

A Step Toward Disentangling the Alliance/Improvement Cycle in Family Therapy

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The authors focused on 2 unique aspects of the alliance in conjoint therapy: feeling safe in the therapeutic context with other family members and the family's shared sense of purpose about treatment (i.e., productive within-family collaboration). Low-income, multiproblem families were seen in a community clinic by therapists with varying theoretical orientations and a wide range of experience. Alliance-related behavior was assessed using the System for Observing Family Therapy Alliances (M. L. Friedlander, V. Escudero, & L. Heatherington, 2006). The significant mediated model showed that parent safety contributed to productive family collaboration in the 1st session, which, in turn, predicted global improvement rated after Session 3. Given the heterogeneous sample of clients, therapists, and therapy approaches, findings support the ecological validity of the alliance in family therapy.