

Fusion

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He who knows not and knows not that he knows not — is a fool. Shun him.
He who knows not and knows that he knows not — is simple. Teach him.
He who knows, but knows not that he knows — is asleep. Awaken him.
He who knows and knows that he knows — is wise. Follow him.

(Old Arabian proverb)

The process of *fusion* is central to the entire theory of family systems. One descriptive model is to picture two strong magnets, one held in each hand. The closer the hands are held to each other, the greater the magnetic pull and the greater the tendency for the magnets to unite. So it is with people. As two people get closer to each other, the intensity of emotional attraction (level of expectation, positive or negative) increases and the tendency for them to fuse or unite increases.

People seek a distance at which the emotional attraction is still felt but at which the effort at preventing union is within a comfortable range. This is not a static or fixed position. People move toward or away from each other in their search for that comfortable balance. The amount of distance will vary from family to family and within the same family around different issues, problems and stressful times in life. The amount of distance between people will also vary with the level of expectation for closeness — expectations that come from the extended family.

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In some families an entire continent may be physically placed between two members, to avoid fusion or a total emotional cutoff. Fusion leads to distance and people seek closeness without fusion.

This alternating phenomenon of distance and closeness is present to some degree as a problem in all families and relationships. It becomes labelled as a problem when the actual fusion, or the tendency to use, is so intense that the degree of closeness expected by one or more members of the family is impossible to attain. Complaints of loss or individuality ensue . . . "I don't know who I am. I have not been myself since I got married." Emotional disruption is common . . . "My feelings for my husband are dead. I only feel bitterness. I wish he would leave." . . . Distance ensues . . . "We haven't talked to each other in years. He is never home and I am just as happy." Feelings of emptiness creep into awareness . . . "I no longer have hope. There is nothing outside or inside of me."

Fusion can be described as a mixture — a blending, or coalescence of one person into the other. It is a process because it consists of a series of actions or operations that results in a flow of movement . . . an ebb and a tide. Clinically,

