

EFTA Conference
(Glasgow, 2007)

Being There, Building Bridges, Creating Space for Dialogue

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Korner & Brown (1990)



Research of family therapists in the U.S.A. :

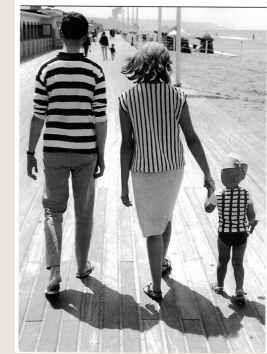
- 40 % of family therapists *never* include children in their therapies
- 31 % of family therapists invited children to the session, *without really including them* in the therapy.

Children are trouble for the therapist....

“They are not motivated... a lot of noise ... they don’t answer questions ... they disturb the conversation... they don’t stay in their seat... they would rather stay at home ...”

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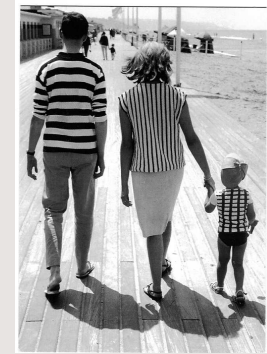
Stith, Rosen & McCollum (1996)



Interviews with children (5-13 yrs old) who were in family therapy:

- Children want to be present and participate in the session, even when they are not the focus of the therapy.
- Children don't want to talk all the time: they also want to *do* things

Johnson & Thomas (1999)



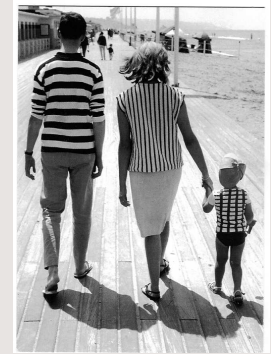
Research focused on the reasons why family therapists sometimes exclude children from the session:

- Because the therapist feels uncomfortable around children (almost 50% of the cases of exclusion)
- Because the child has an externalizing problem (instead of internalizing problem)
- Because it's a two parent family (instead of a one-parent family)
- Because it's a problem of adults (instead of a child problem)

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Zone of discomfort

(Jim Wilson, 2007)



The therapist often has to take risks
and work in the “*zone of discomfort*”

... not feeling comfortable all the time
comes with the territory

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Important task for family therapy training...



Train young therapists to be more at ease and
have *more confidence* in working with children...

in such a way that

they learn to *bear discomfort, insecurity and chaos* in
the session,

and *to be helpful* to the family with young
children...

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Important task for
the family therapist in the session...



To deal with his/her discomfort
in working with children...

To use it to *be helpful* to the family with young
children...

*‘What should I do or say,
and how should I position myself?’*

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Dealing with discomfort?

A model of therapist reflection



Research of the Therapist Inner Conversation (TIC):

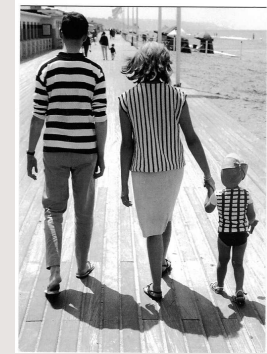
Study of the inner reflections of experienced therapists in practice (See Rober, in press)

→ Experience – Danger – Opportunity Model

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Based on research of the TIC:

Experience-Danger-Opportunity model

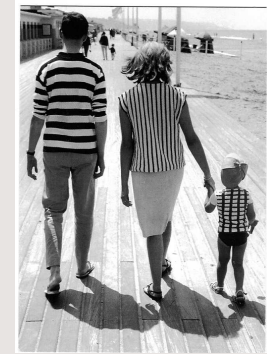
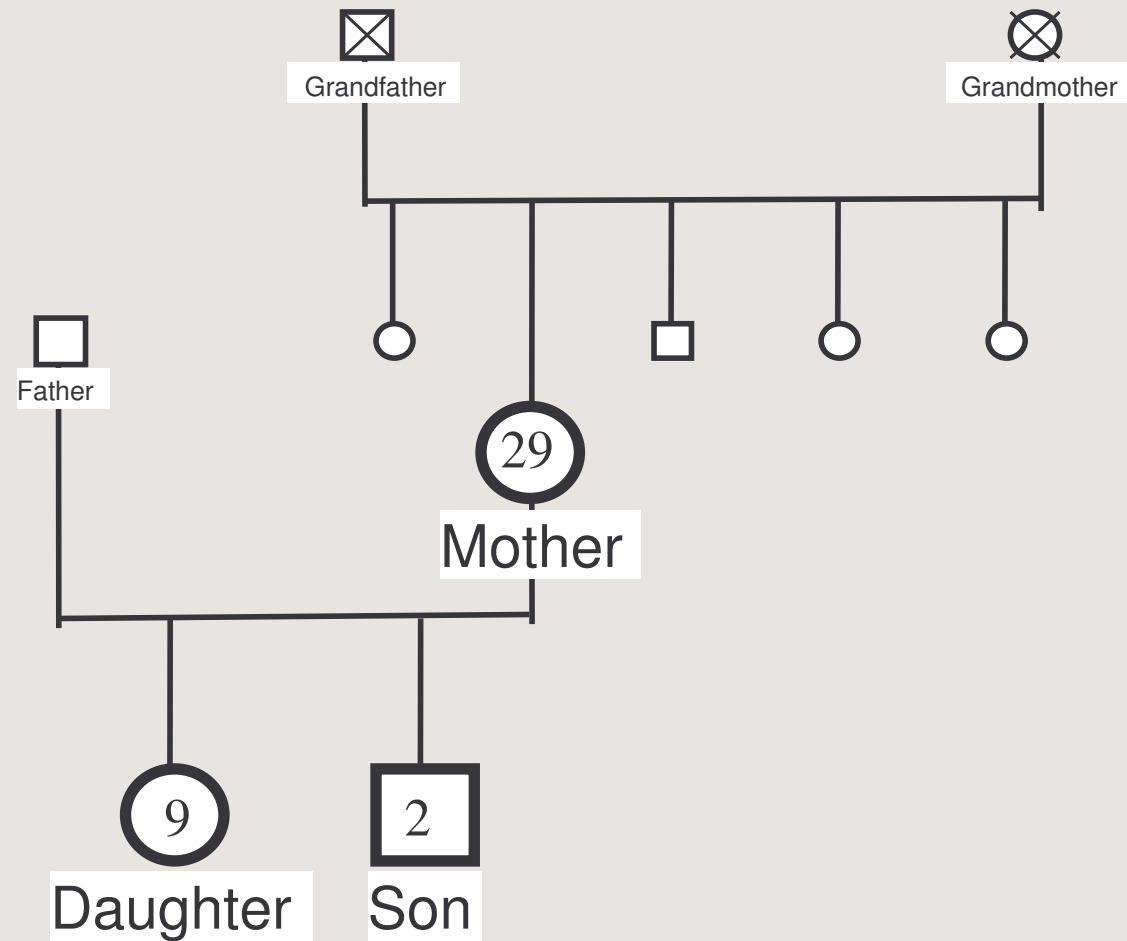


Important questions in therapist's inner conversation:

- What do I experience? (*experience*)
- How can I avoid to get involved in destructive scenarios in the session? (*danger*)
- How can I create space for the telling of stories that were not told before? (*opportunity*)

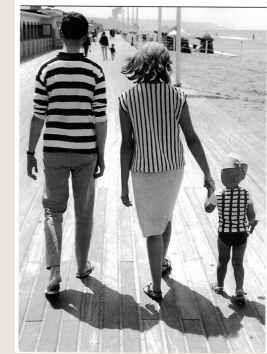
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A case



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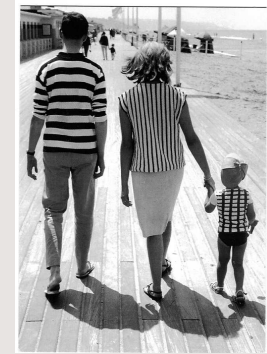
Experience – Danger - Opportunity



<i>Experience of the therapist</i>	irritation/compassion
<i>Danger : Scenario he feels invited into</i>	Blaming and labelling the one who irritates me. Protecting 'victim', comforting, trying to compensate for whatever is missing, ...
<i>Opportunity : Space to create in the dialogue</i>	Talking about good moments between both family members, trying to understand and to see the "good" in the one who irritates me, ...

How it often goes...

danger-experience-opportunity



1. Realising I have become involved in a destructive scenario in the session (sensing the *danger*)
2. Acknowledging the *experience* that lay on the base of this (irritation/fear/impotence/...).
3. Considering the question “How can I create space for the telling of stories that were not told before?” (*opportunity*)

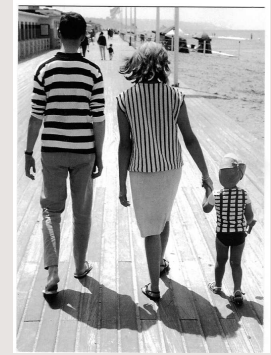
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Some references



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- Rober, P. (2005). The therapist's self in dialogical family therapy: Some ideas about not-knowing and the therapist's inner conversation. *Family Process*, 44, 477-495.
- Rober, P., Elliott, R., Buysse, A., Loots, G. & De Corte, K. (in press). What's on the therapist's mind? A grounded theory analysis of family therapist reflections during individual therapy sessions. (accepted for publication in *Psychotherapy Research*)
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