The Tree of Life

A Framework for Brief Systemic Assessments within CAMHS
The Challenge of CAPA for Family Therapy in CAMHS

• To accept referrals from the initial Choice appointment?

• Families eventually referred to Family Therapy at a much later stage?
Dilemmas

- To accept referrals from the initial Choice Appointment which is a brief screening not full assessment
- Does not fit with DOH recommendation for assessment prior to formal psychotherapy
- Unable to know if clinic based approach fits for the family
- Families eventually referred to Family Therapy at a much later stage
- Families offered ‘family work’ by other colleagues not trained to work with family groups
- Risks: loss of hope and increased disaffection with service for families when they may have experienced little change from the earlier input.
Solutions

✔ Accept referrals from Choice appointments
✔ Create a three session assessment model
✔ Use The Tree of Life as a framework
The Tree of Life

- Roots: Family history, People who have taught me most in life, Favourite place at home, a treasured song or dance
- Ground: Where I live now and daily activities
- Trunk: Skills and Abilities
- Branches: Hopes, dreams and wishes for the future
- Leaves: Significant people who may be alive or may have passed on
- Fruit: The gifts that have been given to me
Benefits

- Collaborative approach to assessment
- Shared family process
- Fun
- Allows the family to help each other
- Therapeutic
- Important themes emerge
- ‘Finds hidden stories of strength and skills’ (Dulwich Centre 2009)
Mother

Child

Life

Life

Good at managing money.
Cooking
Cleaning
Computers
Driving
Understanding
Learning new things.
Thoughtful.
Encouraging to do the best in life to kids.
Helpful.
Mum can be very bossy.

Kylie

Mum

Children.

Soil
Taxi driver.
Hoovering
Cooking
Washing up
Feed dogs + cat
Arts
Shopping
Testing
talking

Roots

Family tree.
My favourite place is Florida.

Thoughtful.
Encouraging to do the best in life to kids.
Helpful.
Mum can be very bossy.

Father

Branches

Win the lottery
Be nice to people

Skills

DIY
Computers
Helping others
CARS
looking after
Family + dogs
+ Cat

Give a helping hand.

Soil
HELP
Drive
KYLE

DIY

When stuck

Television
Visit

Feed dogs

1969

Burgeon Born Now live in Wolverhampton

Carl

James

Brother

Unkle

Joanne

Leaving

Rum

Scooter

Bicycle

Trike

Motorbike

Sword

Scooter

Dad

Henry Castle

Living

Wilsden

New Live in

Uncle

Jill

Wilsden

Carl

James

Brother

Unkle

Joanne

Leaving

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Sword

Scooter

Dad

Henry Castle

Living

Wilsden

New Live in
The Family are invited to give a name to their forest
They can reflect on family qualities relating to closeness, distance, shelter and other themes that may have arisen
Tree Of Life

Mother

Leaves:
- Natalie
- Kyle
- Mom
- Dad
- Chelsa
- Kaita
- Nia
- Snow

Fruits:
- Children
- Love
- Life

Branches:
- Hope Kyle learns to manage his ADHD better and make more friends.
- Hope Natalie sorts herself out and learns to do things for herself.
- Hope Chaela does not throw away our education and knows the way she is now hope to go back to Florida again some day.

Ground:
- Tax Driver
- Honoring
- Cooking
- Reading up
- Feeding dogs and cat
- Nursing
- Shopping
- Twinning and walking

Roots:
- Walkerhampton
- Brave Family
- Kyle, Daniel, Natalie, Paul, Kaita, Snow, Chelsa and Ziggy
- Favoirite Song: The Way I Love Favorite Place: Florida

Father

Leaves:
- San
- Mum
- Dad
- Kyle
- Zaimi
- Ziggy
- Zea
- Nasa

Fruits:
- Grandkids
- Snow
- Ziggy
- Zea
- Nasa
- Kaita
- Lula
- Chelsa

Branches:
- Find a current job
- Get help for Kyle to have a more peaceful life
- Win the lottery

Ground:
- DIY
- Drive
- Walk
- Feed dogs
- Help Kyle when stuck

Roots:
- Born in Newcastle, now living in W. Tan
- migration
- Sani
- Fatimah, Daniel, Nad, Kyle
- Carl, Uncle Carl, Jos, Nial
- Nasa, Amy, Mark and Sani

Trunks:
- Good at managing money
- Cooking
- Driving
- Understanding
- Hospital
- Learning new things
- Thoughtful
- Encouraging to the kids to do their best

Trunk:
- Can
- Fixing things
- Giving a helping hand
- Caring
- Helping others
- Looking after family, dogs and cat
- My dad is 77 now

Roots:
- Family History, people who have taught me most in life, favorite place at home, a treasured song or dance

Ground:
- What I like now and daily activities

Branches:
- Hopes, dreams and wishes for the future

Leaves:
- Significant people who may be alive or who may have passed on

Trunk of Tree = Skills and abilities
Fruits = The gifts that have been given to me
Written Assessment

Wolverhampton City NHS
Primary Care Trust

BRIEF FAMILY ASSESSMENT

SESSION DATES:
1. 3.8.2010
2. 17.8.2010
3. 31.8.2010

STRUCTURE:
The ‘Tree of Life’ was used as a framework for the assessment. Please see attached the individual trees.

Each family member thought about their own history, the significant people in their life, a favourite place at home - a treasured song or dance. Day to day activities were named for each person and their particular personal skills and abilities were noted. Hopes, dreams and wishes for the future were shared and significant people who may be alive or who may have passed were acknowledged. The non-materialistic gifts given to each person were identified and named.

PROCESS:
All the family participated co-operatively with the process helping each other and adding personal qualities and attributing that the family member had not identified. The family use of humour is indicative of cohesiveness in relationships and a strong sense of the family bond came across. The family were invited to view each other’s trees and think about each other’s hopes and wishes for the future. Thought was given to the adverse factors for this family on a day to day basis. The family appeared to recognise that e may have had undiagnosed ADHD which may explain the challenges they have faced and continue to face with regard to each other. The ADHD was not mentioned in introductions or the therapist commented on this omission and wondered what the diagnosis meant for him. I looked quite embarrassed about raising ADHD and I gained a sense of his shame about the diagnosis. The day to day impact of living with the effect that ADHD has on a child’s behaviour came across as a shared source of concern for all members of the family.

The family have experienced the death of a baby and this loss has touched them all.

All members of the family referred to their love for the family pets which can be interpreted as a family strength and illustrative of caring and warmth. The family were asked to think about the name of their forest for the final session and decided that ‘The Freaky Forest’ captured some of the family quirks.

OBSERVATIONS:

- Presented in an open manner and approached the different aspects of the task with amiable good humour. He appeared confident about his family background and his connection to his numerous siblings. The family held a shared view that e may have undiagnosed ADHD and I recalled the problems he had experienced at school. He felt that this could explain some of the difficulties he has faced in employment.

- He appeared to find it more difficult to think about the past and I gained the impression that there was unresolved sadness for her about this topic. She described herself as a bit anti-social preferring to socialize with other people outside the family. She also questioned whether her protectiveness of e when he was younger might have contributed to his socially avoidant behaviour and lack of friends.

- Recognised that she also shares this characteristic.

- Was described as ‘the good one’ who helped to keep her mother ‘sane’ and talked of being able to rely on her when she is ‘stressed’. We could see how she responded to when her mother from support within these sessions and we discussed our view that perhaps she had become a co-parent with her mother in parenting e instead of in her.

- Presented in a very uncertain manner. He checked constantly with his mother when asked a question and seemed to require reassurance from her in most of his responses. He appeared to be very lacking in self-confidence and sensitive to potential criticism.

- Openly questioned what purpose sessions such as these could play in relation to e and we explored the dilemma of putting ideas into practice. If things are discussed and between sessions nothing is put into action, then of course there will be no change.

FAMILY THEMES:
- Trust and reliance on other people-How this might impact on e?
- Humour is a family strength but can be deployed as a defensive mechanism to hide or avoid painful issues within the family.
- Interrelating roles of e and becomes co-parent and in a carer as e.

PLAN:
The family are concerned about e’s transition to secondary school. They want him to make friends and develop better social skills. The family have a key role with regard to this by encouraging him to make contact with peers and joining in after-school activities. This may help e to become more outgoing and confident. We discussed how we can help him by engaging with him in activities that involve going out together. Both I and e recognise that they need help to parent e co-operatively and consistently together.

As the mother is more likely to rely on her daughter to help out with e and although this means e gets ‘off the hook’. This inadvertently places e in a position of less authority as e’s and becomes the parental young person in his place. We agreed to meet and for a further meeting to discuss this report and agree whether there is a further role for our service.

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Gill Goodwillie AFT Conference 23.9.2011
Outcomes

- Family are in driving seat regarding way forward in service
- They can choose to continue in Family Therapy Clinic
- There may need to be other specialist assessments, such as referral to neurodevelopmental clinic; psychiatrist
- Popular with colleagues: 44.74% of referrals received in year April 2010-March 2011
References

• David Denborough (2008) Collective Narrative Practice: Responding to Individuals, Groups and Communities who have experienced trauma. Dulwich Centre Publications

• Georgia Iliopoulou et al. The ‘tree of life’ in a community context. Context 105 October 2009, pp. 50-54

