



## **Key Ideas in Therapy**

### *Beyond Individual Therapy*

#### **Narrator:**

Whether you're Genghis Khan or the Dalai Lama - a nightmare family is sure to get you down. So it's surprising just how little attention therapists used to pay to the systems their clients lived in, such as family and work.

In the early days, they focused on the individual, on how they saw and dealt with the world. And they certainly wouldn't invite families into a therapy session, which was considered highly unethical.

But from the fifties onwards, pioneers like Virginia Satir started looking beyond the client to the systems they live in.

Satir invited families into therapy and found that, not only do problems extend to the family, they often come from them.

Systemic therapists began viewing families as balanced systems with interconnected parts. A change in one part of the system affects the rest. So what looks like one person's problem, like a child's bedwetting, is actually a sign that the system is unbalanced. In this case, by tensions between the parents.

Within these systems, people can get stuck repeating stress-causing patterns; which is where each person's behaviour maintains the others. Dad might nag Mum because she always ignores him, whereas Mum ignores Dad because of his incessant nagging.

These ideas chimed with critics of individualised therapy, such as R.D. Laing.

His studies showed that many emotional problems are, in fact, rooted in families, schools, workplaces and wider society.

For Laing, the client is just expressing the problems within a system. So if Dad's got low self-esteem, we can't ignore the fact he's out of work, or the problem of unemployment in his community.

This idea, of looking to the systems a client inhabits, is now firmly established in therapy.  
Because no-one's an island, not even you Genghis.