

Family Therapy at The London Centre

One of the services which The London Centre offers is Family Therapy. As Family Therapy can encompass a number of different therapy approaches, here is some information about the different types that we offer and the answers to some frequently asked questions.

Why has Family Therapy been Suggested / Offered?

Many families feel anxious about engaging in family therapy, or feel that this has been suggested because the family is somehow at 'fault'. In fact, quite the opposite is true. There are many ways in which Family Therapy may be helpful, which is why we tend to offer it to most people. These reasons include:

- Families needing their own support to help think about and cope with the impact of having a family member who is struggling.
- Families feeling short of ideas about how to help or what to say, or feeling ashamed to ask for guidance because they think they should instinctively know what to do at home (hint: you aren't meant to be an expert in eating disorders just because you have a family).
- Families needing their own space to process and talk about what they are experiencing as a family, or what they experienced in the past, prior to there being an eating disorder in the family.
- Because the family is an incredible resource in helping someone to recover from an eating disorder. Therapy typically involves an hour a week of support and ideas, but involving the family in this process means that support and ideas can be offered between sessions as well.
- Families finding that when someone has been unwell for some time, the family has changed or moulded itself around the illness, and they may need support to think about the changes that both the family member and the family may go through as recovery happens.
- Because there is a young person with an eating disorder in the family. We know that it is the best and most effective treatment for young people (NICE guidelines) therefore we always offer it as a first line treatment for any young people we are seeing in our service.

What is Family Therapy for Eating Disorders?

1) Family Support and Psychoeducation

This involves offering guidance and support to families or partners of those suffering from an eating disorder. 'Caring' for someone with an eating disorder can take its toll. Families or partners may have a lot of questions about the eating disorder and the role

of the family in supporting a loved one through recovery, and may also need their own support throughout this process.

As these sessions focus on support for the family or partner, typically the person with the eating disorder would not attend. The session might be a one-off session, or you may wish to have a small number of sessions every few weeks.

2) Maudsley Family-Based Treatment (FBT)

Family-Based Treatment for eating disorders is a specialised outpatient treatment that aims to empower parents to take charge of the recovery process.

FBT is suitable for young people who currently live at home with a parent/caregiver (or can move home for the duration of treatment).

Generally, this treatment has three phases which occur over a period of 12-18 months (depending on severity):

Phase One: Refeeding and Weight Restoration

Phase Two: Returning Control of Eating to the Young Person

Phase Three: Addressing Adolescent Concerns and Treatment Completion

Treatment typically involves the whole family, including siblings, although the young person will be seen alone for a part of each session. Treatment will usually occur weekly and the family will be responsible for supporting their child to improve their eating and weight and for providing guidance and support between sessions.

3) Parent Supported Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT-E)

CBT-E is the leading evidence-based treatment for adults with an eating disorder. In recent years, this treatment has also been shown to be effective with adolescents. This approach is most suitable for older adolescents who are not considered to be at high risk and who are very motivated to recover from their eating disorder.

The main goal of CBT-E is to remove disordered eating symptoms, thoughts and behaviours by directly addressing the mechanisms that have maintained these over time. Treatment typically consists of 20 sessions conducted over 20 weeks but some young people may need up to 40 sessions (depending on severity).

Although most adolescents will typically spend more 1:1 time with the therapist compared to other approaches, it is essential that parents still attend part of each session so they can be involved in treatment as much as possible. Parents play a key role in supporting their adolescent to implement changes at home and manage any setbacks that may occur, as well as providing much needed emotional support throughout the recovery process.

4) Family Therapy (FT)

Sometimes families need help and guidance to address difficulties that have occurred, or are occurring within the family. Sometimes these are issues around grief or separation. Sometimes these are unhelpful patterns that families have fallen into either prior to or after an eating disorder came into the family. Sometimes these are extremely distressing or complex issues that are very difficult for a family to discuss. Family therapy aims to provide a supportive environment for the whole family to think about and work through these difficulties.

Frequently Asked Questions

How often will we be seen?

The answer to this question is usually as often as feels helpful. When the only treatment being offered involves the family, this may occur weekly. If the family simply needs a little education around eating disorders and a chance to ask some questions, this may just involve a one-off meeting. When the family wants to do some more intensive work, but this is happening alongside a family member having individual weekly sessions, the family work may happen every 2 – 6 weeks. This will be thought about during the first meeting you have with the therapist and a realistic timescale in terms of frequency and cost will be agreed.

Who should these sessions involve?

If the sessions are aimed at psychoeducation and support for the family, this is likely to happen without the family member who is experiencing an eating disorder. In other forms of family therapy, generally speaking the whole family is involved in all sessions. However, depending on the aims of the session(s), sometimes it can be useful to meet with different parts of the family. This will be discussed and decided on during an initial family meeting.

How long does a session last?

We would recommend that an initial family assessment last 90 minutes. This will enable all members of the family to contribute and to feel heard and ensure that there is sufficient time to discuss treatment options. After that, sessions may continue to be 90 minutes in length or may be shorter depending on the number of people attending, the aim of the session(s), and the family's preference.

Is Family Therapy a standalone therapy, or do we need other sessions too?

This depends on what type of family therapy you are engaged in, and on the severity of the illness. Typically, Family Based Therapy (FBT) and Parent Supported CBT-E are stand-alone therapies. However, when there are particular concerns about weight or physical health, we may recommend that there are

dietetic appointments (typically fortnightly or monthly) or physical health monitoring by a GP or psychiatrist (frequency dependent on risk). Occasionally there may be reason to suggest a weekly family session and a weekly individual session to give the child or adolescent additional 1:1 time although this isn't usual practice.

In contrast, Family Therapy (FT) is more likely to run alongside individual work, with the individual attending weekly sessions and the family/partner attending less frequent FT sessions.

Who are our Family Therapists and when do they work?

Gladys Ellis is a Consultant Family and Systemic Psychotherapist and couples therapist. She has spent the last 17 years offering eating disorders focused family therapy interventions (Maudsley FT-AN; FT-BN). Gladys is based within our Central London office and offers a Saturday clinic.

Dr Hollie Shannon is one of our Senior Clinical Psychologists based across both our Central London and Richmond offices, Tuesday-Friday. Although Hollie is not technically a family therapist, she has received extensive training in both FBT and Parent Supported CBT-E and has a lot of experience of working with families.

Contact Details

Please do contact us or ask your clinician if you have any other questions that we haven't answered here.

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