

## Family Constellations:

**“Children seldom or never dare to live a happier or more fulfilling life than their parents. Unconsciously they remain loyal to unspoken family traditions that work invisibly. Family constellations are a way of discovering underlying family bonds and forces that have been carried unconsciously over several generations”**

**(Bertold Ulsamer)**

This revolutionary therapeutic method brought to light by German psychotherapist, Bert Hellinger, clearly identifies hidden dynamics located in the family tree which lie at the very heart of family dysfunction. The therapy incorporates themes located in the family system often going back generations, rather than working purely on the presenting, surface issues that an individual is often strongly attached to e.g. a strong emotional condemning of another family member or situation. Blind, unconscious loyalties, from the past, are often taken on by those seeking help. Often the children or the most vulnerable carry this past family burden but this suffering or sacrifice is not there's to carry and needs to be relinquished so that full and productive lives can be lived free or accepting of: trauma, guilt, fear, depression, dread, anxiety, anger, chronic illness, and many other associated negative traits and emotions.

**Common areas and dramatic themes for the individual client are found in the following family fates when connected to:**

War  
Murder  
Genocide  
Adoption  
Migration  
Suicide  
Divorce  
Unrequited love  
Abandonment  
Early death  
Crime  
Unfulfilled relationships  
Termination  
Addiction  
Genocide  
Secrets  
Physical Injury  
Chronic illness  
Incest

Most families then are subjected to hidden dynamics that lie out of conscious awareness. The facilitator brings to light the hidden burdens carried by unsuspecting clients.

### Common case themes found in constellation work:

- 1) A child has been denied access by one parent to the other after the adults separated. A split emerges in the child as they are bonded to both parents resulting, most commonly, in deeply ingrained anxiety for the child. This anxiety is taken into adulthood. The child can become parentified feeling the need to care for one parent and feeling guilty in expressing a need to connect with the 'condemned' parent.
- 2) A fear of having children and a pull to suicide. This can be seen in family fates, such as the holocaust, where deep grief and fear pass onto later generations. Life is defined by deep anxiety and the inability to trust life.
- 3) A desire to end one's life , an inexplicable pull to death and deep depression and grief. A sibling or parent has died prematurely and the burden of loss is carried for the family by one of the children.
- 4) A rejection of a parent (e.g. the mother) by the child who is bonded to a former lover of the father. The child unconsciously feels but secretly acknowledges that the former relationship is not over in the heart of that parent. Unrequited love and denial of reality results in deeply suppressed pain but is carried by the child who joins the dissatisfied and grieving father in resenting the mother and remembering and giving a place to the 'lost love'.
- 5) A grandchild dies of a brain aneurism at 13. In therapy the father cannot grieve. In exploration it is revealed that the father's own father was executed in the Middle East by a bullet to the head in front of him when he was 13. When this is acknowledged the father grieves for his son and his own father. The son's condition highlights the extraordinary level of 'misguided' loyalty children subconsciously go to for their parents.
- 6) A man feels tremendous anger and resentment at the father who adopted him. It is discovered in the constellation that his biological mother and adopted mother display much rage and resentment towards each other. The adopted mother looks down on the biological mother for giving away her child and the biological mother is resentful of that other women mothering her child. These negative emotions are carried by the adopted child and aimed at his adoptive father. After the therapeutic work this anger immediately ceases as the client is allowed 'access' to his own biological father-the excluded one in the system.
- 7) A man leaves his own family and children unexpectedly. It is revealed in the constellation that his father killed a child in a car accident, under the influence of alcohol, before his own son was born. The client carried his father's guilt and his self-imposed punishment was to leave the family that he loved dearly.
- 8) A female in her late teens is addicted to heroin and is abandoned by her strict religious family. In the course of the constellation her great, great, grandmother was identified and being sent to a mental institution where she eventually suicided. In

the constellation a great warmth and bond is clearly seen between the teenager and her long distant grandmother even though neither met. The elder woman lovingly tells her great, great granddaughter to stop following her fate and to live her life well. This movement allows the teenager to honour the fate of a past relative and to stop following a systemic and historical pattern of self-destruction.

- 9) A teenage girl has terrible headaches and her immune system is poor inviting infections and also anxiety. Her mother reveals that she lost a baby girl to illness. Her daughter, who shares the same name as her lost sibling, had never known that she had an older sister. This secret was felt by her and her condition is a reflection of the secret and suppressed grief of her mother and father.
- 10) A woman fears leaving her house and for many years has been plagued by dread and anxiety and she lives a frightened and narrow existence. In the constellation an aunt's horrific experience of being gang raped by soldiers is brought to light. This constellation saw many involved. The perpetrators initially had little remorse for the aunt and displayed great hatred towards the enemy they were fighting. Eventually, after bringing in the mothers of all participants involved, a softening emerged in which the soldiers displayed remorse. Constellation work requires a meta level of understanding where perpetrators and victims are given a place, because without this nonjudgmental attitude of the facilitator, movements of love at a soul level are not possible and the responsibility that is required for allowing love to flow continues to be entangled behind negative emotions of blame and disgust.
- 11) A female presents a deep grief and while she openly speaks about the relief of several terminations the constellation shows a deep bond to the unborn. This grief is released when the unborn are honoured and remembered and this acknowledgement brings a softening and the ability to let the grief go.
- 12) A couple love each other deeply but separate. They have brought the neediness of their childhood to the adult relationship and instead of treating each other as equal partners have parentified each other causing stress and resentment.

**A Family Constellation, when set up, can reveal the actual hidden family dynamics and patterns resulting in a more fulfilling and less burdensome life experience in which members are given a place with love and acceptance. All too often, clients blindly hold onto family stories in which family members and fates are labelled as good and bad, acceptable and unacceptable. These judgements do little to tap into the actual love that exists in a family. A good resolution requires an acceptance of fate which helps to disentangle the complicated blocks that cause generational disharmony which are perpetuated by stories that breed exclusion and pain.**

I set up family constellations in group workshops but also in individual settings. Look out for future workshop dates. For more information on Family Constellations read my book, **10 Jigsaw Pieces to Wellbeing**, Ch 4 -The Hidden Dynamics of a Family System- and page 138-140 on Systemic Conscience.

Dr Tony Byrne