A Child and Youth Care Approach to Working with Families

Thom Garfat • Editor

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Cover design by Marylouise E. Doyle

To Henry W. Maier, who has turned so many of us into willing students.

ABOUT THE EDITOR

Thom Garfat, PhD, has been working with troubled young people and their families for over 30 years. He is currently in private practice as a consultant and trainer and has worked with teams, programs, agencies, and governments in Canada, the United States, England, Ireland, Scotland, South Africa, and other countries. Dr. Garfat has developed several residential programs, community-based family intervention programs, family support programs, and numerous other programs for troubled young people and their families. He has worked as a child and youth care worker, a clinical psychologist, and director of a community-based family-intervention program. He also taught child and youth care and family work at the University of Victoria in the School of Child and Youth Care and was Director of treatment for one of Canada's largest group care agencies.

Dr. Garfat is well recognized as a trainer, teacher, consultant, and writer, having published over 100 professional articles on working with youths and families. He is Co-editor of the Canadian journal *Relational Child and Youth Care Practice* and the *International Child Youth Care Network* (CYC-Net)—an Internet-based discussion group and journal. He is a member of a number of child and youth care associations, a member of the Academy of Child and Youth Care Professionals, and is on the board of a number of other journals in the field. His doctoral research at the University of Victoria into the characteristics of helping interventions with troubled youth was awarded the Governor General's Gold Medal. This research has been developed into a training program for child and youth care workers who are engaged with youth and families and has since become a foundation for the field.

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CONTENTS

Foreword

J. K. Rowling's heroes of popular culture, Harry Potter, Hermione Granger and Ron Weasley, provide rich metaphors for contemporary child and youth care practice in the Western world. It is not so much the broomstick games of Quidditch or the images of sorcery that spring to mind so much as the lived experiences of young people leaving childhood and entering adolescence, the transitions from family life to semi-independent living, and the life-space dramas experienced between the worlds of families and the worlds of residential centers. Daily life experiences with these fictional characters have transformed Harry and his friends into household names amongst a whole generation of young people. Few examples can be found in history where young people the world over have waited so eagerly for each new installment or queued in such numbers for each new blockbuster film. Given the opportunity for an early read of chapters that make up this new volume about a child and youth care approach to working with families, it was difficult to avoid making comparisons with challenges illustrated in the fictional world of Harry Potter.

Like Rowling, Garfat and his colleagues have attempted something new, even though it is doubtful whether this volume will sell on a par with Harry Potter. These authors have drawn from direct experiences of working with children, young people, and their families to articulate something that practice wisdom has known for a long time: Families remain important figures in the lives of all children in care. Each of the writers took risks by daring to enter–or even stake claims to–a practice domain carefully guarded by other, more established and reputable professions (if measured by volumes of scholarly prose). Many professions lay claim to the domain of family work, be it family therapy, therapeutic work with families, family casework, or parenting education. However, it is the "magic" that resonates from direct practice experiences with young people and their families that makes this volume special, if only as a beginning attempt to say something about being with and building life-space relationships that continue well after the professional hour, the clini-

xv

cal session, or the therapeutic counselling sessions have finished. The essence of this volume, the magic if you will, is about the practicalities and the importance of forging smart partnerships with mothers, fathers, aunties, uncles, grandparents, foster parents, adopted brothers and sisters, and family members of all shapes and sizes.

Thinking about Harry Potter, it is sometimes surprising to find how many child and youth care workers have never read the books or seen the films! Meanwhile, most of the kids with whom they work can quote whole passages from all five books and identify characters as though they were part of their extended family. In this one might be forgiven for drawing attention to "Muggles" or non-magic folk, like the very family into which Harry Potter was placed as a foster child in kin-group care after the premature death of his parents. That Harry was emotionally and psychologically abused by his Muggle family, indeed even locked in a windowless room under the stairs, might be said to parallel the experiences of many children and young people for whom care and protection services have been established. That Harry learned to express his angry emotions through hurtful wishes may well mirror the thoughts of many a young person, as seen in the example with his nasty cousin at the London reptile centre. And what about the unlikely character of Hagrid, arguably Harry's community "child and youth worker," whose task it was to keep an eye on this unhappy young man until the time came for him to start secondary school at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry? When faced with Hagrid's startling revelations about what made Harry Potter special, Harry's response was not unlike that heard daily by child and youth care workers everywhere: "I'm not a wizard! I'm just Harry!" Or to put it another way, "I'm not special! I'm just . . . (a succession of labels offered by exasperated parents, teachers or professionals)." And with beginning lines just like these, child and youth care workers engage troubled and troublesome kids in their daily living and learning life spaces. That which makes kids special and opens up opportunities for both them and their families is reenacted over and over again with child and youth care workers everywhere. Like magic, the stories continue to unfold.

Those who approach this volume hoping to find new definitions and prescriptions about working with families should look elsewhere. This is not a scholarly tome developed in pursuit of academic citations. This volume is about some of the practicalities of entering into the daily events and patterns of interaction between family members and kids. It is about using daily life events for therapeutic purposes in the life spaces where young people and their families live. It is about the advantages of picking up a dish towel and helping to dry the dishes while interacting with family members about their lived experiences with young people and about the aspirations and dreams that family members hold for their young. It is about rhythms and timing, about connect-

ing with family members and kids in *their* places and times, not just in professional office settings or in a therapeutic group. However, this volume makes no attempt to devalue professional therapeutic activities such as these. Instead, it seeks to complement that which is often missing, in the other 23 hours of each day, or in the other 167 hours of a busy, action-filled week. It is about moving from what Ricks and Bellefeuille called "a knowing" paradigm, driven by expert knowledge, to an ethic of entering into the life-space with the other(s), demonstrating a willingness to walk alongside, or as Shaw and Garfat put it, being where young people and families live their lives. Krueger calls it a way of being in the lived experience with young people and their families, likening the process to modern dance, creating moments of connection, discovery, and empowerment but always wary of the rhythms that connect people so that their interactions have meaning.

Child and youth care workers, like Hagrid–the disgraced wizard and surrogate youth worker at Hogwarts–credibility is earned with young people like Harry Potter and his friends by actually living with them through difficult and scary times. Phelan calls on professional helpers to trust families more and to believe that they know a great deal about what they need or want for their children. All too often, families have been written off as "Muggles" who do not live up to the expectations of those holding "magic wands of authority" or professional expertise. Being with families in their life spaces requires a special kind of magic and what Phelan calls "an observing ego" where one must be continually vigilant about personal boundaries in situations of intimacy. Fewster's primary concern is with the subjective experience of the child or young person, arguing that a child is more than a family member who needs to be acknowledged as a separate and unique being in his or her own right. Charles and Charles caution that there is no one avenue to successful interventions with families.

First interactions do not always go the way one might like. By the time child and youth care workers get involved, many kids and families are jaded by their experiences with helpers, feeling as though the "iron hand of help" may strike again, no matter how desperately they seek an anchor to help them through turbulent times. These practice scholars argue that if change is to occur, it only happens in manageable chunks and through relationships, not interventions. There is no magic wand shop in Diagon Alley where relationships can be exchanged for family-work interventions. And, as VanderVen argues, it is through activities in life spaces that opportunities for new ways of being and interacting are facilitated.

Smith reminds child and youth care readers not to ignore the significant roles played by fathers in the lives of the young people with whom they work. At a time when the dominant discourse challenges patriarchal structures and male dominance in family life, there are institutional forces that exclude fathers and

target them as the prevailing source of problems faced by mothers and children. Smith offers a Scottish voice, in this predominantly North American collection, that draws from both direct practice as well as practice research. His conclusions remind the reader that dads are important in their kid's lives. Most men desire to be fathers and to be good fathers as well, often better fathers than they themselves had. Men do not always fulfil as important a role in their children's lives as they would like, and it is easy for professional attitudes and ways of working to label dads as "the problem." Existing services are rarely geared toward supporting dads and may actually discriminate against them. And even though such attitudes may result in practice scholars like Smith being labelled "teachers of the dark arts" at schools like Hogwarts with some, perhaps, arguing that he should be banished to the prisons of Azkaban with other heretics and nonbelievers, it is difficult to dismiss claims that many fathers would welcome support they perceive as credible and non-stigmatising. And, once again, this involves entering into fathers' life spaces and personal rhythms, often using activities to help them learn new ways of being and interacting with their sons and daughters. The reader is left with questions about the meaning of absent dads and what impact absent dads may have on the self-esteem and personal identities of their children.

Both Modlin and McElwee offer practical observations about the processes required to move child and youth care from a history of center-based practice with children and young people removed from their families to working partnerships that give family members a prominent place alongside child and youth care workers in their day-to-day work. Modlin reports on steps taken to involve parents through group home services and, in so doing, to shift the mindsets of child and youth care workers that open new opportunities for all concerned. Writing from an Irish perspective, McElwee traces both historical and policy themes that have prevented families from playing a more active part in social care services in that country. His concerns are about child and youth care workers finding an identity through working with family members in a political environment where other professions seek to draw boundaries around what might be appropriate or about doing the work of others. In the concluding chapter, Hill and Garfat offer valuable insights as a manager and supervisor, arguing that not all child and youth care workers should do work with families, perhaps because they lack maturity and experience. It is especially pleasing to find a supervisor emphasizing the importance of scheduling that supports working with families and reinforcing first priorities about covering the needs of children and young people while making sure to timetable opportunities for family work to happen. It is also fitting that Hill and Garfat remind readers about the economics of child and youth care, pointing to ways in which opportunity

cost-benefit arguments might be developed to support child and youth care approaches to working with families.

While there is much to commend in this beginning effort to articulate a child and youth care approach to working with families, it must be said that all the chapters are largely Eurocentric and monocultural in their orientations. It is true that many of the principles identified in this volume might offer insights for child and youth care workers engaging with indigenous families and young people or with children from Hispanic or Afro-Caribbean and Afro-American families. References to culture are few and, where these do appear, they are not developed to any great extent. There is little room for views such as those documented in Rangihau's New Zealand research about child and family welfare services for Maori peoples which found that "at the heart of the matter was a profound misunderstanding or ignorance about the place of a child in Maori society and its relationship with *whanau* (family), *hapu* (sub-tribe), and *iwi* (tribal) structures" (*Puao-te-Ata-tu* [Daybreak] 1986, p. 7). In pursuing family-oriented policies and practices, New Zealand health and welfare workers and teachers–mostly of European ancestry–failed historically to take account of cultural influences that shape the development of indigenous children. Most accept now that, in spite of good intentions, professional efforts with indigenous children in New Zealand as well as in North America and elsewhere have been largely monocultural, where interventions have been informed by ideas imported from elsewhere. Such practices are changing, and some child and youth care workers have gone to great lengths to develop culturally appropriate ways of working with children and families. However, these voices are missing from this volume and will need to be nurtured and supported in future efforts as child and youth care workers continue to articulate more responsive ways of working with indigenous and minority group children and families. Until then, this volume offers an important beginning and is recommended to all concerned with improving child and youth care services, wherever they are.

Leon Fulcher
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Preface

The head of a federal department quite recently begged a settlement to transform into readable matter a certain mass of material which had been carefully collected into tables and statistics. He hoped to make a connection between the information concerning diet and sanitary conditions, and the tenement house people who sadly needed this information. The head of the bureau said quite simply that he hoped that the settlements could accomplish this, not realizing that to put information into readable form is not nearly enough. It is to confuse a simple statement of knowledge with its application.

   Permit me to illustrate from a group of Italian women who bring their underdeveloped children several times a week to Hull House for sanitary treatment, under the direction of a physician. It has been possible to teach some of these women to feed their children oatmeal instead of tea-soaked bread, but it has been done, not by statement at all but by a series of gay little Sunday morning breakfasts given to a group of them in the Hull House nursery. A nutritious diet was then substituted for an inferior one by a social method.

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–Jane Addams, 1899
"A Function of the Social Settlements"
[reprinted in Addams, 1992, p. 89]

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Jane Addams said that the purpose of the settlement house is to "express the meaning of life in terms of life itself, in forms of activity," and she believed that a settlement works because of reciprocity between its members, even those who are destitute, oppressed, and troublesome.

In 1996, Jerry Beker and I argued that residential care programs in the U.S., based on what we learned about from colleagues in Israel, have few reasons not to practice reciprocity and a social method with youth residents, even difficult youth.

Here, Thom Garfat and his colleagues argue that we have no reason not to practice reciprocity with the parents and families of these same youth. He furthers the work of Addams by illustrating how it is practiced, even with difficult

xxi

parents. And so we have come full circle pedagogically: We cannot practice child and youth care in a way that leaves out the parents nor can we simply blame them for child and youth problems. Reciprocity includes everyone.

Just as Addams challenged preconceptions about immigrants and how persons learn, these authors challenge our preconceptions about parents of difficult children and youth: their capacities, interests, values, and lifestyles. Not only is this a challenge to our own preconceptions about *their* identity. . . . That challenge is also to preconceptions about *our* identity. They challenge us to sustain the primacy of person before behaviors and performance. They challenge us to make ethics a priority over method. They challenge us to practice "care-work" before intervention. They challenge us to place the interpersonal and contextual before the intrapersonal and individual.

Their explication of care-work is timely, because we are nearing the end of a period of naiveté about family work and, it is hoped, the end of a period of dichotomous thinking about families. One choice was to place hope in a range of interventions for families in trouble (e.g., wraparound services, therapy, casework, parent education), but these have not been that successful in either saving money or preventing placement of children outside of the home. Another, earlier choice was to abandon work with the family and to try to save the children. That created new problems between children and families, and it created relationships of hostility and defensiveness between families and care systems.

This dichotomous choice between children and their families was a false, unrealistic choice, and perhaps we may now give it up. Both choices are based on a mistaken hope for the "right" solution and a unitary intervention. Yet the discussions of work with families in these pages makes no false promises of easy success or an easy romanticism about difficult families. What it does promise is a practice of working with families that is consistent with the tradition of child and youth care work, and this book is a good lesson in the pedagogy of that work even for those not interested in family work.

These authors teach us that human development begins with the practices of respect, dignity, and the wholeness of a human life, principles described by Taylor (1989); the child and youth care practice described here begins with this kind of philosophical anthropology of person. There is a basic pedagogical principle here: Like Addams, Garfat argues that parents' dignity is an *a priori* condition and that direct attempts to change them are disrespectful, violates their dignity, and contradicts the inherent, intrinsic organic wholeness of a person's life.

This is not just a principle of family work; it is a guide to all traditional child and youth care work. Development and growth is a mysterious, asynchronous, nonlinear process and dynamic. All child and youth care work aims to further

growth and change, yet its pedagogy is not interventionist and direct. Youthwork practice is indirect, cooperative, collaborative, and invitational.

A further characteristic of this paradox is that the reciprocity described in these pages rests on a creative tension between acknowledging the "otherness" of and in clients while nurturing shared experience and common understandings. This is a rich–although demanding–explication of reciprocity and shared experience as alternatives to conformity and similarity, which are the usual standards.

The federal department head, described by Addams, wanted to help and, seeing a linear connection between behavior and problem, asked for a linear intervention. Addams proposed instead a "social method," a nonlinear and moral practice method of respect and dignity.

Here, Garfat and his colleagues have done well in upholding this practice tradition.

Douglas Magnuson

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Introduction

> If family ties are to be conserved and family responsibilities insisted upon, systematic attention is needed in dealing with the families of children for whom we are caring. . . . When the child comes into care, the family comes with it. . . .
>
> By such means reconstructive and recreative work with families becomes possible, the child does not stay away from his home any longer than is necessary, and there is ample time for his adjustment and follow-up.
>
> –Carl Carstens, 1927 (quoted in Daniels & Tucker, 1989)

WHAT IS FAMILY?

This collection of papers, from people embedded in the field of child and youth care, is about working with the families of those young people who are sometimes called troubled or troubling. But what is family? This collection does not definitively answer the question. It is, like so many other writings, encompassing of many definitions. It does not, however, avoid the issue.

It would have been nice to start with a clear, singular definition of family, but we find, in our field as in most others, that such a definition is not available. More importantly, a single, common definition would be limiting and restrictive and, quite frankly, it would interfere with effective family work with young people and their families. For young people and families themselves resist any formal definition of what constitutes family, preferring the freedom of a flexible definition.

As you read this collection, you will find, among other, sometimes implied, definitions that family might be:

- The traditional, related group of individuals into which a child is born, which may consist of a few or multiple individuals, close or extended.

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- A nonbiologically related group of individuals, living together in a systemically related commitment.
- The individuals to whom the child is attached and who hold a place of primary importance for the young person, but with whom the young person is not living, and with whom the young person may even have limited contact.

We recognize that there are legal, organizational, and functional definitions that have various implications for our work with the young person. But in the end any and all of these definitions seem to be of lesser importance in direct practice with young people and their families. As a field, we appear to have adopted the position that the family is whatever it is as created, determined, and experienced by the young person and the significant others in the young person's life. This "constructed family" is what is most important in our work because it is what is most important to the youth's experiencing.

This is not to suggest disrespect for those other, more formal definitions. Nor does it imply that we ignore, for example, the biological family in favor of the constructed family. Indeed, we often work with a young person and the young person's family to help them have experiences that may change their perception of what constitutes family, thereby modifying perhaps the constructed definition.

I remember a young person who came to stay in a residential center where I was working. On her arrival, we were clearly informed that she "had no family": no parents, no extended relatives, no one. I remember, too, when she left the center. By then she had regular, if infrequent, visits with a distant aunt who had been tracked down and engaged by a persistent staff team. She had regular, more frequent, visits with a man who, while unrelated by blood, had been there at some significant early moments in her development and who was interested in playing some supportive role in her life. She developed close and personal relationships with two other young women, and the three of them decided that they were sisters. In short, when she came, she had no family. When she left, she had some.

Ten years later, as I write this, those connections–that family–still exists. This young person, with the help of a caring staff team, had developed her own family, and her constructed family is as supportive, important, and powerful as any other family might be in the life of a young person. One day I asked her about this constructed family and how she thought of it relative to more traditional families. Her reply was clear enough: "It feels like my family so it is my family."

So in the end, this collection has nothing to offer by way of a clear definition of family. You will find multiple descriptions and definitions. As

Niall McElwee says, "The family today looks very different than it did a couple of decades ago" and, as a result, we need, to quote Grant Charles and Holly Charles, a more "fluid definition of family." Perhaps we would be wisest to align ourselves with Gerry Fewster's interest in the family "as a subjective reality that is constructed collectively and experienced individually" which seems appropriate as child and youth care moves towards a more phenomenological orientation. For when we position ourselves inside the constructed world of the child, we at least position ourselves to attend to the family as experienced by the child and, in the end, maybe that is the only definition that is relevant.

I remember once talking to a young woman about family and what it was for her. She was a young woman who had, like so many of the young people with whom we work, constructed her own family out of the myriad of people who had been a part of her life.

"Family," she said, "is where you belong, isn't it?"

Or the other young person who, when asked, looked at me strangely and replied, "Family is, well, it's the place where your heart feels safe."

In the end, maybe that is a good a definition as any: "Family is the place where you have a sense of belonging and feel safe," for belonging and safety are certainly among the most basic of needs. As the young people implied in the quotes above, family is, more than anything, a feeling, an experience, an experience of self in a particular context. As we explore this territory, as we place ourselves in the position of being with the young person and family, we open the opportunity to know a little more of their experiential world.

YOUTH CARE, YOUTH WORK, CHILD AND YOUTH CARE: WHAT'S IN A NAME?

The reader will also notice that in this collection there is no clear label or name for members of the staff we discuss. In some papers you will find the use of the term Child Care Worker, in others the term Child and Youth Care Worker. At times you will discover the term Youth Worker, and at times, Youth Care Worker, Youth Family Worker, Care Worker or, even, Social Care Worker. Sometimes the label, whatever it is, is capitalized. Sometimes it is not. We have made no attempt here to come to an agreement on one particular term. If the field itself cannot do it, we would be foolish to attempt to do so ourselves (see McElwee & Garfat, 2003). What is important is who we are talking about, not what they are called.

We are talking about those people who work with troubled (well, sometimes not) young people who sometimes live in group care (but not always), and/or are in the care of the system (well, most often anyway). Maybe the easi-

est thing to say, for the moment, is that we are talking about the direct care, front-line helpers whose positions and work grew out of the influences of the 1950s and 1960s. We see the influences, for example, of Redl and Wineman (1951, 1952), Meyer (1958), Redl (1959), Burmeister (1960), Maier (1957, 1960, 1979), Polsky (1962), Trieshman (see Trieshman, Whittaker, & Brendtro, 1969), Beedell (1970), Beker (1972), and others who work in a variety of environments. For a description of many of those locations of work, the reader is referred to the general literature of the field (e.g., Denholm, Ferguson, & Pence, 1993; McElwee & Garfat, 2003).

Or maybe it is best to say nothing at all because the people for whom this collection was written know exactly who they are. Labeling them with a common definition feels too much like trying to come up with a common definition of the family. The reality is that we who work in this field share much in common and are, ourselves, comfortable with the variety of names, labels, and definitions by which we refer to ourselves. In the end, the variety reflects our collectively constructed and individually experienced identity.

A LITTLE HISTORY BEFORE WE BEGIN

There was a time in our professional history when the family was not seen in a positive light. Indeed, in the early days of our field, family was considered irrelevant (Fewster & Garfat, 1993). Then when it did become relevant, it was negatively so, in that the family was seen as a problem, the enemy, the cause of all this pain and suffering of the child (Garfat & McElwee, 2001). To make this statement is not a criticism of earlier programs or approaches for, indeed, those programs and approaches simply reflected the prevailing attitude of the times (Charles, 2003). We have now, to a great extent, arrived at a place where we see family as a partner, a solution, a way of helping the young person who remains our focus (Garfat & McElwee, 2001). But it is not just the involvement of families that has changed in child and youth care. There have been, as well, dramatic changes in the focus of our work, the role of child and youth care workers and, most important, in the locations in which we work. As you read this collection of writings, you will recognize many of the new roles for child and youth care workers, especially in the community. Child and youth care work has become, finally, a true support to families. In a recent article, Niall McElwee and I summarized the changes over the years in a simple chart, which is offered here as a quick reference (see Table 1). Readers interested in further details could consult the original article.

Suffice to say that in contemporary child and youth care practice, family is the focus (Garfat, 2002). There is an increasing expectation on the part of families, other professionals, and society in general that family will be involved in the care and treatment of young people. For many of us, as Mark Hill says, it is

TABLE 1. Changes in Family Involvement and Work in Child and Youth Care Work

Era Variable	Beginning	Past	Recent/Future
Definition of client and location of problem	child	child/parents	family
Perception of parent and purpose of contact	irrelevant; the enemy; ———— ———— blaming; information sharing	parental incompetence; ——— ——— program input; education; support	person/individual as a part of systems; ——— ——— collaboration, relationship, intervention into daily life
Role of family members	none, occasional visitor	parenting, contact, input into IIP, recipient of support	client, co-helper, input into daily decision-making
Role of Youth Care Worker	control, protection of child from parents; substitute parents	protection, parent educator, behaviour change, connection	engagement, family interventionist, outreach, facilitation
Location of service	none for parents	in program, community	in home, community and program

Reprinted from Garfat, T. & McElwee, N. (2001). The changing role of family in child and youth care practice. *Journal of Child and Youth Care Work,* 16, 236-248.

difficult now "to imagine how concentrating solely on one family member will lead to lasting change."

Child and youth care in both theory and practice has now placed family as central to effective helping. It is hard to imagine anymore a collection of writing about helping young people that does not include an emphasis on family. It was not that long ago, however, that a collection such as this would have seemed like a radical idea. Now, we hope, it just makes sense.

Thom Garfat

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Working with Families:
Developing a Child
and Youth Care Approach

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SUMMARY. Recently there has been discussion of a distinctly "youth care approach" to working with families. There are some assumptions of this kind of work, including (a) family life is lived in "daily events," and in those daily life events there are patterns of interacting; (b) child and youth care workers are involved with families as they live their lives; and (c) child and youth care utilizes daily life events for therapeutic purposes, as they occur. Family work interventions are characterized by caring for the family and individual family members, related to the immediate and the overall context, and reflect a way of connecting that fits each family, including their rules, roles, culture, rhythm, timing, and style. *[Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <http://www.HaworthPress.com> © 2003 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]*

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It is an early spring weekday evening. John, a youth care worker, is in the family kitchen talking with a father and son about fly-tying. The boy, Bobby, aged 14, is being considered for placement in a residential treatment center. He is under consideration because he keeps getting into fights and thrown out of school. Then the fights carry on at home. After a while he was doing whatever he wanted at home.

A younger brother and sister are in the adjoining living room, bickering while playing a game, their volume gradually rising. Mom is in the bedroom taking a nap. She was napping when the worker arrived. After a few minutes the mom comes screaming out of the bedroom, yelling at the bickering siblings that they should "shut up," her volume overpowering theirs. Mom glances over and notices that the worker is there. She turns back to the other children and continues, without changing volume, intensity, or style.

She yells at them that she has had a tough day and, that if they cared about her, they would be quiet. They stare at her in silence. She then walks into the kitchen, says to her husband, "God, can't you keep them quiet while I am resting?"

Dad retorts: "How was I to know they'd wake you up? They were only playing, you know."

"They were fighting, for God's sake," she responds, and turns to put on the coffee pot.

The worker says, "Evening, Jane," and turns back to the father and son who are both staring at the mom. The father has an angry look on his face. The son looks embarrassed. The worker turns back to the dad and Bobby gets up and goes outside. Mom brings the cups to the table.

We read this scenario and give it meaning. From within our own framework, we critique, judge, and evaluate. We make assumptions. We interpret. We try to make sense out of what we have read. We wonder how the worker is interpreting what is going on and how to respond. In this process some of our assumptions become evident. Our perceptual frame (Bruner, 1990) is partially revealed.

As you read, a number of questions might come to mind:

1. Why are they in the house rather than an office? And why the kitchen?
2. Why are the worker, father, and son talking about flyfishing instead of talking about the youth's difficulties in school or with his parents?
3. What is the meaning of the mother being asleep while the worker, dad, and youth are talking?
4. Why is it that mom's volume, intensity, and style do not change when she sees the worker sitting in the kitchen?
5. Why is the worker not intervening with the siblings?
6. Why did the worker not ask the mother to join them?