

Certificate in Systemic Practice with Families and Couples, with the Institute of Family Therapy

I am an experienced social worker, who works for an organisation that offers therapeutic work to children and young people and their families. The funding from FPSA enabled me to undertake the Certificate in Systemic Practice with Families and Couples, with the Institute of Family Therapy (IFT) in London.

This is an introductory course to systemic theory and skills, and comprises of plenary sessions and smaller tutorial groups, which provided an opportunity to practice and develop my skills. We also undertook formal assignments throughout the academic year. The Certificate in Systemic Practice with Families and Couples course took place for one day a fortnight, from October 2019 to June 2020. The course can be both an end in itself; or part of the Postgraduate Certificate in Systemic Practice for students who go on to complete Year 2. It can also be the beginning of a four-year training to become a systemic psychotherapist (MSc in Family and Systemic Psychotherapy).

I would not have been able to embark on the course without the funding from FPSA, and I am very grateful for this. The course enabled me to build on the knowledge, experience and skills I already have in working with young people and their families by adding systemic thinking and skills to my practice. I have been able to creatively transfer my new learning into my work and to reflect on how I could encourage the meaningful participation of young people in individual, family and group work; and how I can be a more effective, efficient and collaborative practitioner.

I have become more mindful of how social and cultural contexts influences both families and the practitioner. Reflexivity has become central in my practice, as it helps me to notice my interactions as I become a part of the family system. I have become more considerate of how my perceptions influence my responses; and how clients may experience me. I am more aware of the multiple contexts in the client and practitioner relationship and am grateful for concepts like the Social GRRRAACCEESSS; intersectionality and Burnham's (2012) metaphor of a 'collide-scope; as they provide me with the language to name these processes and a framework that helps me to utilise them in a more intentional way.

My transition from a reflective practitioner who 'reflects on action'; to a reflexive practitioner who 'reflects in action' means that I am constantly thinking about how I can bring my understanding of the various systemic schools of family therapy and techniques into my sessions with young people and their families. I have noticed how my wish to be more empathetic and non-judgemental correlates with the Early Milan concept of 'neutrality'. My understanding of Cecchin's (1987) concept of 'curiosity' and the need to be 'constantly curious.' has helped me to come out of my comfort zone and to challenge myself and the client. I am learning how to remain puzzled, and to question the possibilities, so that therapeutic conversations become more meaningful. I now share my hypothesis with clients and note how this enables me to explore my assumptions; develop more of a connection with clients; and influences the direction of the session. I have started to explore how I can make my experiences with clients more relational and have moved away from relying on linear and strategic questioning. I have started to introduce circular and reflexive questions into sessions and have observed how this results in more meaningful responses between family members and brings the wider context into the room. I would highly recommend this course.

My new learning has enhanced my confidence as a practitioner, and I have become more flexible in my approach as I seek to incorporate systemic ideas into my work in a way that relates to young

people. I am excited about my new learning, as it has sparked my desire to learn more. Completing year, one was the first step, I plan to continue my journey by progressing onto year two of the course. Once again, I thank FPSA for this opportunity.

July 2020