

Family and Marriage Education "Recording"

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Family and Marriage Education Centers in a combined format have been shown (Pew & Pew, 1972) to be an exciting and viable way to help people become more aware of strategies to alleviate difficulties in adult-child and adult-adult relationships. Current experience in two centers, one that has been operating in a large city for approximately 4 years and another in a smaller community for 18 months, has enhanced and supported the previous suppositions. It has been observed that the dynamics of a center change when there is a focus on intimate relationships of adult as well as an adult-child relationship. Research (Satir, 1967) indicating that a healthy marital relationship spawns positiveness in broader family dynamics can also be supported through observations made in the Family and Marriage Education format.

Observations in our Family and Marriage Centers have been made in an organized and consistent fashion through the use of a recorder and a recording format that has been modified from the original recording work of Lowe (1974) and Dreikurs (1959). The recording format that we use is broader, due to both adult-adult and adult-child interviews, yet is more specific in several areas. We view the purpose of recording as threefold: (a) to provide a permanent record of the sessions' activities, (b) to provide a ready reference for the co-counselors prior to subsequent sessions, and (c) to provide a training tool for counselors in training.

Throughout the year several Family Counseling and Group Counseling classes, taught by the writers, have observed and recorded both marriage and family education sessions. The students are encouraged to participate as fully as possible in the sessions and, if they wish, may have their recordings critiqued for discussion in the classroom setting. We have had occasion to draw on the permanent record in marital situations that end in dissolution proceedings or in refreshing our memories when other referrals are necessary. The Family and Marriage Education Center, as a part of the community mental health program, receives a large number of referrals from other public and

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private care-givers throughout the community and from the mental health center staff. Consequently, it is necessary to utilize the recordings as a permanent record of information so that appropriate referrals can be made. It is our practice to review the recordings of previous sessions prior to continuation interviews to allow for a common memory bond for the co-counselors and for presession planning.

Recording Format

Essentially, the format of the recording form is self-explanatory; however, a few simple guidelines are essential to effective recording and use of the recording by the co-counselors.

The recorder is asked to report the actual happenings of the session in a very concise and objective fashion. Interactions that show movement on the part of any participant are recorded. Direct quotations may be recorded, since they may indicate the attitude of the person speaking. All recommendations from the counselor that may or may not be agreed on by the co-educators (interviewee) are recorded along with principles presented as supporting the recommendations. It is essential to record minilectures and their acceptance by the audience, since they provide guidelines for future presentations. These general guidelines seem to be adequate for recording to begin and to become usable for future reference by the co-counselors.

Family and Marriage Education Center Recording Information Form

Date: _____

Co-Counselors: _____

Session: Marriage or family.

Recorder: _____

1. Family constellation. Typically, at the beginning of each session, the names, ages, and length of time together are placed on a chalkboard in front of the audience. Any extended family or semipermanent others are also included. This procedure gives us an opportunity to learn something about the family and to help the audience learn about family constellation dynamics.

2. Who was there—adults and children. Names of co-educators and family members present.

3. Description of each person present—adults and children. Recorders record any personal information, such as physique, style of dress, or any outstanding characteristics.

4. Presented problem—adults and children. The presented problem is garnered from the question: What would you like to discuss with us tonight?

5. Goldmines—adults and children. Goldmines are those casual items discovered during the interview that the participant may not have understood as a problem but, when probed, reveal pertinent information.

6. Goals of behavior—adults and children. Goal behavior of adults for our purpose is defined as the intended result of any identified behavior. When identifying goal behaviors with children, it is in terms of the four goals of misbehavior.

7. Techniques used. The techniques used may include the typical day, creative complaining, marriage conference, minilectures on principles, the four goals, number one priority, temperature of the marriage, family constellation. Any creative activities that can be justified through sound psychological principles are sought out by the co-counselors and the audience.

8. Recommendations—adults and children. A typical scene where goal 2 (seeking power) is identified may end with a recommendation to the parents to use the "bathroom treatment" to extricate the person in conflict from the power struggle. The child is advised of the fact that the parents will be applying this treatment.

9. Agreements—adults and children. Agreements to the recommendation are sought by the co-counselors for a limited time period, usually 1 week.

10. Audience questions and comments. Audience members often ask questions such as: Why did you make that recommendation? Does he feel guilty about his decision? Why is he so insistent in his demands? Comments include: "I once had that problem and here is how I handled it," or "I noticed friction between them when they were talking!"

11. Minilectures—adults and children. Throughout the sessions, time is taken to teach through the use of short 2- or 3-minute lectures. Topics may include, inferiority-superiority, compensation, number one priority, myths of marriage, or discussion of one or more principles from *Children: The Challenge*. Audience members respond very favorably to these short presentations and often ask questions as a result of the lecture.

12. Reaction to minilectures. The recorder is asked to record "the pulse of the audience" as a result of the topics presented. Was it accepted, were people interested, how appropriate was it to the topic being discussed by the participants?

13. Attitudes. The attitude of the varied groups is the subjective perception of the person doing the recording. Examples may include: *Name* seems generally calm with occasional spurts of emotion; *Name* seems confident and pleased with the progress she and her daughter have made; the *audience* seems very supportive and offered many suggestions. The purpose of this "attitude area" is to gain an overall "feeling" tone of the participants.

14. Activity center summary. The activity center is the child observation and training room for the family and marriage education center. During each session with parents, a report is given by a staff member of the observations made of their child or children. Reporters are asked to be as objective and encouraging as possible when reporting.

Summary. Recordings of the activities of a family and marriage education center are a necessary and useful aid in the development of counseling skills, program development, appropriate referrals, and for a permanent record for the center. Experience has shown that a record is as essential to a "public" educational activity as it is to those more traditional behind the closed-doors "therapy" activities. The recording format presented herein has, in our center activities, proven itself to be a useful and helpful tool.

Family and Marriage Education Center Sample Recording Information

Date: May 3, 1977

Co-counselors: Dr. Bill Pew; Dr. Gordon Fuller

Session: Family

Recorder: Karen Halvorson

1. Family constellation. Mary, 31; Charles, 35; Tom, 9; Jeff, 2; married 9 years.

2. Who was there? *Adults:* Mary came to the Center; her husband did not come. *Children:* Both boys participated in the activity center and later on stage.

3. Description of each person present. *Adults:* Mary is a very large woman. She had only attended the Center once previously, and she

slowly, nervously approached the stage. During the conversation she was very nervous and wrung her hands. She tried to keep her composure and fought back tears. She looked frequently down at the floor.

Children: Both boys easily, cheerfully, confidently approached the stage. Tom was dressed in a suit and looked very nice. He cared for his little brother but never spoke for him. He had a pleasing smile, big brown eyes, and seemed comfortable speaking before such a large audience. Jeff smiled a lot, spoke little, but acted bravely and unafraid. He spoke quietly when addressed, but he let Tom do most of the talking. Both boys showed they really cared about their mother.

4. Presented problem. Mary listed three main problems with her older son Tom: (a) He doesn't come right home after school; she never knows where he is and this frustrates her. (b) Tom doesn't clean up his room. (c) Tom doesn't study his homework. Mary admitted that all three of these problems make her feel sad. Mary tries to punish Tom for his behavior, but he tries to get revenge by staying late after school, purposely not cleaning his room, and avoiding his homework. Her emotion of sadness reveals she is locked in a punishment challenge. The counselors suggest that Tom has not learned to be responsible and suspected this was partly due to someone else (mother) being responsible for him.

5. Goldmines. Mother "talks" when she doesn't know how to handle the problem. She recognized this behavior in herself. Mother also realized she takes responsibility for the boys' fights. Later, Tom admitted he didn't come home from school because he's trying to get back at mother. The same was true of his messy room. Tom knew and said this makes his mother sad.

6. Goal of behavior. *Adults:* Mary's goals—Mary stated she wished to have a better relationship with her boys. She is frustrated and doesn't know what to do so she talks. She wants suggestions for action. She wants Tom to come home after school, pick up his room, and study. She also wants the boys to fight less between themselves and to stay away from fights with their father.

Children: The boys are "mother-deaf" since she talks rather than acts. Tom admitted his room was his responsibility, and he said he wasn't happy when he tried to hurt her. The counselors' advice was directed at helping the boys take on responsibility.

7. Techniques used and results. The counselors asked Mary several questions about her day with her children. When her emotions were hard to control and she was on the verge of tears, discussion veered to minilectures about how her problems are typical of many parents. They then returned to Mary's personal situation. This helped Mary gain and keep her composure on stage and made her feel a part of problems many parents have, not just Mary.

8. Recommendations. The counselors recommended Mary suddenly get a severe case of laryngitis for 1 week so she won't be able to talk to her children except in whispers. Her second recommendation was to stay out of fights between the boys and their father. When the boys run to her for sympathy, she must not get involved.

9. Agreements. Mary reluctantly agreed for 1 week to whisper. She was told she'll discover how much she does talk and learn other ways to relate to her children than talking. She also agreed to stay out of battles and agreed that the boys probably did not need her protection. When the boys were told of the recommendation, Tom didn't think it was fair that they could talk louder than mother!

10. Questions and comments from the audience. The audience really encouraged both the mother and the boys. The people were impressed with the maturity of the boys, how they each talked for themselves, how Tom looked after his little brother. The audience admired Mary's determination, courage, and concern for her family. They reinforced her in the fact that "she really has neat kids."

11. Minilectures. Whenever parents don't know what to do, they talk. Every parent wants to be a good parent, but we don't have any training. We don't know how to deal with our young instinctively. Our society no longer has a tradition to lean on. Punishment temporarily alters behavior but doesn't change it permanently.

Anything a parent wants for a child more than the child wants for himself, he won't try to get. Children often use this issue to get back at the parents. Asking a child why he does something is a complete waste of time because he usually doesn't know himself.

12. Reactions to minilectures. Mary realized she was not alone in her situation. The minilectures gave her time to compose herself and see her situation more clearly. They gave the audience a chance to learn from Mary's situation.

13. Attitudes. *Mary:* Mary was determined and courageous. She showed a genuine concern for her family. She wanted help and was willing to try the recommendations.

Children: During the interview they showed respect and concern for their mother. They showed recognition for their behavior and nodded that the counselors understood the situation.

Audience: The audience was very impressed with Mary's children and their attitude toward their mother. The boys understood the situation and the mother received reinforcement from many members of the audience.

14. Activity center report. Both boys played nicely and were well-behaved. Jeff watched Tom, while Tom spent most of his time helping care for the younger children.

References

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