

Master Class in Systemic Practice – The Essex Way

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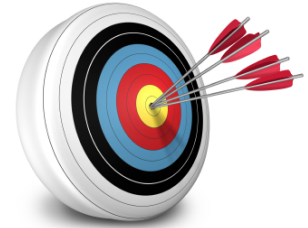
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Essex County Council



Aims

- To understand our journey
- To get interested in a systemic approach
- To start to become familiar with some systemic language and models
- To start to understand a systemic approach to risk and change
- To remember to be excited about social work – that you can make a difference!

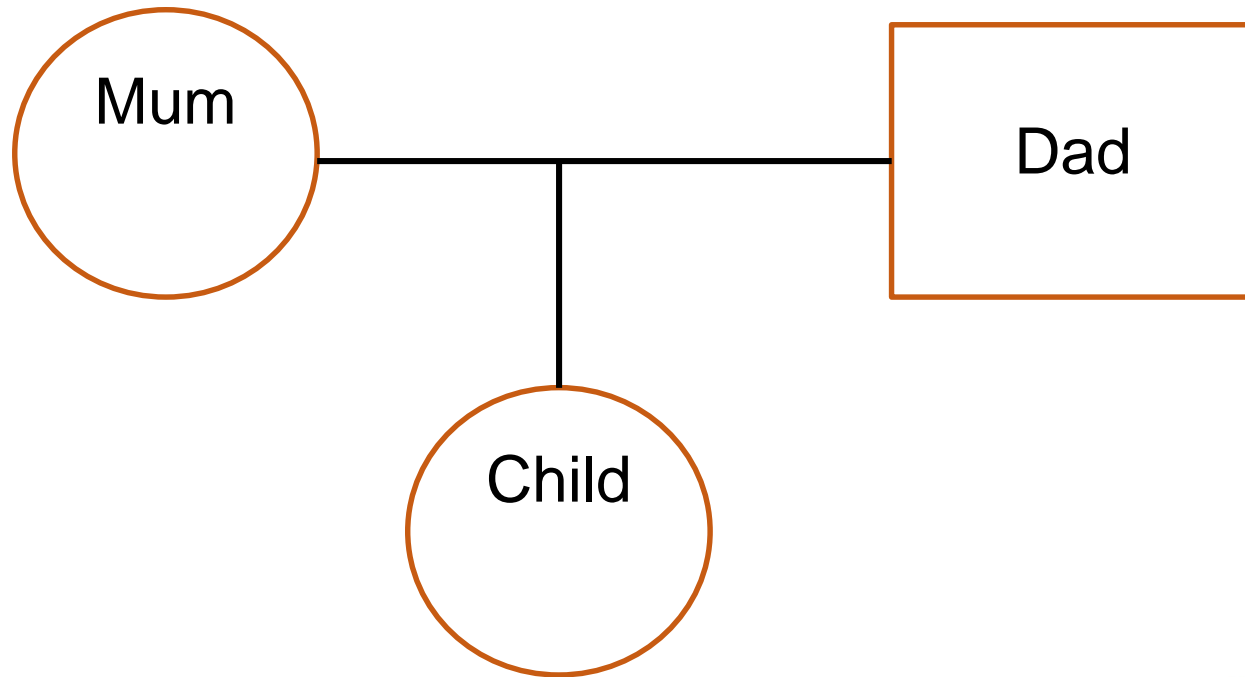


Whistle Stop Tour of our journey towards a Systemic Approach

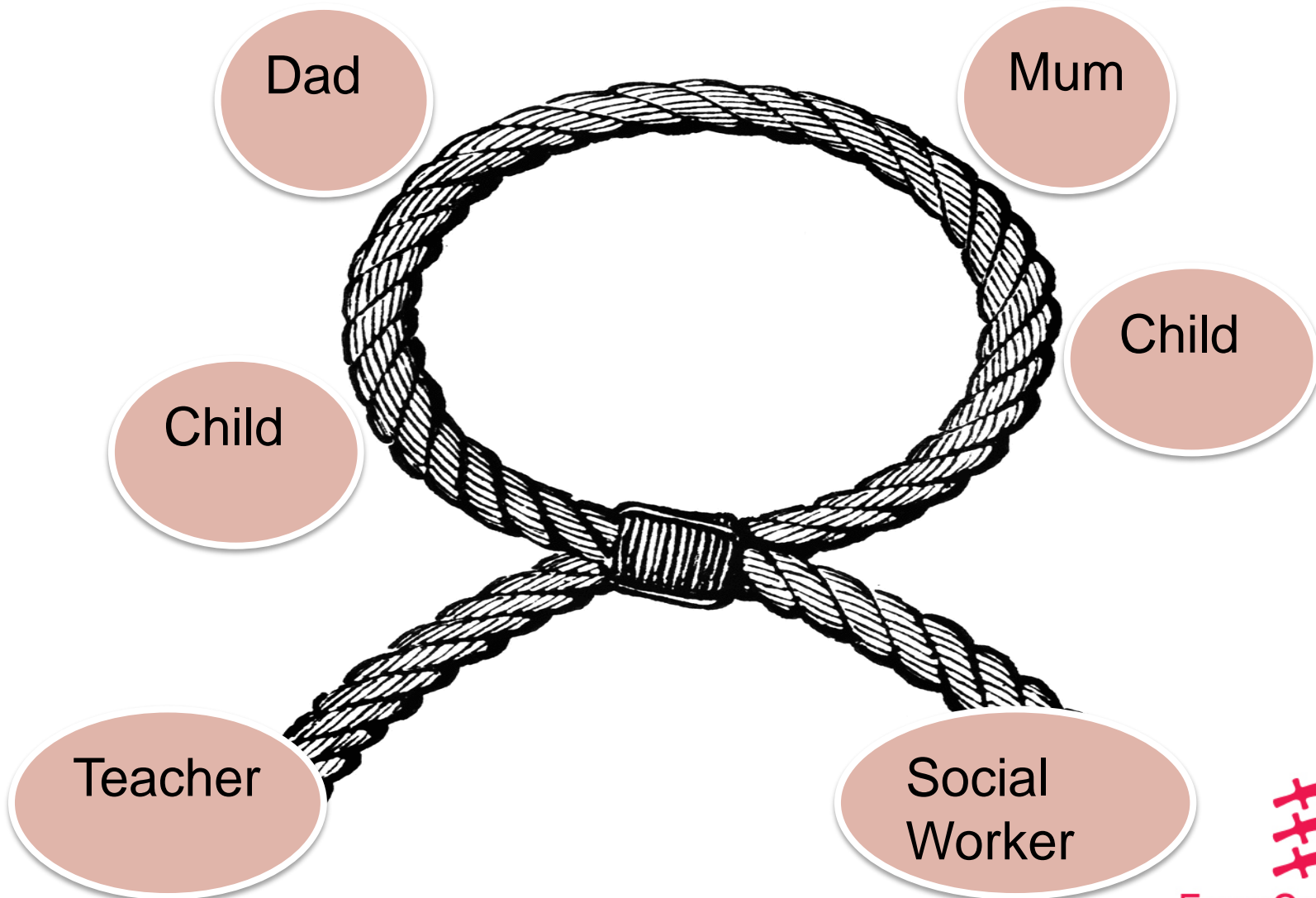
- Setting the context/setting the scene
- Special measures - now Good (Ofsted)
- Nearly 300 Practitioners and Managers have completed some form of systemic training
- Reduction in CP plans 903 March 2011– 548
- Statistics of children in care 1580 March 2011 – 1003 currently.



An Essex Family



Systemic Thinking - Exercise

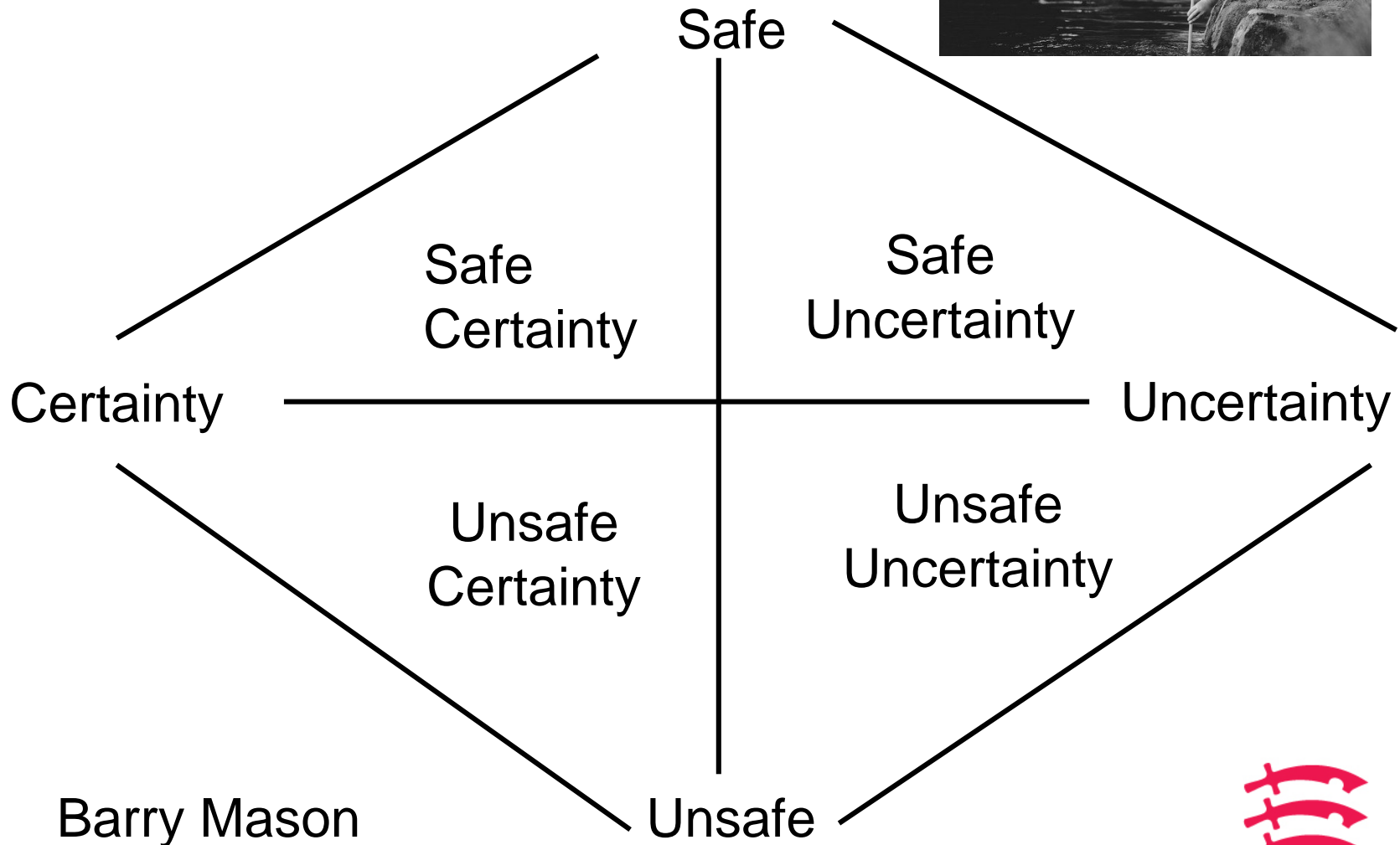


What is Systemic?

- Problems existing in the relationships between people, not 'inside' a person.
- A person or family system exist within other systems.
- A change in one part of a system is felt in other parts of the system. This could include wider family, schools, doctors, neighbourhood, culture.
- Change happens in relationship with people and other systems.
- Models of intervention focus on beliefs and experiences within these relationships.



Safe Uncertainty

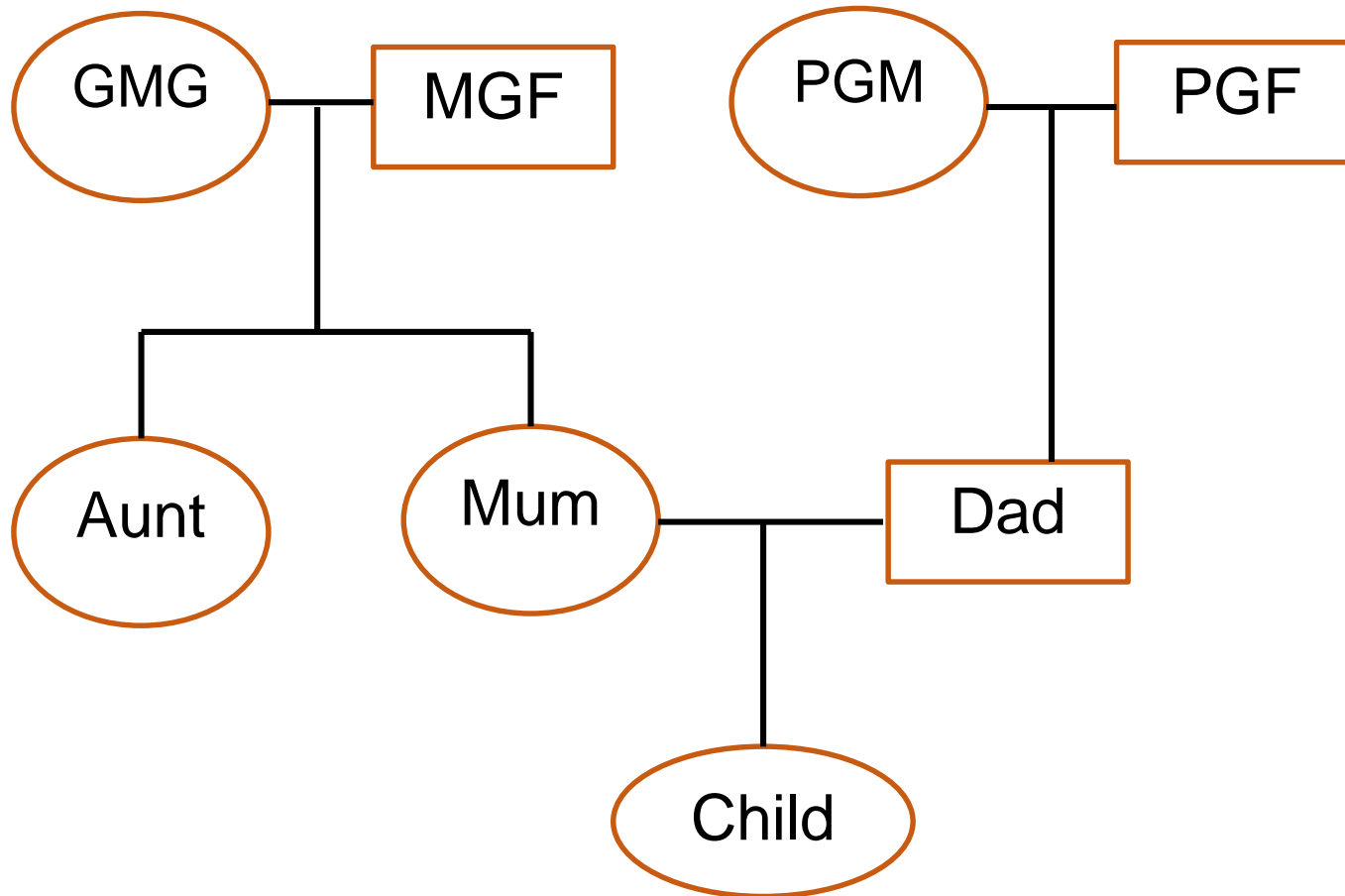


Barry Mason



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Family's Safety Plan

- If Mum is feeling that she wants to harm her baby she calls Dad, Social Worker or the out of hours social work team.
- All had a scripted way of talking to Mum using the scaling Mum engaged with.
- Dad agreed to come home from work if Mum/social worker called him and asked.



Reflexive Practice Decisions

Modernist/objectivist perspective:

- Valid accounts for decisions are reasoned in relation to objective aspects or facts
- **Decisions ideally based on laws, rules or authoritative theories**
- Observer and participants not relevant, ideally interchangeable
- **Convergence to a single right story, the Truth (only one truth exists)**
- Planning, organisation, commanding, controlling are valued activities.

Systemic/social constructionist perspective (post modernistic):

- What counts as relevant fact is situated and negotiated
- **Laws, rules or authoritative theories are constructed and used from within situated contexts**
- Mediating context include political, departmental, team and worker experience, others
- **Multiple stories can be told (Curiosity regarding stories/narrative/discourse and meaning)**
- Clarifying contexts, sense making, dialogue, reflexivity are valued activities



Domestic Abuse Decision Making in Practice

Old Essex

- Automatic notification from Essex Police of every domestic abuse incident
- 3 strike rule led to compulsory assessment.
- Assessment outcome often directed that the perpetrator left the home.
- Written Agreements
- Failure to comply led to ICPC

Current Practice

- JDAT and shut off of automatic notifications.
- Assessment decision made by Duty Seniors based on referral information and agency enquiries.
- Assessments co-creates with families Safety Plans
- Manage under CIN, CINRO and ICPC only considered if Safety Plan fails



Domestic Abuse Decision Making in Practice

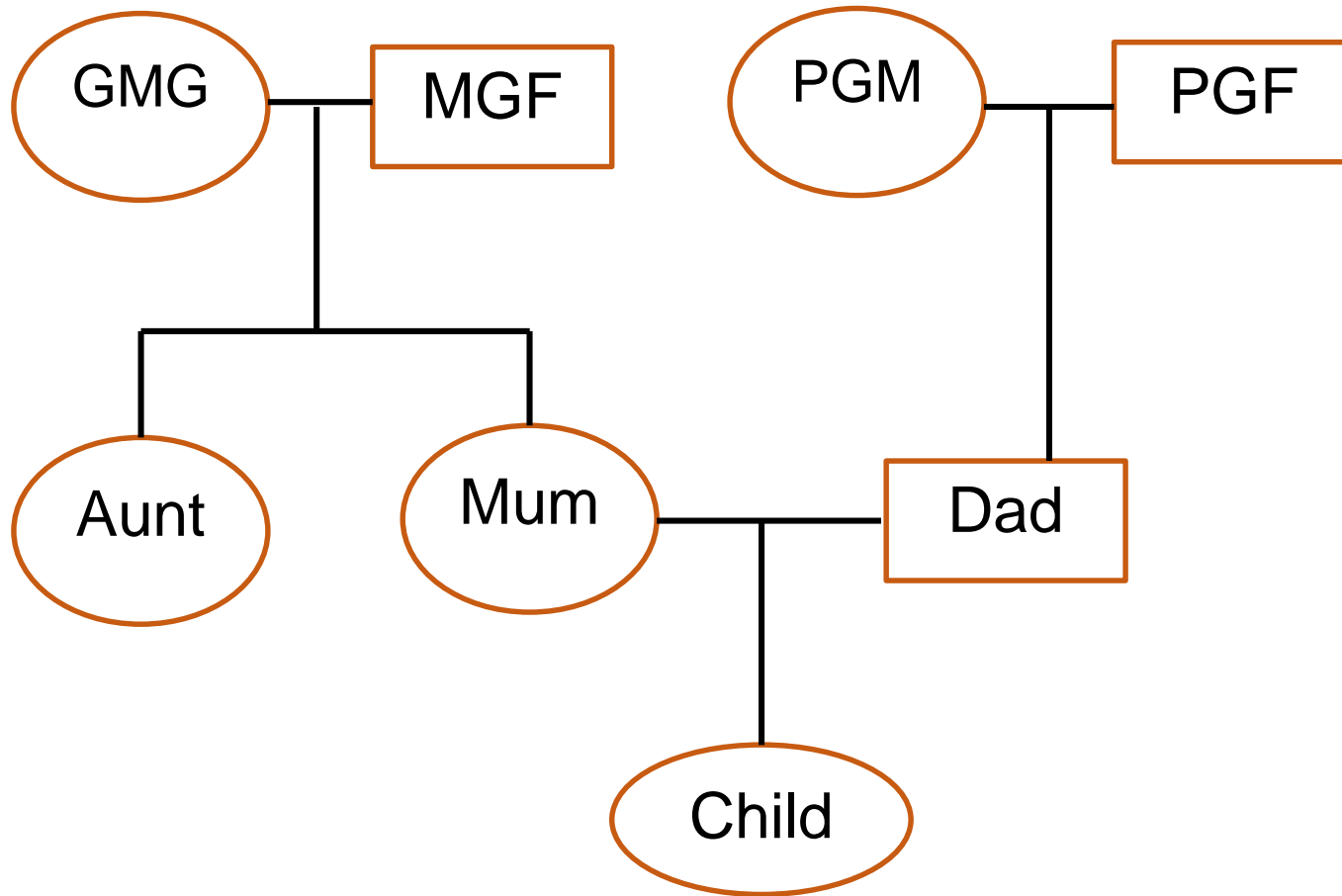
Old Essex

- CP plan of tasks and actions made by SW/professionals
- Parenting assessment
- Parents not to have contact
- Mum to do DA work (externally provided)

Current Practice

- Strength based planning with parents/children
- What are the stories told and untold by families/children as well as professionals about DA
- Holistic single child and family assessment, hypothesis of what DA could be the symptom of?
- What works in the family?
- What do they want to change?

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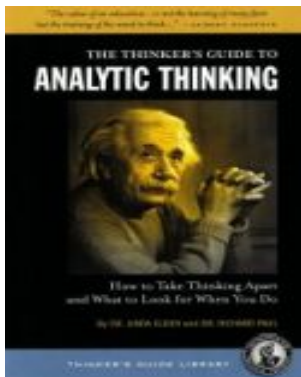
Hypothesis

- A tool which enables therapists or other professionals to conduct their interviews, to ask the questions which will bring them pertinent information and thus to have a directing thread. It is an 'unproved supposition, accepted provisionally as a basis for subsequent investigation' (Selvini Palazzoli et al., 1980a).
- Oxford Dictionary, hypothesis is "a supposition made as a basis for reasoning, without reference to its truth; as a starting point for an investigation".

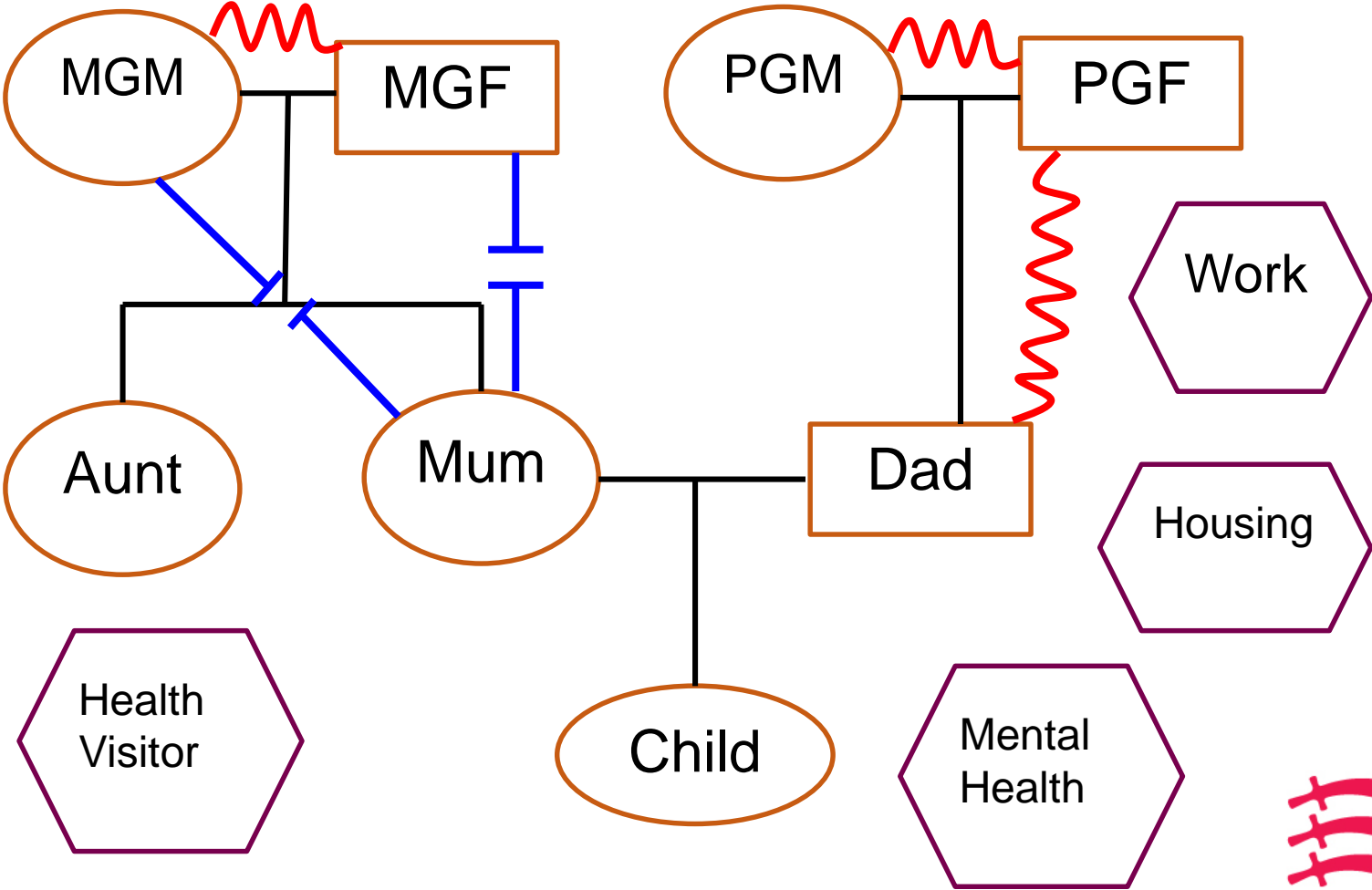


Hypothesis

- By hypothesizing we refer to the formulation by the Social Worker of an hypothesis based upon the information they have from the referrer regarding the family.
- The hypothesis establishes a starting point for the investigation as well as verification of the validity of this hypothesis based upon specific methods and skills.
- If the multiple hypothesis are proven false, the Social Worker can form other hypothesis based upon the information gathered during the testing of the first, or from new information.



An Essex Family



Family's Future Safety Plan

- If Mum is feeling that she wants to harm her baby she calls Dad.
- If Dad wasn't available, she would call her sister or her friend (they lived close by now).
- If no one was available, Mum could call the non statutory mental health service, and if needed she knew she could call the police.
- Dad would come home if Mum called and needed help.
- If Dad felt he could not come home, he would call Mum's sister or friend to support her.
- If Dad needed respite, he would ask Mum's aunt or friend to be with Mum and the child for support.
- Dad knew he could call the police if he was very worried.



Essex Family's Feedback

- Our worker has been really supportive, and has been there as much and as soon as she can, for example when my mood has gotten really low.
- She is easy to talk to and non-judgemental. I feel able to trust her and she gives reassuring advice. I like that she knows about other services that are available to support our family.
- She comes back in follow-up visits with different suggestions, and helps us to make our own plans to overcome obstacles.
- Our worker has been there at desperate times and given us support and comfort. She is always reliable to contact. I like that she is good with our daughter and I can trust her with her, for example if I go out of the room for a minute while Our worker is visiting.



Learning

- Safe Uncertainty – Barry Mason.
- 2nd Order of Change – Modernist/Objectivist v Systemic Decision Making.
- Hypothesis and how it informs thinking/practice.
- How we used these models with the Essex Family

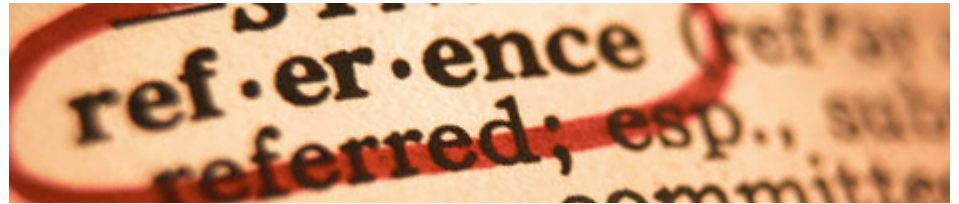


Essex Family's Feedback

- Our worker has done lots of work about the future and planning for the future with us. I really liked looking at the family tree, as this highlighted to me and my partner the support that we do have, which my mental health was making me doubt.



References



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