

Functional Family Therapy

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Family Functional Therapy (FFT) is a family-focused, community-based treatment for youth who are either “at risk” for, or who manifest, antisocial behavioral problems such as conduct disorder, oppositional defiant disorder, disruptive behavior disorder, violent acting-out and substance abuse disorders. Co-morbid behavioral or emotional problems, such as anxiety or depression, may also exist as well as family problems, such as communication and conflict issues. FFT has been applied to a wide range of families with at-risk, pre-adolescent and adolescent youth in various multi-ethnic, multicultural contexts. Interventions are conducted at home, in school, in juvenile court, in community-based clinic or outpatient settings and at times of transition from institutional placement. FFT therapists recognize that solutions to behavioral health problems require an integration of high quality science, tested theoretical principles and extensive clinical experience to accomplish the achievement of specific functional goals for the youth, the family and society as a whole. These functional goals include the following.

- Engage and motivate the youth and family to change by decreasing the intense negativity often characteristic of these families. Work to motivate families and youth who (at the outset) may not be motivated or may not believe that they can change.
- Reduce the personal, societal and economic devastation that results from the continuation or exacerbation of the various disruptive behavioral challenges of the youth.
- Reduce and eliminate problem behaviors and family relational patterns that put the family and youth at risk. Develop individualized behavior change plans that focus on improving parenting skills, family communication, conflict resolution and problem solving skills.
- Generalize positive changes across problem situations by increasing the family’s capacity to adequately utilize community resources.

FFT incorporates specific intervention phases which include engagement, motivation, assessment, behavior change and generalization. Each phase includes a description of goals, requisite therapist characteristics and techniques. The intervention phases enable clinicians to maintain focus in the context of considerable family and individual disruption. The range of treatment is 3 to 30 sessions over a three month period with an average of 8 to 12 sessions.