



McMaster Divinity College

MS 3P1380 – Couples and Family Therapy

Winter Term 2027 | Saturdays Jan 16, Jan 30, & Feb 27 | 9:00 am – 5:30 pm
Online (Synchronous)

COURSE INSTRUCTOR: Dr. Herman Chow, D.Min, RP, RMFT-SM
ICEEFT Certified Therapist & Supervisor (EFIT, EFCT, EFFT)
CACFT RMFT Supervisor Mentor
AAMFT Approved Supervisor
CRPO Supervisor

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Office hours: Brief chats during class and longer conversations by appointment only

Course Description

This course provides students with an introduction to the difference between counselling individuals and counselling relational systems, as well as an orientation to the flow and foci of counselling couples and families. Students will critically examine various couple and family models by exploring their theoretical tenets, views of family functioning and dysfunction, methods of assessment, therapeutic goals, treatment process & techniques, role of the therapist, and evaluation.

Specializations: Counselling and Spiritual Care (CS), and Pastoral Studies (PS).

Learning Outcomes

At the end of the course, students will be able to:

1. Identify the distinctiveness of the family therapy approaches studied
2. Reflect how the family therapy approaches fit and do not fit with the students' own clinical approach and faith system
3. Conceptualize their clients via multiple systemic lenses and develop appropriate treatment interventions
4. Construct a treatment plan

CRPO COMPETENCIES TAUGHT IN THIS COURSE

The following CRPO Entry-to-Practice Competencies are addressed throughout this course and are organized according to McMaster Divinity College's learning domains of **Knowing, Doing, and Being**.

KNOWING

Students acquire the theoretical foundations necessary to understand, compare, and critically evaluate systemic models of couple and family therapy.

- 1.1 Integrate a theory of human psychological functioning and development.
- 1.1.2 Contextual and systemic factors affecting human functioning.
- 1.1.3 Human development (spiritual, moral, social, emotional, cognitive, behavioural, sexual, gender, and biological).
- 1.2 Work within an established psychotherapeutic theory.
- 1.2.1 Theory of problem development.
- 1.2.2 Theory of therapeutic change.
- 1.3 Comparative psychotherapy.
- 1.3.3 Benefits, limitations, and contraindications of differing approaches.
- 5.1 Access and apply professional literature.
- 5.1.1 Access current literature.
- 5.1.2 Critically analyze information.
- 5.2 Use research findings to inform clinical practice.

DOING

Students develop competencies in systemic assessment, case conceptualization, treatment planning, and intervention.

- 4.5 Structure and facilitate the therapeutic process.
- 4.5.1 Formulate an assessment.
- 4.5.2 Formulate a direction for treatment.
- 4.5.10 Facilitate client exploration of issues and behavioural patterns.
- 5.1.3 Apply professional literature to enhance clinical practice.

BEING

Students reflect on one's own experience of marriage and family, how this influences the students, and how it may impact the counselling relationship.

- 1.4 Integrate awareness of self in relation to professional role.
- 4.2 Establish and maintain an effective therapeutic relationship.
- 4.2.5 Maintain a non-judgmental stance.
- 4.3 Ensure safe and effective use of self in the therapeutic relationship.

Course Format

Class sessions will include didactic instruction, discussion, video presentations and case studies as appropriate. Reading material is assigned for all classes. Students are expected to participate in discussions and to incorporate the class readings and lectures when discussing case studies.

Required Readings

- Nichols, M.P. & Davis, S. (2021). [Family Therapy: Concepts and Methods](#). 12th ed. MA: Pearson Education Inc.

(Please note: This is the only textbook you need to purchase for this course. This is an e-text only. You would not need MyLab.) This is available online via Pearson – click the link above to access Pearson.

- Greenman, P. S., & Johnson, S. M. (2013). **Process research on Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT) for couples: Linking theory to practice**. *Family Process*, 52(1), 46–61.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/famp.12015>

The article is posted on A2L.

Recommended Readings

- Yarhouse, M. A., & Sells, J. N. (2017). **Family therapies: A comprehensive Christian appraisal (2nd Ed., Chapter 1)**. IVP Academic.

The chapter is posted on A2L.

- Patterson, J., Williams, L., Grauf-Grounds, C., & Chamow, L. (2009). **Essential skills in family therapy: From the first interview to termination (2nd ed., Chapter 5)**.

The chapter is posted on A2L.

Hurlburt Family Bookstore

All required and recommended books for this class are available from the Hurlburt Family Bookstore located beside the entrance to the Nathaniel H. Parker Memorial Chapel of McMaster Divinity College. To purchase in advance, students may contact the bookstore manager, Bernice Quek, by phone at 416.620.2934 or 416.668.3434 (mobile); or by email at books@readon.ca. The Hurlburt Family Bookstore also carries other books and merchandise and is open throughout the academic year during posted hours.

Bibliography

For all topics except for Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT), refer to Nichols' book for the bibliography. For EFT, you can use the following bibliography:

- Esteban, J., Suárez-Relinque, C., & Jiménez, T. I. (2023). Effects of family therapy for substance abuse: A systematic review of recent research. *Family Process*, 62(1), 49–73. <https://doi.org/10.1111/famp.12841>
- Greenman, P. S., & Johnson, S. M. (2022). Emotionally focused therapy: Attachment, connection, and health. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 43, 146–150. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2021.06.015>
- Johnson, S. M., Hunsley, J., Greenberg, L. S., & Schindler, D. (1999). Emotionally focused couples therapy: Status and challenges. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice*, 6(1), 67–79. <https://doi.org/10.1093/clipsy.6.1.67>
- Lee, N. A., Wiebe, S. A., Wittenborn, A. K., & Spengler, P. M. (2024). A comprehensive meta-analysis on the efficacy of emotionally focused couple therapy. *Couple and Family Psychology: Research and Practice*, 13(2), 81–99. <https://doi.org/10.1037/cfp0000233>
- Tseng, C.-F., Wittenborn, A. K., Morgan, P. C., & Liu, T. (2024). Exploring the effectiveness of emotionally focused therapy for depressive symptoms and relationship distress among couples in Taiwan: A single-arm pragmatic trial. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 50(1), 202–217. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jmft.12681>

Assignments and Evaluations

1. Group Project: Video Analysis of a Therapy Session (15%); Due Date: Jan 30, During 2nd day of Class

This group assignment will help students develop the ability to identify and critique the distinctiveness of a couple or family therapy approach.

Prior to coming to the assigned date of the group project (see schedule), each student would have to watch the assigned video: **Internal Family Systems Therapy (by Richard Schwartz)** – you only need to watch Part 2 (the actual session with Loren and Kathy).

You can have free access to the video via **Psychotherapy.net** via McMaster:

On the group discussion date (see schedule), each student will be assigned to a group of 4-5 people. You will not know your group members until the scheduled date. Each group will have about 1 hour to discuss their video analysis.

The focus of the analysis and discussion is on four areas (see some sample questions – please note, the

sample questions are not exhaustive; you need to come up with your own reflection):

- a. **The therapist's micro-interventions:** what interventions were used, how well they were used, what was helpful to you or not helpful, etc.
- b. **The therapeutic process:** what direction is the therapist going, how well and not well is the therapist moving the clients, how effective is the therapist tuning in to the clients, etc.
- c. **The client's response:** how was the therapeutic alliance, what were the clients' reactions, what kind of motivation did you notice in the clients, etc?
- d. **The self-as-therapist reflection:** what are some of your own reactions watching the therapist, what came up strongly for you, what do you notice about your own body response, etc.

Group Process Evaluation

Group Process Evaluation **Your name:** _____ **Your group #:** _____

It is important that each group member contributes equitably to the group assignment. Once you have completed the assignment, you will have an opportunity to privately evaluate the contributions of each member of your group (Your scores of your classmates are confidential). The highest score and the lowest score that you received will be removed. An average of the remaining scores will be used for your grade.

Group Assignment	Measurables	Max. Weight	Group Name #1:	Group Member #2:	Group Member #3:	Group Member #4:	Group Member #5:	Group Member #6:
Add Last Names & First Names (Lopez, Mia):								
Aptitude (Demonstrated Abilities)								
1. Critical Thinking (e.g. analysis, reflection, etc.)	35							
2. Communication (e.g. clarity, conciseness, etc.)	15							
Attitude (Demonstrated Willingness)								
3. Preparation (e.g. readiness, participation, fully present, etc.)	25							
4. Equitability (e.g. allow mutual sharing, collaboration, etc.)	25							
Total Score for Each Group Member	100							

Comments (Optional):

Since this is a group project, each student is expected to contribute fully to the work. You will use the Group Process Evaluation form to privately and fairly evaluate your fellow group members according to their contributions. There are four areas to evaluate:

1. **Critical Thinking:** Your ability to critically analyze
2. **Communication:** Your ability to effectively communicate
3. **Preparation:** Your ability to prepare for the discussion
4. **Equitability:** Your ability to collaborate

After entering the score for each category for each person, please add up the scores. Each person is to offer a sound evaluation of their group members (i.e., not too harsh and not too lenient). Remember that to score 100% in anything, you must meet all the requirements in all respects. If a score of 100% is given, please justify your score, and you will receive an inquiry from your professor about it.

At the end of the group discussion, each member will complete the form privately and submit it via AL2 by 11:59 pm of the last class. 1 out of 15 points will be deducted for late and incomplete submission. Your group members' highest and lowest scores will be removed from the calculation of your grade. The average of the remaining scores will be used to calculate each person's mark.

*Please note: A written submission is not required because I want everyone to fully immerse themselves in the discussion without worrying about writing a paper.

If you missed the group project ...

If you are away on the presentation day for a legitimate reason, the weight of this paper will be evenly applied to your next two assignments. If you don't have a legitimate reason for missing the group presentation, you will get 0% for this assignment.

2. Critique Paper: (35%); Due Date: Mar 13 at 11:59 pm

This assignment evaluates how well you can critique and notice the distinctiveness of the various family therapy models studied in this course.

You need to write a personal critique paper on two of the family therapy models that you have studied in this course. With each of the two models selected, critique how they fit and do not fit with you personally in 2 areas: 1) your clinical approach (or potential) and 2) your Christian faith. Please include contextual factors such as culture, gender, race, racism, religion, etc. where appropriate.

There is no need for an introduction or conclusion for this assignment. The paper should be **4 pages**. It will be typed, double-spaced, 12-point Arial font, with 1-inch margins, in PDF format only, and a proper title page. The grader does not read beyond the page limit.

Please save the file only in PDF format and submit it via AL2.

See the rubric for details of expectations.

3. Treatment Plan Paper: (40%); Due Date: Mar 27 at 11:59 pm

This assignment evaluates how well you can prepare an integrative treatment plan.

Using the movie “The Whale Rider” as the backdrop for a case study, you will create a treatment plan for the Apirana family.

Caro, N. (2002). Whale Rider. Newmarket Films.

You can have free access to the video via McMaster:

Context: A few weeks after the end of the movie, Paikea, Koro, Nanny, and Porourangi came to you for family counselling. They expressed that **their goal was to improve the family’s connection**. You saw them for one session and gathered enough information (whatever you learned from the movie) to propose a treatment plan. The treatment plan should be **6 pages** in length (Submissions beyond the page limit will not be read).

Along with a title page, a reference page, and an appendix page, you should include the following three sections and a genogram (appendix):

a. Conceptualizations (3 pages)

You are to use system language to describe what contributes to the problem (i.e. what prevents the family’s goal of connection). You should discuss with depth at least 4 conceptualizations. You can include from various systems: individual, interactional, inter-generational, family life cycle, community – whichever you feel are the most relevant to the case. You need to include examples pertaining to this family with each conceptualization, system language, and at least 2 research to support your treatment models/interventions and referrals (you don’t need to support all of your models/interventions/referrals, just a selection of them). Please note: The research portion belongs to the conceptualization section of the paper. This section is about 3 pages.

b. Interventions (2.5 pages)

In this section, you will select only 2 of the family therapy approaches from this course as your treatment interventions. You should discuss in-depth how you will use at least 4 interventions from the 2 selected models to help with some or all of the mentioned conceptualizations in (a). You can choose 2 interventions from 1 model and 2 interventions from another model or choose 3 interventions from 1 model and 1 intervention from another.

You may choose to use your referrals (from c) to address some of the conceptualizations. You should have addressed all the conceptualizations between your interventions (b) and your referrals (c).

You need to include the following for this section: the choice of therapies used, specific interventions/techniques, and some examples of what the techniques will look like. Whenever possible, always incorporate depth and system language.

c. Referrals (0.5 page)

In this section, you are to offer at least 4 appropriate referrals for your family to further their goal of connection. You should have addressed all the conceptualizations between your interventions (b) and your referrals (c). Referrals can include: books, community resources, support groups, therapists, etc. You should convey clearly why these referrals are helpful pertaining to your conceptualizations.

Appendix: Genogram

You need to create at least a three-generation genogram (static and dynamic) of the family (along with relevant info and nodal events) and its relational patterns. A hand-drawn genogram is equally as good as a computer-generated genogram. A legend must be included. Please attach the genogram to your appendix (this is not part of the 6 written pages). No diagrams should be part of the body of writing. Introduction and conclusion are not necessary for this assignment. However, I am expecting research and citations for this paper.

The paper is to be typed, double-spaced, 12-point Arial font, with 1-inch margins. A detailed discussion of how to design the treatment plan will be presented during the lecture. Please note: You need to write this in paragraph form. No point form is allowed in this paper. There is no need to retell the story except what is necessary to describe the family patterns.

Please save the file only in PDF format and submit it via AL2.

See the rubric for details of expectations.

4. Participation: (10%)

This evaluation tool encourages students' participation in understanding the various family therapy models – including their distinctiveness, critiques, and applications with families.

You are expected to have read the assigned chapters for each lecture and attend each class, including groups and case study discussions. The grade will be awarded based on attendance, punctuality, willingness to contribute, critical thinking, and thoughtfulness in your interactions with the professor and other students. The focus is on the quality of their participation and not on the quantity. While holding different opinions, each person is expected to express themselves clearly and communicate with others respectfully.

Presence and Meaningful Participation

Presence and participation in this course are expected and a student's level of presence and

participation in the course will impact how well they will score in the course. Low levels of presence and participation tend to translate to low grades; mediocre presence and participation tend to translate to mediocre grades; and high levels of presence and participation tend to translate to higher grades.

Students must establish a record of participation in academically related activities to meet the expected level of attendance and meaningful participation. Merely logging into the online class is not, by itself, sufficient as a demonstration of attendance and participation by the student. Students are expected to engage with the course content/materials throughout the week both within and outside of the learning management system (Avenue to Learn).

Online Etiquette

It is critical in any MDC class that students show respect for both classmates and the instructor. This is even more important in the online environment because many of the non-verbal cues that people use to interpret communication are largely absent. Therefore, students should be especially mindful of how their words may be interpreted by those who read them. Course instructors will monitor communications to ensure that all students feel comfortable expressing their views in a respectful manner. This applies to individual and group communications involving the instructor and the others enrolled in the course.

Technology Requirements

- A reliable internet connection (tested before class time),
- A device with audio and video capability
- The correct video conferencing platform installed (e.g., Zoom, Teams).

Webcam & Environment

- Students must keep their microphones muted except when speaking to minimize background noise.
- Students must keep their webcams on throughout the class session.
- Students must dress appropriately.
- Students must ensure their surroundings are free from unnecessary distractions. Professional virtual backgrounds are permitted.

Summary of Assignments and Grading

Evaluation is based upon the completion of the following assignments:

Group Project	15%
Critique Paper	35%
Treatment Plan Paper	40%
Participation	10%
Total Grade	100%

Course and Reading Schedule

Day 1:

- Introduction and Syllabus
- System Concepts (Nichols, chapters 1, 2)
- Bowenian Therapy (Nichols, chapter 4)
- Structural Therapy (Nichols, chapter 6) -Part 1

Day 2:

- Structural Therapy (Nichols, chapter 6) -Part 2
- Group Project: Video Analysis of a Therapy Session (IFS)
- Solution Focused Therapy (Nichols, chapter 11)

Day 3:

- Emotionally Focused Couple Therapy
(Greenman, P. S., & Johnson, S. M. (2013). **Process research on Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT) for couples: Linking theory to practice.** Family Process, 52(1), 46–61.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/famp.12015>)
- Integration (Nichols, chapter 13)
- Treatment Plan

Rough Course Schedule (Days 1–3)

Time	Activity
9:00 – 10:40 a.m.	Instruction
10:40 – 10:50	Break
10:50 – 12:30 p.m.	Instruction
12:30 – 1:15	Lunch
1:15 – 2:50	Instruction
2:50 – 3:00	Break
3:00 – 4:15	Instruction
4:15 – 4:20	Break
4:20 – 5:30	Instruction

Disclaimer: The syllabus is the intellectual property of the instructor and that the instructor reserves the right to revise the syllabus up to the first day of the course.

College Style for Submission of Written Work

All stylistic considerations (including but not limited to questions of formatting, footnotes, and bibliographic references) must conform to the **McMaster Divinity College Press Style Guide**

<https://mcmasterdivinity.ca/resources-forms/mdc-style-guide/>

Failure to observe appropriate form will result in grade reductions.

Academic Honesty

Academic dishonesty consists of misrepresenting the authorship or ownership of written work through deception or other fraudulent means. In an academic setting this may include copying or using unauthorized aids during tests or examinations; plagiarism, that is, presenting another person's (or generative AI's) words, ideas, data, or creative work as one's own without appropriate acknowledgement and citation; or submitting work for credit in more than one course without instructor permission.

A special note about Generative AI: Students are expected to do their own thinking and write their own papers and assignments. Generative AI is not to be used to do this work. The use of AI to produce content that is then submitted as though it were the student's own work constitutes plagiarism and is a violation of the Academic Honesty Policy. While AI tools may be used to correct errors in English grammar, usage, and mechanics, Generative AI must not be used to translate assignments from a student's native language into English. All degree programs at MDC are taught in the English language. Students are expected to be sufficiently proficient in English to engage fully in academic discourse in these programs.

Gender Inclusive Language

McMaster Divinity College uses inclusive language for human beings in worship services, student written materials, and all its publications. It is expected that student will use inclusive language in all MDC assignments. When referencing biblical texts, students should preserve the integrity of the original expressions and the names of God while using gender-inclusive language when referring to human beings. Biblical quotations should be taken from a gender-inclusive translation such as: NRSVue (2022), NIV (2011), CEB (2011), NLT (1996), or CEV (1995).

AODA

In accordance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), McMaster Divinity College (MDC) is committed to supporting a learning environment that is inclusive and accessible to all students, including those with disabilities. Students who require academic accommodations to participate fully in this course must register with Student Accessibility Services (SAS) (<https://sas.mcmaster.ca/>) of McMaster University. SAS will work directly with the MDC Registrar to ensure reasonably appropriate accommodations are in place. Students with accommodations must use the SAS portal to activate the accommodations relevant to each course at the start of each term in which they are enrolled. Please note that accommodations must be requested in advance to allow sufficient time for implementation. Accommodations are not retroactive and will not be applied to

coursework or activities that have already concluded.

Contact Information:

- **Student Accessibility Services General Inquiries:** sas@mcmaster.ca
- **Roksana Sobota (SAS Representative for MDC):** sobotar@mcmaster.ca
- **MDC Registrar:** mdcreg@mcmaster.ca