**Evidence Based Psychotherapy - Family Therapy**

Priya Larson: Hello Byte-sized Brain listeners. My name is Dr. Priya Larson, and I’m a physician completing a child and adolescent psychiatry fellowship at the University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics. Today we continue learning about psychotherapy by talking about family therapy. I am interviewing Maggie Moore, a therapist who works with employees at the University.

Maggie Moore: Hello, thank you for having me… etc. Today we want to talk about how family therapy can be an important part of the care and treatment of you and your child.

Priya Larson: Maggie has taught me many things about family therapy, so we hope to share them with you. Maggie, how is family therapy different from other things like individual therapy? Don’t we ask parents to get involved in all the other appointments of their children?

Maggie Moore: It’s true, it’s good for parents and caregivers to stay involved even with their child’s individual therapist. An assessment of the family should always be part of the psychiatric evaluation and care of a young person. However, sometimes we actually would like families to participate in family therapy, rather than just individual therapy.

Priya Larson: So, tell us what family therapy is.

Maggie Moore: Family therapy comes in different forms but is usually based around a common principle. At its core, every family or household is a system. Family members act and interact in a way to balance their system and keep it running so that the needs of all the members are met and developmental tasks achieved. Sometimes families get into patterns that, while keeping their system running, have some bumps. Family therapy can help us take a look at the system to find out why it is running in a bumpy way, and how we can re-balance to smooth things out so that families don’t get stuck out of balance.

Priya Larson: Who gets involved in family therapy?

Maggie Moore: Many times, family therapy is done by a therapist with two or more family members in the room. Sometimes, you might have a session with just one family member though, because an individual person is still part of the system! We often recommend that the family therapist be different from any family member’s individual therapist. This helps the individual therapist stay an individual therapist and allows each family member to form their own trusted relationship with the separate family therapist.

Priya Larson: That is smart. So, why would a family want to be in family therapy?

Maggie Moore: Family therapy can be done for several different goals. The therapist can guide the family to develop different conflict resolution skills or to manage emotion in a healthy way. Another goal could be to improve positive interactions among family members. Sometimes therapy helps a family system adjust to a major life transition.

Priya Larson: That can be very helpful! Now, I always recommend my patients get involved in a type of therapy that is evidence-based. We want to choose something that treats symptoms better than “treatment as usual” or “placebo.” We want to make sure that we are spending time and effort on a treatment that works!

Maggie Moore: Yes, family therapy has been shown to work for things like anxiety, depression, disruptive behaviors, trauma-related symptoms, and autism spectrum disorder. The therapist will likely pick the right approach for your family or will refer you to someone who can address your needs.

Priya Larson: What can you tell us about different types of family therapy?

M: There are several different types of family therapy. One famous form is called structural family therapy. This was developed in the 1960s by Salvador Minuchin, a child psychiatrist. It can help for things like depression, anxiety, or disruptive behaviors as well as help families who are blending two households together after divorce. In structural family therapy, you will look at the structure, or invisible rules, that help your family balance relationships between each family member. You will probably look at ways to stabilize the relationships so that you can use healthy ways of relating to each other.

Priya Larson: I can see how that could help in families dealing with different stresses and symptoms. It sounds like there are types of family therapy that help with very specific conditions.

Maggie Moore: Yes, one specific type is for eating disorders. This is often called “Family Based Therapy” where the parents support their child in specific ways that promote healthy behaviors after diagnosis of an eating disorder. Family members will learn a lot about the eating disorder and what types of treatment help. For example, the therapist will help you develop a plan for planning mealtimes and helping set expectations around food. Those are areas that often cause a lot of stress for families who are coping with an eating disorder.

Priya Larson: Family therapy can be so important to help treat many tough issues. There also is parent training for autism spectrum disorder, or attachment-based family therapy for things like depression. We often work with families struggling with disruptive or oppositional behaviors, and they might do a program like Incredible Years or another form of Behavioral Parent Training. All these types of family therapy should be done by a skilled therapist who has specific training.

Maggie Moore: Thank you for talking to me about family therapy today!