

Child centred, family-focussed therapies.

Although the child presenting with a problem is central to therapy, in most instances, the family must also be focussed on. With a narrow child focus, patterns of reactivity within the family can keep the problem from being resolved. For example, the child may stay in a triangulated position that functions to divert anxiety to what is not being addressed in the parental relationship. The following things are important to note:

1. **PARENTS ARE NOT THE CAUSE OF THEIR CHILD'S SYMPTOMS.** We simply have the ability to provide leadership and **can initiate change in our own behaviour** that has a ripple effect throughout the family. When we are willing to take responsibility for our own difficulties we may not automatically resolve the child's problems but we may set the stage for our child's behaviour to be less of an automatic reaction to us as parents and more of an expression of their individuality.
2. A mother will never be blamed for simply doing what she has been socialised to do; this often includes being 'over-involved' and believing she must take all the responsibility for her children. Many fathers are as much a part of the repeated family patterns of tension as is the mother, and cultural background as well as parental upbringing has a huge impact on how we behave in the parenting role. We learn our behaviours from our parents, and our children learn from us.
3. The *most important validation of the child* needs to come from within the family rather than from the therapist. By concentrating on the strengths of our children rather than their weaknesses, we will help increase our child's self-esteem.
4. As parents we need to think about...
 - How are we as parents responding to the symptoms?
 - What are the patterns in any fights that may ensue?
 - Who gets involved in the argument?
 - Who is the child's supporter?
5. We need to be assertive and not aggressive. Our children need our respect as much as we need theirs. Shouting and smacking are aggressive responses that only create fear in our children. An assertive way of handling a provocative situation might be to say, "When you behave like this, I get frustrated. I will feel much happier when this behaviour stops". Aggressive threats and blaming can cause emotional harm to the child.

As parents we need to understand that **the parental relationship and other relational processes may be maintaining the problematic symptoms that are displayed by our children.**

Notes adapted from an article by Jenny Brown (2008), "We don't need your help, but will you please fix our children", Australia & New Zealand Journal of Family Therapy, 29, 2, pp61-69.