

## **BRIEF REPORTS**

### **AN ANALYSIS OF LIVE SUPERVISION "PHONE-INS" IN FAMILY THERAPY**

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The family therapy training and supervision literature is becoming more and more generous in offering ideas of specific skills and techniques that are useful and helpful to family therapists (Allred & Kersey, 1977; Falicov, Constantine, & Breunlin, 1981; Haley, 1977; Tomm, in press; Tomm & Wright, 1979; Wright & Leahey, 1984). The literature is much more parsimonious, however, in describing necessary skills and techniques that are essential for family therapy supervisors (Berger & Dammann, 1982; Constantine, Piercy, & Sprenkle, 1984; Liddle, Breunlin, Schwartz, and Constantine, 1984; Wright & Coppersmith, 1983). This paper is an effort to contribute to the identification of specific, concrete skills needed by family therapy supervisors using the "phone-in" technique during the live supervision process.

#### LIVE SUPERVISION "PHONE-INS"

One of the primary advantages of live supervision is that trainees are able to receive immediate feedback on the development of their skills, particularly because of the "phone-in" technology. The use of the phone-in during live supervision offers the opportunity for the family therapy supervisor to be of immense assistance and support to trainees by reducing the time lag in the generation of an idea to the implementation of it; and allowing trainees to witness the immediate effect of implementing a particular instruction.

Boylston and Tuma (1972) and Haley (1977) give specific suggestions for supervisors on how to use the phone-in technique but there is very little focus in the literature on the actual analysis and evaluation of phone-ins made by supervisors. Birchler (1975) and Hare-Mustin (1976) refer to verbatim statements of supervisors but did not analyze them. Kniskern and Gurman (1979) and Liddle and Halpin (1978) strongly suggest more evaluation needs to be done regarding our supervisory methods and their effectiveness.

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## ANALYSIS OF "PHONE-INS"

Over the past five years I have analyzed approximately 150 phone-ins made during live supervision by family therapy supervisors in two different training centers at the University of Calgary: The Family Therapy Program and the Family Nursing Unit. Seventy-two phone-ins made by supervisors to both beginning and advanced trainees were analyzed at the Family Therapy Program. The other phone-ins by supervisors to beginning trainees occurred at the Family Nursing Unit (Wright, Watson & Duhamel, 1985). The total analysis focused on the specific content of the supervisor's statement, implementation of the supervisor's instruction or suggestion by the supervisee, and the professional level of the supervisee (beginning or advanced). Since both training centers have the capability to record the phone-ins on videotape, the supervisor's phone-ins were transcribed verbatim. The therapist's statements following the phone-ins were also transcribed verbatim off the videotape.

The family therapy models used in training are reflected in the phone-ins. At the time of the analysis at the Family Therapy Program a cybernetic-systems model was being used, whereas now a systemic (Milan) approach is the primary model. The Family Nursing Unit predominantly adopts a systemic/strategic model.

### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TRAINING FAMILY THERAPY SUPERVISORS

The most obvious recommendation from this extensive analysis is that family therapy supervisors need to be trained in the art and science of phone-ins. The analysis also indicated that there is an identifiable, optimal format when phone-ins are intended for skill development (e.g., suggestions of questions to enhance engagement). There are times when phone-ins are designed as a therapeutic strategy (Imber Coppersmith, 1978) but those types of phone-ins were not analyzed in this project. The following specific recommendations primarily evolved from this indepth analysis of supervisor phone-ins and are based on clinical judgment:

1. Supervisors need to give supervisees opportunities to experience the phone-in prior to actual work with families. This is often an overlooked part of the training and orientation of the trainee's work with families. Supervisees should not experience their first few phone-ins during their first interview with a family. Experience with phone-ins can easily be given through role playing prior to sessions with families.

2. Supervisors should reluctantly utilize phone-ins so as to not be overintrusive or overcontrolling for both the trainee and family. Ideally, phone-ins should not exceed 5 per session, with the first call after at least 10 minutes of the session has elapsed. When phone-ins are made before 10 minutes into the session, the trainee often feels that the session is already out of his control, and it may also threaten engagement. However, there are occasional times when phone-ins during the first few minutes of a session are appropriate and necessary, but more often supervisors should use restraint. If a supervisor is having the impulse to call frequently, this is a signal that there needs to be an intersession discussion. It is much better to call a supervisee out of the room than to have the supervisor become "trigger-happy" and eventually frustrated because the supervisee is unable or unwilling to carry out the instructions. Also, it prevents the supervisee from becoming frustrated and/or embarrassed by the number of calls.

3. Supervisees benefit from positive reinforcement of their work during the supervisory process. This can be done by making a specific positive statement at the beginning of a few of the phone-ins (e.g., "You did a nice job of engaging Father"). It is not necessary to make a positive statement at the start of every phone-in but is most important in the first one or two phone-ins. If not, supervisees may leave a session believing that they were not effective since they only received directions or suggestions. These positive statements also appear to strengthen the receptiveness of the supervisee to implement



