
Systemic and Family Psychotherapy

What is Systemic Family Therapy?

Family and systemic psychotherapy – also known as family therapy – can help those in close relationships to better understand and support each other. It enables family members to express and explore difficult thoughts and emotions safely, understand each other's experiences and views, appreciate each other's needs, build on family strengths, and work together to make useful changes in their relationships and their lives.

Every family is a bit like a human body. Sometimes it feels great, and things work well. Sometimes even small things can feel like a huge challenge. When we hurt one part of our body, every part can be affected in some way. But all the parts of the body can work together to help if a bone gets broken, or if there's an infection. So family therapy helps family members to work together when something is hurting, or just feeling out of sorts.

What do Systemic Family Therapists do?

Family therapy helps family members and friends to understand and support each other. Family therapists try to help everyone to feel safe so they can talk about their difficult thoughts and feelings, understand each other's experiences and views, appreciate each other's needs, build on family strengths, and work together to make useful changes in their relationships and their lives.

Some family therapists work in teams, because it's useful to share lots of ideas for families to think about together. Others work on their own. But they will all help families and individuals to talk about their hopes, and to work towards their own goals as a family. Sometimes it only takes a few sessions to help a family find their way. Sometimes difficulties are more complicated, and families may need longer to find the solutions that work best for them.

Family therapists sometimes use their understanding of relationships to work with bigger groups and organisations. When they do this they often call themselves 'systemic psychotherapists' because they are working with systems rather than families.

Family therapists sometimes coordinate teams when several different agencies are supporting a family. They try to make sure that everyone is working together in a way the family finds helpful. Many family therapists also supervise other professionals working with families and children

How do I train?

In the UK, Family and Systemic Psychotherapy training, is a four-year part-time Masters professional qualification route, designed to meet the standards of education and training, (SET's) detailed by the United Kingdom Council of Psychotherapy (UKCP) and the College for Family, Couple and Systemic Therapy (CFCST). Here is a list of accredited training courses:

[See a list of accredited training courses at the Association for Family Therapy and Systemic Practice website \(https://www.aft.org.uk/page/Accreditedtrainingcourses\).](https://www.aft.org.uk/page/Accreditedtrainingcourses)

Entry Requirements

- A first degree
- A prior professional qualification

Previous Experiences Required

This training route requires applicants to have already completed training in a relevant health and social care profession and hold a relevant Prior Professional Qualification (PPQ) e.g. be a Clinical Psychologist, social worker, mental health nurse etc, usually at post-graduate level.

Applicants who do not hold a relevant PPQ may apply directly to the institute they wish to train with e.g. IFT, via the Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) route. This is to demonstrate applicants have the necessary prior knowledge, skills and experience for training.

Career Prospects

Although there is a strong tradition of Family and Systemic Psychotherapists being employed in the NHS, social services and the voluntary sector, qualified Family and Systemic Psychotherapists also work in independent private practice.

Some graduates find opportunities to do family therapy within their original profession, while others seek designated family therapy posts. These continue to increase and develop, with the majority still within child and family, and adult mental health services within the NHS.

Posts usually have a strong field of applicants and there are still many more trained Family and Systemic Psychotherapists than posts available.

Any other relevant information

It is advisable to read an introductory text in family therapy and/or attend one of the many workshops and conferences available.

Many Foundation level courses welcome students to complete the first year, as a way of finding out about the systemic approach and the training in detail.

Many institutes and universities have open days where you can find out more. Some institutes may also run online access courses.



Useful Organisations

[The Association of Family Therapy \(https://www.aft.org.uk/page/Overview\)](https://www.aft.org.uk/page/Overview)

[The United Kingdom Council of Psychotherapy \(UKCP\) \(https://www.psychotherapy.org.uk/\)](https://www.psychotherapy.org.uk/)

*All the information from this leaflet was drawn from the AFT website and AFT leaflets

