### Module 5: The Micro Level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objectives</th>
<th>The purpose of Module 5 is:</th>
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<td></td>
<td>1) To identify components of the micro level in the framework.</td>
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<td>2) To have participants apply the micro level of the framework to casework practice.</td>
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<td>3) To have participants identify strengths and challenges in using the micro level of the framework in their practice.</td>
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<td><strong>Module 5: The Micro Level</strong></td>
<td><strong>Overview</strong></td>
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<td><strong>State:</strong> One of the benefits of using a systems theory framework is that it gives you a complete picture of what’s going on for that family, both in terms of their challenges and resources. We have looked at the Mezzo and Macro levels in depth and applied factors from these two levels to our cases. Obviously, the family itself is an important part of that picture, that story. So now we turn to the Micro level – the individual and family level – in more depth.</td>
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<td>[Slide: Mod V: Micro Level]</td>
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<td><strong>[Slide: Individual &amp; Family]</strong> You can think of the family at the Micro level as a little system within a system. It is made up of the child or children in your case and their immediate family and household members. Earlier, we discussed that families come in all shapes and sizes and consist of various subsystems, such as the children, siblings, the parents, etc. The family members within this micro system influence and affect each others’ lives. Therefore, when assessing important factors at this level, we look at two things, both individual characteristics and family characteristics.</td>
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<tr>
<td>[Slide: Individual and Family Characteristics]</td>
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<td><strong>[Slide: Characteristics]</strong> Let’s consider individual characteristics first. Individual characteristics include things such as temperament and determination. These characteristics intersect with factors such as class, race and gender to define an individual. Some characteristics, for example, determination or a sense of humor, are strengths that can help individuals cope with social pressures and problems. Personal characteristics can also create challenges for the individual and those who live and work with them. That same determination can feel like stubbornness when you want someone to be flexible.</td>
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<td>[Slide: Characteristics]</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>[Slide: Individual Char] Ask:</strong> Think about an individual in the case you brought. Which of their personal characteristics stand out to you? When is it a strength? A challenge?</td>
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<td>Participants share characteristics from their case. Process the strengths and challenges.</td>
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University at Albany
School of Social Welfare
Module 5: The Micro Level

Characteristics

Now let’s look at family characteristics. Family characteristics can include to what extent the family is open or closed, or the family’s religiosity, for example.

Like individual characteristics, family characteristics may be an important strength for the family or its members. A close-knit family, for example, can moderate the effects of the environment on individual family members, such as the impact of racism or other forms of oppression. This closeness, however, can also be a challenge for outsiders trying to provide services to the family.

What family characteristics stand out in the case you brought today? How do they support or inhibit growth and change? Where are the strengths? What are some of the characteristics that create challenges for the family?

Most of the individual and family characteristics and behaviors are open to change - when there is change readiness and support for change, change happens. We take the approach that human beings are fluid and flexible – not rigid or concrete. I have an example of how fluid individual characteristics can be.

*Trainer shares an example and asks for other examples from participants.*

Remember, both individual and family characteristics are mapped at the Micro Level of the Eco-map and can be used when completing your FASP.

So, how does understanding individual and family characteristics help us work more effectively with families in meeting the child welfare goals?

We’re going to show you two ways to use micro-level information to your advantage in working with families.

First, we’re going to look at how to use this information to work with couples in your caseload.
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Couples Quiz Activity

Ask:

Let’s do a quick survey. How many people have a married couple in a family on your caseload? A cohabiting couple? Involved but not living together?

Trainer discusses various couple forms.

Supporting Couples

In recent years, the child welfare community has looked more and more at how the strength of a couple plays a direct role in the safety and stability of a child’s home. There are some misperceptions about marriage and couples in the child welfare caseload. For example:

True or False: In a national study of children known to Child Protective Services, of children living with a biological parent, one-third of those parents were married (true).

True or False: In a study of unmarried cohabiting parents who had just given birth to a child, 80% said they planned to get married (true).

True or False: Some unmarried couples say they are waiting to be economically secure before they get married (true).

Turn in your workbooks to page 13, where you’ll see an information sheet about couples.

Your role in a family is to help achieve the child welfare goals of safety and permanency; the health and stability of a couples’ relationship is a part of this picture. Obviously, you are not couples’ therapists, but what are some of the ways that you currently work to support couples in the families on your caseload?

Any final thoughts on couples or marriage before we move on?
The last piece we’re going to look at in the micro level is how elements at the macro and mezzo levels influence the micro level, in other words, their influence on us, on our lives, and the lives of individuals we work with.

The factors we identified earlier in these levels have an impact on us. For example, the war, or unemployment, or other economic factors.

How and to what extent we are influenced will differ from person to person. There may be moderating factors which influence how we perceive the world around us – factors which influence the way our story goes. However, it is important to understand the dynamics of external influences on us as individuals.

The following activity is to help us to recognize how power and privilege can affect our lives even when we are not aware that it is happening. The purpose of this activity is not to blame anyone for having more privilege or for receiving more help in achieving goals, but to give us an opportunity to identify both obstacles and benefits we have experienced in our life.

Please form a straight line across the room, leaving space in front and behind you. Listen to the following statements, and follow the instructions given. For example, when I read “If you are a white male, take one step forward,” only white males will move and everyone else will stand still. Each step forward or backward should be an average length step. No one is going to check up on you, so if you feel you qualify to take a step then do so, if not then you may stay where you are. You are the judge of what you should do.

What is your “gut reaction” to where you find yourself at the end of this list of privileges?

Are you surprised at where you are? How does it feel to be in front? In the middle? In back?

Did you come to any new realizations? If so, which one had the most impact on you?
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Wrap-Up

Ask: We have seen how privilege affects each of us in different ways- a benefit to one person can be an obstacle for another. Let’s think about our framework for practice and the Family Map for your case…

Summarize & state: You have just seen how you have been impacted by the various "isms". Imagine how the "isms" are amplified for the families that you work with.

Ask: What information about the family members’ experiences with privilege, poverty, or the -ism’s (the macro level) would you want to include on your map?

What personal information would you want to include about the members of the family in your case?

Do you find it easier to identify strengths or challenges? Why do you think strengths are easier? …Challenges?

Thinking back to the web-cast, remember that when we reframe challenges as strengths, we can empower our families so they have hope and belief in their power to change.

Remember that each individual in the family system is an “intersection” of factors such as race, gender, and class, combined with their own unique personal characteristics such as age, temperament, and intelligence.

The point is that we must hear the “story” from the individual to understand how the many influences on their life intersect to form that individual. We must ask ourselves, “What has had the biggest influence on this person’s life- their race, their gender, their class or some other influence?” “How do they view themselves?” “What do they think is the biggest problem in their life?” The answers to these questions can help in the engagement process by showing respect for the person and not seeing only that which is obvious, but finding out what is inside. Remember the iceberg analogy we discussed earlier.

Next we are going to bring all the components of the system together in an activity which we expect will help us think about all levels of the system at the same time, as we process a family-group conference.
If you are a white male take one step forward.

If there have been times in your life when you skipped a meal because there was no food in the house take one step backward.

If you have visible or invisible disabilities take one step backward.

If you attended (grade) school with people you felt were like yourself take one step forward.

If you grew up in an urban setting take one step backward.

If your family had health insurance take one step forward.

If your work holidays coincide with religious holidays that you celebrate take one step forward.

If you feel good about how your identified culture is portrayed by the media take one step forward.

If you have been the victim of physical violence based on your gender, ethnicity, age or sexual orientation take one step backward.

If you have ever felt passed over for an employment position based on your gender, ethnicity, age or sexual orientation take one step backward.

If you were born in the United States take one step forward.

If English is your first language take one step forward.

If you have been divorced or impacted by divorce take one step backward.

If you came from a supportive family environment take one step forward.

If you have completed high school take one step forward.

If you were able to complete college take one step forward.

If you are a citizen of the United States take one step forward.

If you took out loans for your education take one step backward.

If you attended private school take one step forward.

If you have ever felt unsafe walking alone at night take one step backward.
If you own your own property or home take one step forward.

If you have ever felt that you were the target of racial profiling take one step backward.

If you have ever had to consider special accommodations while traveling take one step backward.

If you feel you are in a position of power in your workplace take one step forward.