

# SYSTEMIC THINKING CHEAT SHEET

CLIENT:

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DATE:

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**Use this self-guided reflection sheet to help you think about a client or system using concepts from Systems Theory**

### Systems Focus:

- What relationships are you exploring? Who to keep in mind for this reflection?
- What other agencies, services, clubs or churches are involved and what are the relationships amongst the services?
- Are other broader contextual factors at play? e.g., Culture, SES, Gender, Work/Study.

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- **Process AND Content**
- What is the content the system wants to discuss?
- What is the process of how they discuss it?
- Consider Circularity (later in cheat sheet)



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# SYSTEMIC THINKING CHEAT SHEET

## Homeostasis:

- What is this family or systems "familiar" state of being, relating, interacting and communicating?
- What keeps the status quo? (patterns? meanings?)
- What potentially has disrupted the homeostasis?

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## Morphogenesis:

- What change is occurring in the system?
- What change is occurring in the broader treatment system?

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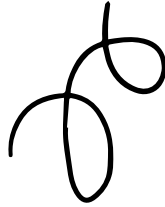
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# SYSTEMIC THINKING CHEAT SHEET

## Positive Feedback Loops:

- Is the system creating new patterns?
- What patterns are forming?



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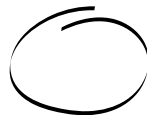
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## Negative Feedback Loops:

- What patterns continue to repeat?
- What in the homeostasis pulls the family back into old patterns to maintain status quo?
- What in the broader family system makes it challenging for the family to change?



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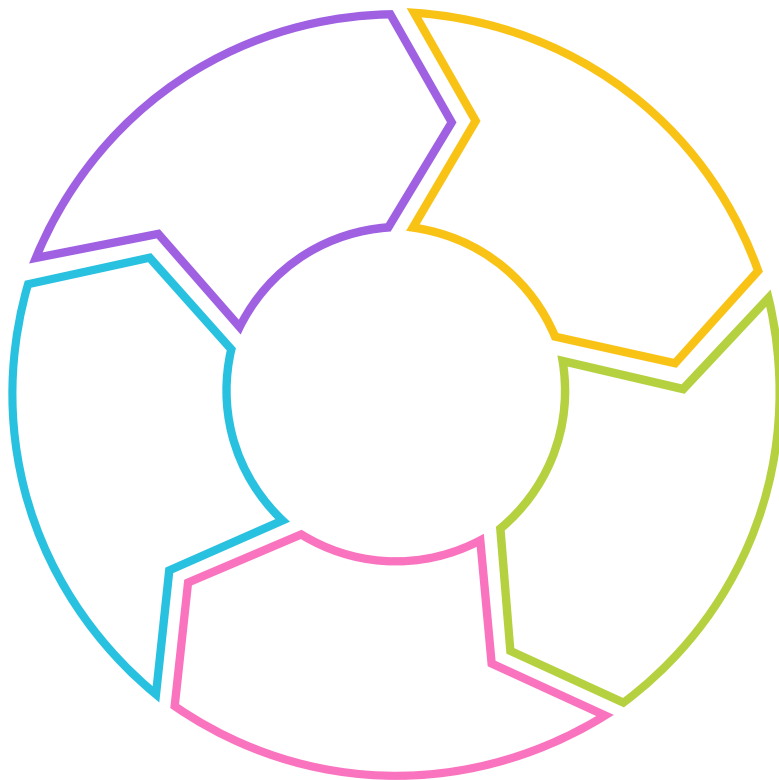
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# SYSTEMIC THINKING CHEAT SHEET

Dr *Kate Owen*  
Clinical Psychologist  
Clinical Family Therapist

## Circular Causality:

- What is the circular pattern?
- What patterns maintain challenges in the system?
- How does something in one part of the system affect another part?...and the family as a whole?
- What cycles are repeating?





# SYSTEMIC THINKING CHEAT SHEET

## Double Description:

- What are the different view points, explanations, hypotheses about the problem?
- How are the different members and stakeholders viewing the situation?

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## Equifinality:

- How does each person see the problem resolving?
- What are the different possible pathways for therapy?

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## Family Structure:

- What type of family structure? e.g., nuclear, step-family, foster family, residential care etc.
- How does that influence therapy?

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# SYSTEMIC THINKING CHEAT SHEET

## Family Rules:

- Explicit and implicit family rules.
- Consider expectations, communication, decision making, etc.

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## Roles:

- What roles do people or organisations play?
- Consider explicit and implicit roles.



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## Hierarchy:

- Power differences - appropriate, effective?
- Is there an effective hierarchy? Rigidity vs Lax? Family and Organisation?
- Clear or unclear?

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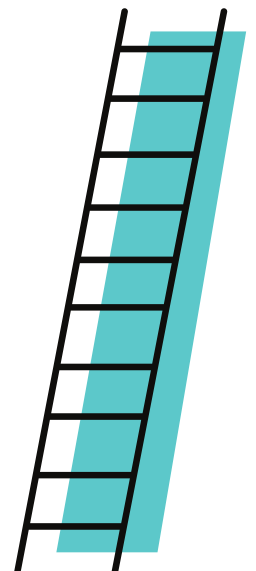
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# SYSTEMIC THINKING CHEAT SHEET

## Boundaries:

- What are the boundaries like? e.g., fused/enmeshed, distant/disengaged, healthy etc
- Boundaries between people, systems, services, therapist, your service, etc.

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## Sub-Systems:

- What smaller groupings exist in the system?
- Do people sit within their appropriate sub-system, or have they been invited into other sub-systems (e.g., parents and children).

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## Alliances and Coalitions:

- What alliances exist? How can you tell?
- What coalitions exist? How can you tell?
- What effect does this have on the system?



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## Multi-Generational Patterns:

- Family rules, stories and relationship templates that develop over time.
- Best explored through the Genogram.



- Are there any patterns of difficulties and challenges?
- If so, how have the family faced these?
- What are the patterns of resilience, strength and coping?

Draw Genogram Here

# SYSTEMIC THINKING CHEAT SHEET

## Differentiation:

- What is the level of reactivity in the person, family or system?
- Do they need skills to soothe anxiety and frustrations?



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## Triangulation:

- What triangles exist?
- What triangles overlap and interlock?
- Who is the "buffer"? - person, system, organisation, therapist?

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# SYSTEMIC THINKING CHEAT SHEET

## Communication:

- How is information communicated within the system?
- What types of things can the system communicate about? And what can't they?
- What is the behaviour/emotion communicating? And to whom is the behaviour/emotion communicating too?
- What is the emotional tone of the system?

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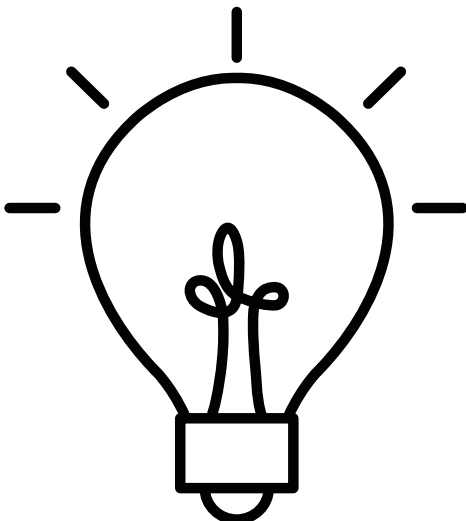
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## FINAL REFLECTION

- How has this exercise been helpful to you?
- What insights have you had?
- What will be your next step - your area of maneuverability?



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