

## Using Respect-Focused Therapy with Individuals, Couples and Families

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### **Overview**

- Definitions of respect and empathy—how they differ and overlap
- What is Respect-Focused Therapy?
- Therapeutic relationship and process
- Applications in working with couples and families using two case studies as examples

### **Couples Case Study: Will and Jenny**

Will was married for eight years to Jenny and they had a four-year-old boy. They both were devout Catholics and seemed like the perfect couple, but Will did not ever feel sexually connected to Jenny. For years he'd felt attracted to different men in his life, but was able to block those feelings...until he met Troy on a business trip. After several hours and drinks in the hotel bar, Will did something he had never done before: he spent the night with Troy, and he knew his life was forever changed. He knew he was gay and for the first time he was really in love. Will and Jenny come in for their first session right after Will announces his news to Jenny.

- What biases might a therapist need to keep in check in order to truly offer genuine respect to each client?

- How might a therapist honor Jenny's sense of betrayal without dishonoring Will's discovery and transition into his new identity?
- Likewise, how does a therapist honor Will's identity while attempting to address the relational wounds presented and what would be the best way to go forward with this case?

### **Family Case Study: Fred, Angie and Marcus**

Fred, a 56-year-old Hispanic man, and Angie, a 47-year-old African-American woman, brought their adolescent son, 14-year-old Marcus, into therapy. Marcus had behavioral issues at home, truancies from school and it was suspected of being involved in drug and gang activities. Marcus has two older siblings, a sister (21) who is in nursing school and a brother (25), a truck driver who had addiction issues in the past but is currently clean. Angie blames Fred for Marcus's current behavior because of his history of incarceration. Fred is angry with Marcus for "acting like all the other Black boys in the neighborhood."

Marcus had a few brushes with police, mostly related to his truancies, trespassing and loitering. He was accused of drug possession and dealing once, but no charges were filed because of lack of evidence.

- What cultural biases/understandings, or lack thereof, might a therapist need to be aware of when working with this family?
- How can a therapist bring a sense of genuine respect for each individual in this session without disrespecting the others?
- How does the therapist address the biases of each family member and the broken alliances that these create? And how does the therapist utilize the RFT process for setting goals toward family healing?