Avoiding Obstacles when Working with Families

1. Attend to the basic needs of the family and any immediate issues/‘crises’ the family need addressing (Maslow’s hierarchy of needs)

2. Ensure that sufficient attention is paid to the establishment of a therapeutic relationship will all family members (ask about family members not present...‘if x was here what would he say about...’). Engage all family members – do not underestimate the importance of social engagement in the initial stages

3. Respect the hierarchy and consider cultural factors. Adhere to traditional/nature values placed within the family and extended network

4. Be aware of any attempts by parents to engage in separate contact with the clinician as an opportunity to ‘control’ and/or provide ‘secret’ information

5. Ensure trust and credibility is established (be open and explicit about your role, goals of the session and expectations)

6. Be clear about goals for those attending the session. Are family members prepared to work on change? Is a resolution possible? If not, what are we working towards?

7. Is there parallel process occurring: Ensure that you can ‘stand apart’ from the family and view their concerns clearly and openly. Reflect on process

8. Check in with your ‘feelings/attitude and beliefs’ about the family and reflect on how these might influence your ‘attachment’ to the client and ability to help them

9. Don’t cut corners to get the full picture. The more time you spend on understanding the concerns of the family the better able you are to help them manage

10. Employ a strengths based approach – develop a ‘lens’ which identifies how the individual/family manage adversity. Share what you notice about their strengths

11. Balance your questioning style: where necessary be direct and confident in your questioning and feedback

12. Link the connectedness of individual, family and wider system. Recruit outside supports where possible

13. Be aware of any hidden agendas that might ask you to ‘fix’ the problem

14. Empower the client to find their own solutions by building on their strength story

15. Avoid blame at all costs – it doesn’t help anyone and is more than likely going to create defensiveness and distrust

16. Awareness of safety and confidentiality issues. You should never be so busy that you overlook these issues and related paperwork/reporting requirements

17. Always be aware of the power of language in therapy. How you ask a question or reflect back to a family will greatly impact the effectiveness of a question or statement

18. Get supervision to review your clinical work regularly