

The Role Diagram for Clarifying Parenting Issues

A Mother and a Father have difficulty agreeing on their parenting of their eleven year old son. They want to explore these differences before he hits his teenage years. Describe how you would use the role diagram as one of the instruments for clarifying both the roles and their feelings about one another as parents. An answer suggested by Ann E. Hale.

Use of the Role Diagram in a Parenting Session

– One of the sociometric methods for exploring the relationship two people have with the same person, which also has a similar role repertoire, is the bilateral role diagram. The practitioner assists the parents in identifying the roles they have in relation to their son, and they go over the notational system which is designed to elicit here and now comments. The notational system has a specific line for feels positive now, feels more positive now, and feels less positive now. Also, the person can identify feels negative now, feels more negative now, feels less negative now. There is a way to note indifferent, neutral, and unexamined.

The instruction to each person is to:

– (1) draw a line from your place on the role diagram and indicate the feelings you have about yourself in one of the specific roles you share as parents This is followed by (a) a line you draw from your son toward you in the role, showing your perception of how your son feels about you in the role., and (b) a line drawn from your spouse toward you in the role showing your perception of how he/she may feel about you in that role; and (c) a line drawn from your spouse toward the role, showing your perception of how you imagine he/she feels about him/herself in this role in relation to your son.

– Each person completes the role diagram, and identifies all these perceptions they have. Next, the facilitator helps each partner focus on one role at a time, telling one another the perception they have and having an opportunity to hear and respond to the perceptions. Having a chance to clarify, to be free of assumptions, can smoothe the way toward clarity, communication and help them prepare for the future. One of the benefits of this approach is that it broadens the focus the partners have to the larger role picture, and not just those which are problematic. Seeing the larger picture helps the partners stay invested and to accept areas in the roles which work well and are mutually beneficial.

– Moving into action: It is possible to go back to a time and set a scene on stage when the feelings began to change. Have the parents look for an opportunity to share more from the role and to make their own interventions with each other. What needs to happen to change this statement or perception you have on paper to “feels more positive now”? Reverse roles with your son. “From his role, speak to each parent and share what for you as the son would “feel more positive now.”

The exploration can include use of the mirror (show me so I can see what

it is I am doing). It can use the role training model: show me a different way while I play you, or his role.

Since one of the motivations for having this session, involves anticipating parenting of a teenager, the practitioner can help the parents set a scene in the future where they support one another in a specific role interaction which may involve conflict. Each person takes action steps to have an outcome both can appreciate.

The exploration can end with a sharing and honoring each other as parents.

1 Ann E. Hale (1985) "The Role Diagram Expanded" Chapter 5 in Conducting Clinical Sociometric Explorations: a manual for psychodramatists and sociometrists. Roanoke, VA, Royal Publishing Co., pages 113 - 142. The bilateral role diagram is illustrated on page 142.. (Currently available from the Toronto Centre for Psychodrama <http://www.tcps.on.ca/books.html>)

2 Hale (1985) p. 129.

3 For another view of role analysis see: Max Clayton (1994) "Role Theory and its Application in Clinical Practice" in Psychodrama Since Moreno: Innovations in Theory and Practice. London: Routledge, pages 121 - 144.

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