

Specific systemic techniques

Ability to use systemic hypotheses

An ability to develop systemic hypotheses:	
	that address a broad range of issues (e.g. reasons for referral, the meaning of symptoms or problems, factors involved in the development and maintenance of the problem and issues of difference and diversity)
	that help clients to understand the presenting symptoms in relation to the context in which they occur
An ability to make use of systemic hypotheses to promote ideas about change	
	an ability to share hypotheses with clients in ways that are meaningful to them
	when sharing hypotheses, an ability, to make explicit the assumptions being made by the therapist
	an ability to discuss hypotheses with professional colleagues in a manner which supports planning the work
An ability to make use of systemic hypotheses:	
	to generate systemic questions
	to guide further lines of enquiry
	to develop the therapist's understanding of the system
	to promote client(s) understanding and facilitate new perspectives
An ability to hold in mind concurrently more than one hypothesis	
An ability to revise systemic hypotheses following feedback from clients	
	an ability to work collaboratively with the clients to explore and evolve hypotheses

Ability to use circular interviewing

An ability to use knowledge of the aims of circular interviewing to:	
	generate new connections among members of the system, and hence to promote change
	directly encourage exploration of the ways that feelings, ideas, beliefs or perceptions of relationships are experienced by each member of the system by asking about how these are represented (e.g. "who in the family is most worried about this problem?" "how does mother show that she is the most worried?")
	attempt to clarify one person's understanding of another person's beliefs, expectations, and emotions
	help make connections to wider contexts
	help members of the system to develop a capacity for reflecting on the systems of which they are a part
An ability to make use of the different formats of circular questions, e.g.	
	difference questions, which ask about differences between members of the system
	hypothetical/ future-related questions, which explore options and alternative actions which aim to yield responses which are related to solutions
	behavioural questions, which explore the connections between the effects of one member of the system's actions on another
	triadic questions, which are posed to a third person about the relationship between two

other people
questions which invite clients to adopt the perspective of another person about feelings, behaviours and systemic processes within the family
questions which identify connections between beliefs, behaviours, emotions and relationships across time
An ability to phrase circular questions in a manner which maintains therapist neutrality in relation to each member of the system
An ability to adapt the style and content of circular questioning to the developmental stage of different members of the system
An ability to draw on knowledge of the use of circular interviewing, in which feedback from clients is used to generate subsequent interventions

An ability to use systemic techniques to promote change

An ability to help clients develop new and more functional understandings by using systemic techniques which include:
encouraging clients to question their feelings, thoughts, beliefs and attitudes
helping clients to identify links between presenting problems and patterns of behaviour
An ability use “externalisation” to provide distance between the client(s) and the problem to promote reflection by offering them an alternative perspective, which aims to promote exploration by separating the problem from the person and giving it an external identity e.g. by asking clients to map the influence of the problem in their lives, and their influence on the life of the problem
to reduce attributions of blame to individuals
to encourage belief that clients can potentially manage the problem

An ability to use narrative techniques to help client(s) reframe and re-label their ideas and descriptions of the presenting problem(s) their descriptions of themselves and their relationships
An ability to identify family and individual strengths which may not be apparent to clients in order to help draw their attention to the resources available to them
an ability to comment on observations of patterns of behaviour which occur across time and which reflect the strengths of the system
an ability to amplify change through a positive stance which focuses on past actions of the client(s) which have initiated or implemented change
An ability to offer information and opinion which promotes change by:
helps clients to develop a different perspective
offers a resource which empowers the members of the system (e.g. information about medical conditions, or about developmental stages)
An ability to help clients contextualise emotional and behavioural expression, by:
normalising emotional or behavioural responses
validating emotional or behavioural responses
An ability to make use of reframing techniques e.g. in order to reduce blaming, to help shift perspectives, to help clients “reposition” themselves in relation to difficulties
An ability to observe and address problematic family processes in order to draw these to their attention and to help members see that there could be alternative ways of interacting

An ability to use a range of experiential systemic techniques to enable families to experience, express and communicate content which it may be difficult to verbalise (e.g. role play, interviewing the “internalised other”, sculpting, repositioning family members in the session, implementing developmentally appropriate techniques (e.g. drawings, puppets etc))

An ability to work towards resolving problems

An ability to help clients define problem(s) by a non-judgmental analysis of the sequence of events that lead to their development

An ability to help clients(s) identify events that precede the “first” step in the sequence, by using techniques such as:

agreeing the sequence of behaviours which constitute the problem (as defined by the members of the system)

tracking the pre-problem sequence of events

examining the impact of family life cycles on the problem(s)

reviewing attempted solutions

An ability to identify and discuss with the client(s) how attempted solutions may serve to aggravate or maintain problems

An ability to help clients(s) develop a number of possible solutions by using techniques such as:

identifying early preventive action

brainstorming about other possible solutions, highlighting the advantages and disadvantages of each one

agreeing desired outcomes (defining goals)

formulating a detailed plan to implement the chosen solution

speculating about the consequences of implementing a specific plan, and discussing how to review outcome

An ability to map systems

An ability to draw the family’s attention to contemporary, historical and trans-generational factors (including family and personal history) to promote and maintain change

an ability to construct a genogram with the client(s) with the explicit intention of guiding the client(s) to clarify previous patterns of relationships and their possible impact on the current system

an ability to use techniques to help clients develop new perspectives on their lives, and their understanding of the current systems in which they live (e.g. role plays, family circles, eco maps, structural maps, genograms, sculpting, etc)

An ability to make use of enactments

An ability to make use of enactments in the session (e.g. asking parents and children to enact familiar arguments)

An ability to note and to work with the occurrence of spontaneous enactments

an ability to make use of spontaneous enactment (e.g. to help identify repeating

patterns of relationships)
An ability to set up in-session enactments by:
choosing interactions which are manageable by clients and from which they are likely to learn, and which fit with therapeutic aims
encouraging members to reproduce problematic interactions in the session
identifying when members are finding it hard to carry out an enactment and making therapeutic use of reflection about the reasons for this
An ability to focus on specific issues raised by the enactment in order to help clients find alternative resolutions in the session, using techniques such as:
‘intensifying’ the transaction (e.g. by asking members to prolong the duration of the transaction, to speak more loudly, etc)
asking members to pause during the transaction in order to reflect
experimenting with and exploring alternative interactions
de-escalating the interaction (e.g. by the therapist engaging one of the clients in a dialogue)
using video feedback to promote reflection

Ability to work with a systemic team

An ability to work with different forms of team reflection e.g.
a “reflecting team” which offers their observations of therapy in front of the family
discussion with a team of colleagues before, during and after the therapy
live commentary/suggestions from colleagues to the therapist
reflecting on process with one or more co-therapists in the presence of the family
An ability to establish the context for reflection by:
helping client(s) to understand the rationale for involving a team in the therapy
agreeing (in conjunction with the client(s) and the team) the most appropriate way in which to involve the team in the intervention (e.g. the number of team members joining the session with the client and/or who are observing the client(s) via a one-way screen)
monitoring, in conjunction with client(s) and the team, the effect of the team’s intervention and whether (and in what form) it should continue

[Back to Competences Map](#)