Family Therapy Through the Decades

Before 1940

- Cultural beliefs stress the individual, the use of community resources, & psychoanalytic theory.
- Ernest Groves, Alfred Adler, & county home extension agents teach family living/parenting skills.
- Abraham & Hannah Stone, Emily Mudd, & Paul Popenoe begin to provide marital counseling.
- 1938: National Council on Family Relations is founded.

1940 – 1949

- 1942: The American Association of Marriage Counselors (AAMC) is established.
- 1946: National Mental Health Act is passed by Congress.
- 1948: First account of concurrent marital therapy is published by Bela Mittleman.
- Theodore Lidz & Lyman Wynne study dynamics of families with a member with schizophrenia.
- World War II brings stress to families.

1950 – 1959

- Nathan Ackerman develops a psychoanalytical approach for working with families.
- Gregory Bateson’s group begins studying patterns of communication in families.
- 1955: Carl Whitaker sets up first conference on family therapy in Georgia.
- 1958: Don Jackson creates Mental Research Institute.
- Murray Bowen begins the National Institute of Mental Health project studying families with a member with schizophrenia.
- Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagi begins work on contextual therapy.

1960 – 1969

- 1961: John Bell publishes ideas on family group therapy.
- Family Process, the first journal in family therapy, is cofounded by Ackerman & Jackson; Jay Haley edits from 1962-1969.
- 1963: California passes first state licensure law regulating family counselors.
- 1964: Virginia Satir publishes Conjoint Family Therapy and gains a national following.
- 1966: Ackerman publishes Treating the Troubled Family.
- Murray Bowen begins formulating theory of family therapy.
- General systems theory, formulated by Bertalanffy, becomes the basis for most family therapy.
- Training centers & institutes for family therapy are established in New York, Philadelphia, Boston.
- Carl Whitaker moves to University of Wisconsin & begins to write & lecture extensively.
1970 – 1979

- 1971: Nathan Ackerman dies.
- 1974: The Journal of Marital & Family Therapy is founded.
- 1976: The Family Therapy Networker is created.
- 1977: The American Family Therapy Academy is created.
- 1978: Paradox and Counterparadox is published by the Milan group.
- European family therapists become influential in the USA.
- 1979: American Association for Marriage Counselors becomes the American Association for Marriage & Family Therapy (AAMFT). Its degree-granting programs are recognized by the Department of Health, Education, & Welfare.
- Membership in the AAMFT grows to 7,565.
- Feminist theorists, led by Rachel Hare-Mustin, begin questioning the premises of family therapy.
- Families and Family Therapy and Psychosomatic Families are published by Minuchin & associates.

1980 – 1989

- New leaders, including many women, come to the forefront in the family therapy movement.
- Membership in the AAMFT grows to 14,000.
- 1984: Division 43 (Family Psychology) of the APA is established.
- 1986: The International Association of Marriage & Family Counselors within the ACA is established.
- Research procedures in family therapy are defined & refined.
- Publications in family therapy increase. The Family Therapy Networker reaches a circulation of 50,000.
- Multisystemic therapy is developed to address poor outcomes with at-risk adolescents.
- Family therapy is placed on par with psychiatry, psychology, & other professions seeking federal training grants through the Public Health Service Act, Title III, Section 303(d)(1).

1990 – 1999

- Family therapy becomes more global as an approach to helping.
- Solution-focused family therapies of deShazer & O’Hanlon and the narrative approach of White & Epston become popular.
- New theories are developed for work with couples and families, such as constructionist theories, that challenge systems thinking.
- The Basic Family Therapy Skills Project focuses on determining, defining, & testing the skills necessary for novice therapists to master.
- Family therapy theories are integrated, with less emphasis on specialization.
- The new epistemology, which involves second-order cybernetics, emphasizes positive feedback in systems transformation.
2000 – 2009

- MFT becomes global, with professional associations throughout the world.
- Growth occurs in the influence & impact of professional associations, such as AAMFT, IAMFC, AFTA, & Division 43.
- All 50 states and DC license marriage & family therapists.
- Accreditation of MFT programs grow.
- Health care reform & mental health care provider status become increasingly important.
- Research on efficacy of family therapy with different cultural groups increases.

2010 to the Present

- Professional associations make greater use of technology to deliver journals, news, and webinars to member.
- The AAMFT and the IAMFC revise their codes of ethics.
- Online therapy becomes more popular.
- The DSM-5 is published, with the elimination of some disorders and the revision and addition of others. The new DSM requires family therapists to update their knowledge of disorders and what insurance companies will reimburse them for.
- The U.S. Supreme Court declares the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) unconstitutional and lifts the ban on same-sex marriage within the state of California.