

NEWS

- on 27-28 May 2016 Colette Richardson and Patrick Sweeney from Ireland presented a two-day workshop focusing on the experience of family therapists working with adolescents who self-harm (Colette) and a systemic approach to organizing support groups for professionals (Patrick).
- *Solution focused therapy: the miracle of collaborative conversations with children, adults and families*, a 20-hour in-service training will take place on 2-3 September 2016 in Cluj.
- the 9th Conference of the European Family Therapy Association (EFTA) will take place in Athens from 28 September to 1 October 2016.
- ATFSC is starting a new introductory course in systemic family therapy.
Deadline for applications: 30 September 2016 (see page 2 for more information).



Patrick Sweeney and Colette Richardson at AGAPE Life Care Foundation (May 2009)

În perioada 1-30 septembrie 2016 primim înscrieri la noul

CURS DE FORMARE ÎN TERAPIE FAMILIALĂ SISTEMICĂ,

coorganizat de ATFSC și Fundația AGAPE pentru Ocrotirea Vieții.

Cursul este acreditat de Colegiul Psihologilor din România și Federația Română de Psihoterapie.

Detalii și formular de înscriere:

http://www.terapeuta.ro/romana/formare_in_terapie_familiala.html

CULTIVATING THE PRACTICE OF HOPE: WITHSTANDING THE PULL TO HOPELESSNESS

A brief review of the workshop presented by Colette Richardson on 27 May 2016

The workshop was based on a research exploring the experience of family therapists working with adolescents who self-harm.¹ Nine family therapists were interviewed, all of them with substantial experience in the field of self-harm, working in different context, like psychiatric hospitals, child and adolescent mental health services and specialist outreach teams for adolescents. The aim of the researcher was to learn about the central concerns of these workers and about the practical ways they deal with these concerns; what it is like to work in a context where the possibility of suicide is a constant worry and what emotional impact does this type of work have on practitioners?

The workshop provided a good opportunity for participants to get acquainted with the basics of qualitative research in general and grounded theory in particular. Colette described the steps of the latter methodology, from formulating your questions and clarifying your position as a researcher, through interviewing, transcribing the interviews and coding the themes that occur, to organizing the codes in “bundles” and the bundles in even bigger bundles (overarching themes, thematic analysis), then finally creating a story that links the big bundles, the “core category”.

¹ Richardson, C. (2014) *Family Therapists' Experiences of Working with Adolescents who Self-Harm and their Families: A Grounded Theory Study* (Unpublished doctoral thesis).

A question was raised about the necessity of all this tedious effort; why not simply obtain the data and share with the consumer of the research in this raw form, letting her extract from the text her own personally useful meanings. Soon somebody from the audience came up with a metaphor that settled the dilemma once and for all: if the interview transcripts are a ton of plums, then the resulting core categories are the *brandy* made of them! (Romanian *țuica*, Hungarian *pálinka*).

The research resulted in a body of knowledge extraordinarily rich in ideas that could act as guidelines for any therapist working with families where the loss of hope is a central issue:

- Do not believe kids when they say this was a one-off episode. Therapists should not be naively optimistic where self-harm on any kind is involved.
- Do not shy away from being direct in your language, e.g. use the word „suicide” when the family tries to evade a painful reality by saying „she drank medicine”
- Blame is often a central organizing principle in these families, where the parents blame the child, the professionals blame the parents and the parents commonly blame themselves
- The siblings of self-harming youth can be badly affected by what happens in the family, but their suffering is often neglected by the parents and the helpers alike. Attending to the feelings of the siblings should be on the agenda of the family’s therapist.
- Working separately with the parents can be a useful practice. Parents are often afraid that what they say may trigger the young person’s suicidal behaviour. One task for the therapist during work with the parental subsystem is to help them understand the adolescent’s emotional distress.
- Hope comes in two varieties: “rainbow hope” (Kaethe Weingarten’s metaphor², unrealistic hope) and realistic hope. Therapist should nurture the latter.
- Allow yourself to be touched by hopelessness, acknowledge it openly, but do not become hopeless. Working in a team helps therapists maintain hope. Self-harm is about hope; hold hope, then “*hand the baton of hope over to the family*”!

Programele de formare în terapia familială sunt coorganizate de către ATFSC
și Fundația AGAPE pentru Ocrotirea Vieții.

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ATFSC – Asociația de Terapie Familială Sistemică Cluj pe Facebook

Redactat de Ágnes Kónya și Zoltán Kónya

² Weingarten, K. (2010) Reasonable hope: construct, clinical applications and supports. *Family Process*, 49 (1):5-25.