

Recent Developments in Family Counseling

James Croake

During the past three years I have included two additions to the basic Dreikursian model of family counseling which is based upon the principles of Adlerian Psychology. The first alteration has been modeled by the Pews (1972) and entails seeing the family as a complete unit rather than parents and children separately. The second embellishment has been utilized in a like manner (Dreikurs, 1970) by Lowe in another therapy setting and involves discussing the family with the audience (or group) without direct interaction with the family.

Dreikurs has stated that children below adolescence should be seen separately from the parents in counseling since the parents will dominate the interview and encumber the free interaction of the child(ren) with the therapist (Dreikurs, 1968). After adolescence children feel secure enough in their power to speak freely in front of the parents and a truer family situation can thus be seen. My own experience suggests that when sufficient rapport is gained with the family, the children do speak freely in front of their parents. Additional rewards from seeing the family as a unit are increased trust, greater family cohesion, and shortened counseling time.

The usual procedure in counseling is to first talk with the parents, then the children, and finally again see the parents while listening to a playroom report and subsequently make or confirm a recommendation to the parents (Dreikurs, Corsini, Sonstegard, & Lowe, 1959).

At no time does the counselor side with the children or the parents or in any way attempt to deceive either by withholding information or not giving the children full knowledge of the recommendations made by the counselor. For example, if the problem concerns one of the children throwing food during dinner, the counselor might ask both parents and children what they think could be done about the matter along with guidance and probably a direct suggestion by the counselor. In this case the counselor might recommend that when any food is thrown, all of the children be allowed to finish their dinner in the carport. Both children and parents would need to agree to follow the suggestion.

Even though the counselor informs the children of the discussion between himself and the parents and informs the parents of the discussion between the children and himself and all agree on any decisions, there is still a feeling of suspicion which logically arises when one is asked to go into the next

room while the counselor speaks with the rest of the family. Sensing this problem, Lowe (1970) has suggested the use of closed circuit TV which would allow the excused family members to view the proceedings between counselor and the remainder of the family. This could certainly increase trust as all family members would know the entire context of the family counseling.

When one of the family members states the presenting problem in the face of all other family members, everyone is aware of the current tensions. Conversely when one member makes a positive comment, all family members can feel that encouragement. The family together begins to bring forth ideas for improvement with less reliance on the counselor to make direct suggestions. In the above example, even though all the children may not have been implicated in the misbehavior at dinner time, they may be more aware of their involvement than the parents realized. Thus their cooperation is more readily seen by the parents, and the parents can more easily see the false dichotomy between the good and the bad child (Dreikurs & Soltz, 1964).

This confrontation with the entire family because it increases trust and family cohesion, shortens the number of counseling sessions needed. Generally a family is asked to sit in the audience for two sessions previous to being seen for counseling themselves. They are then seen for typically eight to ten sessions. By seeing the family as a unit, five to seven sessions is more common.

The second recent development in family counseling is based upon a method which Dreikurs (1970) indicated that Dr. Raymond Lowe discovered while working with extremely uncommunicative schizophrenics. Rather than talking to the patient, the therapist talks to a third person, often the patient's relative, about the patient and his behavior. I happened upon this method because my practicum students, although supposed professionals in training, would often turn post practicum sessions into gossip or discouraging talk about the family. It seemed logical that if the family were still present, the students would couch their questions and comments in a more encouraging rather than discouraging form. Mental health workers particularly those who have been in the field for some time, tend to make discouraging, negative diagnostic statements about patients which are of little value to anyone rather than emphasizing positive patient characteristics. Having the family in the audience subsequently did bring about a great increase in encouraging communication content and a decrease in negative, nonproductive communication about the family. However, the real serendipitous finding was even more beneficial to the family because it placed the family in a more receptive reeducative position.

I typically see a family for about one half hour and then invite them to sit in the audience while the audience and I discuss the family dynamics. As a practicum teacher, the family knows that in addition to other families the audience is also composed of counselors in training. Therefore, my teaching

is expected. However, anytime there is an audience this method can be used since the clients come to realize that all psychotherapy is reeducation. A chalk board often facilitates the education emphasis. Diagraming the family interaction, e.g., the mother, father, oldest, and youngest, all aligned against the middle child and how that division developed, enhances the didactic atmosphere. In instances where there is not an audience available, I will inform the family, with their permission, that my cocounselor and I will discuss them (the client, couple, or family) as if they were not present.

This method allows the counselor to give the family a large amount of reeducative information without having to worry about the defensive reaction of the clients. Since the family is just being discussed there is no need for them to feel that they must respond or give a retort to the counselor. Talking about the family rather than speaking directly to them is especially helpful when one of the members is a "righter" (one who feels that he must be right in order to have a place). Often such sessions get bogged down by the righter nit picking over every issue or always wanting to have the last word. The righter, since he is not being directly addressed can listen because he understands that during the discussion it is not right for him to enter in.

A case in point was a family where father was a righter, mother a martyr, and the three teen-age children were aligned with mother against father. Whatever the point of discussion, the father had to have the last word and rarely agreed with any point made by other family members. He was aided by a functional hearing problem. If he did not care for the question addressed to him, he could not understand the question being asked or seemed to miss the content of the question. Two of the three children also showed righter characteristics. Certainly Adlerians have known effective methods for dealing with righters (Shulman, 1972) but the method of asking the family to sit in the audience while we discuss them is definitely a short circuit to therapeutic satisfaction.

Content of the discussion can include whatever family dynamics are operating and need to be understood for reeducation to occur or the discussion can afford an opportunity to reiterate the same reeducative information given during the session if the material was not fully understood or the counselor was having difficulty making his point. In the above example, some of the post counseling discussion included a more detailed discourse on the family constellation, some of the dynamics occurring during the session among family members and among family members and the counselor, illustrations of direct attempts by family members to prevent change, statements which directly said that mother needed to show faith in the children since they were strong enough to deal with father without interference from mother, exploding the myth that father was the "bad guy" in the family and that if only he changed everything would be OK, and stating my concern for the oldest girl who displayed great skill at defeating males (including the counselor) as a method of masculine protest.

The opportunity to discuss the dynamics occurring during the session is especially beneficial. The “here and now” aspect is a clear example of the family interaction patterns which occur at home but have more meaning when seen during the session. The subsequent discussion aids the family, and gives the audience and students in training propitious insight.

The combined methods of seeing the entire family as a unit and inviting the family to sit in the audience while their family dynamics are being discussed has increased the effectiveness of my counseling and shortened the number of sessions required.

References

- Dreikurs, R. Workshop at West Virginia University, Morgantown, West Virginia, August 1968.
- Dreikurs, R. Workshop at Ninimo School District, British Columbia, Canada, February 1970.
- Dreikurs, R., Corsini, R., & Sonstegard, M. & Lowe, R. *Adlerian family counseling: A manual for counselors*. Eugene, Oregon: University of Oregon Press, 1957.
- Dreikurs, R., & Soltz, V. *Children: The challenge*. New York: Hawthorn Books, Inc., 1964.
- Lowe, R. Saturday session at University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon, March 1970.
- Pew, W. & Pew, M. Counseling demonstration at annual meeting of ASAP in Houston, Texas, May 1972.
- Shulman, B. Confrontation techniques. *Journal of Individual Psychology*, 1972, 28(2), 177.