



FAMILY STORIES FROM REAL LIFE

Presenting

Friday Bowen Family Systems Shorts

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#2. Managing Yourself in Your Family System

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During this Coronavirus time of sheltering at home, we have the opportunity to observe ourselves in our families. Bowen family systems theory sees the family as an interdependent emotional unit, each person affecting the other. This is different from cause-and-effect thinking where each person blames the other when things go wrong. It is so easy to see what others are doing to make us miserable. It is not so easy to see our contribution to the misery of others. As Bowen said, a shift from conventional to systems thinking is difficult (*Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, p. 262). But living through that discomfort is part of the process in becoming more of the person we want to be.

The effort is to relate to the family as a single organism. This has required a great effort because we are all trained in the problems of the individual, the entire body of psychoanalytic knowledge is oriented to the individual, and it is a most difficult task to reorient oneself.¹

In a 2020 article about the Coronavirus², epidemiologist Jonathan Smith states: "You should perceive your entire family to function as a single individual unit; if one person puts themselves at risk, everyone in the unit is at risk." The effort to see one's family as a unit and manage oneself in it can be a worthwhile effort.

For your consideration:

- What do you notice about yourself in the moment when you are blaming another for your upset and discomfort?
- How does this new awareness inform your ability to see your part in the process?
- Are the efforts you are making helping you to better see the changes you want to make?

1. Bowen, Murray. 2013. *In The Origins of Family Therapy: The NIMH Family Study Project* edited by John F. Butler. Lanham, MD: Jason Aronson. (p. 60)

2. <https://www.wbur.org/cognoscenti/2020/04/03/hold-the-line-coronavirus-jonathan-smith>

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