

# Ecosystemic Structural Family Therapy (ESFT)

## Target Population

The ESFT model is for **children and adolescents with moderate to severe emotional and behavioral disturbance and their families**. Families with a high level of conflict are also often appropriate.

## Treatment Setting

ESFT can be delivered in a clinic and in a community setting.

## Length/Frequency of Treatment

Sessions typically occur once per week and are 50-60 minutes in length. Length of treatment is individualized and determined in collaboration between the family and the therapist.

## Referral Process

Outpatient providers delivering ESFT can be accessed by calling those providers in the provider directory. Pre-authorization from Community Behavioral Health is required for higher levels of care.

## Website:

<http://philafamily.com/>

## Overview

ESFT is a treatment for **children and families experiencing behavioral or relational challenges** and is based on the theory that change in family structure contributes to change in the behavior of individual members. ESFT begins with the fundamental assumption that both the child and caregivers functioning are linked to their relational environments at home and in the community. Treating a child within this model means working simultaneously with the child and family, the home setting, and the family's community network.

## Core Components

- Clinicians facilitate and support change by coaching family members in individual, parent(s)-child, parental, marital, or family sessions.
- Recurring relational patterns of interaction are explored both within the family and between the family and the community.
- Treatment focuses on strengthening parental supports, capacities, and skills, including:
  - increased problem-solving, communication, understanding of children's individual differences, and management of parental emotional and developmental challenges
- The four overlapping treatment stages within the model are:
  - Constructing the therapeutic system
  - Establishing a meaningful therapeutic focus
  - Creating key growth-promoting interpersonal experiences
  - Solidifying changes and termination.

## ESFT in the DBHIDS network

All of the Family Based Mental Health Service providers in Pennsylvania are required to receive training in ESFT. In addition, DBHIDS began an ESFT training initiative for select outpatient providers in 2010. In 2013 an additional cohort of providers was selected via a competitive Request for Proposal (RFP) process. The selected agencies participate in a 3 year training curriculum with training for staff and supervisors occurring approximately twice a month.