

## **General Glossary Terms**

**alliance:** a shared connection between two or more people, typically based on common interests or a shared perspective, but is not an attempt to keep others on the outside (which is what occurs when there is a coalition)

**autopoiesis:** A construct within second order cybernetics that refers to a way in which various parts of a system interact to create a recognizable autonomous system (e.g. Family; Marriage; Parent/Child; Employment; Student/Teacher etc.)

**boundary:** A concept that includes the demarcation between parts of a system or between systems, typically defined by implicit or explicit rules regarding who may participate and how; these are typically created by family rules regarding emotions or physical space and protect the individual, subsystem, family, group, and so forth.

**butterfly power:** Derived from chaos theory, it is that view that tiny differences or changes in a system can suddenly blow up in a way that transforms that system.

**circular causality:** The idea that causality is nonlinear, and actions are connected through network of interacting loops (or recursive) within a context. One event impacts another event which has some impact on the first event, so it is not possible to determine the “first cause”.

**circular questioning:** An interviewing technique with the goal of eliciting information about connections and contexts that influence family members and of the differences in perception about events or relationships from members of the same system.

**closed system:** A self-contained system with rather impermeable boundaries that limit interactions with outside systems. A closed system tends to be resistant to change and thus prone to increasing disorder (e.g., if you never ate or drank or breathe (refusing to take sustenance), eventually the system known as your body would collapse and become part of another system (e.g., nature)).

**coalitions:** Alliances or affiliations, temporary or long-term, between certain family members against others in the family. The key word is “against”, us versus them. Families have “alliances” that are healthy, alliances around shared activities and interests, not intended to create division.

**Content / Process:** The constructs of Content and Process are used to delineate between examining the systemic interaction pattern maintaining the identified problem (Process) and focusing on the unwanted behaviors and the ‘cause and effect’ understanding (Content) offered by the complainants.

**complementarity:** Interactional patterns where members take very different and unequal roles (for example, pursuer/distancer) and in which each participant’s response tends to increase polarization in these roles (e.g., the more I try to get close to you, the more you try to create distance).

**countertransference:** The therapist’s emotional reactivity to a client or family that is rooted in feelings and perceptions he or she experienced with a person or context (e.g., family, group, etc.) in the past or present.

**cybernetics:** The science of studying feedback, and how the flow of information through feedback loops helps a system to remain stable.

**detriangulate:** Withdrawing from a dysfunctional triangle.

**differentiation:** According to Bowen, it consists of two elements: 1) the ability to be a separate individual within a system while remaining emotionally connected and 2) the ability to balance one's intellectual and emotional functioning so that one side of the balance does not overwhelm the other side.

**disengagement:** A family organization with overly rigid boundaries, where individuals feel isolated and unconnected, tend to get into conflict to avoid intimacy, and tend to act more as individuals than a family.

**double-bind concept:** The idea that conflict occurs when an individual receives important contradictory injunctions at different levels of abstraction, and this individual is not permitted by family rules to either comment on or escape this contradiction.

**ecosystemic approach:** The view that families are nested within larger systems (schools, courts, health care).

**emotional cutoff:** Choosing to handle anxiety by withdrawing or running away from the parental family, or denying its current importance in one's life. While this temporary reduces the anxiety, it also deters an individual's growth in differentiation.

**enmeshment:** A family organization with blurred boundaries characterized by individuals have limited autonomy (e.g., to be different is to be seen as disloyal) and members are overly involved in each other's lives.

**entropy:** The tendency of a system to go into disorder, and if unimpeded, to reach a disorganized and undifferentiated state.

**equifinality:** The systems concept that there are lots of ways to reach the same goal, which contrasts with linear cause-and-effect explanations. There are many potential reasons why an individual or family system behaves as it does in the present.

**equipotentiality:** The systems concept that from any one point there are many potential destinations or end points that are possible.

**family homeostasis:** A term coined by Don D. Jackson, MD which referred to the idea that all members of a system are engaged in a never ending process by which equilibrium is maintained. This process mandates constant adjustments in order to sustain stability within the system. An example would be the suspension of a car. It is ever changing and adjusting to the bumps in the road so your ride remains relatively stable.

**family rules:** Recurring patterns of interaction that, in time, define the limits of acceptable and appropriate behavior. Shared norms and expectations which govern the interactions of members of a system (e.g., men do not cry, women should depend on men, etc.).

**family systems:** The view that a family is made up of a collection of parts that operates as a "whole" emotional unit or network of interlocking relationships.

**feedback:** Information about the results of past actions that regulates the system.

**feedback loops:** Circular interaction patterns where the information about the results of a previous action are returned to the system in a way that impacts ensuing actions.

**first-order change:** Temporary or superficial change or changes that do not alter the basic rules or structure of the system.

**first-order cybernetics:** The view that families can be objectively evaluated by someone who is not a part of their system.

**general systems theory:** Initially proposed by von Bertalanffy, living systems are viewed as whole systems with interacting parts within a context, and are maintained by ongoing feedback between the system and the environment.

**homeostasis:** A state of balance or equilibrium in a system and the tendency toward achieving and maintaining this state. Some view this tendency as “resistance” to change, others view it as an attempt to manage anxiety by doing what is familiar.

**levels of abstraction:** This is the process by which individuals within a system constantly negotiate the nature of their relationship. Jackson believed this process is always present and without end. He also believed that most people operate at the second level of abstraction. It is believed that systemic conceptualization happens at the third and fourth level of abstraction. (e.g., 1) How I see you; 2) How I see you seeing me; 3) How I see you seeing me see you; 4) How I see you seeing me see you seeing me; this process continues Ad nauseam).

**identified patient (IP):** The person in a system with the presenting symptom; identified by the family as the person with the problem.

**isomorphism:** The concept that various levels of a system tend to match each other (e.g., if it is not safe for a supervisee to confront a supervisor, it is often not safe for a client to confront the therapist/supervisee, thus the relation dynamics ‘match’).

**linear causality:** The view inherited from classic science that event A causes event B in a nonreciprocal relationship, such that one event causes the next event, but not vice versa. In a family it is the idea that an event can cause someone to think, feel, or do something else (e.g., I got fired from my job causing me to be depressed). This view downplays free will and personal responsibility.

**negative feedback loop:** The flow of information from the action of a system back into the system that attenuates deviation and restores system functioning back to within prescribed limits.

**negentropy:** The tendency of a system to remain flexible and open to new information, thus allowing it to make needed changes and enhance survival of the system.

**open system:** A system with generally permeable boundaries that permits the flow of information between the system’s members, subsystems, and other systems.

**positive feedback loop:** The flow of information from the action of a system back into the system that amplifies deviation from the state of equilibrium, inviting instability and change.

**projective identification:** Unconscious defense mechanism where unwanted parts of one’s self are attributed as belonging to another person (e.g., I view you as critical of me when the reality is I am critical of myself but I do not own that part of myself, thus treating the other person as if they are critical and inviting them to actually be critical of me).

**pseudohostility:** Superficial bickering in the family that distracts from the real issues.

**pseudomutuality:** Superficial family harmony that distracts from the real issues.

**punctuation:** Each person in an interaction pattern believes his or her actions are caused by what the other person's actions, in effect holding the other responsible for his or her reactions (e.g., I hit her because she disrespected me, so it is her fault I hit her).

**quid pro quo:** Literally 'Something for Something' this construct refers to the ever present, often unconscious, process by which relationship rules are negotiated and maintained.

**reciprocal relationships:** The concept that interactions between two people or systems fit together in a complementary manner (e.g., he over functions while she under functions).

**recursion:** Refers to the ever present influence and shared responsibility by the entire system, for the behaviors of each individual.

**redundancy:** Interaction sequences tend to keep repeating themselves in a family.

**reframing:** A class of clinical intervention that attempts to alter people's perceptions of a presenting problem. The alternative understanding incorporates a more useful systemic understanding of the problem which creates greater potential for systemic change.

**second-order change:** Fundamental change or changes in a system's interactional patterns.

**second-order cybernetics:** The view that families cannot be objectively evaluated by someone "outside of the system" because the act of observation makes the observer part of the system.

**strategies:** Repeated, organized, predictable patterns of interaction that become habits; well established strategies become rules.

**subsystem:** Components of larger systems, each with autonomous functions and roles (e.g., parental subsystem, marital subsystem, sibling subsystem, etc.)

**symmetrical interaction pattern:** An interaction pattern where members take very similar and equal roles (for example, both compete to be the sickest person in the relationship); each member's actions tends to invite a similar response in the other member.

**system:** A group of interacting parts that together function as a whole, so that whatever impacts one part of the system impacts other parts of the system.

**theory of logical types:** States that one cannot be both a class and a member of that same class. The theory highlights the impossibility of bringing about change with the same constructs that were present when the original behavior began.

**transference:** The client's emotional reactivity to a therapist that is rooted in feelings he or she experienced with a person or context (e.g., family, group, etc.) in the past or present, thus often displacing unresolved issues with significant persons in the client's past onto the therapist.

**triangle:** A three-person system, the smallest stable emotional system; according to Bowen, the least differentiated person in a two-person emotional system will recruit a third person into the system to lower the intensity and anxiety and gain stability.

**wholeness:** The systems view that combining units, components, or elements produces an entity greater than the sum of its parts (example, water is more than just hydrogen and oxygen molecules, it becomes something with its own unique properties).