

You are encouraged to read the whole book, and please make a proper citation if needed.

Satir, V. (1983). *Conjoint family therapy*. Science & Behavior Books.

Definition and Functions of Family

1. It may be profitable to remind ourselves about what sociologists and anthropologists have decided families are, and what functions they perform as a crucial sub-unit of every society.
 - They generally seem to agree that the nuclear family (made up of parents and children) is found in all societies.
 - They define a family as a group composed of adults of both sexes, two of whom (the mates) live under the same roof and maintain a socially accepted sexual relationship.
 - Families also include children created or adopted by these mates.
2. As a social institution, such a group of individuals is held together by mutually-reinforcing functions. These functions are:
 - To provide a genital heterosexual experience for the mates.
 - To contribute to the continuity of the race by producing and nurturing children.
 - To cooperate economically by dividing labors between the adults according to sex, convenience, and precedents, and between adults and children according to the child's age and sex.
 - To maintain a boundary (by the incest taboo) between the generations so that smooth task-functioning and stable relationships can be maintained.
 - To transmit culture to the children by parental teaching.
 - i. To teach "roles" or socially accepted ways to act with others in different social situations. (These roles vary according to the age and sex of the child.)
 - ii. To teach the child how to cope with the inanimate environment.
 - iii. To teach the child how to communicate; how to use words and gestures so that they will have a generally accepted meaning for others.
 - iv. To teach how and when to express emotions, generally guiding the child's emotional reactivity. (The family teaches the child by appealing to his love and to his fear, by communicating to him verbally, nonverbally, and by example).
 - To recognize when one of its members is no longer a child but has become an adult, capable of performing adult roles and functions.

- To provide for the eventual care of parents by their children.

Marriage

1. A person with low self-esteem has a great sense of anxiety and uncertainty about himself.
 - His self-esteem is based on an extreme extent on what he thinks others think of him.
 - His dependence on others for his self-esteem cripples his autonomy and individuality.
 - He disguises his low self-esteem from others, especially when he wants to impress others.
 - His low self-esteem comes from his growing-up experiences which never led him to feel that it is good to be a person of one sex in relation to a person of the other.
 - He has never really separated from his parents, that is, arrived at a relationship of equality with them.
2. The mates may see what they hope for in the other because each is behaving at the level of his/her defenses rather than at the level of his/her inner feelings. After marriage, each found the other was not the strong person for which he/she hoped. Frustration, disappointment, anger, are bound to result.
3. One might wonder how they managed to find a mate if they had such low self-esteem and so little trust.
 - One puberty brought adult sexuality to the fore, they risked relationship in spite of all of their fears.
 - They were in love which, for the time, enhanced their self-esteem and made each feel complete.
 - Both ended up living for each other and, in doing so, entered into a “survival pact.” They might think that they could take from each other if they ran out of supplies.
4. The trouble was, when choosing each other as mates, that they did not communicate their fears to each other.
 - The husband may fear that the wife would not love him if she knew about his worthlessness (and vice versa).
 - Yet in spite of what each privately expected from the other and thought of himself/herself, each also felt he/she must be what he/she thought the other saw in him/her because he/she had put the other in charge of his/her self-esteem.
 - Neither the wife nor the husband can ask what the other expects, hopes for,

fears, because both feel they are supposed to be able to guess about what is going on inside the other.

- Since each operates from the assumption that he/she must please the other, neither of them can communicate when he/she is displeased with the other, nor acknowledge disagreement or criticism directly.
5. In effect, they married to “get.” Each wanted the other’s esteem of him. Each wanted the other’s qualities which he/she felt he/she lacked. Each wanted an extension of himself/herself. Each wanted a “good” parent in the other.
 6. When they married they did not realize that they would have to “give” as well as get. Each may feel he/she has nothing to give. Each may feel he/she should not be expected to give because the other is an extension of the self.
 7. If they have self-esteem, each would be able to trust the other. Each would feel confident in his/her ability to get from the other. Each would even wait to get. Each could give to the other without himself/herself feeling robbed. Each could use the differentness of the other as an opportunity for growth.
 8. If they lack trust, certain areas of joint living which especially challenge their ability to take into account the individuality of the other are especially threatening to them. Even if they were able to trust others, joint living forces on them decisions about when to give, when to get, within the context of reality at the time. They must decide:
 - What they will share or do together (how dependent they will be).
 - What they will not share or do separately (how independent they will be).
 9. They need to learn how to assert their thoughts, wishes, feelings and knowledge without destroying, invading or obliterating the other, and while still coming out with a fitting joint outcome

Parenting

1. Why are mates willing to take on such obligations to become parents?
 - They can feel they have succeeded in fulfilling society’s expectations.
 - They can gain a feeling of perpetuity by leaving one of their own flesh and blood to live after them.
 - They can enjoy over again parts of their own past life by vicariously experiencing their child’s discoveries, joys, wonderment.
 - They can try to correct for their past pains and mistakes by trying to help their child avoid the avoidable and anticipate future problems.
 - They gain added purpose when they note how very important they are to the child. They must care for, protect, guide, be responsible for their child because they are obviously the wiser ones, the more accomplished ones, the

authority, the truly stronger ones.

- The husband/wife and feel united with the wife/husband. It took both mates to produce a child; neither could achieve this feat alone. It will now take the joint efforts of both to nurture and educate their child. When only one parent is raising a child, that parent has double the work to do and has to make up in some way for the loss of the other parent.

2. There are deficits to parenting

- They may not have planned to be parents at the time when they actually conceived their child. Perhaps all thought about were the sexual gratifications they were receiving from each other.
- They may have been economically unready to take on responsibilities of feeding, clothing, sheltering. The husband may see the child as demanding an economic support which he feels unable to supply. The wife may have a job, which must now be given up for the sake of the child.
- They may be emotionally unready to add a third, dependent member and become a family.
 - i. The husband may see the child as diverting the wife's interest in him.
 - ii. The wife may see the child as diverting the husband's interest from her.
 - iii. The wife may see the child as a creature who demands all of her and gives little in return, requiring her to isolate herself from adults all day while catering to its needs.
 - iv. Both may be frightened by the total responsibility thrust upon them.
 - v. Both may wonder, now that the third member creates a family triangle, if someone won't sooner or later get left out.

3. Marital disappointment and its consequences for the child

- If the parents, as mates, are disappointed in each other and thus feeling upset, confused, empty, despairing, any outside stress will pack an extra wallop.
- If the mates, as individuals, did not integrate what they learned in their own families, they will find it particularly hard to work out a marital integration so that they can give clear, consistent messages to their children.

4. If the mates have low self-esteem, they will see the child:

- As a vehicle for maintaining esteem about self and family.
- As a vehicle for maintaining their esteem as parents. They need to feel that they child likes them.
- As an extension of the self.

5. But these are wishes which each parent has about the child. Trouble arises when each parent comes up against the other mate's wishes. The child finds himself

caught between conflicting demands. Each parent now sees the child as a potential.

- Ally against the other mate.
 - Messenger through whom he/she can communicate with the other mate.
 - Pacifier of the other mate.
6. In other words, each parent's wish for an extension of himself/herself gets blocked or challenged by the other parent's wishes.
- Individual parenting motivations become confused with the marital conflict.
 - "Be like me" becomes associated with "Side with me."
 - Both parents battle for preferred place with the child, mainly because neither feels assured of preferred place with the other.
7. Given this state of affairs, if the child seems to side with one parent, he runs the risk of losing the other parent. Since the child needs both parent, making such a choice inevitably hurts him/her.
8. In addition to the problem of who will side with whom in the family triangle, we have found that the mates themselves seem to share the same basic conflicts, even though they may often appear at opposite poles in relation to each other.
- Each can project his/her dislike of attitudes or behavior representing one half of the conflict onto the other parent or onto the child, and fight it there.
 - Or, together, they can fight half of the conflict by inducing the child to act it out and then punishing him/her when he/she does.
 - Or one parent may take one side of the conflict, the other parent the other side, and in this way attach each other through the child.
 - This is why one must watch how both parents behave with each other and with the child.
9. The child suffers the most.
- He/she internalizes the marital conflicts, which makes it difficult for him/her to maintain gratifying male-female relationships. He/she continues to live out the family drama with other males and females.
 - He/she feels low self-esteem.
 - He/she is inappropriately trained to cope outside the family.