

Competency
Addressing Religion &
Spirituality in Couple &
Family Therapy
Self-Paced Workbook





WELCOME!

Hi there! We are Dr. Jen Ripley and Dr. Jim Sells, Co-directors of the Charis Institute at Regent University. Welcome to the learning series titled Family and Couple Therapy Competencies Addressing Religion and Spirituality, or *Family CARS*.

This is a continuing education experience to apply principles from diversity education and family systems theory to addressing religious and spiritual issues in therapy for family or other relationships.

This training is part of a research project, co-sponsored by Regent University, Charis Institute, and the University of North Carolina, School of Nursing. It was funded by the John Templeton Foundation, through the University of South Alabama and Stetson University.



With special thanks for contributions from
Kaitlin Wray, Reema Smith, Logan Hummel & Sarah Haught

www.familycars.org



THE ROAD AHEAD

01

Cultural Comfort

An overview of awareness of R/S competency in couple & family therapy. What is your comfort with R/S? What is your Expertise? Working within your competency and maintaining ethical boundaries.

02

Research in Family CARS

Research basics in religious coping, sanctification of family relationships, forgiveness & humility, and prayer in families. Applying prayer to therapy.

03

Assessment in Family CARS

What are the family's R/S identities? How prominent is R/S? What role does R/S play in their concerns? How would they include R/S in therapy?

04

Systems application

Applying 4 systems principles to clinical work: Non-anxious presence, Multi-directional partiality, Differentiation in R/S, and Exclusions & Embrace.

05

Application to a case

Apply the CARS principles to a family case.

Family

Competencies Addressing
Religion/Spirituality



Remember Family CARS:
Comfort, Assessment, Research, Systems

1. Reflect on R/S in your **Comfort** for each case (CECE)
 - a. What is your **Cultural comfort** with R/S?
 - b. What is your **Expertise** with their R/S tradition?
 - c. Work within your R/S **Competency**, and
 - d. Always maintain **Ethical boundaries**
2. R/S family **Research** concepts are usually positive, but can be negative (Can Someone Find Peace?)
 - a. **Religious Coping**
 - b. **Sanctification** of family relationships
 - c. **Forgiveness** & Humility
 - d. **Prayer** in families
3. **Assess** 4 key R/S assessment questions (IPRI)
 - a. **IDENTITY**: What is the religious/ spiritual tradition or beliefs for you and your family?
 - b. **PROMINENCE**: How prominent is R/S in your family's daily life together?
 - c. **ROLE**: What role does R/S have with your current concerns?
 - d. **INCLUSION**: Would you like to include your R/S practice into therapy?
4. What **Systems** therapist attitudes help address spiritual tensions? (Nuns & Monks Dance Everyday)
 - a. **Non-anxious presence**
 - b. **Multi-directional partiality**
 - c. **Differentiation** around R/S issues
 - d. Engage in both **Exclusion and embrace**

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Please note we do not offer Continuing Education Credit for the self-paced Family CARS Program. If you are seeking CEUs, please contact us.

Module 1: Introduction to CFR/S (introductory level)

- (a) accept R/S as a diversity variable,
- (b) understand the influence of personal beliefs or biases,
- (c) learn how relational and family language is essential in R/S constructs

Module 2: Translating basic science of CFR/S for therapy (intermediate level)

- (d) translate basic science on R/S in families to therapy (e.g., the sanctification of marriage, religious coping in parenting),
- (e) negotiate when R/S is viewed as a threat to functioning,
- (f) apply research on prayers as exemplar religious intervention utilized as part of treatment

Module 3: Assessment of CFR/S and their relationship with aspects of diversity (introductory level)

- (g) discover basic assessment skills in R/S factors that both help the family function and potentially create tension within families.
- (h) review the intersection of R/S with other diversity variables, especially LGBTQ+, race/ethnicity, family type, and life stage.

Module 4: Religious/spiritual intervention: Best practice and Ethics (intermediate level)

- (h) integrate established systems theory, including relational ethic for diverse R/S contexts,
- (i) review procedures to collaborate with religious leaders/communities.
- (j) review ethical use of religious practices (e.g., prayer).

Module 5: Application to a Case Spiritually Integrated Parenting Focused Treatment (intermediate level)

- (k) examine the integration of clinicians' theory of CF treatment with religious concepts.



MODULE 1: CULTURAL COMFORT

The first module will be about self-reflection of our comfort with R/S in therapy.

The Four Great Ideas for Module 1 are (CECE):

- Explore our **C**ultural Comfort level
- Consider our **E**xpertise in Client's R/S
- Work within our **C**ompetency
- Maintain **E**thical boundaries



Your Mission:

1. Watch the Module One Video
2. Take Notes on What you Learned
3. Check out your Learning with the Content Questions
4. Engage in personal reflection applying the ideas to a case



WATCH NOW

Play Module 1 Video & Take Some Notes

Froma Walsh said "Most families and couples who come for therapy or counseling are seeking more than symptom reduction, problem solving, or communication skills; they are seeking

d_____.

m_____ and

c_____ in their lives."



FOUR GREAT IDEAS FROM FAMILY SYSTEMS

Great idea #1: A non-anxious _____
_____ wins over _____ when creating a non-_____
presence.

Great idea #2: Differentiation is the ability to maintain
a sense of _____ in close relationships with others.

Great idea #3: Multi-directed _____. being partial to
each _____. The contextual family therapist engages fully.

Great idea #4: Exclusion & _____. The basis for
healthy therapeutic attachment is to embrace in spite of
_____. Acknowledge that we are both different
and valued, separated but _____.

Hint: "Nuns & Monks Dance Everyday" is mnemonic for Non-anxious
presence; Multi-directed partiality; Differentiation; and Exclusion & Embrace



MODULE 1: CHECK YOUR LEARNING FROM THE VIDEO

- Feelings that arise before, during, or after culturally relevant conversations A. Cultural Humility
- Meaning making and striving that is not focused on a religious tradition or history B. Cultural Comfort
- Being open and willing to reflect on oneself as an embedded cultural being and an openness to hearing about and striving to understand the cultural background and identity of others C. Spirituality

Which of the following is NOT one of the four "great ideas" from systems theory to increase our competency addressing religion and spirituality proposed in this module?

- A. Attend to each person in the room
- B. Maintain a sense of self in close relationships with others
- C. Acknowledge that we are different and valued, as well as separate but embraced
- D. Ignore the religious and spiritual diversity factors that the client presents with
- E. Create a non-anxious presence in the face of diversity issues

There is a scientific basis for understanding religion and spirituality in couples and families, just like other aspects of diversity. Answers in margin below.

True

False



AFTER THE VIDEO GUIDED SELF-REFLECTION

In your current personal relationship or spiritual journey, where do you find yourself at this moment?

How might your personal experience impact your work with clients?

When reflecting on your religious or spiritual experiences, do you generally hold positive sentiments? Are you more inclined to be a performer, an audience member, or someone who prefers not to participate?

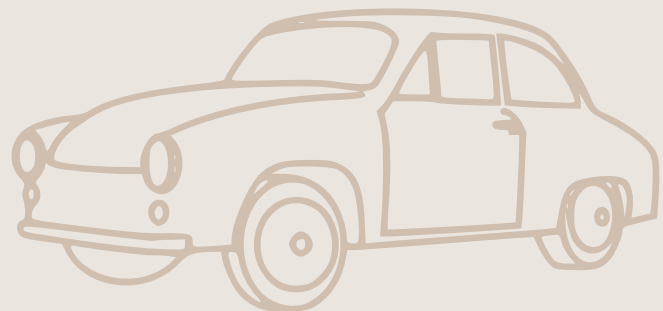
Would you describe yourself as more inclined towards conventional, unconventional, both, or neither in your approach to R/S?

Can you share insights on your comfort level when engaging with different cultures?

MODULE 1: CASE REFLECTION

Dana is a therapist who has a case that presents for family therapy and talks about conflict over their 22-year-old son who is gay and recently announced he would like to marry his boyfriend. The husband in this family is a traditional religious follower and finds this to be a desecration of the family. The mother is the same religion but believes that there is no problem with being gay in their religion. She supports her son and believes the proper religious response is to actively support the son's relationship. You can tell the mother is worried about it although her worry is expressed subtly. The son isn't sure he wants to do family therapy, doubting it will be helpful.

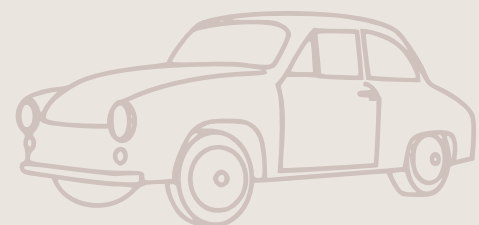
Dana herself is nonbinary (she/they) and active in supporting gay rights. But Dana knows this conflict runs deep for this family. Dana decides to move on from their conflict about the marriage and instead focuses them to talk about general communication between them. Dana knows nothing about their religion and finds their religion and views on gay marriage confusing. Instead Dana decides to focus on their language and ethnicity as a family from Tuvalu in Polynesia to address diversity in the couple. After all she is busy as a clinician, and can't be an expert in everything.



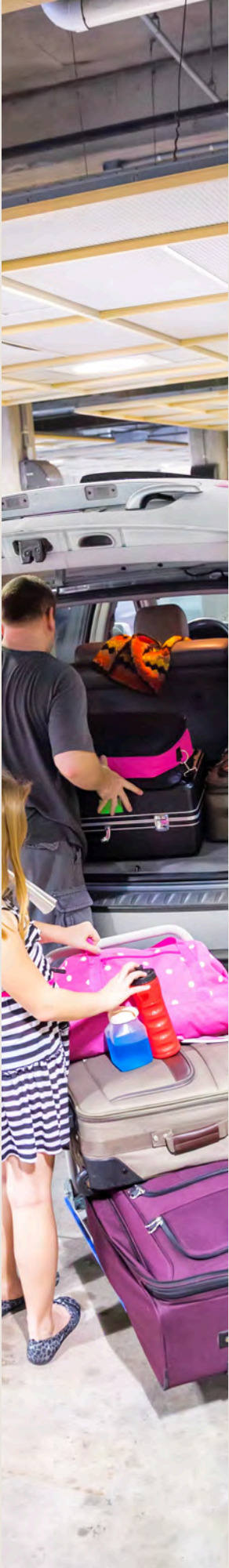


MODULE 1: CASE REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. In reflecting on this case, what emotions or thoughts does it bring up for you? How aware are you of your reactions to the family's religious or spiritual background, and how does your own personal experience with religion or spirituality influence your response to a case like this?
2. Considering the teachings you've encountered, which principles could Dana apply to address the challenges presented in this case?
3. Identify what elements Dana might be overlooking in this case. Why do you think these aspects are missing from her perspective, and what could be a more effective response in this situation?
4. If Dana were to broach the topic of religion and spirituality with the family, how might she navigate the tensions surrounding the son's gay identity and the parents' differing beliefs? Apply training ideas from this module to suggest an approach.
5. What are your personal spiritual identities (religious, spiritual, both, or neither) and your emotional reactions to religion and spirituality (performer 1 or 2, audience, or no thank you)? Reflect on any anxieties when considering sharing this personal, often hidden, information. Consider how your clients might feel about revealing such information to you.



MODULE 1 NOTES





MODULE 2: RESEARCH IN R/S IN FAMILIES

The second module will focus on the extant research on religion and spirituality in couples and families.

The Four Great Ideas for Module 2 are (Mnemonic: Can Someone Find Peace?):

- Religious Coping
- Sanctification of Couples and Families
- Forgiveness & Humility
- Prayer

1. Watch the Module Two Video
2. Take Notes on What you Learned
3. Check out your Learning with the Content Questions
4. Engage in Reflection applying the ideas to a case



Fill in the Blank Module 2 Video Notes

Religion/ Spirituality usually predicts _____
general health and _____ life.

Sanctification is the manifestation of God or imbued with
_____ qualities.

Divine triangulation would place one partner allied with _____
against another family member.

Is Forgiveness Healthy? _____

All major religions have encouraged their followers to engage
iin _____ as an answer to the problem of
offenses in relationships.

Frank Fincham and Stephen Beach have conducted studies
that show that positive _____ increases couple
commitment, and forgiveness.



MODULE 2: CHECK YOUR LEARNING

- A tactic that can be used in a family dyad to get one entity on their side to increase their power. A. Sanctification

- The manifestation of God or imbued with sacred qualities B. Negative Triangulation

- joining with a Higher Power to pray for blessings for one's children or spouse. C. Divine Triangulation

According to research, which of the following could be associated with increased sanctification in a relationship?

- A. Increased psychosocial adjustment
- B. Less negative functioning
- C. Positive communication
- D. Lower infidelity
- E. All of the above

All major religions have encouraged their followers to engage in forgiveness as an answer to the problem of offenses in relationships.

True

False



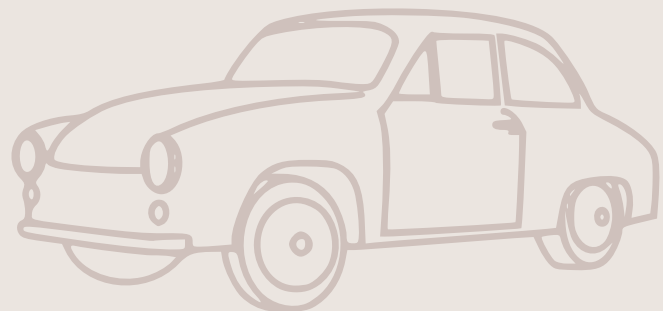
MODULE 2: CASE

A couple presents to therapy where the husband is a Baptist pastor and the wife also works for the church. Their primary presenting issue is the husband has been using pornography which violates their values for sexuality. It doesn't appear to be affecting his ability to work, or self-care. But the couple is deeply affected by this. The wife caught her husband watching some pornography and brought the incident to another local pastor for advice. Consequently, the husband's position in the church is threatened by this discovery where he could be sanctioned but is unlikely to be removed from his position for a "first offense."

The wife is just aghast at the "whole affair." She is having nightmares, and can't sleep. The husband is contrite and apologetic but more likely to say it's a moral problem, not a psychological problem. The wife is convinced it's both. The couple is asking for a forgiveness intervention and want to use prayer to help them through this struggle.

The couple's therapist isn't quite sure how to respond to this couple. The therapist is agnostic and has had some negative experiences with Baptists in her community. She doesn't know much about forgiveness interventions and doesn't think the husband's relatively small amount of pornography use is a psychological problem. She wonders if she should perhaps refer them to a local religious therapist but is unsure if they would end up shaming the husband and creating more problems for the couple. It's a small town so there aren't but a few therapists who do couple therapy in the area.

She tells the couple that the pornography use wouldn't be considered a psychological diagnosis, but she could help the couple with communication issues. She offers to do emotion-focused couple therapy with the couple. They ask about forgiveness interventions a couple more times and then drop out of treatment. The therapist decides they weren't ready to do the work of couple therapy.





MODULE 2: CASE REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What recommendations would you provide to the therapist regarding integrating the couple's religious context into the therapeutic process?
2. Do you believe there are potential cultural or religious resources the therapist might have overlooked when deciding the couple's readiness for therapy?
3. If the therapist were to discuss religion and spirituality with this family, how could they navigate the spiritual triangulation involving the wife, another pastor, and the perceived connection between the wife and God?
4. How might you use forgiveness and prayer for a couple/family like this or one with a different religion/spirituality than you do?

MODULE 2 NOTES





MODULE 3: ASSESSMENT OF R/S IN FAMILIES

The third module will focus on assessment techniques for religion and spirituality in couple and family therapy

The Four Great Ideas for Module 3 are (IPRI):

- Identity: What are the R/S identity/identities of the family?
- Prominence: How prominent is R/S in the life of the family?
- Role: What role does R/S play in the family's problems?
- Inclusion: Would they like to include R/S practice in therapy?

Your Mission

1. Watch the Module Three Video
2. Take Notes on What you Learned
3. Check out your Learning with the Content Questions
4. Engage in Reflection applying the ideas to a case



Fill in the Blank Module 3 Video Notes

The first question for identity is: What is you and your family's religious and spiritual _____ or traditions?"

Be specific in their religious _____ and terminology, for example, use "your Islamic tradition" if that is their term.

If the family is not engaged in formal religion or spiritual practices, you might instead ask about how they uniquely create _____ in life together as a couple/family or explore deeper questions about death, birth, love, and marriage (if married) in their own way.

The video suggests to ask about #4 inclusion by using the the phrase "How would you see your spiritual/ religious /faith practices _____ in your counseling?"



MODULE 3: CHECK YOUR LEARNING

On the screening checklist described in this module, what two terms should be differentiated for clients due to identity preferences and negative associations?

- A. Faith and Religion
- B. Faith and Spirituality
- C. Religion and Spirituality
- D. None of the above

What question is important to ask for couple's who have a high interest in spirituality or religion and see religion/spirituality as a part of their family's purpose or problem?

- A. How might your spiritual practices help in your counseling?
- B. How important is religiosity and spirituality in your life?
- C. With what religion, faith, or spiritual label do you describe yourself?
- D. None of the above

If a family is not engaged in formal religion or spiritual practices, what is something you might ask about instead of faith tradition or religiosity?

- A. How the couple/family understands the influence of outside stressors
- B. How the couple/family uniquely creates meaning in life together or explores deeper questions about death, birth, love, and marriage
- C. How the couple/family communicates about their cultural backgrounds
- D. None of the above

In therapy, you might have an open discussion with your clients about what language they use and acknowledge with them that, within their own family or religious group, there is a whole lexicon of terminology.

TRUE

FALSE



MODULE 3: CASE

A single mom Carmella presents for treatment concerned about her only son Will, who is 15 and has been diagnosed with ADHD and bipolar disorder from a reputable local child psychologist. His teacher says he might need special education and referred the family for mental healthcare. The family is African-American. The mom lives on her own with the son, and relies heavily on her family for support and childcare. Will really loves spending time with his grandmother and cousins, and they seem to accept the odd behaviors that come with his diagnosis.

The family is heavily involved in a local Muslim community center with her brother and also the grandmother's African-Methodist Episcopal church. The two religious groups both engage in many local political and community activities including marches, and rallies which Carmella enjoys and finds meaning in being active in the political work.

The mom receives a good deal of her financial support for utility bills and food from these two religious groups. An older lady at the AME church asked if her son might be cursed by God or have "some kind of demonic influence over him" and states "I know that sounds kind of crazy, and I don't mean to sound that way, but he's just so unusual and odd. Sometimes he like sees ghosts when he's depressed. And he just seems sorta wild. Sometimes I wonder." You are the therapist and just met this family.





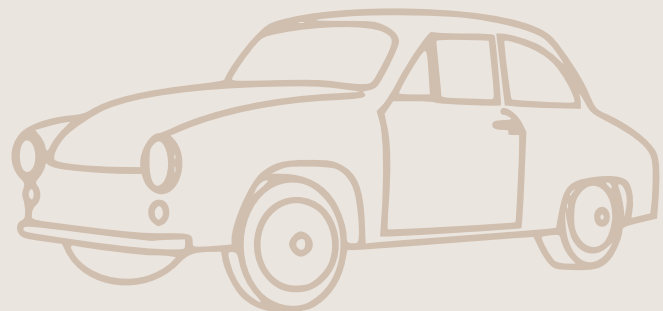
MODULE 3: CASE REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. How would you discuss Carmella and Will's religious/spiritual beliefs and practices? What specific questions would you be able to ask to ensure a thoughtful and open conversation?

2. Reflect on your feelings regarding Carmella's dual religious involvement. How might your own beliefs impact your interactions? Are you familiar with both religions and if not, how might that influence your understanding?

3. How might the assessment of IPRI (Identity, Prominence, Role, and Inclusion) ideas be applied to a case like Carmella and Will?

4. In your theoretical framework, how would you conceptualize the role of religion/spirituality in Carmella and Will's case? How might these aspects shape their identities and roles within the family?



MODULE 3: NOTES





MODULE 4: SYSTEMS APPLICATION TO R/S ISSUES

The fourth module will focus on applying great ideas from family systems theory to religion and spirituality in couple and family therapy

The Four Great Ideas for Module 4 are (Nuns & Monks Dance Everyday):

- Non-anxious presence. Calmly and courageously sitting with families with R/S tensions
- Multi-directional partiality. Taking the interests surrounding R/S of each party.
- Differentiation. Applied to R/S issues
- Engage in both Exclusion & Embrace in R/S issues

Your Mission

1. Watch the Module Four Video
2. Take Notes on What you Learned
3. Check out your Learning with the Content Questions
4. Engage in Reflection applying the ideas to a case



Fill in the Blank Module 4 Video Notes

In family systems, problems and solutions are found _____ people.

The four big ideas are

1. Maintain a _____ presence
2. Use _____ partiality
3. Employ _____ around R/S issues
4. Engage in both _____ and _____.

You can create _____ using multidirectional partiality.

Differentiation: Maintain a strong _____ of _____ while engaging curiously with those who are different.



MODULE 4: CHECK YOUR LEARNING

Check which concepts from this training below relate to creating a systemic alliance with each person. Check all that apply.

- A. Calm presence with religious tension
- B. Treatment planning
- C. Sacred Relationships
- D. Prejudice
- E. Exclusion and embrace
- F. Multi-directed partiality

Instead of focusing on "IT" the religious difference between couples who present to therapy, what should the therapist focus on instead?

- A. How other family members feel about the religious difference
- B. Do actually focus on the religious difference for most sessions
- C. Focus on and explore the recursive patterns established by family of origins





MODULE 4: CASE

David is a Jewish young man, age 30. He has a young son with his grad school girlfriend and has weekend custody and the relationship with the ex is amicable. He works as a chemist in Boston and does not believe in God or practice his Jewish faith but appreciates the legacy and history of Judaism. He is engaged to Bindi, age 29, a Hindu woman who is a pharmacist. She does practice her faith with her family who also live in Boston.

Bindi's family came to the U.S. from Mumbai India before she was born. They are a proud family who have succeeded in the United States after the parents' investment and sacrifice. The family is quite respected in the Hindu community, as they are from the Brahman caste and the father was favored by a guru in the Boston area. The couple is living together for a year now and planning a wedding in another year.

The reason to seek counseling is that they have had some disagreements about the wedding planning, and about religion. David is glad to just have a Hindu wedding, since religion isn't important to him but his mother refuses to attend the wedding if it doesn't include some Jewish traditions. Words like sacrilege and desecration were used by the mother at a family meal recently.

Bindi states that she can't even sleep or eat out of anxiety over the problem. She feels as though she can't possibly handle the stress of the extended family tension. David seems to be minimizing the problem saying that none of their families even really believe in a God or gods, but Bindi finds this very offensive.

In individual meeting David confesses that he has thought about trying to reconcile with his ex due to the stress around religion and their families. Bindi just seems lost and deeply frightened of losing the man she has loved for several years.



MODULE 4: CASE REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Consider your emotional responses to the religious differences in Bindi and David's case. What awareness or discomfort does it bring to you regarding religious diversity in families?

2. Reflect on how adopting a non-anxious presence could benefit Bindi and David in addressing their problems. How might your ability to remain calm and clear positively impact their dynamic?

3. Envision what multi-directional partiality could look like in the context of a couple with different religions, such as Bindi and David. How might a therapist navigate supporting both individuals' perspectives without favoring one over the other?



Module 4: Reflection Questions

4. Considering the concept of ego-differentiation, how can a therapist maintain a sense of self while addressing religious/spiritual differences professionally? What qualities of well-differentiated therapy might be crucial in managing conflicts arising from religious disparities?

(Differentiation is maintaining a sense of self in close relationships with others. It is the capacity to manage one's anxieties and to resist reacting to anxiety in another. Well-differentiated people can recognize that they need others but stay calm and clear when conflict, criticism, and rejection occur. They can respond selflessly in the family's best interest and not respond in over-conforming or pouty rebellious ways.)

5. In what ways is the couple excluded from each other's individual experiences, and yet can embrace each other's religious identity and issues?

6. How might you use prayer with a couple like this, who are different religions?

MODULE 4: NOTES





MODULE 5: APPLY TO A PARENTING CASE

The fifth module will focus on applying the great ideas from family systems theory to religion and spirituality in a parenting case. The 4 great ideas for this module are:

1. Reflect on our comfort in a parenting case with a religious problem
2. Assess the R/S needs of parents in treatment
3. Discuss Family CARS research concepts applied to the case
4. Apply family systems theory principles to a religious problem in family therapy.

Your Mission

1. Watch the Module Five Video
2. Take Notes on What you Learned
3. Check out your Learning with the Content Questions
4. Engage in Reflection applying the ideas to a case



Fill in the Blank Module 5 Video Notes

The cultural comfort concept uses CECE as a mnemonic, which stands for:

C_____ E_____ C_____

E_____

For R/S assessment, this couple from Malaysia appears to be:

Identity: Eastern Asian _____

The prominence of R/S in their lives? _____

Role of R/S in the problem? _____

Inclusion of R/S in treatment? _____

Working within ethical limitations of _____ & role in important.

_____: When psychological problems impair the ability to practice one's faith/religion/spirituality.

For multi-directed partiality think of each partner's interests; in this case, the father's interests are about the _____, and the mother's interests are _____.

Differentiation: Draw from _____ and _____ resources for treatment.



MODULE 5: CHECK YOUR LEARNING

CARS stands for:

Module 2: Research in Family R/S "Can Someone Find Peace" stands for

C_____

Sanctification _____

F_____

P_____

Module 3: Assessment "IPRI" stands for

I_____

P_____

R_____

I_____

Module 4: Systems Theory "Nuns and Monks Dance Everyday"

N_____

M_____

D_____

E_____

What is a therapist's *first* job in considering the best way to address Religion and Spirituality issues?

- A. Understand their R/S history, traditions and practices**
- B. Awareness - reflect and identify your cultural comfort, reaction and response to the client's religion.**
- C. Figure out which R/S resource is best for the couple to use.**

A therapist can help clients explore their religion/spirituality as a resource instead of point of tension.

True

False





MODULE 5: CASE

Trace has a new case. They are a young Buddhist couple who are deeply committed to meditative prayer and yoga practice. They are a 2nd generation Malaysian, living in Washington DC., working in a family business, and quite supportive and loving with each other. They requested couple therapy to assist with adjustments with their 5-year-old daughter who is newly diagnosed with autism. The father is anxious about the diagnosis and worries he won't be able to be a good father to a child with autism, and keep up the business.

The couple would like to use prayer, meditation, and yoga practices to help cope with the stress of parenting and be more accepting of the diagnosis. Trace is not that familiar with Buddhism but does practice non-religious yoga and mindfulness for his self-care. He asks the couple what they were thinking might work for them with the practices, and follows their lead. The wife begins to pursue her husband to engage in practices together, he withdraws, and they have conflict around the practices.

Trace isn't sure what to do. He contacts a Buddhist psychologist in the area who believes that Trace can't help the couple because he isn't a practicing Buddhist himself. This is discouraging. It reinforces Trace's feeling of incompetence and the imposter syndrome. Trace brings ideas for conjoint prayer practices to the couple but this just seems to entrench them further in conflict around how to do the practices. Trace attempts standard communication exercises to help the couple listen to each other better, but they both reject the attempts.





Module 5:

Case Reflection Questions

1. Reflect on your emotional responses to this case's religious and spiritual aspects. What new clinical experiences or discomfort does it evoke in you?
2. What intersections of diversity do you notice in this case?
3. Consider how a systemic approach to couple/family therapy might help address the tension around religious practices in this case. How can understanding the family system dynamics contribute to therapeutic interventions?
4. Envision how Trace, as the therapist, could use the couple's Buddhist religion as a resource while respecting their individual struggles with the autism diagnosis. What specific strategies or interventions might be effective?



Module 5:

Case Reflection Questions

5. Reflect on what you find most impactful in this case. What insights or learnings would you like to share with others in your professional group?

6. Explore the role of being a competent religious/spiritual provider in your identity as a professional mental healthcare worker. How does this aspect align with your personality as a diversity-conscious clinician?

MODULE 5: NOTES

