

# **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.**

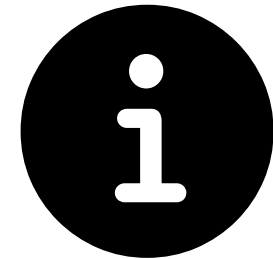
**Distinguish between first-order and second-order interventions and identify appropriate applications for each.**

**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 through 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 OUTS



# PROBLEM SOLVING APPROACHES

## CONSIDERATIONS FOR ADAPTING TO FAMILIES

1

Engage  
simultaneous with  
both family  
members

2

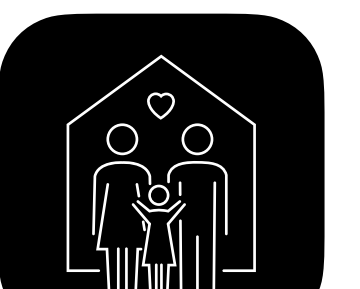
Recognize that  
sometimes the  
focus will move to a  
second order  
strategy

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.**

