



Family constellations

Deputy Editor **Gemma Birss** clammers up the family tree for a dose of ancestral healing with this extraordinary technique

They f**k you up, your mum and dad. They may not mean to but they do.' Philip Larkin's *This Be The Verse* is a poem that most of us humble mortals can relate to. We spend much of our adult lives wrestling with issues that stem back to the tender years of youth. As we grow up, we find ourselves scurrying along inside a hamster wheel of addictions, co-dependent relationships, commitment issues to name a few. Most of us are aware that the roots of these patterns can be traced to our childhood. But we can follow these roots back even further through time to an unresolved event or situation that happened in our ancestry, that we may be unaware of, which has been carried forward to the present day.

Step in, Family Constellations. This profound healing system unravels the often painfully entwined roots of our ancestry and finds the heart of any issue, whether physical, mental, emotional or spiritual. It delves deep into our psychology, unearthing the chords of tension between current or ancestral family members and situations. By recognising and acknowledging the core of an issue on an ancestral level, it is finally healed and released, clearing the way for a healthier, happier life.

The flow of love

A key component in the Family Constellations' healing process is to look at the flow of love. When the natural flow of love between family members is mutated or misdirected due to some trauma, situation or event (for example suicide, the death of a child, the death of a parent, abuse or emigration), an imbalance occurs. These events are generally brushed under the carpet because they are too painful to address. Unresolved, they echo down the genetic line, even if those in the present are unaware of the original event. This phenomenon is referred to as 'invisible loyalties' by psychiatrist Iván Böszörményi-Nagy.

The set up for Family Constellations is unique in that it is usually made up of more than two people, and is more like a workshop of between

10 and 30 people (there is no limit) than a one-to-one healing or psychotherapy session.

A typical session

A facilitator leads the group of participants, who take turns to explore a personal issue that's bothering them, whether that's a skin disorder, a phobia or an unhappy marriage. One of the attendees will elect to go first. The facilitator briefly interviews them on their family background. They are then guided through the breath into a state of centred connectedness where they can release any prejudices or ideas about how things 'should' look or be, and to accept and explore how things actually are.

With the help of the facilitator, the seeker chooses a member from the group to represent them, while other individuals are selected to represent the seeker's family and ancestry. Occasionally the representatives will be asked to portray an abstract concept like loneliness or grief, depending on the issue that's being explored. The seeker is asked to arrange these representatives spatially in a way that best echoes the energetics of the real life situation. The seeker's main role is now to simply observe and make sense of what they are watching.

The representatives, who have now been positioned in the Constellation, are encouraged to behave in response to their intuition, what has been described as echoing the 'movements of the soul'. They are subconsciously tapping into the 'knowing field,' a phrase coined by psychiatrist Albrecht Mahr to define a space that the members in the Constellation inhabit during a session to connect to the dynamics of the issue being explored. This knowing field guides participants to perceive and articulate emotions that accurately reflect those of the members they are representing. The actual mechanisms behind the knowing field are not fully understood. However, although the representatives have little or no knowledge about those they represent, they usually experience emotions and reactions, which inform the process and facilitate a healing.

The facilitator then asks each representative

Meditate

Bringing happiness, nurturing and healing from your mother

Authority on Family Constellations, Bert Hellinger guides us through an effective meditation to heal your relationship with your mother

Close your eyes and relax. See your mother before you in your mind's eye. Acknowledge all the things she has offered you in being there for you as your mother. How much of it have you taken? How much of her wealth, of all the things she offered, did you take? What percentage? It may even just be five per cent.

Now build up the image of all that your mother has offered you. Add more and more and still more love, on and on, wider and wider and more encompassing, all her love. Pile it up.

Now look into your mother's eyes and say, "Dear mother, such happiness, such abundance and love."

Open your heart wide, wide, and wider still. You can only accept this love when your heart is wide open. Say, "Dear mother, now I accept you with all of the abundance and wealth that God gave me through you. Now I accept you and all this abundance and joy. Now I have arrived with you, because I finally accept it all. With gratitude, with love."

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how they feel. By tapping into the 'knowing field', the representatives are able to perceive and describe their reactions in actions or words. By acknowledging the situation and then repositioning the representatives to appropriately reflect the 'new' situation, a healing resolution is reached. The facilitator sometimes gives the representatives a phrase to say out loud to help with the healing process. Once each representative feels comfortable and happy in their place, and the other representatives agree that all feels well with the energy flow in the group, the constellation is completed. There is a sense that a great healing has taken place, which resolves any residual resentment and anger in the seeker and helps to release any issues that they may be holding on to.

German psychotherapist Bert Hellinger is strongly associated with Family Constellations. His approach is one of flexibility and adaptability, and he encourages those that use his techniques to own them and apply them in their own unique way. The flavour of Hellinger's work in Family (otherwise known as Systemic) Constellations is that there is no judgment, punishment or criticism, no matter what the scenario. Even in incidents of abuse or incest, the issues are explored and resolved in an attitude of non-judgement. Hellinger relies greatly on what Guru Dev Singh calls 'deep relaxation in the Divine name', and what Hellinger translates as 'surrender to the essential truth', which not only allows him to be deeply involved in the actual process of Family Constellations without taking the issues on himself, but also opens the space for an entire healing process to take place. In other words, Hellinger says that the mental space that you must occupy in order to enter into a Family Constellations session is similar to enlightenment, or Divine presence. This allows the participants to access the grain of truth at the core of each issue.

Family Constellations in action

Having come across a number of success stories, I decided to try Family Constellations out for myself. Edward Stopler is a London-based practitioner with a treasure chest of healing qualifications and experience behind him. Sessions with Edward are carried out on a one-to-one basis, without the need of others to act as representatives. Edward guides you to intuitively tap into the energies present in the 'knowing field' rather than using actual people to represent them. In this sense, the entire process takes place internally.

I'm not convinced that my powers of imagination stretch as far as tapping into people and situations that I know very little about, but I'm willing to give it a go. Edward's track record bristles with success and I know I'm in safe hands. Edward's sessions are held at his therapy rooms in London's Muswell Hill. He greets me with a massive smile and, once I'm sitting comfortably, he launches straight into the session by asking me what I'd like to work on. I'm just interested in a general session at this stage, so am happy to work with whatever comes up. Edward then asks me to summarise my family tree, and any significant events that I am aware of. Although I had a happy childhood, I know of a sad event that happened with my grandparents on my

mother's side, so I tell him the gist of this. Edward assures me that I don't need to know all the ins and outs, only a vague description will do.

Edward asks me to close my eyes and then guides me into a state of deep relaxation, leading my focus from the noise in my head into the stillness of my heart. This is a good place to start, he explains, as your heart knows the truth of the issue without the mind throwing in its tuppence worth! He asks me to describe my parents as I can see them in my mind's eye. I thought I'd struggle with this, but it comes really easily and I describe what I see to Edward. Although my parents are generally happy as far as I know, the image in my mind portrays them as sad and worried. Strangely enough, the figures act of their own accord, and it's as if my imagination has very little to do with the scenario. Edward explains that I am tapping into and interpreting an energetic imprint of them. Edward tunes in to what I'm seeing and offers insights and suggestions on their state of being that I hadn't previously thought of or been aware of, but which make perfect sense.

Next Edward brings in my grandparents and looks at their relationship to each other and to my parents. Once again, it feels as if I'm watching a movie with the characters acting autonomously,

holding their own emotional reactions to each other which are beyond anything that I had been aware of before.

Edward holds the space and reminds me to remain in my heart with my eyes closed rather than trying to translate their actions or reactions.

My main impression at this stage is that everyone is stiff and frozen by guilt and sorrow. However, Edward guides the scenario, describing how the

individuals may be feeling and what they might say to each other. I notice that huge amounts of healing happen in simply acknowledging what each person might be feeling. Edward marks this by asking the figures in my mind's eye to bow their heads in surrender and acknowledgement.

I sob my heart out throughout the session. However, my tears stem from a sense of the depth of healing that is taking place. It feels that by acknowledging the past, it is released and healed, and not just for me, but for all the members of my family, too. Unhelpful patterns that had emerged as a consequence of my family's history become apparent to me, and I feel as if I can actually move through and beyond them.

Family Constellations is a very grounded system of healing, and one that seems to get to the root of psychological and spiritual issues. It really holds the space for a deep energetic healing to take place. Although this was a simple, hour-long session, I feel as if centuries of healing have taken place. Issues that would have taken years to uncover on the psychotherapy couch have been acknowledged and dissolved in the blink of an eye. I feel that everyone would benefit from a session with Edward, and contrary to Philip Larkin's poem that ends, "Get out as early as you can, And don't have any kids yourself," Family Constellations gives you the technology for a profound healing that's definitely something you'll want to pass on to your children. n

A 75-minute session with Edward costs £70. Visit familyconstellationsuk.com or call 0208 444 6712 to book a session

