

Brief Strategic Family Therapy®

An Empirically Validated Therapy

By Joan A. Muir, Ph.D.
José Szapocznik, Ph.D.
Brief Strategic Family Therapy Institute

BSFT™
An Evidence-Based Practice

UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI
**MILLER SCHOOL
of MEDICINE**



Brief Strategic Family Therapy

How was the intervention developed?

35 years

- *Integrating theory, research and practice*
- *Family approach developed in a real world setting; community settings with multi-problem youth and multi-problem families*
- *Through a series of studies that refined and tested the effectiveness of the model*

Research Evidence

- Reductions in adolescent behavior problems
 - Drug use
 - Delinquency/conduct problems
 - Association with delinquent peers
- Improvements in family functioning
- Superior rates of engagement/retention
- Comparisons to individual and group therapy

BSFT Treatment Philosophy

- Adolescent symptoms are best understood and changed by focusing on the context in which they occur
- To rid a family member of undesirable symptoms a therapist must understand the context in which problems occur

The primary goal of BSFT is to:

- Replace maladaptive family interactions with adaptive interactions
 - Develop competence and mastery
 - Transform affect to create change opportunities
 - Facilitate appropriate connections between family members

BSFT FOCUSES ON CHANGING PROCESS, not the content

Content: friends, school, coming home late

Process: conflict, connection, behavior control

Areas of family functioning that are addressed in BSFT

- Connections or bonding between family members
 - Over- or under- involvement
- Family conflict
 - High levels of conflict
 - Ability to resolve conflicts
- Improve relationships with extended family
 - Access sources of parental support
 - Level of support or conflict between all parental figures

To rid a family member of undesirable symptoms (i.e. drug abuse) a therapist must understand how the family functions as a *whole*

Homeostasis

Tendency of the family system to keep things the same in the face of changes



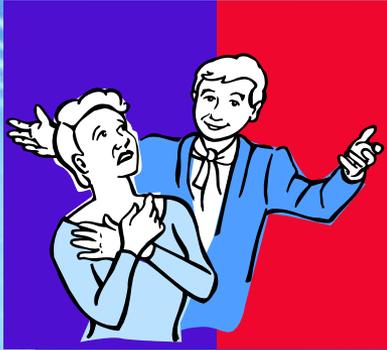
Resistance to change

***Understanding How
Families Work:
Systemic Diagnosis***

BSFT Diagnosis

- ▶ ***Describes the patterns of systemic interrelationships in the family***
- ▶ ***Based on observed interactions***
- ▶ ***Organizes a series of impressions***
- ▶ ***Tells the therapist where to go***
- ▶ ***Helps the therapist “SEE” beyond the content***

Goal is to identify which family interactions are responsible for giving rise to or maintaining dysfunctional structures



Enactments



Family

Therapist

The process of creating interactions in therapy sessions that represent what families do at home...

- May be spontaneous or directed
 - Stimulate dialogue
 - Springboarding
- Used to Diagnose patterns of interaction

The *BSFT* Diagnostic Dimensions

Organization



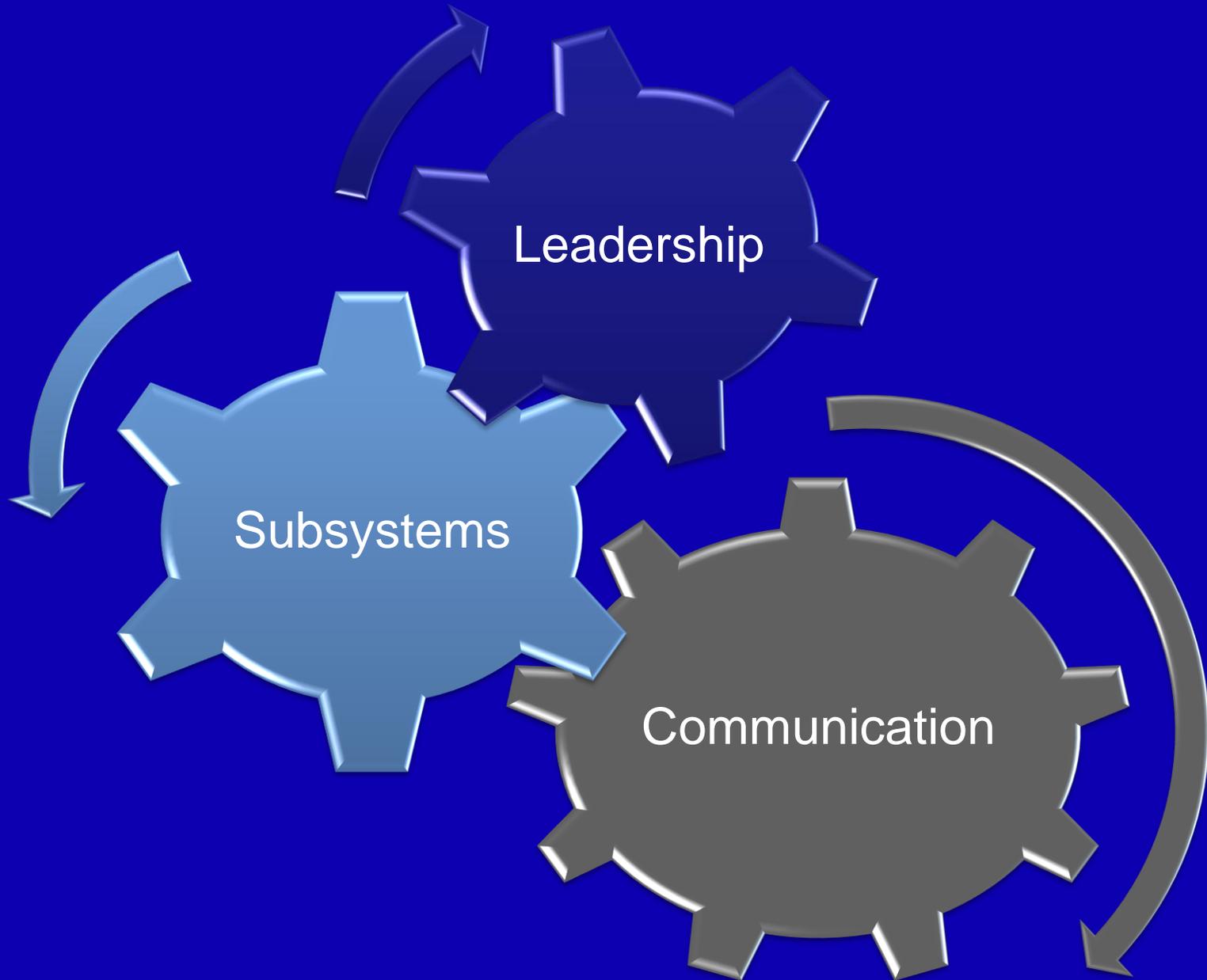
Resonance

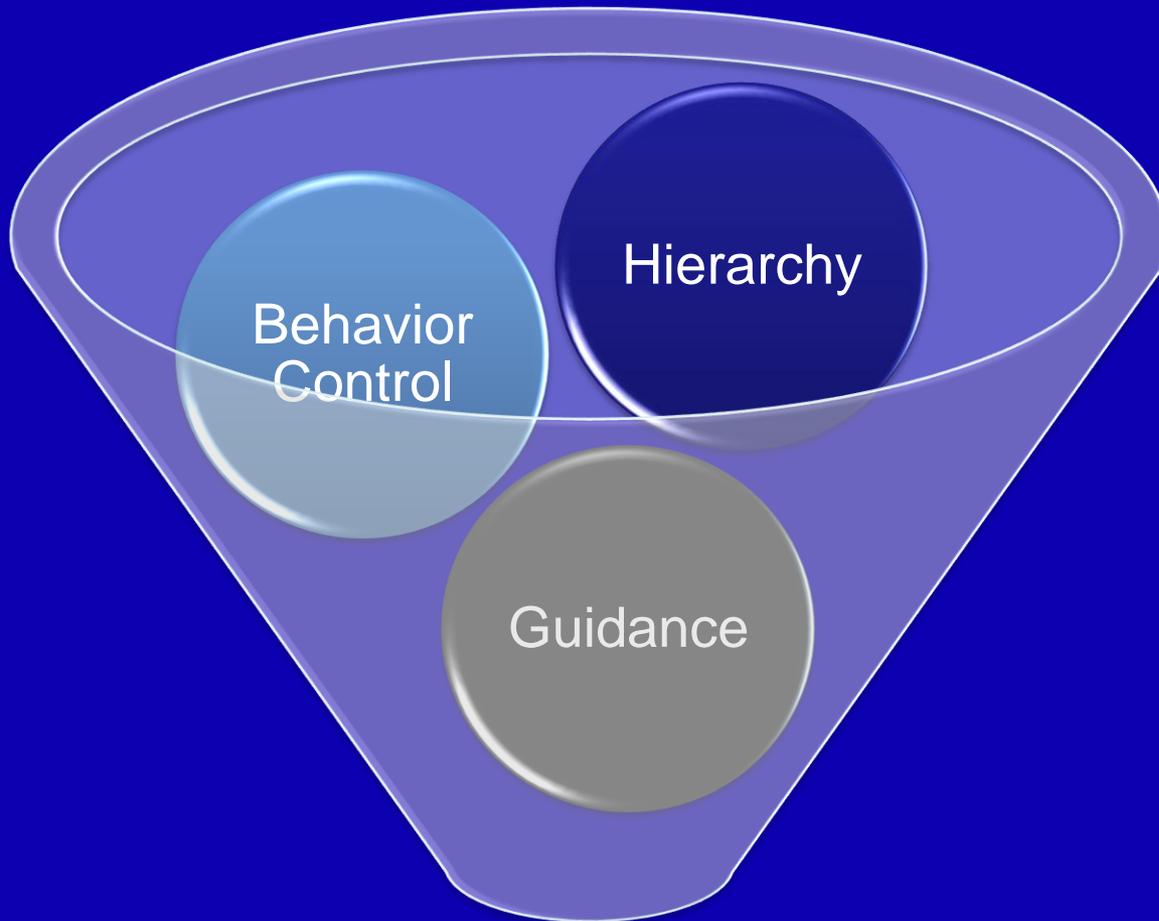
IP-hood

*Developmental
Stage*

*Conflict
Resolution*

Structure or Organization





Leadership

Subsystem Organization

Are close relationships between family members

- Alliances

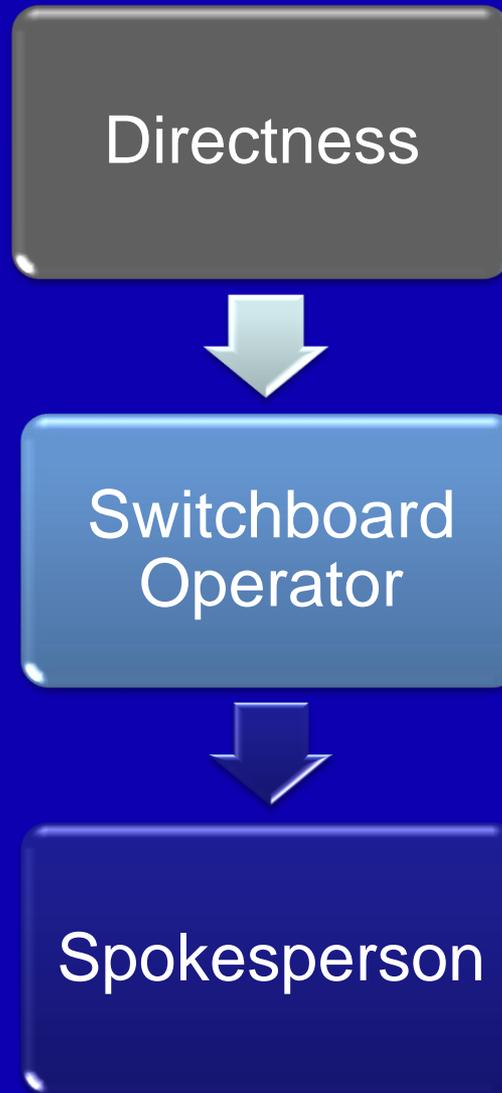
Families have both formal subsystems and informal subsystems

- Subsystem Formation

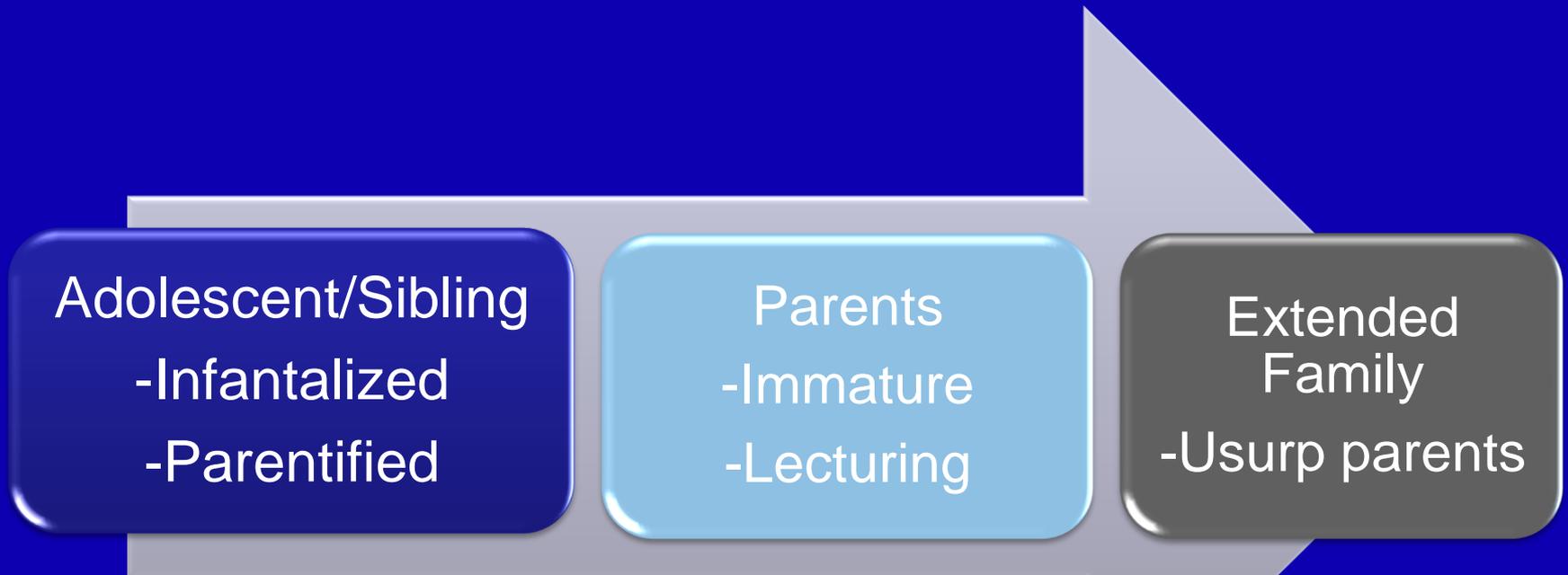
Prevent direct communication and effective conflict resolution

- Triangles

Communication Flow



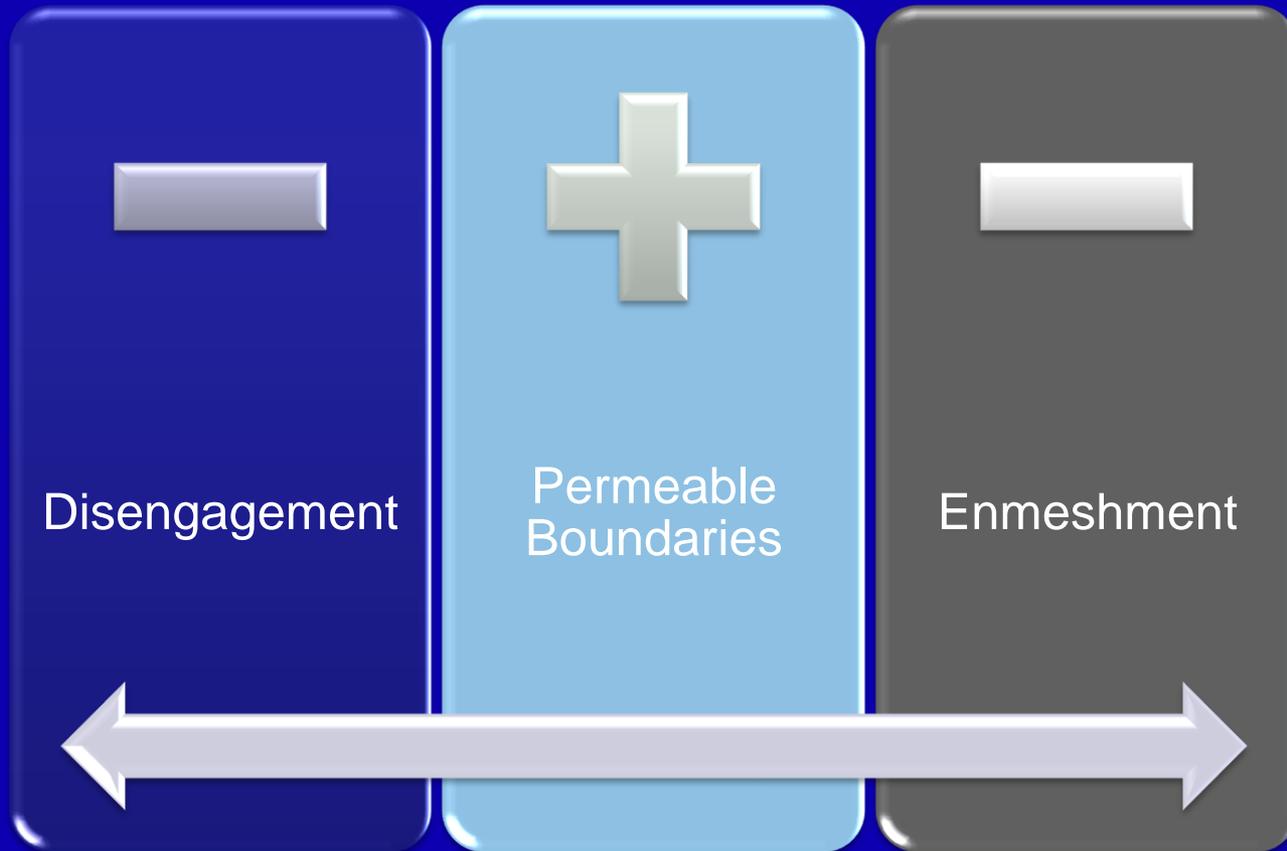
Developmental Stage



Adapting to Transitions

- Expansion of family
- Loss of loved one
- Loss of job
- Immigration

Resonance



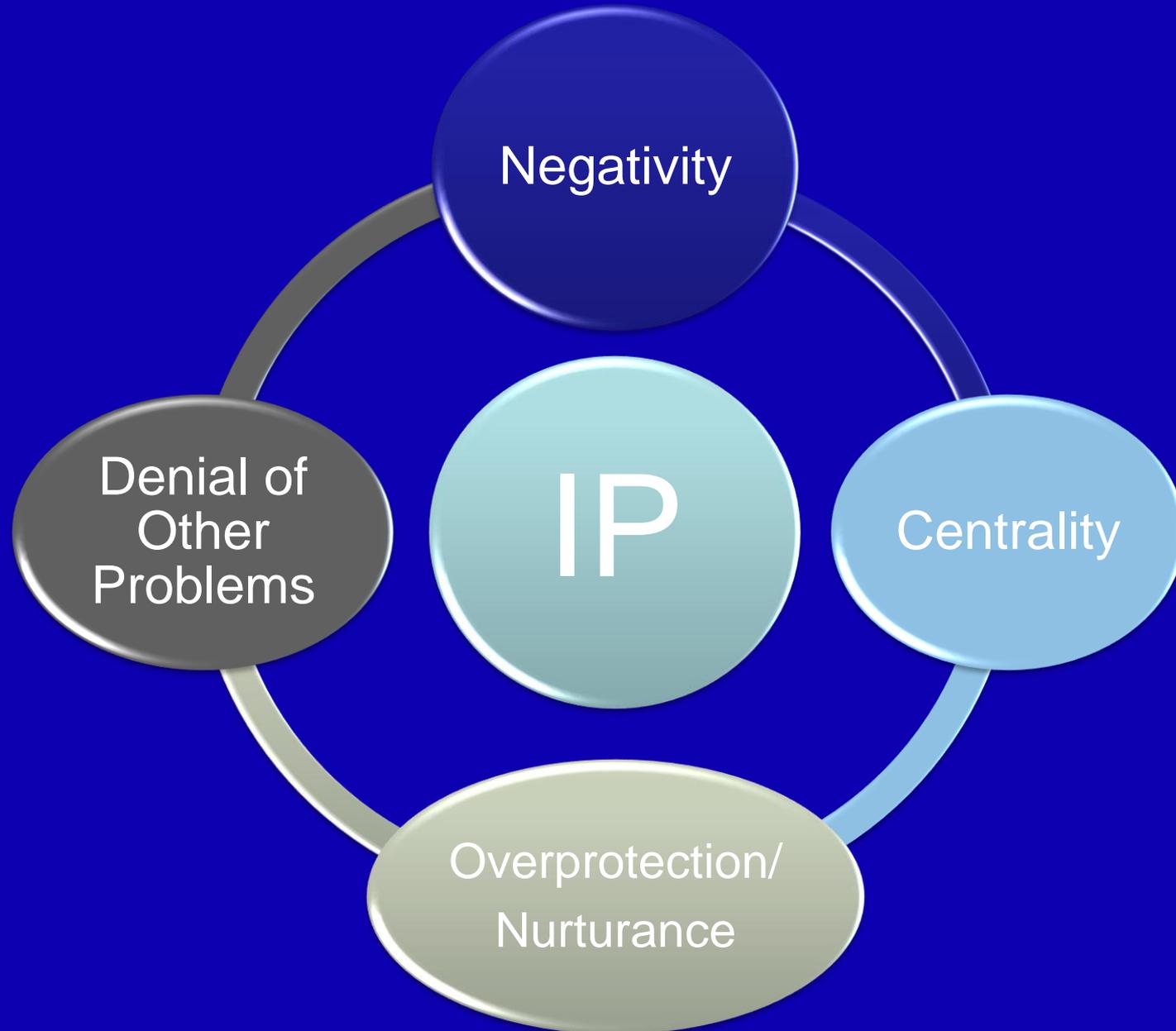
Enmeshment

1. To what extent are family members referred to as individuals; separate from others in the family?
2. To what extent is the content of the communication about someone vague or general, specific, clear, unambiguous or unique?
3. Do family members respect each other's privacy?
4. Do family members finish each other's sentences?
5. Do family members engage in mind readings?
6. Do family members constantly interrupt and talk over each other?

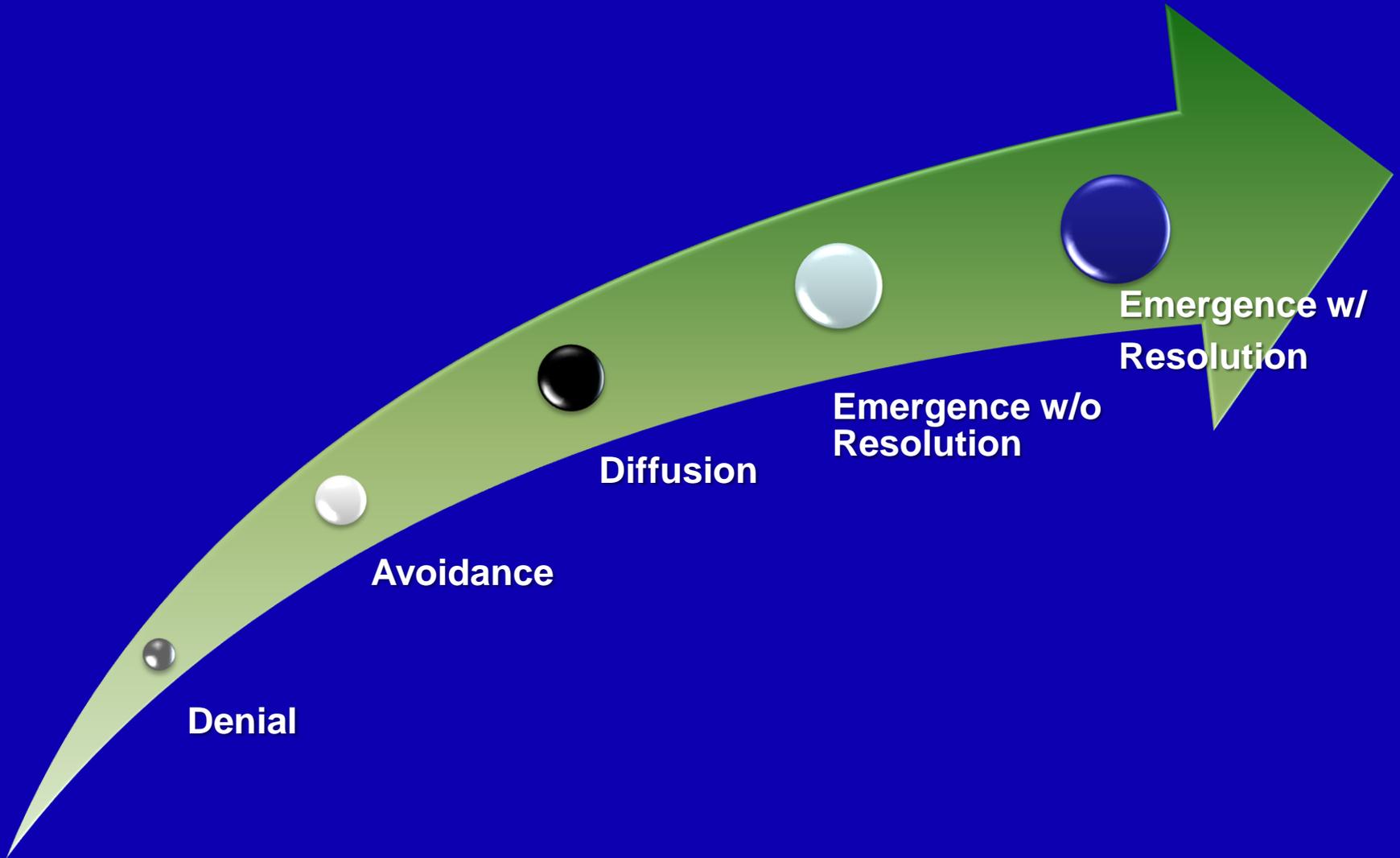
Disengagement

1. To what extent are family members distant from one another; not physically or emotionally connected
2. Are there rigid boundaries between an individual and other family members, between subsystems, or between the family and its environment?

Identified Patienthood



Conflict Resolution



JOINING IS THE PROCESS OF GETTING THE THERAPIST INTO THE FAMILY

Hurdles to overcome:

- Guilty, anxious and defensive family members
- Expect criticism
- Outnumber the therapist
- Have long-standing rules
- Set to resist, not to cooperate

Keys in the Joining Process

- Maintain a relational focus
- Do **not** challenge (persons or the family system)
- Be supportive to all
- Offer validating statements
- Be empathic to everyone
- Convey respect to every member
- Be open to different frames (definitions) of the problem

TRACKING

Follow the cues, (verbal and non verbal) given by one family to elicit the process/response of the other, thus involving all members with one another in their “characteristic manner”

Utilize the comments of one as the springboard for a reaction of another, thus eliciting enactment



Creating a
Motivational
Context for
Change

Creating a motivational context for change.....

- Facilitating motivation requires a systematic “relational” focus
- Highlighting adaptive views, comments
- Blocking negative interactions
- Working with affect to facilitate adaptive connections

A circular graphic consisting of two thick, light blue arrows forming a continuous loop. The word "Restructuring" is written in white, sans-serif font in the center of the loop. The background is a dark blue gradient with a pattern of thin, white, diagonal lines radiating from the center.

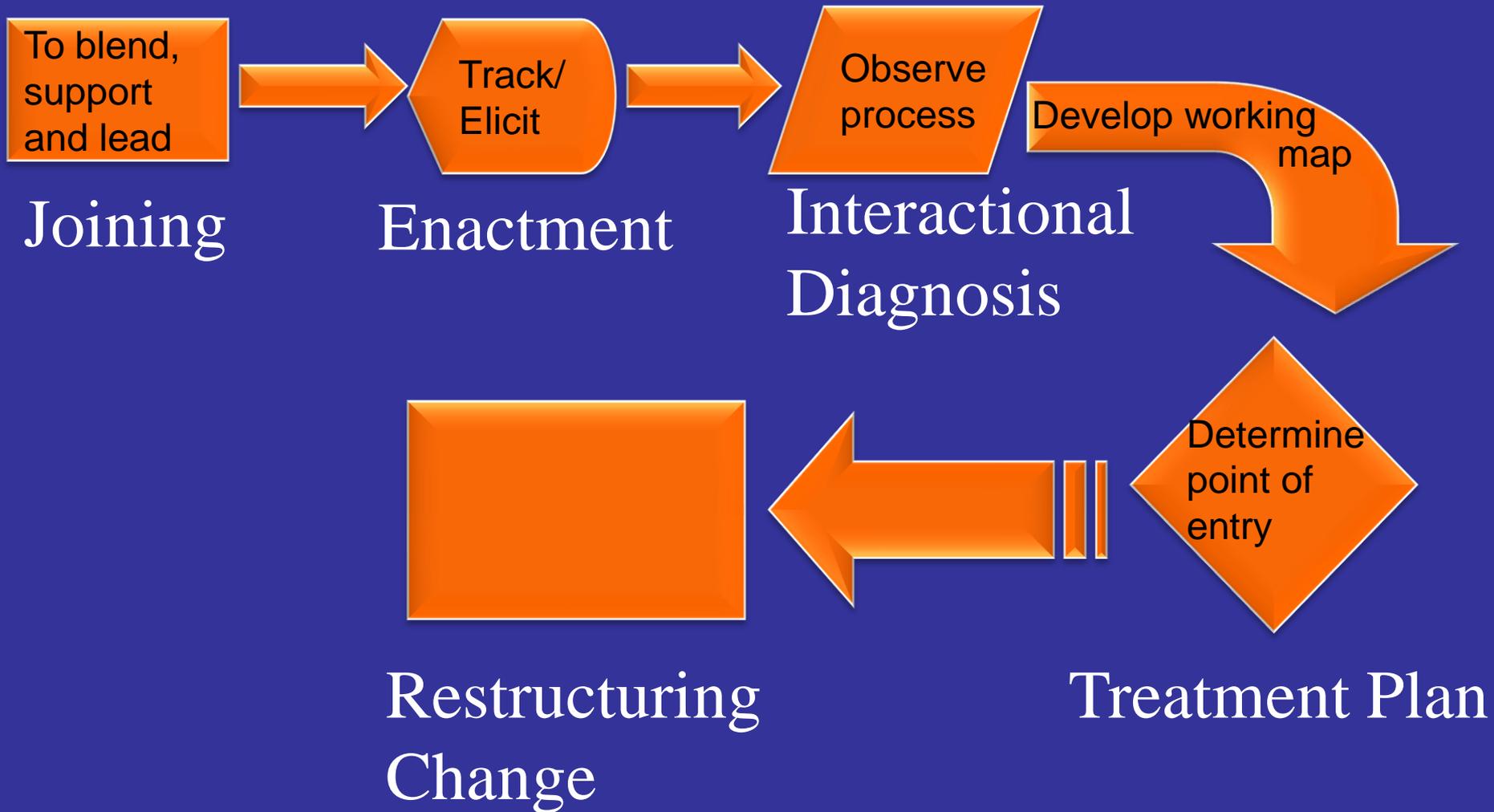
Restructuring



BSFT is like teaching someone to ride a bicycle

- Here, now, action
- Focus is Doing, not “talking about”
- Practice new skills
- Don't do it for them, just direct and encourage

Change Sequence



Enactments for the Purposes of Restructuring (not Diagnosis)

- The goal of enactments during the Restructuring phase is to guide family members to change their behaviors, and create new patterns of interaction
- Therapists are expected to facilitate dialogue and coach family members to try out new behaviors

A circular graphic consisting of two thick, light blue arrows that curve around each other to form a circle. The arrows are positioned such that they appear to be part of a continuous loop. In the center of this circular arrangement, the text "Closing the Deal" is written in a white, sans-serif font.

Closing
the Deal

Closing the Deal

- Decentralization
 - Allow new patterns to emerge
- Positive feedback
- Process Change
 - Let family experience and “OWN” the new pattern of interaction

Closing the Deal

Decentralization

- Permit family to successfully behave in a new way
- Coach without taking over
- Let positive interactions continue without interruption
 - Do not validate (positive feedback individual behaviors) during a transaction
- Provide opportunities for self-correction
 - Do not immediately jump in and micro-manage transactions

Closing the Deal

Process Change

- Punctuate “change” for the family after task has been completed
 - Slow down or stop interaction and review the process from start to completion of task
 - What changed or did not change?
 - What worked well?
 - What did not work?
 - What were family members experiences (thoughts and emotions) throughout the task?
 - Most importantly, contrast new state with initial state
- Punctuation can occur with failed tasks as well as successful tasks

Thank you

Joan A. Muir, Ph.D.

Email address: jmuir@med.miami.edu