

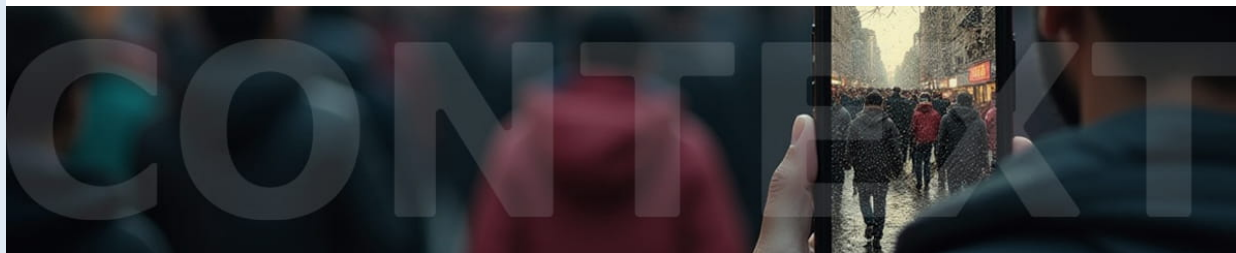


FTA Newsletter



The Challenges of Multigenerational Family Therapy in Contemporary Individualistic Societies

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Over recent decades, the social and cultural context in which families live has undergone profound and rapid transformations. The acceleration of everyday life, the centrality of performance, the pervasiveness of social media, and the growing emphasis on individual autonomy have progressively reshaped the ways in which people form bonds, manage conflict, and attribute meaning to relationships. Images of war have become part of everyday normality, while aggressive political leadership, authoritarian governments, and the dominance of economic interests over ethics and human rights have increasingly prevailed. In particular, individualism has become

radicalised in Western countries. Within this scenario, family therapy is confronted with new and complex challenges, especially when the external world appears increasingly aggressive, competitive, and oriented toward individualism.

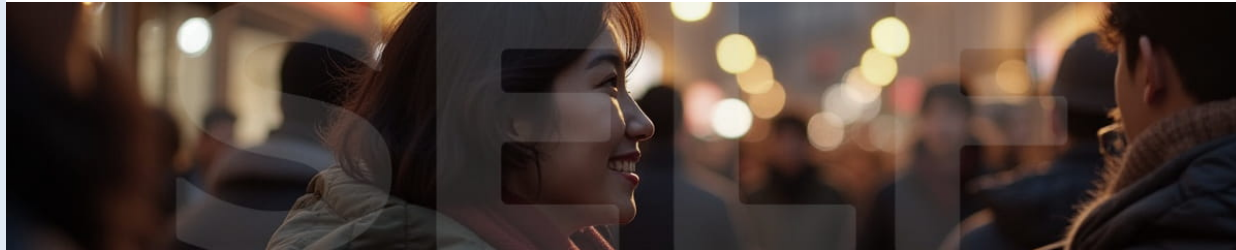
One of the most significant changes concerns the gradual erosion of interdependent bonds in favour of a view of the individual as a self-sufficient and self-centred entity. While this shift has supported the recognition of individual rights and self-determination, it has also weakened the sense of belonging and mutual responsibility within family systems. Many families enter therapy carrying distress that manifests through emotional isolation, communication difficulties, early relational ruptures, and a low tolerance for frustration. In a social context that normalises the idea of “cutting off” relationships when they become demanding, the care of relationships is increasingly deprived of cultural support.



A further challenge is represented by the rise in levels of aggression, often expressed verbally, in passive-aggressive forms, or through relational acting out. This aggression does not emerge out of the blue; rather, it is frequently the result of chronic stress, economic precarity, emotional overload, and the absence of spaces for emotional processing, and it also reflects a Western society that tends to impose its own values and ways of life over others. Within families, such tensions may translate into polarised dynamics, rigid triangulations, and difficulties in recognising one another’s emotional needs. Family therapy is therefore called not only to address the presenting symptoms, but also to offer a containing space in which aggression can be acknowledged and transformed into communication.

In this context, multigenerational family therapy offers theoretical and clinical tools of particular relevance. Its focus on the intergenerational transmission of relational patterns, invisible loyalties, and modes of emotional regulation allows current difficulties to be situated within a broader historical framework. In a world that privileges the “here and now” and immediate gratification, multigenerational work introduces a perspective of continuity, helping families recognise how certain patterns

of functioning are the result of past adaptations, often linked to contexts of survival, loss, or trauma.



A central concept in multigenerational therapy is differentiation of self, understood as the capacity to maintain one's emotional and cognitive identity while remaining in relationship with others. In a strongly individualistic culture, differentiation is at risk of being confused with emotional independence or relational disengagement. Therapeutic work instead helps clarify that healthy differentiation involves the ability to tolerate intimacy without losing oneself, and to face conflict without resorting to relational rupture. This capacity is particularly crucial in families marked by generational conflicts intensified by rapid social and value-based changes.

Contemporary family therapy must also contend with the fragmentation of shared time and living spaces. Families often experience not only geographical distance between generations—due to migration or work-related mobility—but also symbolic distance, fuelled by differing languages, values, and cultural reference points. Therapeutic work thus becomes a space of “translation,” in which different generations can recognise one another's vulnerabilities and re-signify their positions, reducing tendencies toward blame and the aggressive simplification of conflict.



Finally, in an increasingly aggressive world, family therapy is called upon to rehabilitate the value of care, slowness, and relational responsibility. The multigenerational perspective reminds us that families are not merely aggregates of individuals, but living systems embedded in a web of relationships that unfolds over time. Offering families a space in which to re-read their history, acknowledge

transmitted wounds, and reactivate relational resources represents both an ethical and a clinical response to contemporary fragmentation.

In conclusion, the current challenges faced by family therapy cannot be fully understood without considering the socio-cultural context in which families are embedded. In a world that pushes toward individualism and aggression, multigenerational family therapy emerges as a privileged space for reconstructing meaning, continuity, and belonging, offering families the possibility to transform conflict into an opportunity for growth and authentic reconnection.



Family Therapy Academy



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