1960's to the extensive research conducted until the present, The Filial Program has been shown to intervene in difficulties that impede optimum functioning in children and utilize an improved family context to support gains. The Filial Program helps parents learn to conduct weekly child-centered play therapy sessions with their own children at home. This occurs in a constructive relationship context that is designed to model the assumptions and methods of child-centered play therapy. The role of the therapist/leader in The Filial Program is to teach, guide and supervise the parents to learn how to conduct these play sessions, generalize this and help them maintain and integrate what they have learned. This is a model that clients can learn from and recreate in their own lives. The therapist/leader integrates dynamic and didactic methods to maintain a safe learning environment for parents and children. This helps to foster optimum learning and continued skill practice. It is through learning, developing and practicing these skills that the parent creates a more constructive, emotionally engaged and stable family life. As a result children become more open to developing attachment with caregivers and peers.

The research in The Filial Program demonstrates its power as an intervention in that it increased the parent's acceptance, self esteem, empathy and fostered positive changes in family environment. Concurrently, the child's adjustment and self-esteem improved while parental stress and the child's behavioral problems decreased.

The Filial Program has a great applicability as a prevention/intervention program to enhance the attachment, intimacy and quality of the father-child relationship. A significant advantage of the Filial Program is that it makes no distinction in methodology between prevention and intervention. The Filial program can be organized for fathers who are single parents (custodial or non-custodial) or in an intact marriage or couple relationship. It can be offered as a group program whereby fathers can learn and share with each other. It can address the needs of those fathers and children who may be vulnerable to factors leading to child abuse and neglect. It also can be organized to address the needs of fathers and children who are already affected by abuse and neglect. The power of the Filial Program is that children receive attention for their own developmental and behavioral issues and the parent improves his parenting skills, confidence in himself and closeness with his children. The educational/skill training methodology of the Filial Program shifts the focus from pathology and dysfunction to constructive and functional relationships.

This INTRODUCTORY workshop will inform participants of the basic principles of child-centered play therapy and The Filial Program as prevention/intervention in father-child and family relationships.

Participants will learn the principles and methods of child-centered play sessions, the value of teaching fathers to conduct these play sessions at home and the carryover to the improvement of the father-child relationship and the father's parenting skills. Special attention will be paid to the flexibility of the Filial Program in working with individual fathers and their children, in groups and/or in intact families and as prevention or intervention. Didactic, discussion, experiential and video demonstration methods will be utilized to enhance participant learning.

Involved fathers key for children

Girls whose fathers are involved in their upbringing are less likely to have mental health problems in later life while a good relationship with father can prevent boys from getting into trouble with the police. Good father-child relationships are associated with an absence of emotional and behavioral difficulties in adolescence and greater academic motivation too. . Teenagers who have grown up feeling close to their fathers in adolescence also go on to have more satisfactory adult marital relationships. An involved father is one who reads to his child, takes outings with his child, is interested in the child's education and takes an equal role in managing his child. That does not necessarily mean that he lives with the child's mother or is even the biological father of the child. The research also shows that a good relationship with the father or father figure can also protect against adolescent psychological problems in families where the parents have separated. The study also showed that early father involvement is associated with continuing involvement throughout childhood and adolescence.

Emotional and behavioural problems in childhood and distress in adult life: Risk and protective factors. By Buchanan, Ann; Flouri, Eirini; Brinke, JoAnn Ten Australian & New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry. 2002 Aug Vol 36(4) 521-52

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Objectives of Filial Therapy

The child is able to:

- Better understand and communicate feelings
- Accept himself or herself more completely
- Feel more secure
- Solve problems
- Gain mastery
- Be responsible for his or her own actions
- Change maladaptive behaviors to more proactive ones
- Become more interpersonally competent

Parents are able to:

- Improve their understanding of children's development
- Develop more realistic expectations
- Become more receptive to children's feelings and experience
- Better accept children and their behavior
- More skillfully communicate to children their understanding and acceptance
- More effectively communicate their own expectations and needs
- Generally improve their parenting skills and functioning

The family is able to:

- Feel more secure and comfortable with each other
- Have better relationships with each other
- Trust, accept, respect, and be open to others
- Be more intimate with each other
- Be more independent while acknowledging the importance of the family relationships
- Reduce stress and conflict
- Shift the family interactional system to a more positive, functional, and proactive

Filial Therapy Parent Skills

- Structuring Skill
- Receptive Skill
- Acknowledging Skill
- Limit-Setting Skill
- Facilitating Child Initiation/Self-Direction Skill
- Self-Awareness Skill
- Generalization Skill
- Maintenance Skill

Most parents learn these skills when they are taught how to conduct play therapy sessions. These skills are reinforced when clients and therapists generalize them to everyday life. Commonly, these skills are taught together and practiced each time the parent conducts a play session. However, it is useful to delineate each skill separately.

Structuring Skill

The structuring skill is essential in helping parents create a play context that is free, open, safe, and intimate. Parents learn methods that promote positive outcomes in their everyday lives with their children. They are better able to recognize the child's needs and development, and to develop more realistic expectations. And parents learn to recognize how much the child's environment and relationships influence his or her behavior and development.

Parents are taught to structure the play sessions by:

- Picking an area of the house that will be most conducive to conducting these special sessions.
- Removing as many objects as they can to reduce danger and the need for unnecessary limits.
- Establishing the best time (after consultation with the child) to conduct these weekly play sessions.
- Creating a special kit of toys for these sessions that foster children's creativity, responsibility, and initiative.
- Clearly identifying the few limits that remain, such as not being hit, remaining within the play area, ending sessions properly, and so on.
- Clearly informing children that they can do almost anything they want, and if there is anything they can't do, the parent will let them know.
- Expressing limits (and consequences) in a fashion that helps children be responsible for them (see limit-setting skill).
- Setting time limits and clearly informing the child of the beginning and ending of the play session, including indicating periodically how much time is left (e.g., "We have fifteen minutes left to play").

Receptive Skill

The receptive skill helps parents be more sensitive and efficiently responsive to their children. Being realistic regarding their child's development, being able to accept the child and his or her feelings in the present, and being able to wait for the child to initiate play are all important components. Using this skill, parents enter the child's field of experience, suspending their judgment and needs in order to experience the child more fully. This is the beginning of a process during which parents learn to accept children as they are; to appreciate and respect children's capacity and resourcefulness; and to trust in children's ability to resolve many of their own difficulties. Parents learn this skill during play sessions when they practice waiting for the child to initiate before responding.

Acknowledging Skill

Also called the empathic responding skill, the acknowledging skill allows parents to recognize their children's actions and feelings (meaning) in such a way that the children can feel good about themselves and can use this acknowledgement to gain greater self-mastery. The acknowledgment skill includes conveying an understanding and acceptance of the child without judgment. This skill is very close to and dependent upon the receptive skill.

Limit-Setting Skill

This skill helps children learn to become responsible. It fosters independence and self-reliance and enables children to take responsibility for their actions and feelings. In the play session, parents learn this skill by reducing the number of limits to a manageable few; by stating limits clearly so that the child can understand and be responsible for them; by establishing consequences that are related to the limits. Parents state limits and consequences in a step-by-step fashion to help children become responsible for their actions and feelings.

Facilitating Child Initiation/Self-Direction Skill

The integration of the receptive and limit-setting skills is worthy of its own category. Parents who learn this skill are able to help children freely express themselves and direct the play session any way they choose while being responsible for the rules that make it safe the child and parent to interact in this way. Parents also handle limits in a way that fosters child self-direction. Mastering this skill is a process of gradually learning to wait for and accept increasing levels of child initiation and responsibility, being more confident of the child and context, and being able to keep both child and parent safe when the need for limits arises. An increasing interactive component of this skill comes into play: As the child becomes more responsible, the parent trusts the child more and has fewer concerns

Self-Awareness Skill

This skill enables parents to better understand their own feelings and needs in a way that does not undermine the child's freedom to initiate and direct what happens in these sessions. Parents taught to

conduct these play sessions are asked to explore their feelings and needs in relation to what they are being asked to do. They are encouraged to accept these feelings and needs and to structure the play session so that they don't compromise the child's freedom of self-expression.

Generalization and Maintenance Skills

After learning to conduct these play therapy sessions, parents are helped to conduct sessions at home. Once regular weekly play sessions are established, office sessions focus on reinforcing and strengthening parents' play therapy skills. Additionally, the therapist continues to use play session principles and skills to foster parent effectiveness. In other words, RE therapists often respond to a parent's concern about child behavior by asking, "How would you respond if you were in a play session?" It is also useful to use *Parenting: A Skill Training Approach* by Louise Guerney (1995) to reinforce these skills. This is an excellent parent education manual that is drawn from the principles and skills of filial therapy. Parents are requested to continue weekly play sessions for at least six months and thereafter for as long as the child requests them. After play sessions have become an established routine, parents are encouraged to introduce "special times" as a method to continue meeting with the child at a special time that is less structured and more like everyday interactions. The therapist encourages parents to apply the skills more naturally during **special times**. This transition to special times helps to generalize and maintain skill practice.

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THE LEADER'S (THERAPIST'S) ROLE

- The leader (therapist) acts as a teacher/instructor to help the participants learn the Filial Relationship Enhancement Skills.
- The leader (therapist) is not the person through whom the family members communicate or someone who comes up with solutions for the family's problems.
- Instead leader (therapist) helps family members learn skills to improve their direct communication with each other.
- The leader (therapist) helps families learn the RE skills by:
 - *Explaining*
 - *Demonstrating*
 - *Supervising*

EXPLAINING

- The leader (therapist) never asks the participants to do something without explaining the rationale first.
- The leader (therapist) provides participants with a rationale for using their skills and a behavioral description of the skills.
- The skills are explained in a way that help participants understand how these skills relate to their own problems and needs.
- When participants are having difficulties, it is helpful for the leader (therapist) to review the skills.
- It is helpful throughout the training to periodically review the skills and their rationale.

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DEMONSTRATING

- The leader (therapist) shows family members how the skills can be used in their relationship *with* each other.
- It is helpful when the leader takes time explaining each skill giving examples that exemplify the value of the skill and its value to the relationship.

• The leader (therapist) can demonstrate the RE skills in several ways:

- Show a film or videotape.
- Play model audiotaped conversation.
- Demonstrate a conversation using the skills with the leader and co-leader.
- Conduct a conversation with a participant demonstrating each skill.
- Contrast a conversation without RE skills and the same conversation using RE skills

SUPERVISING

- The leader (therapist) continues to model using RE skills.
- When participants are having trouble, the leader (therapist) will model the response for the owning expresser on the empathic responder and then ask that person to state the same to the other person.
- **(When modeling, it is important to ask participants to restate the modeled response to the other person to enhance learning.)**
- It is important for the leader (therapist) to acknowledge and reinforce every effort of the participants to learn RE skills.
- In the beginning, the leader/therapist reinforces less skillful responses particularly as participants are attempting not to accuse, judge or question and acknowledge their feelings.
- As the participants become more skillful, the leader/therapist reduces the frequency of modeling and reinforcement of the behaviors. The reinforcement becomes intermittent strengthening and stabilizing participant skills.
- When participants respond inappropriately, the leader structures the interaction by explaining the rationale and demonstrating the skill.
- The leader/therapist maintains an attitude of encouragement and support toward participants.
- The leader/therapist continuously looks for examples of appropriate behavior to reinforce. This enhances participant motivation.
- It is important for the leader/therapist not to be drawn into taking sides in an issue or dispute. This will devour the therapy away from skill learning and increase the participants' dependency on the leader.
- The leader/therapist's role is to help family members learn the skills necessary to make their own decisions.

PROFESSIONAL TRAINING AT CORE

THE CENTER OF RELATIONSHIP ENHANCEMENT (CORE) OFFERS PROFESSIONAL TRAINING IN:

- CHILD-CENTERED PLAY THERAPY
- FILIAL RELATIONSHIP ENHANCEMENT FAMILY THERAPY
- PARENT-ADOLESCENT RELATIONSHIP DEVELOPMENT(PARD)
- COUPLE RELATIONSHIP ENHANCEMENT
- FAMILY RELATIONSHIP ENHANCEMENT
- FAMILY OF-ORIGIN CONSULTATIONS
- PARENTING: A SKILL TRAINING APPROACH

SUPERVISION GROUPS ARE OFFERED IN:

- CHILD PSYCHOTHERAPY
- PLAY THERAPY
- FILIAL THERAPY
- COUPLE THERAPY
- FAMILY THERAPY

TRAINING METHODS

ALL TRAINING AND SUPERVISION PROGRAM ARE DESIGNED TO HELP PROFESSIONALS DEVELOP AND ENHANCE THEIR SKILLS IN CHILD, ADOLESCENT, COUPLE AND FAMILY RELATIONSHIP ENHANCEMENT THERAPY/ENRICHMENT. AS SUCH, DIDACTIC, MODELING, ROLE-PLAY AND FEEDBACK METHODS ARE INTEGRATED TO HELP CREATE HANDS ON LEARNING EXPERIENCE FOR ALL PARTICIPANTS.

TRAINING IS AVAILABLE AT YOUR SITE

CONTINUING EDUCATION:

Continuing education credits are available for Psychologists, Social Workers, Counselors, Play Therapists and Marriage and Family Therapists.

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