

The FUTURE Series - I

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Family Unification Techniques: Unique Relationship Enhancement (FUTURE)

IMPROVING FAMILY UNITY - INTRODUCTION

The techniques spelled out in these FUTURE booklets grew out of our seventy years of combined experience in dealing with troubled children and their parents. The FUTURE Series has been especially inspired by the therapeutic work we have done in helping the most challenging families of all, families in which divorce has led to high conflict custody disputes.

Such disputes typically create a unique category of very difficult-to-treat situations, which include greatly fractured relationships between a child (or children) and a particular parent or caretaker. Such cases may be labeled “estrangement cases” or “cases in which the parental alienation syndrome (PAS) is found.” The FUTURE Series has been designed to deal with these situations, as well as more normal families, families of divorce, as well as intact families. These techniques are designed to enhance relationships within *any* system or group. But they will also be effective in highly conflicted families, families that are frequently untreatable by traditional mental health techniques, for example, treatment by way of individual therapy, regular family therapy, couples counseling, mediation and so forth. As we will see, the main reason traditional therapy does not help in these cases follows from the fact that the crucial ingredient needed for traditional therapy to be successful is missing in cases where multiple hidden agendas rule the roost. In traditional therapy cases, the participants must have, and demonstrate, a willingness to be open to SELF-CHANGE. Self-change requires a *voluntary use of one’s willpower* in going along with suggestions made by a therapist. In a seminal work, Schwartz and Begley (*The Mind and the Brain: Neuroplasticity and the Power of Mental Force*, 2002) provide a massive array of neurological evidence establishing the biological reality of willpower, and how traditional therapy requires its use. In high conflict cases, almost everyone involved believes change is indeed needed, but it’s always “the other guy who needs to change, not me.” Think, for example, about a main treatment goal of traditional therapy: the creation of multiple perspectives, the ability to look at an issue from several points of view. In these cases, no one, including the children, are interested in seeing an issue from “the other person’s point of view.” Even when treating children, one aims to create in them an openness to self-change via multiple perspectives. If this is not achieved, the main treatment option will end up being some variant of a negatively-tinged coercion. In other words, if a child does not *willingly*

want to carry out a Mental Health Professional's (MHP) suggestions, the MHP will be forced to utilize more sticks than carrots. This is a position/strategy most MHPs would like to avoid, but unfortunately is frequently needed in reunification cases.

THE FUTURE SERIES OF TECHNIQUES is designed to be used in conjunction with the guidance of a Mental Health Professional (MHP) who is thoroughly trained in the special areas we have just mentioned. This is especially important in cases in which there are ongoing custody disputes, disputes which often lead to very unique crises. *The training required to deal with them is quite different than what is learned in traditional educational settings in which mental health procedures are taught.*

Before detailing the FUTURE procedures, we want to offer an overview of what they are designed to accomplish. To do this, we will expand on the implications of the name of this series: The FUTURE Series.

The "F" stands for family. This is to emphasize that our aim is to heal groups or systems of people. These people may be found within an intact family, a divorce family, or a custody-dispute family.

The first "U" in FUTURE stands for unification. The aim of the FUTURE Series is to upgrade the quality of interaction between all members of any targeted-group. As in all of our research on improved interactions, we define upgraded or improved interactions as being characterized by a continual increase in the comfort levels experienced by each member of the group as each interacts with any other, and in the effectiveness with which each person conducts his or her life, including all interpersonal relationships. Effectiveness refers to the degree to which goals, mostly mutually-agreed upon goals, are achieved with a minimum of fuss, anger and upset among the interacting people. (We have published a list of the signs—most are non-verbal—that scientifically measure "comfort and effectiveness." The list is available to MHPs. Contact Drs. Bricklin and Elliot at 610/688-5502.)

The "T" in FUTURE stands for techniques. Our aim has been to make them simple and operationally clear, so that everyone involved knows what to do, and what is expected.

The second "U" stands for *unique*. And here we believe that our system's ability to achieve "uniqueness" is its greatest (and incidentally, most unique) aspect. It allows a MHP to target the unique areas of interactions needing treatment. It offers tools that can identify the optimality of a large range of highly specific areas of interactions between parents and children. By "optimality" we mean the degree to which a child assigns positive (or negative) value to the verbal and non-verbal behaviors one parent offers, compared to the other, in specific life-situations. (A different and special scoring scheme is employed when the protocol is used in a situation where the area of interest is a child interacting with only one parent.)

Hence, the word “unique” in FUTURE means we have the means of helping MHPs to identify the unique areas of interaction between a child and parent that are already good and those that need improvement. These interactions have to do with how a parent offers, and how a child responds to, emotional support, the teaching of competency skills, and a host of other parent-child communications. Contact us at 610/688-5502 for information on the tests and tools designed to illuminate specific areas of interaction between a child and his or her caretakers.

The “RE” in FUTURE refers to relationship enhancement. Here we bring to fruition the promise of a continual increase in the comfort with which targeted people interact, and the achievement of enhanced effectiveness. When the FUTURE system is used as a whole, the effectiveness of which we speak will result from the ability of each person to approach any area of conflict with a broadened perspective. This results in each person having more ability to generate a number of possible solutions for any impasse. The greater the number of possible solutions brought forth, the higher the probability that the disputants can find at least one they can agree about.