

Family and Couple Therapy (Systemic Psychotherapy): Year One Foundation

Prudence Skynner Family and Couple Therapy Clinic at Springfield Hospital.

Course Length 75 Hours: January 2025 - July 2025: Course is related to Systemic Family Therapy Training

Course completed on the 31st July 2025 - Still awaiting certification

My Journey with Systemic Family Therapy

This past year, I took a deep dive into Systemic Family Therapy, and it completely changed how I see and work with families. The course wasn't just about learning theories; it was about shifting my perspective. Instead of seeing a family's problems as something wrong with one person, I learned to see them as a complex web of relationships, history, and social factors. It was a hands-on experience, mixing classroom learning with practical tools and exercises that brought everything to life.

The course was taught by experienced therapists who shared not only their clinical expertise but also their own life and cultural experiences, which was incredibly powerful. This was especially helpful when we talked about how family dynamics are shaped by culture, migration, and other factors.

We studied useful methods, including:

- Genograms: Basically, drawing out a family tree to spot patterns that repeat through generations.
- Circular questioning: Asking questions that get family members to talk about each other's perspectives, which helps everyone see things differently.
- Reframing: Offering a new way to look at a behavior or event. For example, instead of seeing a teen as "lazy," you might reframe it as them feeling overwhelmed and needing to withdraw.
- Reflecting teams: A cool method where a group watches a session and then shares their observations in front of the family, offering fresh ideas without telling them what to do.

We also spent a lot of time thinking about our own backgrounds and how our personal experiences influence how we listen and connect with families. This was a crucial part of becoming a more self-aware and effective practitioner.

Putting It into Practice in My Job

I work in an Intensive Family Intervention team, and we often deal with crises where a young person is at risk of entering care. These situations are rarely simple, and I've found that the systemic approach is a perfect fit. It's helped me look beyond a young person's behaviour and see the whole picture: the unspoken rules, the historical events, and the family patterns that are keeping them stuck.

For example, circular questioning has been a game changer. I was working with a parent and their teenager who were constantly clashing. Instead of asking them to explain their own feelings, I asked questions like, "When your daughter gets upset, how does your son react?" This simple shift helped them stop blaming each other and start observing their interactions, which opened the door for real change.

Reframing has also been a powerful tool. A parent once called their child "unmotivated." I helped reframe this by suggesting the behaviour could be a sign that the child was feeling overwhelmed and needed support. This subtle change helped the parent think about how they could help instead of just punishing them.

The training's focus on culture and context has been particularly important. Many of the families I work with have migration stories or have faced racism. The course taught me to approach these conversations with cultural humility, meaning I don't pretend to be an expert on their experience. Instead, being curious and asking respectful questions so they feel truly heard.

My Takeaways from the Training

What I loved most about the course was how it blended a strong theoretical foundation with genuine human connection. We didn't just learn about theory; we lived it through role-plays and exercises. This made me realise that being a systemic therapist isn't just about having a set of skills; it's about being creative and trusting the process.

The practical side of the training, especially the role-plays and being part of a reflecting team, was invaluable. It gave me a safe space to practice new skills and understand what it feels like to be on both sides of the conversation and gave me the confidence to use it in my professional practice.

On a personal level, the training taught me to slow down. I used to feel an intense pressure to "fix" problems, especially when families were in crisis. The course encouraged me to resist that urge, to hold space for different viewpoints, and to trust that meaning can be built collaboratively with the family. This has been both challenging and freeing.

Looking Ahead

I'm already using genograms at the start of my work with families to not just map names but to explore their stories and legacies. This is great for helping families with intergenerational conflict understand where certain beliefs and coping styles came from.

I also want to bring the principles of a reflecting team into our weekly team meetings. Even if we don't have a formal structure, I can use the idea of talking with the family, not just about them, when we discuss cases.

In the long term, I hope to influence how my service develops. The core values of systemic thinking, looking at relationships, cultural context, and working collaboratively. I want to help embed these ideas into our service's culture, from how we assess families to how we supervise each other.

Why I'd Recommend It

I'd highly recommend this training to anyone who works with families. It's an adaptable set of tools that can be used in many roles, from social care and education to community work. For youth workers and family practitioners especially, it is a real eye opener, shifting your practice from just dealing with behaviours to a more relationally focused approach.

The course asks you to be open to self-reflection and to sit with uncertainty, but the payoff is huge. It gives you more than just skills, it gives you a new, more compassionate, and creative way of seeing the world.

I hope I can continue the full 4 years of the training.

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