

ENHANCING RELATIONSHIPS & WORKING WITH FAMILIES

SPRING 2026 SOWK 487W WEEK 03

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CONTINUING TO LEARN ABOUT FAMILIES

WEEK 03 PLAN

AGENDA

Review family system framework

Discuss family engagement

Practice with starting services

Implementing first/second order strategies

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Demonstrate the ability to apply the family systems framework to assess key dynamics in family functioning.

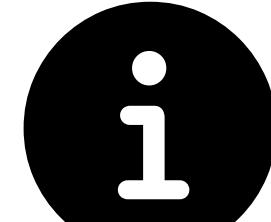
Distinguish between first-order and second-order interventions and identify appropriate applications for each.

Reflect on their own family experiences and beliefs to better understand their professional approach to working with families.



FAMILY SYSTEMS FRAMEWORK

ASSESSMENT DIMENSIONS CASE SITUATIONS



Each group has two situations.
Don't jump ahead. Start with
just the first situation

- **First Situation:** Talk with your group about what type of information you would want to request or what questions you would ask
- **Second Situation:** Choose group members to act out the different family roles

Homeostasis
Boundaries and Boundary Maintenance
Family Decision Making, Hierarchy, and Power
Family Roles
Communication Patterns in Families
Family Life Cycle
Family Rules
Social Environment
Family Adaptive Capacity (Stressors and Strengths)

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

CONSIDERATIONS WE NEED TO MAKE AS WE ENGAGE WITH FAMILIES

Joining

Cultural perspectives on engagement

Differences in communication styles

Hierarchical considerations in communication

Authority of the social worker

Preventing alliances

Dynamics of minority status and culture in experience



THE INITIAL SESSION

PROCESS OF ENGAGEMENT

- Establish a personal relationship with individual and group
- Clarify expectations and explore reservations about session
- Clarify roles and the nature of the helping process
- Clarify choices about participation in the helping process
- Elicit family's perceptions of the problem
- Identify wants and needs of family members
- Define the problem as a family problem
- Emphasize individual and family strengths
- Establish individual and family goals

As a group, first talk though a couple of examples of what kinds of questions you might ask or what that might look like, then role play a couple of the scenarios.

What Would You Do

- In a client's home
- In an emergency room in a hospital
- Parent-child situation in which the child is the identified client
- With a minority family where extended kin are present
- LGBTQ+ family
- Elderly minority grandmother caring for her grandchildren
- Parent-child conflict with teenage children
- Immigrant family with school-aged children, where the parents speak their native language
- A child or children have been placed outside of the home

Something new

SECOND ORDER STRATEGIES

**attempt to foster
changes to family
structure itself**

Expanding on what is already there

FIRST ORDER STRATEGIES

**attempt to solve problems
within the current family
structure**

SECOND ORDER STRATEGIES

Something new

Expanding on what is already there

FIRST ORDER STRATEGIES

- Problem-solving approaches
- Skills training
- Contingency contracting



Something new

SECOND ORDER STRATEGIES

- **Modifying misconceptions and cognitive distortions**
- **Modifying communication patterns**
- **Assessing positive and negative feedback**
- **Teaching positive feedback**
- **Modifying family rules**
- **Modifying family alignments and hierarchy**
- **Structural mapping**
- **Family sculpting**
- **Joined families**

- **One-the-spot interventions**
- **Focus on the process rather than the content**
- **Give feedback that is descriptive and neutral rather than general or evaluative**
- **Balance interventions to divide responsibility**
- **Redirect hostile, blaming messages**
- **Assisting families to disengage from conflict**

Expanding on what is already there

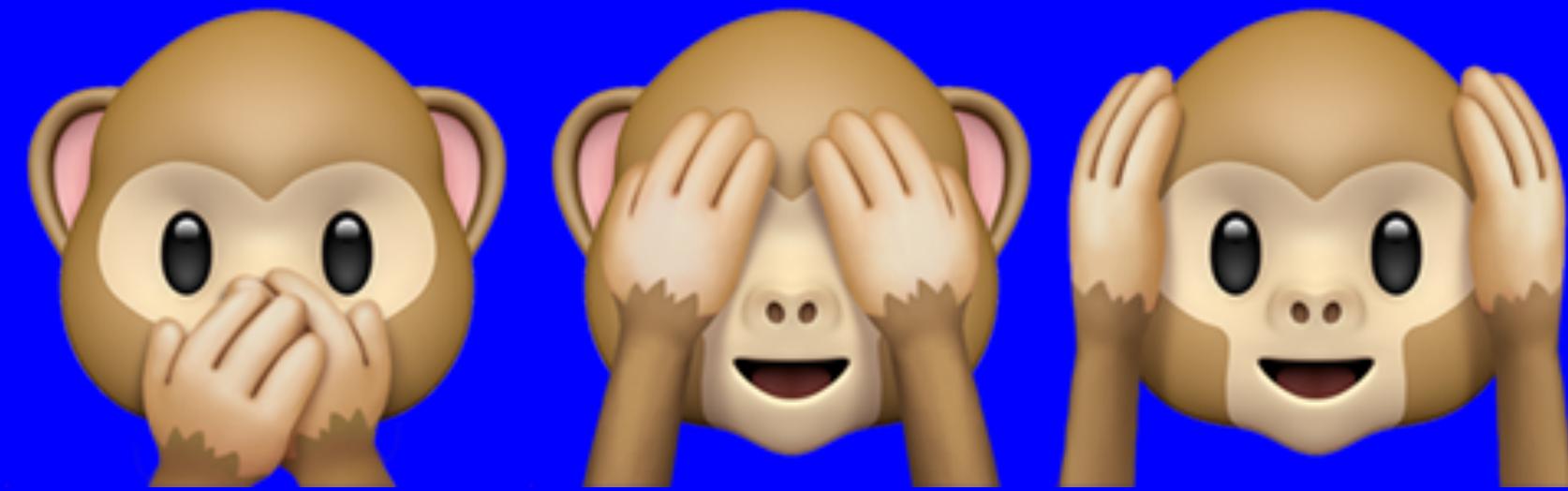
FIRST ORDER STRATEGIES

15 FAIR FIGHTING RULES



Validating vs. Invalidating

Statements





TIME
ours



PROBLEM SOLVING APPROACHES

CONSIDERATIONS FOR ADAPTING TO FAMILIES

1

Engage simultaneous with both family members

2

Recognize that sometimes the focus will move to a second order strategy

3

Take time to understand power and hierarchy

4

Understand the social relationships in the process



Problem Solving
With an Adolescent Mother and her Foster Parent

[Silence]

WHAT DOES YOUR FAMILY LOOK LIKE

WORKING WITH PARTNERS DISCUSS THE FOLLOWING:

Identify some examples of verbal or nonverbal metacommunication that you have used.

Describe how an unspoken rule in your family governs the behavior of family members.

List three societal beliefs and reflect upon how these beliefs may affect the families that you work with.

