



# Strategic Family Therapy

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## About the Presenter

- Dr.Suresh Kumar Murugesan is a passionate Professor, researcher and Mental Health Practitioner from Madurai, Tamil Nadu, India
- At present he is Heading the department of Psychology, The American College, Madurai and Adjunct Professor of School of Behavioural Sciences and Education at TAU
- He is very keen in learning new research studies in behavioural Sciences and open to learn.
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## Strategic family therapy

**Strategic family therapy** is a form of family therapy that seeks to address specific problems that can be addressed in a shorter time frame than other therapy modalities. It is one of the major models of both family and brief psychotherapy.



## Strategic family therapy (SFT)

Strategic family therapy (SFT) combines two major therapeutic models - strategic therapy and family therapy - a combination of therapies that necessitate a carefully crafted plan to effectively manage or ameliorate a family's particular problems or issues.

# What is Strategic Therapy?

Perhaps the best explanation for strategic therapy is to describe what it is not: strategic therapy is not a person laying on a couch describing what kind of inner turmoil or thoughts he or she is having or experiencing, what past childhood experiences contributed to a sense of self, or how a particular psychological issue could have arisen from past experiences.

Strategic therapists are problem-solvers and solution-finders. They are the referees and coaches, not the spectators passively observing the action played out before them. They aren't concerned with where or how the problem started, only how to address it and solve it at this point in time.

According to a website devoted to strategic therapy pioneer Jay Haley, "strategic therapy is any type of therapy where the therapist initiates what happens during therapy and designs a particular approach for each problem."

The strategic therapist becomes actively involved and responsible in helping clients turn their lives around, in helping them strategically plan, execute, and measure "game winning" outcomes.

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# Stages

Haley outlined five integral stages that all strategic therapists implement:

- Identify solvable problems
- Set goals
- Design interventions to achieve those goals
- Examine the responses
- Examine the outcome of the therapy.

# What is Family Therapy?

Family therapy, also called family systems therapy, considers families as systems, systems that organically develop rules and interactions, and systems that affect the psychological health of all those involved. Just as a governmental or organizational system affects individuals, so does the family system. Psychologists consider the family system, however, to have the greatest influence on individuals' lives.

Family therapists believe that any human problem can be addressed and helped by involving the entire family. Family therapists don't draw a causative link between pathology and family dynamics but rather show how family interactions or the lack of interactions contribute to the problems, often supporting them in dysfunctional ways.

# How does Combining Strategic and Family Therapy Work?

Strategic family therapy combines a strategic approach to finding a constructive form of change for individuals within the individual's immediate social context – namely the family.

Within the safety of therapeutic settings, strategic family therapists replicate family interactions and conversations, prompting and engaging participants with provocative questions and discussions. During these sessions, problems present themselves, and the therapist engineers the situation so that participants come to realize and understand the socially impaired interactions taking place.

The therapist also knows how to uncover the family's strengths and abilities at solving its own problems, drawing on internal resources that they hadn't before acknowledged or even realized that each family member possessed.

Haley believed that the therapist initiates the family therapy, and takes direct responsibility for influencing people.

His work in strategic family therapy began to take shape in the 1950s. During this decade, his observations, along with other psychologists, questioned the ineffective results in family therapy using traditional forms of psychoanalysis. The dismal results were especially apparent while working with populations from lower socio-economic classes, populations whose severe social problems stemming from poverty could not be categorized by "intrapsychic conflicts"- a therapy that was more of a panacea for those of the middle classes.

# Haley's Model

During the 1950s and 1960s, Haley along with a number of others began developing alternative models for working with families employing more solution-focused techniques, and Haley's model became known as strategic family therapy.

However, a significant part of the strategic therapy model incorporated the work of another family therapy pioneer, Salvador Minuchin. For more information read about Minuchin's [structural family therapy model](#). Minuchin's model also stressed a solution-focused approach over psychoanalysis, or other types of intrapsychic exploration.

Haley's model for effective family therapy can be summarized as follows:

- Individuals don't develop problems in isolation, but as a response to their social environment.
- In strategic family therapy, the therapist develops techniques for solving problems specific to the family's interactions and structure.
- The therapist sees the problem as part of a sequence of interactions of those in the individual's immediate social environment.
- Symptoms of a particular pathology or behavior must be studied in relation to the social unit or family system.
- The emphasis of the therapy is not on the individual but on the social situation or structure.
- The goals of strategic family therapy are to solve problems, achieve the family's goals, and ultimately, change an individual's dysfunctional or problematic behaviors.

## **What Is Family Therapy?**

Family therapy centers around the idea of families being their systems. In the psychological context, the system will interact and have rules in their way, and this can affect people. The way your parents raise you has quite the influence on how you'll be as an adult.

When it comes to family therapists, they believe that the way families do or do not interact is the main contribution to difficult family dynamics, and they'll try to think of ways families can better communicate with each other to have a healthy relationship.

## **What Is Strategic Therapy?**

When you think of the word strategic, what do you think of? Perhaps a general sitting in his quarters, trying to figure out the best way to win the war. Or a coach who is thinking of the best way to win the game. A strategic therapist is not going just to ask questions to their clients and hope something sticks. Instead, they're going to think of creative solutions to the problems their clients are experiencing.

They're not interested in just figuring out the cause of the problem. They're going to teach you how to solve the problem that lies in front of you. The strategic therapist isn't going to listen to your problems but instead, work with you to find the solution.

Therefore, it's safe to say that strategic family therapy combines these two ideas.

# The Steps Of Strategic Therapy

Every counselor will perform strategic therapy in their way, but there are some basic steps that most therapists will follow. Here's the basic outline:

## 1. Find Solvable Problems

The therapist will listen to the client's problems and look for doable solutions to those problems. Some issues will take longer to solve than others, but some of the issues can be solved easily. The therapists will look for the best solution that can be accomplished with ease.

## 2. Create Goals

Perhaps the best motivator is the concept of a goal. You reach the end of the goal, and you feel so great. Imagining your accomplishments as a race is perhaps the best way to win, and your therapist will know that. They'll create short and long-term goals.

## 3. Make A Plan To Accomplish Goals

As we said, a strategic therapist is like a coach, and they'll work with you to formulate the best plan to accomplish the goals. They'll try to tailor the goals according to how the person works. Some people work better with groups, some alone, and others work better with a little help all the time. It all depends.

## 4. See How They Accomplish Their Goals

A good therapist won't just set goals and push their clients on their merry way. They're going to follow up with their clients and see how they accomplish the goals, or if they're even doing so at all. If there are any hurdles to the goals, the therapists will intervene and figure out a new strategy to accomplish the goals.

## 5. Success

Once everyone has accomplished their goals, the therapist will then get everyone together and talk about how well they did, and also teach them how they can accomplish any future goals.

## **Strategic Family Therapy (SFT)**

Strategic family therapy, or SFT, takes strategic and family therapies and turns them into a way for families to solve problems and become stronger.

SFT will study how the family interacts and then try to replicate it. The therapist will become the family member as they ask questions and spark debate. The problems the family has will soon show like a sore thumb, and the therapist then can point out all the flaws in their interactions. However, where there are flaws, there are also strengths, and a good therapist will use these strengths and use them to the family's advantage.

Everyone likes to pay attention to the negative, and plenty of families don't realize the good in them. By pointing out the good, a therapist can make the family interact with one another in a much better manner.

## Haley's Model Of Family Therapy

Jay Haley, the pioneer of strategic therapy, created family therapy in the '50s. He observed how families interacted and how most psychologists didn't know how to handle them, creating results that were not very effective. Especially for dysfunctional families of lower classes.

Haley worked for the next few decades creating models that were centered around families. He soon created his model of family therapy, and this is the summary of it.

1. How individuals develop problems: Haley believed that individuals do not create problems while they're alone, but as a way to respond to the people around them. Thus, families are the perfect place to develop problems.
2. Developing solutions: the therapists will then create ways for the families to solve problems. These solutions will be specific to how the family interacts and how the dynamic family works.
3. Studying the family's behavior: the therapist will study how the family behaves. A particular behavior will be scrutinized, and this will then be compared to how the family responds to this behavior.
4. The therapy will not be about the person, but how the family structure is. The therapists will look at certain family situations and see how the best way to solve them will be. They will then create strategies for the families to use to help them solve the problems without any fuss.
5. The change will soon happen. If the therapist is successful, they should help the family eliminate any behaviors or issues that are tearing the family apart. For instance, if the family is dealing with an unruly teenager, they'll create a solution that satisfies both teen and parent.

## Is It Effective?

Perhaps the biggest question you want to be answered before you seek therapy is how effective it is. SFT has been around for over half a century, so they are doing something right. It's quite an effective way to solve family issues.

With that said, SFT involves participation from your family as well. The therapist isn't a magician who can wave away your problems with a magic wand; instead, they're going to work with you to create solutions to all your problems. If your family doesn't put in any effort to accomplish those goals, then it won't be effective. But by following the strategies your therapist gives you, you'll be surprised at how effective SFT can be.

With that said, you should pick a therapist who has a good rating. Not all therapists are equal, and you'll want one who specializes in SFT. Read the reviews, make sure they're qualified, and then give them a try.

## Some Causes Of Difficult Family Dynamics

Before you seek help, it may be helpful to consider the causes of the difficulties of your family dynamics. Here is a list of common causes of family dysfunction.

- 1. Parents Are Too Strict:** The child believes that the parent's authority is too strong, be it religious, financial, personal, and so on. Sometimes, the child has a point. Other times, the child needs to accept the authority. And there are cases where it's a bit of both.
- 2. Parents Aren't Supportive:** Be it emotionally or financially. The parent may be too busy with work to talk with their child, and this can result in dysfunction.
- 3. Addictive Personalities:** The parents may have an addiction to gambling, alcohol, and other substances, leading to family dysfunctions.

# References

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