CLINICAL BRIEF · PATH TO FREEDOM ALONGSIDE

Family and Couples Systems Therapy

Differentiation of self within the system

Family and couples therapy locates difficulty in patterns among people and treats change as a property of the system. The path is worked by one person alone. Its emphasis on roles and adopted positions parallels the systemic view of a person's function in a family, and its individual scope makes it a candidate companion to work on differentiation, subject to the therapist's judgment about the system.

Clinical frame

- Circular causality, homeostasis, and symptoms as functions of the system
- Roles, coalitions, boundaries, and triangles (structural and Bowenian traditions)
- Differentiation of self as a central developmental aim (Bowen)
- Attachment focused models, such as emotionally focused therapy, address bond and emotional responsiveness between partners

Path to Freedom frame

- Examines roles and relationships as masks a person adopted, done by that person alone
- No exercise requires another person, a witness, or a return to a relationship
- Attention to what is the person's own and what was inherited
- No treatment of couples or families

Points of conceptual fit

Differentiation and Alignment ALIGNMENT	Differentiation is the capacity to hold a position of one's own while staying connected. Reflection on which roles are the person's own supports that capacity from the individual side.
Roles and masks DISCOVERY	Systemic therapy sees a role as sustained by the expectations of others. The path's account of adopted roles gives one member language for their part without assigning blame to another.
Change and homeostasis REFINEMENT	When one member changes, the system often pushes back. Refinement tests a discovered self against friction, and the therapist can help the client anticipate the system's response.

Division of labor

The clinician

- Assessment of the system and its patterns
- Work on communication, boundaries, and attachment
- Safety screening

The path

- Individual reflection on adopted roles
- Done alone, involving no partner or family member
- Pointing the client back to the therapist

Coordination and cautions

Individual change can perturb a couple or family, so the therapist should know if a member begins the path. Where coercion, control, or fear of a partner is present, safety comes first and the clinician decides what work is appropriate. The path does not treat relational abuse.

Return to the clinician when a memory returns with more force than reflection can hold, when sleep, appetite, or functioning change sharply, when panic, numbness, or a sense of being unreal appears, when there is fear of someone in the person's life, or when there are thoughts of ending life or harming someone (988 in the United States).

A proposed conceptual integration offered by The Autonomy Commission. It is not a manualized protocol and has not been empirically evaluated. The Path to Freedom is not psychotherapy, offers no diagnosis or treatment, and defers to the treating clinician on every clinical decision. Nothing is shared without the client's written consent.

An institute for the self that was always there.

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