STRUCTURAL FAMILY SYSTEMS

FAMILY MAPPING

My People Patterns

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INSTRUCTIONS

1. DECIDE WHICH FAMILY YOU WILL PICTURE.
2. OR CUT OUT ANY OF THE SQUARES AND TRIANGLES YOU LIKE. MAKE SURE YOU HAVE ENOUGH FOR EACH RELEVANT PERSON IN THE FAMILY.
THERE ARE NO RESTRICTIONS ON WHOM YOU INCLUDE OR HOW YOU SYMBOLIZE THEM OTHER THAN SQUARES ARE PEOPLE, AND TRIANGLES ARE NON-PEOPLE (PETS, INSTITUTIONS, ACTIVITIES)
3. LABEL EACH SQUARE AND TRIANGLE WITH APPROPRIATE INITIALS, MOM, BROTHER). INCLUDE AGES IF IT HELPS COMMUNICATE INFORMATION
4. ARRANGE THE SQUARES AND TRIANGLES SO THEY EXPRESS THE RELATIONSHIPS YOU FEEL, SEE, OR HAVE OBSERVED IN FAMILY WORK. IF YOU'RE NOT A FAMILY THERAPIST, THIS COULD BE BASED ON WHAT THE CLIENT HAS TOLD YOU OR WHAT YOU'VE OBSERVED IN MFG OR READING NOTES.
5. DRAW ANY BOUNDARIES OR RELATIONSHIP LINES YOU FEEL YOU NEED TO INCLUDE TO COMPLETE THE PICTURE
6. LIST ANYTHING YOU'VE LEFT OUT THAT YOU MIGHT LOGICALLY HAVE INCLUDED AND EXPLAIN WHY YOU LEFT IT OUT.

SHAPES

Family Mapping is much more simple than a genogram - it's easier to remember that squares are people, triangles are 'things' - places, institutions, ideas.
Remember to put names inside each shape so we know who is who.

COLORS

You can use different colors for different people, or just sketch using the same pen.

IN SESSION When working with teens it is interesting to use colors and process their choices when they're done. "I notice Dad is a red square - any thoughts on that choice?"

SIZE

Please consider the size of each shape you use - does someone in the family feel bigger than others? Perhaps someone feels smaller, and that can be represented too with a smaller shape. Show this in the map. This is a subjective sense of 'size' - show us how you felt in the room with them (or your experience watching)

IN SESSION: I pre-cut shapes of card for the family using a variety of colors and sizes

POSITION

Place each shape on the page until it feels right to you. Consider who is 'above' and who is 'below'.
Who is close? Who is further away? Use the entire page as you see fit, but think where you're putting people and why.

IN SESSION: ***This is a projective activity- clients are showing you unconsciously how they see the family or how they wish it were.***

BOUNDARIES

Place boundaries around or between different subsystems or individuals.

Solid - healthy
Dotted - porous
Double - rigid.

IN SESSION: I have used colored string and rope to make it more engaging.

CONNECTIONS

Use your creativity to mark any relationship dynamics of note.

Focus on this person?

Too close

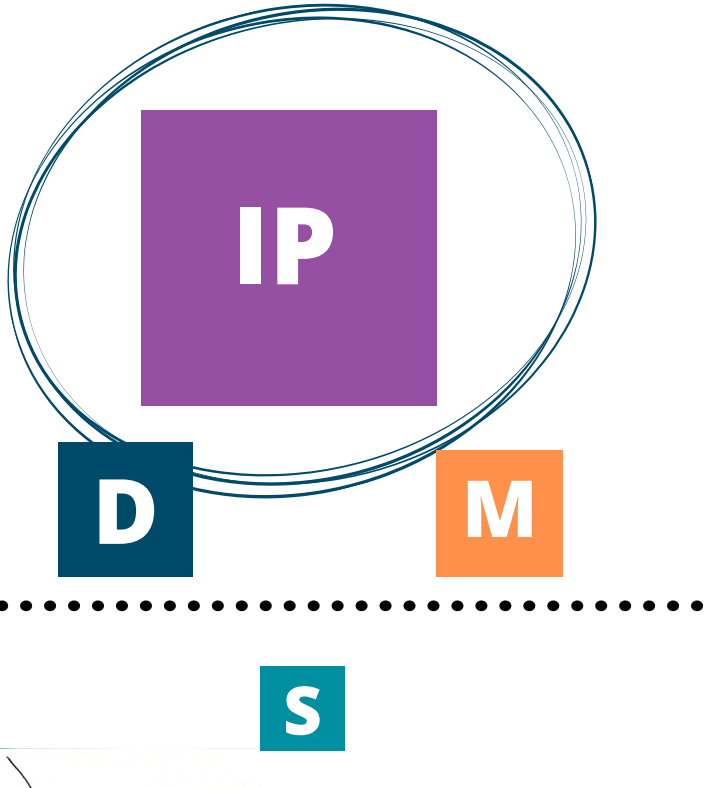
Conflict?

FAMILY MAPS

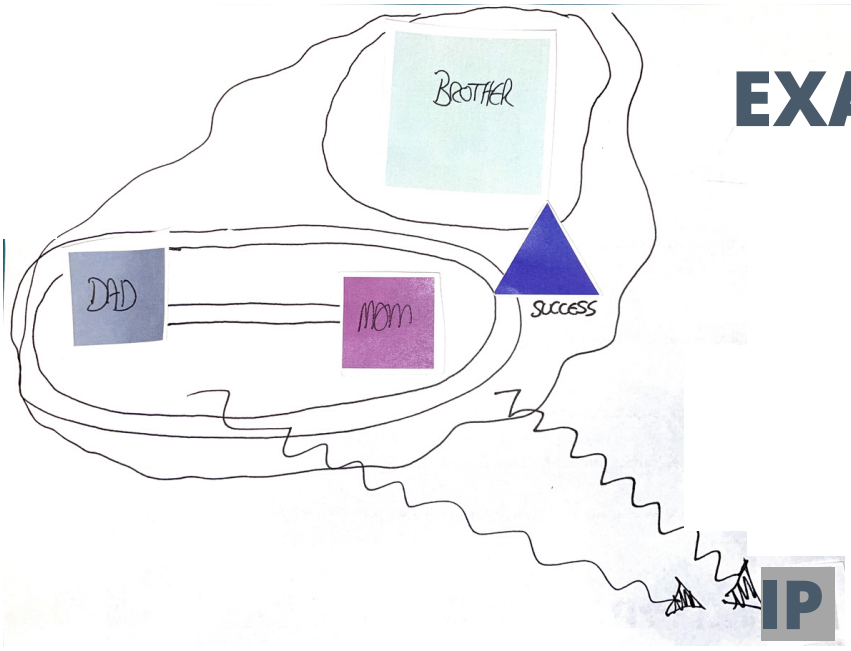
LIMITATIONS:

- Just like a geographical map, **a family map is overly simplified, lacks details, can't account for change and is static.** AND it's really useful for organizing the information, creating a hypothesis and if it's correct, determining treatment plan.
- Structure is not apparent or clear to the therapist or the family but with data and diagnosis achieved from joining the system in the intake it becomes possible. **Data comes from the transactional field - observations, words, feelings etc.**

EXAMPLE 1



EXAMPLE 2



PRE-SESSION HYPOTHESIS

BEFORE THE FIRST SESSION

WHO MADE THE CALL TO YOUR OFFICE?
- WHAT DOES THAT MEAN WITH REGARDS TO STRUCTURE AND HIERARCHY?

WHO HAS HAD THE MOST / FIRST CONTACT WITH PRIMARY (IN RTC)

WHO IS DEFINITELY GOING TO SHOW UP TO SESSIONS?

WHO IS A 'MAYBE'?

WHO IS THE IP ACCORDING TO THE FIRST CALL?

THE FIRST SESSION

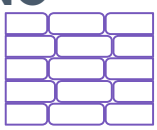
THE WAY A FAMILY ENTERS THE SESSION CAN BE AN ILLUSTRATION OF WHO THEY ARE AND HOW THEY ARE ORGANIZED.

- ARE THEY OVERLY FRIENDLY?
- WHO IS ANGRY?
- DO THEY SEEM DESPERATE?
- DO THEY SEEM DEFENSIVE?
- ARE THEY UNITED?
- WHO IS LEADING THE FAMILY?
- WHO IS MORE RELUCTANT?
- HOW DO THE SIBLINGS ACT?
- WHO IS DISTANT?
- WHO STARTS TALKING?

MARRIAGE

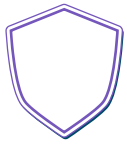
CRITICISM

STONEWALLING



CONTEMPT

DEFENSIVENESS



ASSESSING HIERARCHY

SOMETIMES THE FAMILY SHOWS US HOW THEY ARE ORGANIZED AND WHO HAS POWER BY THE WAY THEY INTERACT

WHEN WE ARE ASSESSING FOR HIERARCHY YOU CAN HAVE THESE QUESTIONS IN MIND

ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

- WHO IS IN CHARGE OF DIRECTING THE FAMILY?
- WHO DIRECTS THE CONVERSATION?
- WHICH OF THE FAMILY MEMBERS HAVE AUTHORITY?
- IS LEADERSHIP IN APPROPRIATE HANDS?
- IS IT SHARED? IF SO IS SHARING BETWEEN APPROPRIATE PEOPLE?
- IS HIERARCHY ASSIGNED APPROPRIATELY WITH RESPECT TO AGE ROLE AND FUNCTION
- `WHOSE BEHAVIOR HELPS REGULATE THE BX OF OTHER MEMBERS?
- WHO STARTS THE CONVERSATION?
- WHO REMAINS SILENT? DOES THIS PERSON GET IGNORED OR FOCUSED ON?
- WHO CALLED TO MAKE THE SESSION?

ASSESSING STRUCTURE

SEATING SOMETIMES INFORMS US OF HOW THE FAMILY IS ORGANIZED AND CAN BE USEFUL TO OBSERVE AND CONSIDER

IF THE ROOM IS LARGE ENOUGH:

IS MOM SEATED BETWEEN CHILDREN?

IS IT PARENTS VS CHILDREN?

MALES VS FEMALES?

DURING COVID - WHO IS SHARING A LAPTOP, WHO IS IN THE SAME HOUSE ON A DIFFERENT DEVICE?

IF THE IP SITS BETWEEN PARENTS, WHAT MIGHT THAT SUGGEST?

ASSESSING POWER

There are several elements of 'power'
to consider when assessing a family:

- **MONEY** Who has power when it comes to money - spending and earning?
- **TIME** Who decides how time is spent in the family either as a family or individually? Does any interrupt this time?
- **COMMUNICATION** Who communicates / who keeps secrets / who determines what will be shared?

If one parent is uncommunicative, decides how time and money is spent, the other might develop symptoms to regain some power.

Did the power in the parent system switch suddenly? If one parent became unemployed - they may develop symptoms to regain power.

If one parent is uncommunicative, decides how time and money is spent, the other might develop symptoms to regain some power.

Does the IP impinge on the parent's time and money while communicating in ways they cannot understand while keeping secrets?

Who has more star 'power' with regards to status and career?
Who ends the conversation?
Who tells people where to sit?

ASSESSING ENMESHMENT

Enmeshment is an inability to see someone else as clearly, as they're an extension of self. If I put my face an inch away from yours, I cannot see your face in it's entirety. In order to see you fully, I'd have to back up another foot or so. For two people to know each other, they have to have sufficient distance.

MIND READING

This is when one family member speaks for another - stating what the other wants, thinks, believes and likes without the other having said anything.

TH - "Johnny, what school do you want to go to?"
Mom - "Well he wants to go to St Josephs like his Dad"

MEDIATION

A variation of mind-reading when one family member acts as a mediator of a conversation between two other members. *When Johnny and Dad get into a heated argument, Mom will jump in as a result of the tension she feels.*

SIMULTANEOUS

Simultaneous speech occurs when two or more family members speak at the same time for more than a few seconds. When one person speaks over another like this, they are never fully able to hear or understand each other.
Interruptions are variant of this.

CONTINUATIONS

This is similar to an interruption, in that one person stops the other from talking. However continuations complete the first person's thought - it's therefore a version of mind reading - the idea is that individuality has been compromised.

CONTROL

Sometimes one family member indicates that he has 'special knowledge' or control over another member. There is a sense of power, control or authority of one member of the family over another for purposes of influencing or directing behavior. *Mom: "I'll get your Dad to see that you do really need that X-box"*

DISTANCE

Diagnostically, we are concerned with loss of physical distance, when it is not age appropriate. A teenager holding Mom's hand is often not age appropriate.

JOINT REACTIONS

These are inappropriate behaviors such as crying, laughter or giggling simultaneously by two or more members at the same time.
This has to happen without the absence of an appropriate cue

"WE" vs "I"

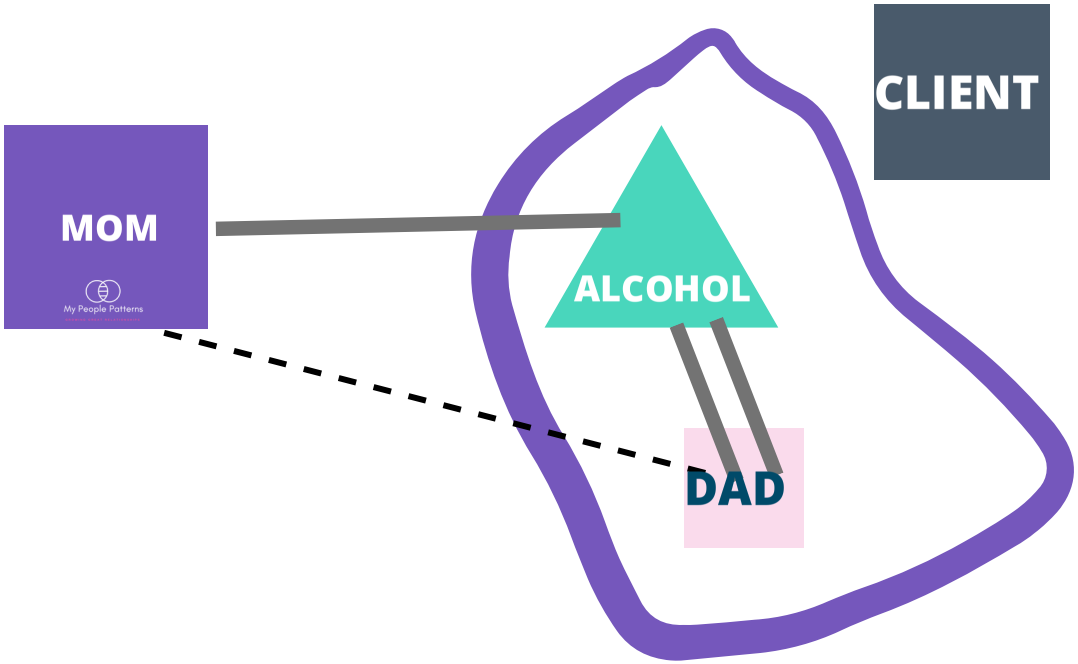
A classic signal in an evaluation that there is some enmeshment is when family members speak for each other and assume the thoughts and feelings of another person by saying 'WE' rather than 'I' statements

FAMILY MAPPING

Family Mapping is a unique way of understanding what is going on in a family.

Rather than using words, mapping is part projective technique and part data collection. It can express the feelings or the sense of the family you have AND it collects data and observations.

This is also an intervention you can use with families and the instructions to do that are included here. I have found this to be an incredibly useful intervention that generates a conversation and co-creates a conceptualization together with clients.



FAMILY MAPPING INSTRUCTIONS FOR GROUP SUPERVISION

- Print any of the pages in this PDF and cut out any of the squares and triangles you like. Make sure you have enough for each relevant person in the family. There are no restrictions on whom you include or how you symbolize them other than SQUARES are people, and TRIANGLES are non-people (pets, institutions, activities)

- Label each square and triangle with appropriate initials (or names *Mom*, *Brother*). Include ages if it helps communicate information or is useful to you.

- Arrange the squares and triangles so they express the relationships you feel, see or have observed in family work. If you're not a family therapist, this could be based on what the client has told you, or what you've observed in MFG or reading notes

- Draw any boundaries or relationship lines you feel you need to include to complete the picture

- Type or write a few lines explaining what you have done and why you have arranged them as you have. Include explanations for colors or size.

- List anything you've left out that you might logically have included and explain why you left it out.

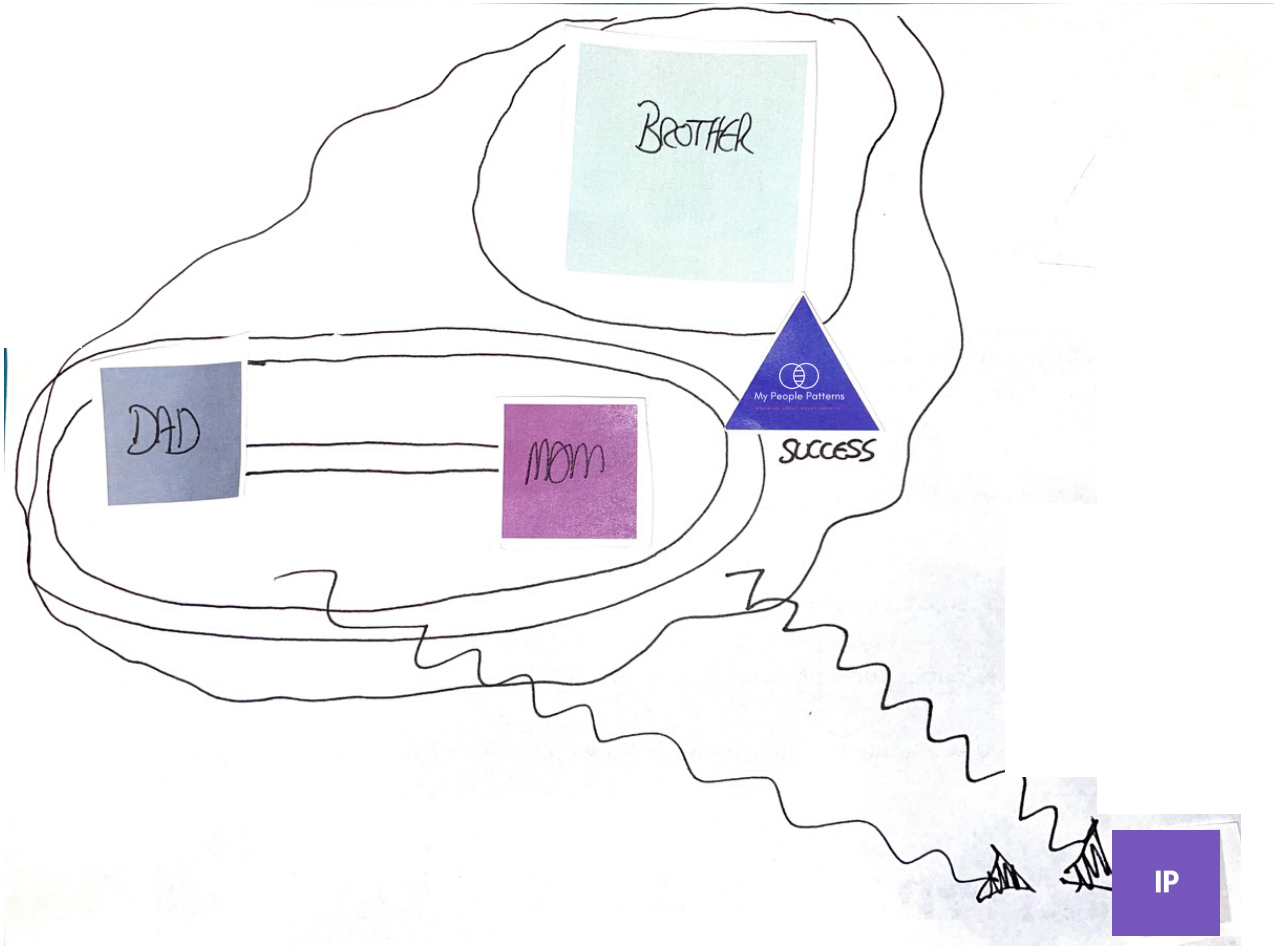
EXAMPLE

We will generate a discussion around the dynamics you've depicted. Some questions you might ask are below, and they are designed to help us think systemically.

The main question to ask is:

If one thing changes, how does that impact the components of the family?

1. What is the meaning of the brother being at the top ? Are they distant or in control of the family?
2. Why is Mom in the middle?
3. What would happen to the family if success was removed?
4. What would happen to the family if Mom became smaller?
5. If brother became smaller and closer to the IP
6. What would happen if the IP was closer to Dad?



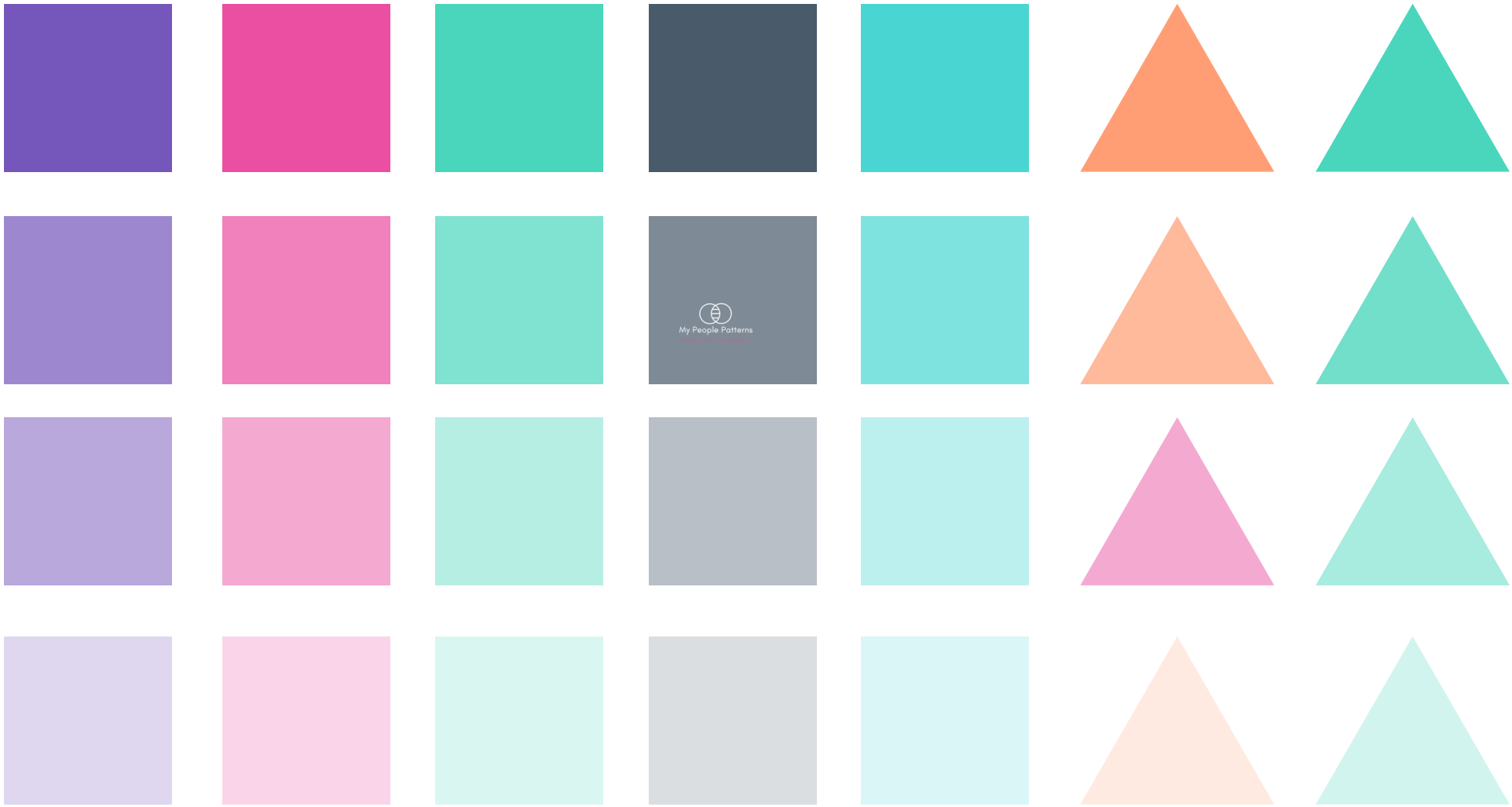
Oliver's Example:

- *Parents are in a coalition against the IP- this is the zigzag arrows*
- *There is a rigid boundary around them, meaning a distance or unwillingness to see anything other than DrSi as being small.*
- *The brother is elevated and larger than Mom/Dad/IP - he's in a faded green because he's missing in treatment.*
- *Success lies between IP, Mom and brother.*

SHAPES

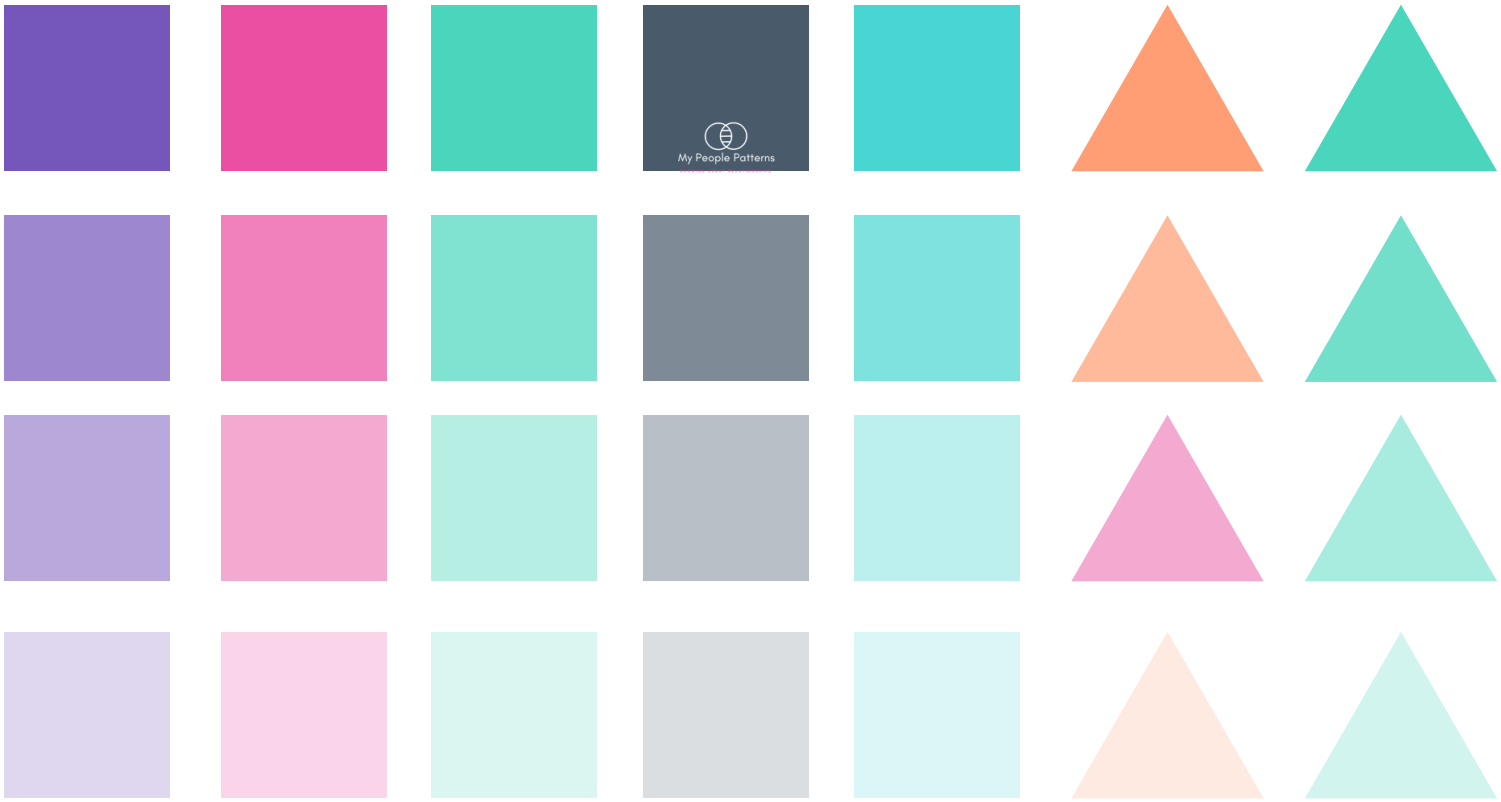
Cut out any of the shapes on the following pages, and arrange them on a blank piece of paper.

- Squares are PEOPLE
- Triangles are NON-PEOPLE- pets / institutions / activities



COLORS

Use any of the colors to represent differences of any sort. If you don't see the color you want, feel free to use your own.



SIZE

There are a variety of different size shapes in this pdf - feel free to use these too in order to represent aspects of the family. There are no rules as to how you use color or size.

CONNECTIONS

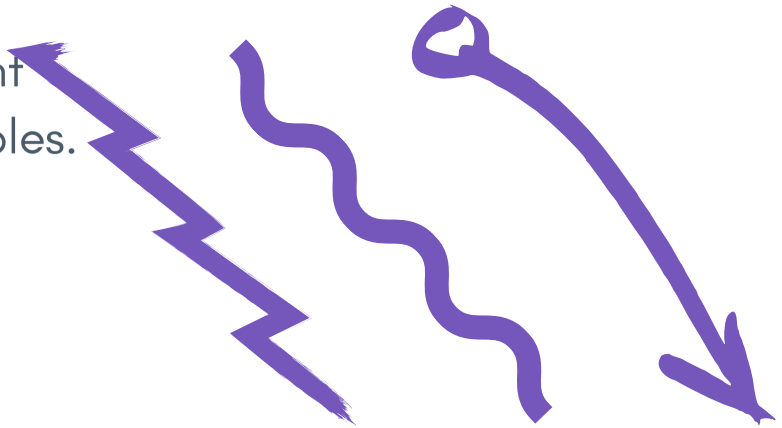
Identify important connections between people or people and non-people.

Solid - close

Dotted - tense / distant

Double - too close

Use your own style of lines if you'd like to represent something other than is expressed in these examples. Just use a key or remember what it means to you.

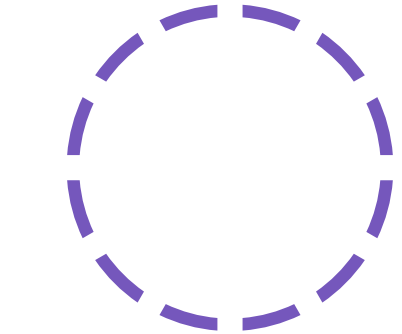


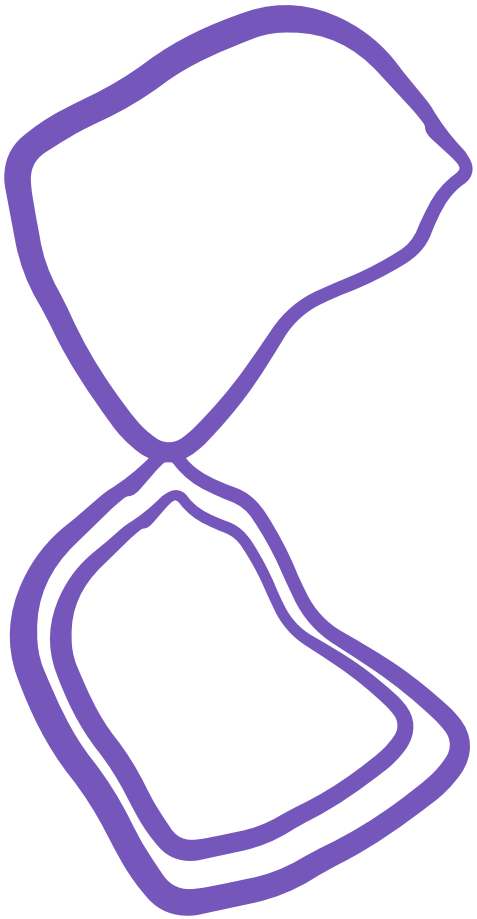
BOUNDARIES

Place boundaries around different subsystems.

Solid - healthy
Dotted - porous
Double - rigid.

Use your own style to represent other dynamics.





Subsystems are often neglected in our conversations, but in this technique, they can be simple or as complex as you need. In our discussion, we can help elaborate on the different subsystems present. A 'healthy' family might have parents in one subsystem, and children in another.

FAMILY MAPS

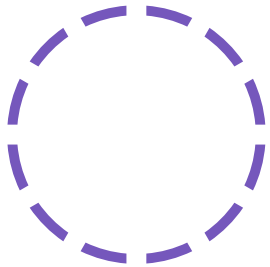
SIZE

COLORS

FAMILY MAPS

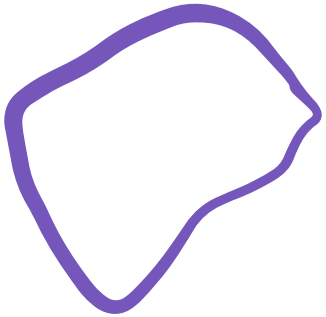
BOUNDARIES

Dotted - diffuse



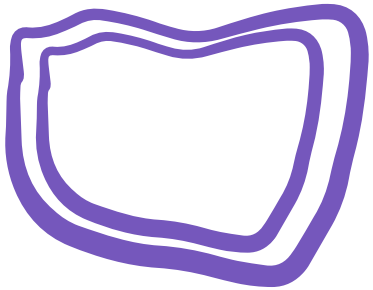
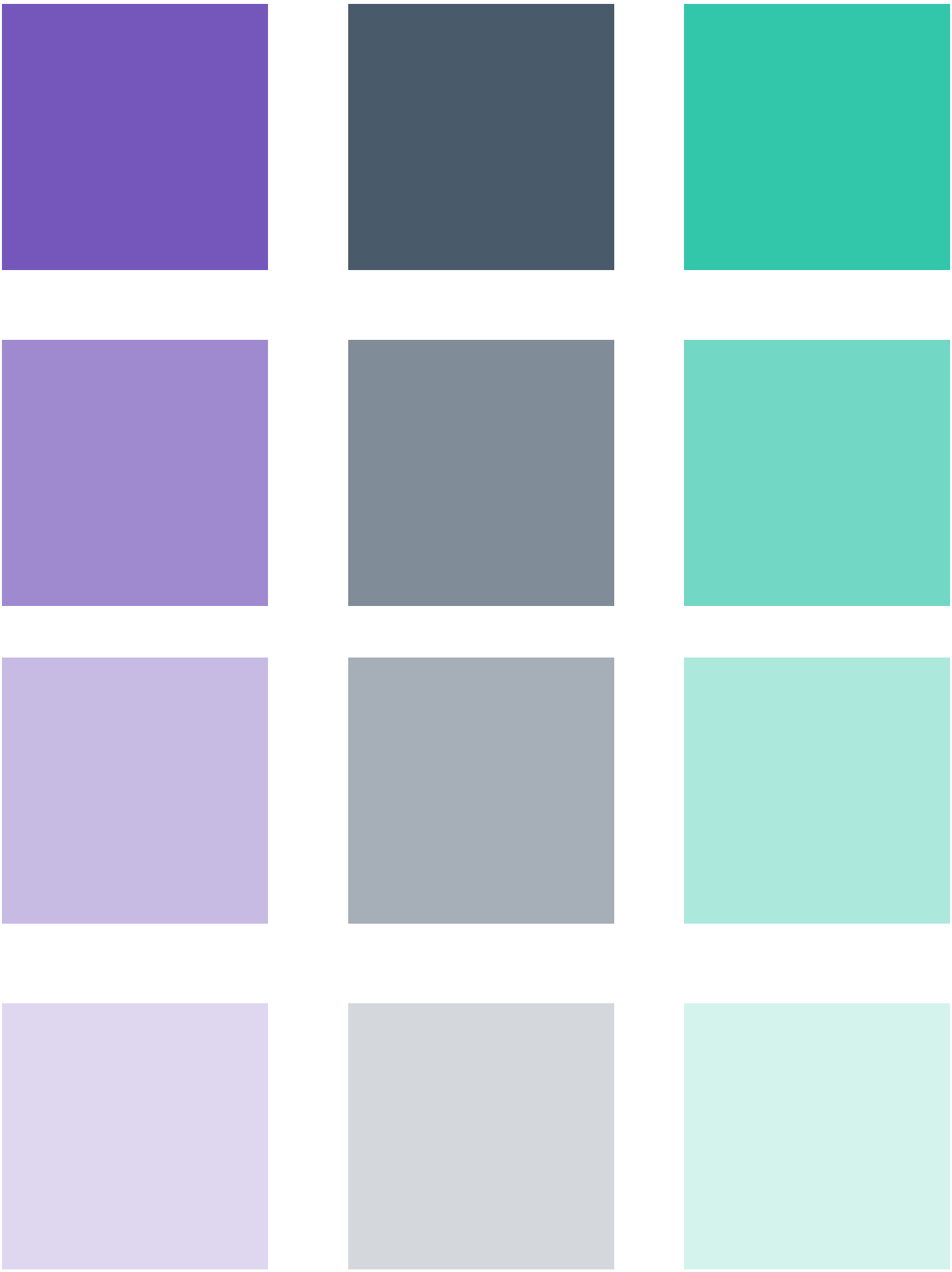
- Little or no privacy
- Over-involvement with others
- Very little independence

Solid - healthy



- Open communication around rules roles and expectations
- Healthy amounts of privacy
- comfortable sharing thoughts and feeling

Double - rigid.



- Maximum privacy
- Minimum communication
- Limited interactions