Family Solutions

Family Solutions is an approach to assessment, case planning, and ongoing casework that targets specific everyday events in the life of a family that 1) have caused the family difficulty and 2) represent a situation in which at least one family member cannot reliably maintain behavior that the family needs to accomplish its goals. The model (Christensen et al, 1999) combines the best of problem focused relapse prevention approaches that evolved from work with addiction, violence, and helplessness (Marlatt & Gordon, 1985; Pithers, 1990), with solution-focused models that evolved from family systems casework and therapy (Berg, 1994; deShazer, 1988). By integrating the two approaches, partnerships between family, caseworker, and service providers can be developed that account for basic needs and restore the family’s pride in their own competence.

The approach was developed through consultation with workers and supervisors who were attempting to remedy problems contributing to reocurrence of abuse and neglect. However, it is applicable to a wide range of family problems such as mental health or work related issues.

Family Solutions has three basic goals:

1. **Develop a partnership with the family:**
   - Assumes that the family wants to be successful
   - Normalizes the stresses and challenges that have made solving the problem difficult.
   - Isolates and externalizes the problem pattern

2. **Focus on pragmatic everyday family life tasks.**
   - Morning and evening routine
   - Arranging for care of young family members
   - Getting children up and off to school
   - Arranging for supervision of older family members
   - Caring for ill family members
   - Keeping clean and healthy
   - Controlling anger with family members or others
   - Staying motivated to perform daily care tasks
   - Controlling substance use the interferes with family life

3. **Promote specific prevention skills tied to the family’s tasks.**
   - Identify high risk situations that lead to difficulties
   - Identify early warning signals in the pattern
   - Develop a plan to avoid the high risk situations
   - Develop a plan to interrupt the pattern early if not avoided
   - Have a backup or “escape” plan if all else fails

Family Solutions has been shown to serve as a common conceptual framework for integrating disparate segments of a response network. Because the model provides for specific outcome skills necessary for relapse prevention, all providers in a service system can work toward common goals. Because the model utilizes a partnership approach based on what is successful, Family Solutions provides a method for tapping a family’s competence without diminishing the absolute need to meet certain criteria. Developing partnerships that lead to identifiable solutions in everyday family life is the best way to prevent future relapse.

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1 Family Solutions (also known as Solution-Based Casework) was developed in cooperation with protection workers and supervisors in the Cabinet for Families and Children, Commonwealth of Kentucky. See Christensen, D., Todahl, J., & Barrett, B. (1999). Solution-Based Casework: An Introduction to Clinical and Case Management Skills in Casework Practice. New York: Aldine De Gruyter.