Foreword

It was a great honor to be asked to write the foreword for the sixth edition of *The Essentials of Family Therapy*. Throughout this book, Mike Nichols has given students, as well as teachers of family therapy, a tremendous gift. I have assigned earlier editions to my students so that they might experience a journey through the evolution of this tremendous field. I have relied on this book to convey the excitement of the discovery and elaboration of the new worldview each model of family therapy introduced, as well as the important concepts and unique contributions it offered. My students have been very appreciative of the book's clear presentation of the history of family therapy and its essential principles.

I came of age in the field during what Mike Nichols describes as “The Golden Age of Family Therapy.” As a graduate student in the early 1970s, my heroes and heroines were the pioneers of family therapy, such as Nathan Ackerman, John Elderkin Bell, Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy, Salvador Minuchin, Murray Bowen, Jay Haley, Don Jackson, Cloe Madanes, Mara Selvini Palazzoli, Virginia Satir, and Carl Whitaker. So many of these giants are no longer with us, but Mike Nichols has a unique talent for bringing them to life and, at the same time, placing them in historical context so that they can continue to influence new generations of family therapists.

Reading this edition has given me the rare opportunity to revisit my own personal journey as a family therapist, which has profoundly influenced the direction of my life and career. I was initially drawn to the work of Salvador Minuchin and his colleagues, who were among the first family therapists to work with poor, ethnic minority families. As an intern at the Philadelphia Child Guidance Clinic from 1974 to 1975, I was privileged to learn structural family therapy from Salvador Minuchin, as well as from Harry Aponte, Braulio Montalvo, Bernice Rosman, and Charles Fishman. I was also trained to incorporate strategic family therapy techniques by Jay Haley. In reading the chapters in this book, I felt again the sensation that I “stand on the shoulders of these giants.”

After obtaining my doctorate in psychology over thirty years ago, my first job was at what Nichols describes as another early center of family therapy: The Family Studies Section at Albert Einstein College of Medicine in the Bronx, New York, started by Israel Zwerling and Marilyn Mendelsohn. It was there that I first encountered the work of Murray Bowen, as Phil Guerin, a later director, was strongly influenced by Bowen's work and had incorporated it into the center. Chapter 5, “Bowen Family Systems Therapy,” captures the excitement of this model and Bowen’s seminal ideas, including differentiation of self, emotional triangles, multigenerational emotional processes, and emotional cutoff. Chapter 5 also shows the model evolved and was elaborated upon by others trained by Bowen, such as Betty Carter and Monica McGoldrick, who developed the concept of the family life cycle. Each has influenced my own work, particularly with multigenerational extended families in ethnic minority groups.

As Nichols has shown, the family therapy movement has really been many movements. It was very interesting for me to revisit the revolutionary role of the feminist critique of family therapy and the transformative power of the postmodern narrative therapy approach. This book addresses the integrative models that have moved away from the orthodoxy of the original theories and the growing movement toward evidence-based practice in the family therapy field.

It was fascinating for me as an author to read the summary of my own work in this book. Nichols does an excellent job of describing my work as well as the seminal contributions of Monica
McGoldrick and Ken Hardy and our emphasis on the importance of understanding the culture, race, and socioeconomic level of the families we treat. Just as it is hard to imagine a time prior to the 1950s when the worldview in the mental health field did not include family therapy, it is also difficult now to imagine the time prior to the 1970s when culture and race were largely ignored in books on psychotherapy. It was the family therapy movement that first opened the door and embraced these concepts.

Consistent with the tradition established in other editions of Mike Nichols’s books, this sixth edition includes new material related to important developments in the field, such as an informative section on advances in neuroscience. He also explores one of the most significant developments of the twenty-first century, that is, the role of the Internet and the benefits and challenges that technology has introduced. His discussion of the critical issue of the role of cybersex in couple relationships will be especially helpful for practitioners of marriage and family therapy. Similarly, he addresses the concern felt by many parents in protecting their adolescents from sexual predators and inappropriate sexual activities that the availability of the Internet has made widespread.

Throughout this book, Mike Nichols has been able to strike a unique balance between giving the leaders of the field the respect they deserve while remaining objective and honest about the challenges they faced. He captures not only the breakthroughs in family therapy but also the controversies and major critiques of the times. He deserves our highest praise for this powerful book and for the major contribution that it has made, and will continue to make through this new edition, to the field of family therapy.

Nancy Boyd-Franklin, Ph.D.
Preface

One thing that tends to get lost in academic discussions of family therapy is the feeling of accomplishment that comes from sitting down with an unhappy family and being able to help them. Beginning therapists are understandably anxious and not sure they’ll know how to proceed. (“How do you get all of them to come in?”) Veterans often speak in abstractions. They have opinions and discuss big issues—postmodernism, narrative reconstructionism, second-order cybernetics. While it’s tempting to use this space to say Important Things, I prefer to be a little more personal. Treating troubled families has given me the greatest satisfaction imaginable, and I hope that the same is or will be true for you.

Changes in This Edition

In this sixth edition of The Essentials of Family Therapy, I describe the full scope of family therapy—its rich history, classic schools, latest developments—but with increasing emphasis on practical issues. Changes in this edition include:

- Research findings integrated into each chapter
- New research chapter including a discussion of why research has failed to influence clinical practice and offering suggestions
- Additional case studies and clinical emphasis throughout guidelines for productive problem-solving conversations
- Slightly condensed format and greater focus on clinical practice
- New section on working with transgendered persons
- Significantly revised cognitive-behavioral chapter, with more focus on recent trends in clinical practice

Albert Einstein once said, “If you want to learn about physics, pay attention to what physicists do, not what they say they do.” When you read about therapy, it can be hard to see past the jargon and political packaging to the essential ideas and practices. So in preparing this edition, I’ve traveled widely to visit and observe actual sessions of the leading practitioners. I’ve also invited leaders in the field to share some of their best case studies with you. The result is a more pragmatic, clinical focus. I hope you like it.

Acknowledgments

So many people have contributed to my development as a family therapist and to the writing of this book that it would be impossible to thank them all. But I would like to single out a few. To the people who taught me family therapy—Lyman Wynne, Murray Bowen, and Salvador Minuchin—thank you.

I’d also like to thank some of the people who went out of their way to help me prepare this sixth edition: Yvonne Dolan, Jerome Price, Deborah Luepnitz, William Madsen, Frank Dattilio, Vicki Dickerson, and Salvador Minuchin. To paraphrase John, Paul, George, and Ringo, I get by with a lot of help from my friends—and I thank them one and all. I am especially grateful to Nicole Suddeth and Carly Czech at Pearson for making a difficult job easier.

Finally, I would like to thank my postgraduate instructors in family life: my wife, Melody, and my children, Sandy and Paul. In the brief span of forty-five years, Melody has seen me grow from a shy young man, totally ignorant of how to be a husband and father, to a shy middle-aged man, still bewildered and still trying. My children never cease to amaze me. If in my wildest dreams I had imagined children to love and be proud of, I wouldn't even have come close to anyone as fine as Sandy and Paul.