



Association for Family Therapy & Systemic Practice

Information for commissioners

Systemic Family Therapy has proven effectiveness in

- **improving** outcomes
- **preventing** distress and difficulties escalating into crises
- **promoting** mental health and recovery
- **adding** value
- **developing** individual resilience and family strengths
- **improving** risk assessment and intervention
- **involving** families and carers in care and service planning
- **supporting** the well-being of family members, partners and carers
- **increasing** staff skills in working in partnership with families
- **reducing** relapse and readmission

Visit AFT's website www.aft.org.uk for more information, including the evidence base for [Systemic Family Therapy](#) and service users' [Messages of Hope](#)

This summary offers a brief overview of Systemic Family Therapy to inform and support commissioners to deliver high quality, effective and safe services

More detailed information is available by following text links and by visiting www.aft.org.uk

What is Systemic Family Therapy?

Systemic Family Therapy (also called Family and Systemic Psychotherapy) is one of the major evidence based therapeutic approaches provided within the NHS. It refers to a range of psychological interventions for individuals, couples and families based on systemic concepts and theory. These are designed to help people make changes in their thinking, behaviour and understandings to relieve distress, improve the quality of their important relationships and make positive changes in their lives.

Who does it help?

Systemic Family Therapy includes work with [families](#)*, couples and individuals of all ages, and is an important resource for multi-disciplinary professional teams. It has proven effectiveness for people experiencing distressing yet relatively common mental health and relational difficulties, and for serious mental health and behavioural problems (see [The Evidence Base](#)).

Fully qualified practitioners often work with service-users experiencing multiple difficulties, sometimes across generations, who have very complex

presentations and don't fit neatly into traditional diagnostic categories.

The rationale

Depending on people's relational resources and experiences, small problems may amplify into serious ones, or relatively serious ones may be negotiated. Close relationships sometimes fuel problems, and sometimes they break down under stress. Yet close relationships can also be key to helping people better manage or recover from difficulties.

Systemic Family Therapy is a collaborative therapy that integrates understandings from social and mental health care in its thinking, approaches and service delivery. It works with the identified client/patient and those important to them, helping them understand each other's experiences and needs, build on their strengths and resources and make changes to improve their lives.

Mobilising a person's close relationships helps ensure benefits from therapy are sustained, with reduction in future demands on services from the identified client/patient and family members and/or others close to them (Crane, 2008).

Systemic Family Therapy has a distinctive interest in culturally sensitive practice, and in working across diverse lifestyles.



Systemic Family Therapy: Information for commissioners

The evidence base

Systemic Family Therapy has a strong evidence base (Carr, 2009a, 2009b, Stratton 2011) in the treatment of

- adult, child and adolescent mental health problems inc somatic problems, conduct problems, ADHD, emotional difficulties, eating disorders, schizophrenia, depression, bi-polar disorder, OCD, PTSD
- the impact of physical ill-health on patient and carer well-being and treatment plans
- the impact of parental mental health difficulties on children and families
- behavioural difficulties
- abuse and neglect
- self-harm
- substance misuse
- trauma
- poverty and social marginalisation
- the needs of 'looked after' children
- family and couple relationship difficulties
- changing family structures.

Systemic Family Therapy forms the basis for intensive family-based interventions such as Multi Systemic Therapy (Henggeler, 2002) and Functional Family Therapy (Alexander et al, 2002) and for new methods for targeting change in safeguarding services (Goodman & Trowler, 2012).

Systemic Family Therapy has also been shown to be highly cost-effective, with evidence of dramatic reductions in health care use among previously 'high utilisers' (Crane, 2008, 2012), improved engagement (Carr, 2009a, 2009b) lower drop-out rates (Leff et al, 2000; Hamilton et al, 2011) and reductions in relapse and readmission (Sydow et al, 2010). [Full references available.](#)

Outcomes monitoring

Systemic Family Therapy has a long tradition of using service user feedback to inform therapy. It involves a variety of strategies to support change, including the use of outcome measures.

AFT has developed a [CORC](#)-accredited systemic outcomes measures ([SCORE-15](#)) and is working with [CYP IAPT](#) (Children and Young People's services - Increasing Access to Psychological Therapies) to develop guidance on using outcome tools with families, couples and other caring networks.

Training

Different levels of skills and competencies are required at the various levels of care.

[Training](#) in Systemic Family Therapy helps staff from all disciplines deliver systemically informed care to support service users, their families and others key to care and recovery. Fully qualified family therapists ([Family and Systemic Psychotherapists](#)**) are accredited in the delivery of specialist and highly specialist evidence-based psychological interventions, and in supporting staff with lower levels of trainings through consultation and supervision.

AFT-accredited [courses in Systemic Family Therapy](#) for experienced professionals are offered at introductory and intermediate, qualifying clinical masters, supervision and doctoral levels. Systemic family therapy skills training (intermediate level equivalent) is also being offered as part of Phase 2 of CYP-IAPT.

Training and accreditation is competency based. The evidence based Systemic Competences framework can be accessed at http://www.ucl.ac.uk/clinical-psychology/CORE/systemic_framework.htm

***Families:** *Systemic Family Therapy recognises that different cultures and groups have different ideas of what 'family' means. It takes 'family' to describe any group of people who define themselves as such, including same-gender couples and families-of-choice. As well as parents and children of all ages, family therapists may work with grandparents, siblings, uncles and aunts, cousins, friends, carers, other professionals – whoever people identify as important to their lives.*

**** Professional registration and titles:** Only fully qualified practitioners are entitled to use the UKCP accredited title of 'Family and Systemic Psychotherapist'. Evidence of registration with the UKCP (United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy)

is a requirement for employment as a fully qualified family therapist. The UKCP's robust registration and regulation systems and central complaints process afford protection to the public.

Need further information or advice? AFT has a panel of National Assessors offering expert advice on the recruitment and appointment of Family and Systemic Psychotherapists and the development of high quality systemic services. [Contact AFT for details or visit \[www.aft.org.uk\]\(http://www.aft.org.uk\)](#)



**Association for Family Therapy
& Systemic Practice**

www.aft.org.uk

7 Executive Suite, St James Court, Wilderspool
Causeway, Warrington, Cheshire WA4 6PS