

Hi, I'm Dr Scott Sells author of training the traumatized child and family, a family systems step by step approach. This month's playbook is called get the lights on because without the lights you can't do family therapy. Basically, the background of this case is that it was a stuck case for over a year. I was called in the, uh, it was a, a child that was 15 years old, African American in the inner city that was both involved in the juvenile justice system for stealing a car and also involved in the child protective service system because the mom was not having enough resources to keep the lights on, to keep the heat on, to, you know, have any kind of utilities. And there was a lack of food, clothing, and a bad for the child to sleep on. So there were seven children. Father had been basically had fathered children from four or five different, moms and had, had, had really abandoned the child.

Uh, his name is Jamal and you'd also likely witnessed a lot of domestic violence with mom's boyfriends that come in and out of the family. Mom was very clinically depressed, I'm the child was sporadically going to school and when he did go he would sleep in class and he was not motivated to do any homework, so there was a high risk for mobile, so the therapists who work with their family for a year and done a lot of individual treatment and then they called upon me to try to unstuck the family. That was really stuck. So what we did first I said to the counselor, have you been able to engage the biological father, the a boyfriend? And she said no because the mom doesn't want to do it and I don't think it'll come. Anyways. So one of the things that I'm this model really does is it gives the therapist tools to engage the father and we use the motivational phone call for that.

The problems symptoms, uh, off the stress chart was for mom. She was 100 percent stressed out. As you'll see out in the article, I'm her biggest stressors are removal the children. Seventy percent of our stresses, depression and another 70 percent is her child won't go to school and he won't go to community service. The case worker who is also present, her stressors are the conditions at home. No lights, no bed, very little food caseworkers concerned about mom's depression, very concerned about school and probation and that Jamal, he's concerned about him continuing to get in trouble at school and not be out of probation and he also has no where to sleep and he says his parents don't even talk. And from that we learned that the mom is connected to her pastor, but nobody's ever called him. And the GPO has never really been actively involved in any of the meetings and the data and the boyfriend I've never been contacted.

So as you're going to see in this a technique, the drivers that we really focused on was unmet basic needs are not met, food, clothing, and shelter. So one of the key mistakes that was done in treatment was that the therapists is focused on psychological needs when the family hadn't even had the basic needs. Also coupled with that under the unhealed wound seed, we saw high anxiety and the missing healthy undercurrent is safety or security. We had to actually help the family get those needs met, so it's going to be evident as you see this playbook. It's clear what everybody's roles are. Probation officer is involved with the, uh, biological fathers involved, the boyfriend is involved and with all of these key players moving in the same direction where the fst therapists before the session even begins, calls the social services to get the lights back on.

The pastor gets inspired by the meeting and context the congregation, and they take up a donation, the GPO and the father and the boyfriend or working together to go to the salvation army to get betting. And within weeks the child starts going to school, to Jamal, starts to feel connected to his father for the first time. And so what you're going to see is a classic, what we call hybrid of to track, which means on one side of the coin we're going to be working on just, you know, Maslow's hierarchy of needs. On the other side, we're going to also be looking at misuse of power because there was no structure, no limits.

So the therapist comes in and actually helps the family have routine about, you know, I'm a log book that, that teachers just initial so the mom knows if he had homework or not, the boyfriend praising a Jamal, if he comes home and does his work or goes to his community service, all of a sudden the family goes from a totally disorganized family to one that has clear plan of who, what, when, where, and how to address the wounds that are associated with not having security and safety.

And, and on the other hand, you're also at the same time working on the issues that are contributing are the undercurrents that are contributing to the, misuse of power, which is empty threats and consistent, disciplined, a lack of nutrients. And so the therapist actually, you'll see brains, a poster board that clearly marks out a very simple, straight forward plan that he hangs up on the, on the wall for the family and does dress rehearsals, practices. The delivery pretends he's the child and comes in with the log book. The energy level goes up in the family because our, they're seeing the future, they're practicing how they're going to, you know, deliver the intervention and mom all of a sudden starts to get less clinically depressed because now all these men are coming up to the plate and helping her out. She's not all by herself and all the other six kids are watching this like a hawk and they are seeing hope because they're seeing their older brother start to thrive.

So what we can learn from this technique is that when you know where to tap by doing a clear step by step stress chart, I'm focused on the right seeds and the undercurrents. You come with a clear plan of action that's written out. You take that plan and you do dress rehearsals. You practice delivery. Then all of a sudden is stuck. Family can get unstuck in the here and now, and the technique is really the gasoline to restructure the family. That's why we call it structural strategic family therapy. When you come in, it's an upside down hierarchy. The child, Jamal is controlling the whole mood of the household. The moms on the bottom rung of the ladder. There's no clear captains of the ship, no clear Alpha males, no clear leadership and the playbook and the behavioral contract around school suddenly brings the adults, you know, the tools and strategies they need and the executive functioning and they need to be the captains of the ship.

A child's anxiety immediately goes down because they have wanted somebody to take charge and nurturance and connection with their father and then they can be a kid again. And that's exactly what happened. So then when we met at the school, the school was overjoyed when the counselor came in with these plans and said, we now have a plan in place to monitor if he's going to school, if he's doing his work. We've got a plan to get safety in the house. He's sleeping at night. We got an alarm clock. These were on diet and food and all of a sudden the child is like ready to go to school. There are sleep, they're not sleeping in school anymore. And then the teachers get all excited and they say to Jamal, would you do a board for the whole school thing? And He gravitates toward that.

So this, these two simple playbook side by side unleashed, you know, healthy undercurrents or properties or whatever you want to calm the nerve endings of the family that were just below the surface. Families continue to show me that they will do well if they can. And what they want is why are we stuck, why are we stressed? How are you going to get us unstuck? What's the playbook? Please give it to us, typed out, and then show us how to use it and then follow up and make sure that we don't relapse. And so this family systems trauma model, I think is that is a huge step in the direction of giving our counselors the tools they need so they can help our families who are traumatized get unstuck. And this is why you just can't work with the traumatized child. You've got to work with the entire traumatized family.