

POST GRADUATE TRAINING COURSE IN SYSTEMIC THERAPY AND FAMILY THERAPY FOUNDATION YEAR

This is the introductory level of the AAFT (Australian Association of Family Therapy) accredited 2-year post-graduate course in systemic family therapy. It is for therapists working in a wide range of human service contexts and it will initiate them into systemic thinking and family therapy practice.

SELECTION CRITERIA

Applicants for the 2-year Post Graduate Course in Systemic Therapy must have already established knowledge and skills bases in the social and health sciences (social work, psychology, nursing, medicine, occupational therapy, education, counselling). The course will build on these already acquired skills and extend them into competence with systemic therapy. This means that applicants should have bachelor's degree qualification in the social and health sciences, or an equivalent qualification. Applicants are required to be currently working as counsellors.

At the discretion of the Director, applicants with different qualifications or equivalent qualifications in an unrelated topic may be admitted to the course. They must be able to satisfy the Director that they have sufficient work experience and training and are able to demonstrate a sufficient level of ability in developing therapeutic relationships. This level of ability would normally be established through an interview and through references.

DURATION OF TRAINING.

This course runs over 2 years, each year of the course has duration of 40 weeks, 5 hours per week. The total hours per year are 200 hours. To complete AAFT accreditation, there is a requirement for post qualifying supervision. Details are available from the AAFT website:
<http://www.aaft.asn.au/>

The course will accept a maximum of 10 trainees per year.

CURRICULUM: BRINGING TOGETHER SYSTEMIC AND SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONIST PRINCIPLES

This course has been designed to provide theoretical knowledge and clinical practice in the principles of systemic (Post-Milan model) and social constructionist practice (narrative therapy, solution focused therapy and Open Dialogue).

The main components of the course are:

- The centrality of relationships
- The importance of how meanings are constructed
- The influence of different contexts and
- The role of language

The theoretical material for the foundation level of the course draws on the work of Bateson, Watzlawick, Keeney and their influence on the Milan associates. The ideas of Constructivism (Maturana, Humberto), the Co-ordinated Management of Meaning (Cronen, Vernon and Pearce, Barnett), Social Constructionism (Kenneth Gergen, John Shotter) are studied and applied to practice.

Throughout the course, theory and practice are continually connected with one another, so that when theory is being discussed, clinical examples are elicited.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS AND CONTENT: FOUNDATION LEVEL

- Context
- The systems focus
- Circularity
- Connections and Patterns over time
- Constructions of Meanings: Coordinated Management of Meaning
- The process of change
- The influence of the feminist perspective on systemic ideas and practice
- The Post Milan approach
- Constructivism
- Introduction to Social Constructionism
- Cultural context
- Power
- Co-constructed Therapy
- Self-Reflexivity

- Strengths and Solutions

These systemic and social constructionist ideas are divided into levels of complexity with the systems theories and cybernetic ideas of circularity, connectedness, context, constraints and therapist self-reflexivity forming the learning areas during the foundation year.

Course Format

- This AAF (Australian Association of Family Therapy) accredited course meets weekly for 5 hours over 40 weeks, from February to December.
- Learning is facilitated via: weekly article seminars, theoretical presentations, observation of live demonstration interviews, simulation of family interviews, skill development exercises and personal study.
- Clinical practice with live supervision and video analysis of clinical work. Clinical work is provided by the course's low fee counselling and consultation service.
- Assignments to connect theory and practice
- Exploration of the influences of the participants' beliefs and context on the therapist/ client relationship.

Main Aims of the Foundation Level

- To understand the theoretical underpinning of the systemic approach
- To appreciate the recursive nature of beliefs, behaviour and emotions
- To appreciate and evaluate the influence of context on meanings ascribed to problems
- To understand circular processes and patterns that evolve over time
- To understand and employ in clinical practice the ideas of negative explanation, restraints (to finding alternative solutions) and double description
- To understand the contribution of feminist ideas on systemic practice and to include the analysis of power and gender in systemic practice
- To critically reflect on the different views of reality and objectivity and their influence on therapist understanding and behaviour
- To gain clinical skills in the practice of systemic hypothesising and questioning (the Post Milan approach)

Key Outcomes

- Application of the systemic model's views on problem development and resolution in family systems and wider systems
- Learning systemic skills with maps of practice

- Increased understanding of social and personal beliefs about race, gender and sexuality, and their place in systemic practice.
- Enhanced core therapeutic skills, such as:
 - Systemic hypothesizing
 - Strategies for engaging families
 - Systemic and collaborative interviewing: circular and reflexive questions
 - Systemic practice interventions: logical connotations, rituals, developing tasks
 - Skills in reframing problems and relationships
 - Assessing and responding to referrals and working with wider systems

Year 1 Program Overview

Semester 1: Introduction to Systemic Therapy and Family Therapy: Principles and Practice

Semester 2: Contemporary Developments in Systemic Therapy and Family Therapy: Principles and Practice

Term 1 - Systems theory: from the intrapsychic to the interpersonal

- Systemic Theory: Context, Circularity and Connectedness
- The importance of appraising the influence of family and developmental life cycles
- Systemic and traditional formulations of clinical problems

Term 2 - Systemic theory and Practice: The "Patterns that Connect"

- First order Cybernetics and the Principles of feedback loops
- Homeostasis
- The importance of how actions are categorised and understood: Theory of logical types
- Exploring the levels of Communication: meta-communication
- Understanding loyalty to beliefs: Negative explanation and restraints to change

Term 3 - Systemic Theory and Practice: the influence of observing systems

- 2nd Order cybernetics and Observing Systems
- Post Milan Systemic Therapy

- Constructivism
- How meanings are negotiated in relationships: The Coordinated Management of Meaning

Term 4 - Systemic Theory and Practice: Social Constructionist theory and Systemic Practice

- Social Constructionism and the view of the person
- Problem –determined systems – language and its influence on problems
- Therapist self-reflexivity and the ideas of a co-constructed therapy
- Reflecting Teams and Open Dialogue

The structure of training sessions for both levels are as follows:

- Article seminar theory presentations
- Skill development exercises
- Video reviews
- Clinical practice Term 1: observation of Course Director's clinical work. From term 2, trainees begin supervised clinical practice
- Position of the therapist work

Article Seminars and theory presentations

The course provides the trainees with articles for reading each week. Each trainee takes it in turn to present the key aspects of the article, its influence on their thinking and practice with references drawn from their clinical experience.

The course director follows this with a theoretical presentation on the theory discussed.

In the advanced level, trainees are asked to design questions or exercises that engage the group with the reading.

Journal reflections

Trainees are encouraged to maintain a training journal throughout the course. It is not part of the assessment process. This journal includes the trainee's personal reflections on the systemic ideas and skills learnt, from any part of the course.

Skill development exercises- Learning by doing

One of the key aims of this aspect of the course is to provide opportunities for participants to practice the various skills of learnt throughout the course. Skill development exercises are designed to reflect both the theory being covered and the needs of the training group. Such exercises, for example, focus on experiencing the family as a system, observing and tracking patterns, hypothesizing around a problem, working in teams, circular questioning, designing tasks that support change outside of the session.

Clinical Practice: Live Supervision and Video Reviews

The clinical work is provided by the course's low fee counselling and consultation service. This training program takes place in a venue with video recording and observation facilities. Therapists will work directly with individuals, couples and families using live supervision.

- There will be an emphasis on developing skills in systemic interviewing and forming collaborative relationships with clients.
- Trainees are split into teams for work with families. The therapy team is responsible for supporting the therapist, by contributing in reflecting team or open dialogue discussions.
- The observing team listens to the team discussions and the therapy, and their role is to observe and comment on the team / family relationship, after the therapy has concluded. This often can include noting popular team hypothesis and its implications, as well as observing how the therapist and the team may be constructing particular interactions or views in their relationship with the family.
- The observing team gives their feedback to the therapy team in a reflecting team format
- Summary of these observations also require recording by the therapy team.
- Reviews of videotapes are used to further learning and awareness of the processes in therapist/client relationships.
- The clinical practice begins in the second term of the foundation year. At other times, trainees are part of a reflecting team.
- Trainees are expected to work with 2 families each during the foundation year.
- Trainees maintain the case files for their clients using the course's session notes guidelines.

The Position of the Therapist

Therapists will have opportunities to develop awareness of their influence in constructing meaning and particular episodes of interaction in their relationships with clients. The course therefore examines the influences of family of origin and socio/cultural themes on therapists' perceptions and actions in the therapy process. This area of work involves understanding the importance of ethical standards and behaviours in systemic practice.

The trainee is required to participate with specific exercises, which demonstrate the influence of his/her own self on the clinical work as well as demonstrating how ideas and actions can emerge and evolve in social interaction with clients and families. This work begins in the third term of the first year and continues into the second year.

ASSESSMENT

Theory

Trainees are expected to submit assignments at the end of each term. This is done in order to demonstrate understanding of systemic therapy and to consolidate learning.

These assignments are between 1500-2000 words and are presented to the training group and director.

Clinical Skills

The Course Director uses live supervision of trainees' clinical sessions to develop an assessment of the trainee's performance.

- With the client's permission, sessions are videotaped and replayed for team analysis.
- Trainees are requested to review each tape of their clinical work and to highlight segments of interaction which they found challenging. A practice development checklist, appropriate to the course level, is used for reviewing the tape.
- Tapes are reviewed in the training group. Role-plays are then used to experiment with alternative ways of responding.
- The discussions held during mid and end of session breaks are occasionally videotaped in order to track the trainees' and team's thinking as session's progress.

Accreditation and eligibility for clinical membership

The Australian Association of Family Therapy has accredited this course.

Following the completion of the course, trainees complete the AAFT's supervision requirements through their own arrangements. (50 hours post training)

The trainees are instructed in making a post training supervision contract and in the keeping of a log such that is acceptable for submission to AAFT for Clinical Membership.

Guest Lecturers

Skilled and experienced therapists and trainers contribute to this course, at no extra cost to the trainees. Ian Percy contributes to the learning of Narrative Therapy in the second year.

Course Description - Advanced Level

This is the advanced level of an accredited (AAFT) 2-year training program in systemic psychotherapy. It is aimed for clinicians possessing introductory levels of knowledge and skills in systemic practice and who have completed an introductory level of systemic study. This level is for counsellors who are currently working with systemic ideas in their clinical practice.

The intention of this year is to increase competence and confidence in systemic practice whilst encouraging the development of the participant's individual styles and identities as therapists.

Selection Criteria

Applicants for the 2-year Graduate Course in Systemic Therapy must have already established knowledge and skills bases in the social and health sciences and have completed a foundation level of study in systemic family therapy. The course will build on these already acquired skills and extend them into competence with systemic therapy. Normally this means that applicants should have bachelor's degree qualification in the social and health sciences, or an equivalent qualification.

At the discretion of the Director, applicants with different qualifications or equivalent qualifications in an unrelated topic may be admitted to the course. They must be able to satisfy the Director that they have sufficient work experience and training and are able to demonstrate a sufficient level of ability in developing therapeutic relationships. This level of ability would normally be established through an interview and through references.

Duration of Training.

This course has duration of 40 weeks, 5 hours per week. The total hours per year are 200 hours.

Curriculum: ADVANCED LEVEL

Key aspects of the Advanced Level

The advanced level examines 4 approaches throughout the year: Post -Milan systemic therapy, narrative therapy, and solution focused therapy and Open Dialogue practice. There will be a continued focus on the ideas of postmodernism and social constructionism and their influence on systemic therapy.

Theoretical Foundations and Content

- Post-Milan Systemic Therapy
- Narrative Approaches
- Solution-Focused Therapy
- Open Dialogue
- Position of the Therapist
- Principles of Ethical Practice
- The place of Research in Clinical Practice
- Systemic Practice in the Public Sector
- Single-Session Therapy

Course Format

- The course will meet weekly for 5 hours over 40 weeks, from February to December.
- Learning will be facilitated via: weekly article seminars, theoretical presentations, observation of live demonstration interviews of clinical work, simulation of clinical interviews, skill development exercises.
- Live supervision and video analysis of clinical practice will form a major component of the course.
- Participation on a reflecting team during live clinical interviews
- Position of the therapist interviews: The course explores the influences of the participants' beliefs and context on the therapist/ client relationship.

Main Aims for the Advanced Level

- To increase understanding of the different approaches developed within the systemic and social constructionist frameworks and to be able to evaluate the application of these models in varying clinical contexts
- To understand the theoretical underpinning of the social constructionist approach
- Enhance awareness of systemic processes and the social construction of meaning
- Increase understanding and skill development in systemic therapy, narrative therapy, and solution focused therapy
- Bridging earlier cybernetic approaches within the more contemporary developments in practice.
- To appreciate the recursive nature of beliefs, language and interactions

- To appreciate and evaluate the influence of social context and dominant discourses on meanings ascribed to problems.
- To appreciate the importance of monitoring relationships with families so that therapy becomes tailored, open and negotiable.

To gain clinical skills in:

- The practice of **solution focused thinking** and questioning: paying attention to the family's ways of describing problems, exploring their ideas of preferred outcomes, developing a future orientation
- To understand and employ in clinical practice **the narrative ideas** of deconstruction, relative influence questions and listening for possible unique outcomes
- In the practice of using an **Open Dialogue** approach with families, skills in keeping the dialogue open with distressed families.
- To participate and evaluate reflecting team and open dialogue processes
- To understand ethical issues in therapy, and the key ethical postures
- Applying Single Session Therapy within the course's low fee counseling service- implementing the pre: session questionnaire and follow up
- Increased understanding and application of the reflexive nature of therapeutic relationships.

Program Overview: Advanced Level

Term 1 Theory: Contemporary Ideas of Postmodernism and Social Constructionism: their influence on systemic practice

- Review of systems principles and practice across the 3 historical periods
- The Post - Milan Approach
- Overview of Research studies

Term 2 Theory: Systemic Models for Change: Narrative Frameworks

- Linguistic views: problem determined systems
- Narrative Therapy Theory and Practice: White and Epston Narrative Therapy: Theory and Development
- Reflecting Teams: Theory

Term 3 Theory: Solution Focused Therapy

- The Solution Focused Approach: Principles and Practice
- Single Session Therapy

Term 4 Theory: Open Dialogue Practice

- Open Dialogue Approach: its development, nature and implications on Family Therapy
- Open Dialogue Teams and Reflexive Teams: what's different?

Accreditation and eligibility for clinical membership and Year 3 of the Course

The Australian Association of Family Therapy has accredited this course.

Following the completion of the course, trainees complete the AAFT supervision requirements (50 hours post training). For those seeking accreditation, this component forms the 3rd year of the course. Supervision groups of 6 are formed.

The trainees are instructed in making a post training supervision contract and in the keeping of a log such that is acceptable for submission to AAFT for Clinical Membership.