Instructor’s Manual

for

OF ROCKS AND FLOWERS:
DEALING WITH THE
ABUSE OF CHILDREN

with

VIRGINIA SATIR

Manual by

Shirin Shoai, MA
The Instructor’s Manual accompanies the video Of Rocks and Flowers: Dealing with the Abuse of Children with Virginia Satir (Institutional/Instructor’s Version) which is part of the Virginia Satir Series. Video available at www.psychotherapy.net.

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Instructor’s Manual for
OF ROCKS AND FLOWERS: DEALING WITH THE ABUSE OF CHILDREN WITH VIRGINIA SATIR

Table of Contents
Tips for Making the Best Use of the Video 4
Satir’s Approach to Family Therapy 6
Discussion Questions 8
Role-Plays 11
Reaction Paper Guide for Classrooms and Training 13
Related Websites, Videos and Further Readings 14
Transcript 16
Video Credits 46
Earn Continuing Education Credits for Watching Videos 47
About the Contributors 48
More Psychotherapy.net Videos 49
Tips for Making the Best Use of the Video

1. USE THE TRANSCRIPTS
Make notes in the video Transcript for future reference; the next time you show the video you will have them available. Highlight or notate key moments in the video to better facilitate discussion during and after the video.

2. FACILITATE DISCUSSION
Pause the video at different points to elicit viewers’ observations and reactions to the concepts presented. The Discussion Questions section provides ideas about key points that can stimulate rich discussions and learning.

3. ENCOURAGE SHARING OF OPINIONS
Encourage viewers to voice their opinions. What are viewers’ impressions of what is presented in the interview?

4. CONDUCT A ROLE-PLAY
The Role-Play section guides you through exercises you can assign to your students in the classroom or training session.

5. SUGGEST READINGS TO ENRICH VIDEO MATERIAL
Assign readings from Related Websites, Videos and Further Reading prior to or after viewing.

6. ASSIGN A REACTION PAPER
See suggestions in the Reaction Paper section.
Psychotherapy portrayed in videos is less off-the-cuff than therapy in practice. Therapists may feel put on the spot to offer a good demonstration, and clients can be self-conscious in front of a camera. Therapists often move more quickly than they would in everyday practice to demonstrate a particular technique. Despite these factors, therapists and clients on video can engage in a realistic session that conveys a wealth of information not contained in books or therapy transcripts: body language, tone of voice, facial expression, rhythm of the interaction, quality of the alliance—all aspects of the therapeutic relationship that are unique to an interpersonal encounter.

Psychotherapy is an intensely private matter. Unlike the training in other professions, students and practitioners rarely have an opportunity to see their mentors at work. But watching therapy on video is the next best thing.

One more note: The personal style of therapists is often as important as their techniques and theories. Therapists are usually drawn to approaches that mesh well with their own personality. Thus, while we can certainly pick up ideas from master therapists, students and trainees must make the best use of relevant theory, technique and research that fits their own personal style and the needs of their clients.
Satir’s Approach to Family Therapy*

Virginia Satir was a 20th-century psychotherapist who is considered one of the pioneers of family therapy. She believed that people are capable of continued growth, change and new understanding. Her initial purpose was to improve relationships and communication within the family unit. Ultimately her work, which was internationally recognized, grew to be accepted as applicable to all human communication and growth—within a person, a family, a company or community. She remained a leading force for human growth and family therapy until her death in 1988.

Satir posited that a client’s presenting issue was rarely the real problem and that superficial issues frequently served to mask deeper ones. She argued that mental health problems were often the product of negative family experiences and roles, and placed a strong emphasis on treating the entire family rather than pathologizing the individual. Satir’s Transformational Systemic Therapy, also known as the Satir Growth Model, emphasizes engaging the inner self and analyzing a person’s situation and choices.

From observing Satir’s work, five therapeutic process elements have been identified that are essential for creating transformational change. These therapeutic elements are necessarily present throughout the entire therapy session, from the initial contact and rapport building through assessment and exploration, goal setting, the transformational change process, anchoring the changes, reviewing the session and assigning therapeutic homework for practicing and integrating the changes. The five essential elements are:

1. **Experiential.** The therapy must be experiential, which means that the client is experiencing the impact of a past event in the present. Often, body memory is accessed as one of the ways to help clients experience their past. It is only when clients are experiencing both the negative energy of the past event and the positive energy of their life force in the now that an energetic shift can take place.

2. **Systemic.** Therapy must work within the intrapsychic and interactive systems in which the client experiences his/her life. The intrapsychic system includes the emotions, perceptions, expectations, yearnings and spiritual energy of the individual, all of which interact with each other
in a systemic manner. The interactive systems include the relationships, both past and present, that the person has experienced in his/her life. The two systems interact with each other, and a change in one impacts the other.

3. **Positively directional.** In the Satir Growth Model, the therapist actively engages with the client to help reframe perceptions, generate possibilities, hear the positive message of universal yearnings, and connect the client to his/her positive life energy. The focus is on health and possibilities, appreciating resources and anticipating growth rather than on pathologizing or problem solving.

4. **Change focused.** As the focus of Satir therapy is on transformational change, the process questions asked throughout the entire therapy session are change related. Questions such as “What would have to change for you to forgive yourself?” give the client an opportunity to explore uncharted waters inside of their own intrapsychic system.

5. **Self of the therapist.** The congruence of the therapist is essential for clients to access their own spiritual life energy. When therapists are congruent, clients experience them as caring, accepting, hopeful, interested, genuine, authentic and actively engaged. Therapists’ use of their own creative life energy in the form of metaphor, humor, self-disclosure, sculpting, and many other creative interventions also comes from the connection that therapists have to their own spiritual Self when in a congruent state.

In this video, Satir conducts a session with a family of four that is struggling with abuse, both to and from the children, and questioning how they can stay together amid their fears. Through hands-on interventions and directive, facilitated discussion with the parents and children (separately and together), Satir establishes a safe, nurturing environment that supports the family’s motivation to change, while addressing the issues of trust, choice, and resistance that can arise during the therapeutic process.

*Adapted from http://satirglobal.org/about-virginia-satir/
Discussion Questions

Professors, training directors and facilitators may use some or all of these discussion questions, depending on what aspects of the video are most relevant to the audience.

**INTRODUCTION**

1. **Family therapy:** Do you have experience conducting family therapy? If so, how does it differ from individual work? What approach(es) do you use? How have the families you’ve worked with compare to the one Satir sees here? In what ways is your approach similar to or different from the one Satir uses in the video?

**SESSION**

2. **Abuse:** What feelings arose in you as you heard about the abuse Aaron and Robbie experienced and/or perpetrated? Has abuse been a part of your clients’ presenting issues? With adults or children? If so, how did you address it? If not, how do you think you might feel upon hearing about it with a client? How might you work with this in yourself?

3. **Owning responsibility:** Why do you think Satir asks Bob and Betty if they believe they can be effective in making things change? Did you believe them? How do you respond internally when a client expresses a sense of helplessness? How and when might you address this?

4. **Directive approach:** What did you think of Satir’s telling Bob what to say to Aaron and Robbie about their mother’s abuse? How do you think each child felt upon hearing this? Would you feel comfortable having family members speak to each other in this way? Why or why not?

**DIALOGUE BETWEEN HUSBAND AND WIFE**

5. **Working with the parents:** What do you think Satir hoped to achieve by working with the parents as a couple? How do you think this intervention impacted the family as a whole? In your own client work, have you worked separately with one person or segment of a family unit? What did you discover? Can you think of any potential pitfalls of such an approach?

6. **Bottom line:** What do you think is the purpose of Satir’s framing
Bob and Betty’s needs as their “bottom line”? How does this frame support the couple’s work together? If you were using this frame, how might you keep the couple focused during this type of negotiation?

7. Couples communication: What did you notice about the quality of connection between Bob and Betty as they held hands and discussed their bottom lines around abuse and leaving? What strengths did you see? What shortcomings? Would you name these with your own couple clients?

8. Taking sides: Satir made a point to tell Bob and Betty her desire to “be on both sides” with them. Have you encountered couple or family clients who directly or subtly pull for you to take their side of an argument? How did you respond? Are there situations where you could see yourself feeling your own allegiance with one person over another? How might you handle this in yourself? With them?

9. Supporting disclosure: Satir asks Betty and Bob about their respective family histories during the course of the session, with each other as opposed to separately. How do you think hearing each other’s histories impacted them? How do you think talking about it impacted them? How might you respond if one family member was reluctant or opposed to discussing certain topics in the room?

VIRGINIA NOW ENGAGES THE CHILDREN

10. Using touch: How do you feel about the use of touch in psychotherapy? Would you feel comfortable doing this? For which types of clients? How do you imagine different clients would feel? Do you believe it can have a place in individual therapy? Have you experienced this as a client?

CONCLUDING MOMENTS

11. Props: What do you think of Satir’s use of a stool for Betty to stand eye-level with Bob? Have you used props to help illustrate a point or evoke a connection? Do certain clients appreciate this more than others?

12. “Nagging parents”: When Bob tells Aaron to “settle down” during the session, Satir advises him to “pick up on only the things that need to happen so that you don’t become nagging parents.” Do you agree with her intervention? Do you think she should have
intervened more frequently, not at all, or somewhere in between? Why or why not?

DISCUSSION

13. **Style:** What reactions did you have to Satir’s overall style? Her use of props, working separately with the parents and the children, and hands-on, experiential interventions? How do you think the members of this family felt with her? Are you left with further questions about her approach to therapy?

14. **Personal reaction:** How would you feel about having Satir as your therapist? Do you think she could build a solid therapeutic alliance with your family, children, or partner? Would she be effective with you? Why or why not?
Role Plays

After watching the video and reviewing “Satir’s Approach to Family Therapy” in this manual, choose one person to be the therapist and four others to be a family, and in front of the whole group, have them role-play 20 minutes of a therapy session with a family experiencing child abuse (by someone outside the family), using Virginia Satir’s approach.

Clients may role-play Bob, Betty, Aaron and Robbie from the video or a family client of their own, or they can completely make it up. The primary emphasis here is on giving the therapist an opportunity to practice using Satir’s approach to family therapy, affirming the family’s desire to change in a nurturing way, and on giving the clients an opportunity to see what it feels like to participate in this type of therapy.

Assessing the presenting problem
The therapist should begin by inviting the family members, including the children, to briefly discuss their reasons for coming to therapy. Reflect their words back to them and inquire about how they’ve coped with the problem so far, and ask them what, specifically, they would like to change.

Working with the “bottom line”
This should comprise the bulk of the session. As the family members speak, help them feel understood, valued, and supported; with regard to the parents, remember Satir’s notion that the client is doing the best they can given how they learned to cope as children. Check in with each family member to get their perspective on what a different member says about them. Watch for instances of resistance to the other’s story or “bottom line,” and affirm shared experiences. Ask about the resistance—perhaps they’re feeling unsure about their ability to change, enforce rules, or provide what another member needs. The rest of the group can observe, acting as the advising team to the therapist. At any point during the session the therapist can time out to get feedback from the observation team, and bring it back into the
session with the client. Other observers might jump in if the therapist gets stuck.

After the role-play, have the group come together to discuss their experiences. What did participants learn about Satir’s approach, in particular her theories of coping and working with resistance to change? Invite the clients to talk about what it was like to role-play a family unit and how they felt about the approach. How did they feel in relation to the therapist? Did they understand the essence of Satir’s approach? What worked and didn’t work for them? Then, invite the therapists to talk about their experiences: How did it feel to facilitate the session? Did they have difficulty working with the approach? How confident are they that the client felt heard and supported? What would they do differently if they did it again? Finally, open up a general discussion of what participants learned about addressing resistance to change with Satir’s approach to family therapy.

An alternative is to do this role-play as a 10-minute session in smaller groups of three, with one therapist and two clients playing the parents. Assess the parents’ degree of commitment to making needed changes, and inquire into any resistance to the other partner’s “bottom line.” Consider asking what each client would like the family’s life to look like, what their individual goals are, or what the problem is preventing them from doing in their life. Every 10 minutes, the participants rotate to create a new role-play. Follow up with a discussion on what participants learned about using Satir’s approach.

Note: Although child abuse brings up issues regarding mandatory reporting, for the purpose of this role-play exercise assume that this has been previously dealt with.
Reaction Paper for Classes and Training

Video: Of Rocks and Flowers: Dealing with the Abuse of Children with Virginia Satir

- **Assignment:** Complete this reaction paper and return it by the date noted by the facilitator.

- **Suggestions for Viewers:** Take notes on these questions while viewing the video and complete the reaction paper afterwards. Respond to each question below.

- **Length and Style:** 2-4 pages double-spaced. Be brief and concise. Do NOT provide a full synopsis of the video. This is meant to be a brief reaction paper that you write soon after watching the video—we want your ideas and reactions.

**What to Write:** Respond to the following questions in your reaction paper:

1. **Key points:** What important points did you learn about Satir’s approach to family therapy? What stands out to you about how Satir works?

2. **What I found most helpful:** As a therapist, what was most beneficial to you about the model presented? What tools or perspectives did you find helpful and might you use in your own work? What challenged you to think about something in a new way?

3. **What does not make sense:** What principles/techniques/interventions did not make sense to you? Did anything push your buttons or bring about a sense of resistance in you, or just not fit with your own style of working?

4. **How I would do it differently:** What might you do differently from Satir when working with clients? Be specific about what different approaches, interventions and techniques you would apply.

5. **Other questions/reactions:** What questions or reactions did you have as you viewed the session with Satir? Other comments, thoughts or feelings?
Related Websites, Videos and Further Reading

WEB RESOURCES
The Virginia Satir Global Network
http://satirglobal.org
Satir Institute of the Pacific
http://www.satirpacific.org
Satir Learning Centre of Ottowa
http://satirottawa.ca/
International Family Therapy Association
http://www.ifta-familytherapy.org/

RELATED VIDEOS AVAILABLE AT WWW.PSYCHOTHERAPY.NET
A Family at the Point of Growth with Virginia Satir
A Blended Family with Troubled Boy with Virginia Satir
The Essence of Change with Virginia Satir
A Step Along the Way: A Family with a Drug Problem with Virginia Satir
Satir Family Therapy with Jean McLendon, LCSW
Structural Family Therapy by Harry Aponte
The Legacy of Unresolved Loss: A Family Systems Approach by Monica McGoldrick
Bowenian Family Therapy by Philip Guerin
Adolescent Family Therapy by Janet Sasson Edgette
Experiential Therapy by Augustus Y. Napier
“I’d Hear Laughter”: Finding Solutions for the Family by Insoo Kim Berg
Salvador Minuchin on Family Therapy
Adlerian Family Therapy by James Bitter
Empowerment Family Therapy by Frank Pittman
Solution-Oriented Family Therapy by Bill O’Hanlon
Object-Relations Family Therapy by David Scharff & Jill Savege Scharff
Narrative Family Therapy by Stephen Madigan
Integrative Family Therapy by Kenneth V. Hardy

RECOMMENDED READINGS


Complete Transcript

SATIR: Hello, I’m Virginia Satir. I’d like to share some information and a bit of theory that I think will be helpful to your viewing the film that you are about to see. Behind me, I have two maps. The first is a universal family map that is present in all families. And it is in the form of a triad. That’s how we all came into the world.

And just briefly, you see the individuals, the three individuals here as individuals. Then you see the three pairs. And then you see the three triads. Now, in the family that you’re going to see, this is a blended family, which means it is a family that first came together in one way. And one of the parents left, and now they are coming back. The family is reconstituting itself with different people.

The people that we have in our family today are Bob, who is 36, Betty, who is 27. And each has been married before. Two children came from Bob and his first wife, who is Marcia. And they are Aaron and Robbie, who are now four and three years of age. Betty had a previous marriage with a man to whom we did not get to know about by name. And he is part of the background. At the present time, Betty is pregnant. And they’re expecting their own child—Bob and Betty.

The custody of the children is with Bob. And at this point in time, this family which is about a year old, is trying to integrate the two children who have had a very rough time in the previous marriage. Bob is a recovering alcoholic. And Marcia, the mother—Bob has great fears about the physical abuse that is going on with the children. This is a young family. And right away, I feel that it needs lots and lots of support and especially with the added factor of abuse in the family, which means that fear is always running around underneath it—the death fear and the wish to live.

NARRATOR: The family faces a difficult dilemma. Betty is acutely afraid that her soon to be born child will be abused by Bob’s two boys, Aaron and Robbie. She would rather be separated than risk this. Bob, however, has vowed never to lose his children, who have been allegedly abused by their mother. Yet neither spouse wishes to be separated from the other.
SATIR: And what I’d like to know is what you would like to have happen for you as you look over your family, yourselves, and what’s going on right now. And maybe we could start there.

BETTY: What I’d like to have is to see the children calming down, to see the physical violence moving down. There’s a lot of physical violence that goes down with them. We have a baby on the way. And they’ve been known to hurt babies.

And I have a lot of fear over that. So the things we’re trying to work on is to get the physical violence down and to get them to where they want to mind. They just don’t seem to want to mind.

SATIR: Could you just help me out a little bit, Betty, with what you mean when you talk about physical violence, and who is doing it, and what seems to be that picture.

BETTY: It’s both of them doing it.

SATIR: You talking about Aaron now, and Robbie.

BETTY: Robbie took up a big stick and hit the dog over the head, knocked the dog down on the ground. She’s a pretty fair size too. They’ve held a two-year-old baby down. Robbie was choking him by the throat. And Aaron was beating him in the face.

SATIR: How long ago was this?

BETTY: Not long ago.

SATIR: Like a week?

BETTY: Well, no, maybe three months ago. It was while I was working that it happened. And they’ve been known to slap babies before and choke babies before, pulled a baby’s diaper down and beat its hind end.

SATIR: Do you have this first-hand from somebody?

BETTY: Yes, the babysitter. And she’s a very good personal friend of mine

SATIR: So I hear you picking up some scares.

BETTY: A lot of scares. I’m really afraid. I’m afraid for the baby I’m carrying. It’s creating a lot of anxiety in the house.
SATIR: Let me ask just one other little question. As far as you know, have either Aaron or Robbie themselves had any abuse from anybody?

BETTY: Yes.

SATIR: OK. Then Aaron and Robbie are not your children?

BETTY: No.

SATIR: They’re not your children.

BOB: They’re my children.

SATIR: By a previous marriage?

BOB: Yes.

SATIR: I see. OK, so how long—

AARON: Mom.

SATIR: Hm? What did you say?

AARON: I said mom.

SATIR: She’s your mom. And I hope that—

ROBBIE: Are you my children?

SATIR: Those are good questions. When I talk to you first for a minute, I hope that you make it possible so your mommy, the mommy you have here, knows of some of the struggles you have and also that you know of some of the hopes she has.

ROBBIE: And Bob.

SATIR: And you just asked your daddy a question. What was it?

ROBBIE: —Bob.

SATIR: This Bob is your daddy?

ROBBIE: Yeah.

SATIR: And he was just saying to me that you, Robbie, and Aaron are his children. And you had another mommy.

ROBBIE: Marcia, a girl named Marcia, too.

SATIR: Another—
ROBBIE: Mom is named Marcia.

SATIR: Marcia?

ROBBIE: Yes.

SATIR: OK, so how hold were Aaron and Robbie when you came into their life, Betty?

BETTY: It’s been almost a year ago now. They’ve known me for longer than that. But I’ve not been the mother until about a year ago. It’ll be a year in July. And it’s been a struggle, a struggle, struggle. I really love them.

SATIR: I can feel that. And I can also feel a scare. I could feel the scare as I was watching what you were doing. And Bob, where are you in relation to what Betty hopes for?

BOB: Well, I’d like to see them get back to the norm. I’ve been working, trying to get them back to the norm. You can put them back in a normal situation and you can put them in a normal health, but it’s not taking care of the subconscious things. And I don’t know how to attack those things. I can get them to eat right. I can get them to go up and down the steps. Well, Betty does most of it. You can get them to do all the surface things, rights, but it’s not changing their little heads. And I don’t know how to attack that. That’s one of the reasons we started going to—in the first place.

SATIR: Right now, I just want to say, congratulations to you for so early recognizing that there’s more than just the normal situation. There are special things that have to happen for some old learnings that have taken place. Outside of this, Bob, was there something else that you would like to have happen for you?

BOB: I’d like us to all get along real well, because Betty is scared to death. I don’t know what’s going to happen if the baby comes and these guys are the same way.

SATIR: Could you for the moment entertain the possibility that you can be effective, you and Betty, can be effective in making things change, that you can be a very special force in that. Even if you don’t at this moment know how, can you accept the fact that you can be?
BOB: Yes.

SATIR: And do you accept that, too?

BETTY: Yes, I do.

BOB: We are the prime motivators of change. You’ve got to have somebody else give you the ideas. And then you do it.

SATIR: I feel that too about you. Now, when you came here today, Aaron, tell me what did you hope would happen for you, honey?

AARON: Um—he was peeing on the ground at Grandma’s. That was it.

SATIR: Look at me now and tell me that again. And talk a little more slowly so I can really understand you.

AARON: OK, I’ll tell you what he does. He did this, and then he pees like that. And—and he pees on the ground.

SATIR: This is what Robbie does, he pees on the ground? Now, would you like him to stop that?

AARON: Yes.

SATIR: OK. Now, when you pee, where do you pee?

AARON: In—in a toilet at her house.

SATIR: In a where, honey?

AARON: In my house, right, mom?

SATIR: You pee in the toilet. Is that what you do at your house?

AARON: Mm hmm.

SATIR: OK, now, let me ask you something. Why do you think Robbie pees on the grass?

AARON: At grandma’s.

SATIR: At grandma’s he pees on the grass. OK, when he pees on the grass, what do you feel about that?

AARON: I feel mad at me. I feel mad at him.

SATIR: You feel mad at him?
ROBBIE: No, I don’t pee on the grass. I pee on the bridge.
SATIR: On the bridge, OK.
AARON: He pees on the bridge. And he was gonna, I tell him to stop it.
SATIR: And is this Grandma, uh—
AARON: It’s Grandma West.
SATIR: Grandma West, that’s your mother.
BETTY: No, that’s my mother.
SATIR: You’re mother? OK. So when you’re at grandma West’s house—
ROBBIE: I put—too.
SATIR: All right, I’m going to get to you in a minute. You’re at Grandma West’s house, and then when Robbie pees on the bridge, then you feel angry with him.
AARON: Yeah, and I get a headache when he does that.
SATIR: You get a headache from that. Uh huh. Did—yes?
AARON: He was going to do this. He’ll sit and play—And then Rob will say—And then Mom says, well, I didn’t mean to.
SATIR: You mean Robbie says to momma, “I didn’t mean to pee on the bridge?” Did I hear that right?
AARON: No, you heard I was peeing on the bridge. But I was telling on me for hitting him.
SATIR: Mommy says to you that you should hit him because he pees on the bridge?
AARON: You said that to me?
SATIR: No, I’m asking what you said to me. I didn’t understand that part and I want to. When Robbie pees on the bridge—by the way, what happens between you and Grandma?
ROBBIE: I pee on the bridge.
AARON: I get sad and he gives me a headache.
SATIR: You get sad and you get a headache.

AARON: He gives me the headache.

ROBBIE: Because I get sad, but he hit me. I get sick.

SATIR: So you get hit by Aaron. You pee on the bridge. That’s what Aaron says. Is that right?

ROBBIE: Bricks.

SATIR: On the bricks. Oh, you pee on the bricks, not the bridge. OK. Let me have now a little bit of history in terms of what you learned in terms of Aaron and Robbie, what that picture is in general for me.

BOB: I started picking up on it a couple of years ago. Aaron was the oldest is the one that had most of the abuse. He was tied up and locked under sinks, and locked in rooms, and thrown down the steps. I took them—the last year I was with their mother, I took them to the hospital 13 times. Then she went through four psych wards. And I’d pick up bits and pieces. I happened to have some people in them, I picked up a little bit of information that was coming out of there.

And then on the visitations, we’d take them for a visitation and they’d come back. It’d take us three to five days to calm them down. Then they came home one day—I’m an alcoholic. I go to AA. And I used to—before I met Betty, I’d have to take them by myself. And I used to tell them, now, we’re going to a meeting, you’ve got to be good or we’ve had it. Because if I get drunk, they’ve had it. I’ve had it. They had it. Everybody’s had it.

Well, I kept telling them, now, you’ve got to be good or we’ve had it. They came home from their mom one day and Aaron kept saying, daddy, you’ve got to go to a meeting. You got to go to a meeting. And we finally asked him why. And he says, because if you don’t go to a meeting, we’ve had it. And we found out that earlier in that day that she’d kicked him in the knee and shoved him down a flight of steps because she was mad at me. And then the next time, they came back and they’d been hit with brooms. They had little—it appears to be brooms. It’s all observation. 13, 15 bruises about like that and cigarette burns. It’s something all the time.
SATIR: OK, now, has that visiting stopped?

BOB: We are in the process of trying to stop it. We’ll see what the courts do.

SATIR: OK, but the visitation is not stopped at this point?

BOB: We stopped the visitation the first of year. Now you can stop visitation, but you’ve got to back it up with muscle. You’ve got to back it up with a court. And we’re trying to get the courts not to make us let them see him.

But that’s easier said than done. I’m not so sure we can pull that off. Because in Kansas, the judge is very reluctant to deny visitation rights to the mother, very reluctant. I figure we might have a 60/40 chance.

SATIR: Wait one minute. We’re talking about when you go to visit your other mommy and how you’re—

ROBBIE: I think my mommy Marcia.

SATIR: Your mother Marcia, yes. We’re talking about when you have gone to visit Marcia that when Marcia becomes angry, she hurts you.

ROBBIE: She’s not angry to me today. She’s not angry, she’s happy to me.

SATIR: She’s happy now with you?

ROBBIE: Yep.

SATIR: But sometimes she gets angry. And when she gets angry, she hurts you.

ROBBIE: Yep. Marcia goes—and—was mean to me, too.

SATIR: And you were here when your daddy was talking about when Marcia gets angry, she hurts you.

AARON: Well, Robbie hurts me. When I was playing with my cars, he took all my cars. When Rob took the cars, we were out to eat—then we were on rides—That’s all and—

SATIR: Aaron, we were talking about your daddy’s worry about how you get hurt by your mother sometimes, by Marcia, when Marcia gets upset and doesn’t know what she’s doing.
**AARON:** Robbie gives me lots of headaches.

**SATIR:** And what I hear you say is that sometimes Robbie also makes you feel bad.

**AARON:** Mm hmm.

**SATIR:** OK.

**AARON:** Oh, I like this one.

**SATIR:** Well, you can look at it a great deal.

**AARON:** It smells good.

**SATIR:** OK, now do you anticipate any difficulty—

**ROBBIE:** I want a—

**SATIR:** Do you anticipate any difficulty in helping Aaron and Robbie to understand why they can’t go to see their mother?

**BOB:** Um, I don’t know. I’ll cross that bridge when I come to it. For the time being, I refrain from saying anything bad about her. I just will not have any part of it. But—

**ROBBIE:** Yes, I do.

**BOB:** I don’t know. They know now. It’s obvious, because we’ve been going back and forth to court. They know now that the reason they don’t see their mother is because we don’t want them to. You can’t keep it under. But I’m really not quite sure how to handle that. Sometimes that backfires on you.

**SATIR:** Well, let me tell you some pieces that may be helpful at this level of things, at this level of things. There’s a difference between saying what I just said, that here is a lady who hurts you, and gets angry, doesn’t know what she’s doing. That’s a different thing from you’re saying she’s no good, a different kind of thing from that. And my sense of it is that you need to be very straight about that.

**BOB:** OK.

**SATIR:** And let me see, at this moment, if you’re willing to say to each of your sons that right now that they will not be able to see their mother because she hurts them. And you have to wait until she knows
how to deal with herself better. Because that’s the same problem as what you’re trying to get them to do, that they may not hurt. And you’re protecting them from being hurt. And I wonder how you would feel just moving up to this son of yours and saying to him, that you—

**BOB:** Aaron, you’re not going to see your mother anymore because she hurts you.

**SATIR:** No, come up here. Just come front to front with him and take his hands. Can you move up a little bit more?

**BOB:** Gotcha.

**SATIR:** Now, to take both his hands and to tell him that.

**BOB:** I’m not going to let you see your mother anymore, Aaron, because she hurts you.

**AARON:** She likes me. She don’t hurt me.

**BOB:** Yeah, she loves you very much, but she hurts you. She don’t always know what she’s doing.

**AARON:** Robbie hurts me sometimes.

**ROBBIE:** Marcia hurts me.

**SATIR:** I wonder if you could also share with him that you are not going to let him hurt Robbie and you’re not going to let Robbie hurt him. And I don’t want you hurting Robbie. I’m not going to let it happen. And I’m not going to let Robbie hurt you either.

**NARRATOR:** At this point, Virginia leads father in a dialogue with his children. We now move to a dialogue between husband and wife.

**BOB:** You know I don’t want to send them back to Marcia. You also know that I want to do everything to keep us together. It’s just I don’t know what options we got.

**SATIR:** No, you’ve been there.

**BOB:** I don’t know what options we’ve got. Maybe we can send Aaron to therapy, treatment center, something. But we’re going to figure out something, because we’re not going to break up the unit for it. We’re not going to break up this family.

**SATIR:** What are you feeling right now as you’re talking directly to
Betty?

**BOB:** I don’t know. I don’t get on to things that quick. It takes me a while.

**SATIR:** I just wondered what the experience was like to for you to tell her that.

**BOB:** I don’t know. I’ve done it before. We’ve been through this several times already. The first time it hurts. It hurts.

**SATIR:** I heard you say three things to her. I heard you say, “Betty, I will turn heaven and Earth so that we don’t separate.” And then I heard you say, “And I don’t want to lose anybody.” And then the third thing I heard is, “I don’t know what the plan is, but I will work hard to make one.” Did you hear any of that?

**BETTY:** Mm hmm.

**SATIR:** And how do you feel as you hear Robbie?

**BETTY:** I understand that. I understand every thing that’s been said, because we have talked about it. I also understand that I’ve waited for a long time for this baby, longer than more than—marriage ever came. And I won’t let these guys or anybody else hurt my baby. I don’t care how much I love them. I don’t care how much I love them.

**SATIR:** This is important for you to know that you have the bottom line. You need to know that, you have the bottom line. And the bottom line is you may not hurt. You may not hurt our baby, to him and to him. You may not. Now, how do you feel about standing firm on that?

**BETTY:** I feel very strongly towards that. I will stand for it. We’ve talked, and I said if something doesn’t change, if this behavior doesn’t change, I just feel like I can’t stay for the safety of this baby. I’ve waited for eight, almost nine years for it.

**SATIR:** Now, I would like you in the very best voice that you can that reflects the strength of your bottom line—”I will not allow my baby to be hurt, our baby.” Can you really put that forth—to Robert.

**BETTY:** Yes I can. I will not allow our baby to be hurt.
SATIR: Now, just be in touch with that for a moment and know that’s your bottom line. Just to hear that’s your bottom line, and that comes out of love. Do you feel it out of love?

BETTY: Yes, I do.

SATIR: And I don’t hear you making this any kind of a deal. It’s just that’s how it is. If Marcia had known how to do that, these children wouldn’t have had the same experience. But somehow she didn’t know how to do that. You know how.

Now, I heard Bob saying something else. His bottom line. His bottom line is I’m not going to allow anybody to hurt anybody, you or my children. Did I hear you say that? Can you say that with a feeling that you have to her about your bottom line?

BOB: I’m not going to let anybody hurt anybody. But I can’t watch them all the time. I can’t be there all the time. I can say that, but I can’t always follow that through.

SATIR: Do you believe Robert now when he says that he’s not going to allow that?

BETTY: I believe that he would like very much to mean that. I don’t believe that he will be there, and that he will be watching every second. And that I would be the one doing it. And I can’t live that way.

SATIR: OK, now—this moment, do you believe Betty’s bottom line?

BOB: Yes.

SATIR: Are you sympathetic with that?

BOB: Yes, I can understand.

SATIR: OK. Now, it might be necessary, it might be, not necessarily so but it might be that in the strength of your conviction to not let anyone hurt is that you would take whatever steps were necessary to see that Robbie and Aaron got what help they needed. Because they do need help. And you may be able to be, provide it yourself. Or you may have to have somebody else provide it. But it’s there. Now, do you believe that that’s true from Robert? That he has enough love for both of these children that he would do whatever he needed to do to get them the help that they wanted and enough love for your unborn child
to give that child help, too?

**BETTY:** Yes, I do believe that.

**SATIR:** Now, have you had any experience in your own past where you couldn’t live up to your own bottom line?

**BETTY:** No. What I say, I do. I’ve been through a divorce before.

**SATIR:** What was the nature of that? Anything like what’s left here between Marcia and Bob?

**BETTY:** I was the one being abused in that marriage.

**SATIR:** And how did that—what form did that take to you, the abuse to you?

**BETTY:** I know what it’s like to be like somebody is bigger than you. And I can empathize with these kids, because I do understand that. At the same time, seeing what they’ve done to these babies at the baby sitters—and I’ve heard first-hand from someone that I know is not lying to me, the things that they have done. And I know inside of me, for a fact, I will not let that happen to my baby. I wonder what I would do to them if that happened to this baby.

**SATIR:** OK, I can only be with you on that. Now, what I’d like to know is do you have any idea how you yourself got abused in your marriage?

**BETTY:** Because my ex-husband was an alcoholic, and he blamed everything that’s happened on me. Everything negative that happened was my fault. And I paid for it.

**SATIR:** Did you accept that?

**BETTY:** No. I did not accept that. And I lived with it for 3 and 1/2 years and never accepted verbally that it was my fault. I fought it every step of the way.

**SATIR:** Now, can you hang on? Are you right- or left-handed?

**BETTY:** I’m right-handed.

**SATIR:** Can you hang on this right hand with that conviction that under no circumstances will you allow someone to hurt your unborn baby, nor will you allow yourself to hurt anybody? Could you do that
in this hand?

**BETTY:** I can say that I won’t allow anyone to hurt this unborn baby. “Accidents” quote, unquote happen.

**SATIR:** I don’t know what you mean.

**BETTY:** Well, I mean setting the baby in the living room and walking to the kitchen to do dishes, and then one of these guys coming through and being in a bad mood that the dog was playing too rough with them in the yard and they’re angry, or something. I don’t feel like I can take a chance on that happening.

**SATIR:** Now, what I’m hearing is a little something going on in you right now that’s almost akin to your own feeling of murder when that happens. That this feeling is so strong of outrage.

**BETTY:** It is.

**SATIR:** Do you know anything about what that feeling is like—the anger that is so strong that you could kill?

**BOB:** Yeah.

**SATIR:** Could you talk together about that, what that is like? Would you take each others’ hands and talk?

**BOB:** Then I got to get rid of somebody. And just who the hell am I supposed to get rid of? Send them back to a monster? Put them in a home? I don’t like none of my options. I don’t like one option I got. And I don’t know what the hell to do. And it makes me angry. And it makes me scared. It makes me real scared. But I don’t know what the hell to do.

**SATIR:** Do you have anything at this moment that you could offer to Bob?

**BETTY:** I feel I’ve been as unselfish in this situation as I can. And I’ve told you that I understand about Aaron and Robbie, and that I’m not asking you to give them up. I am telling you that if they haven’t changed, I will not jeopardize the baby for it. And that I will be the one that will leave and take the baby if it comes to that. But I’m not saying that you have to give them up.
SATIR: Could you share with Betty what you just heard her say, what that meant to you?

BOB: That means that I don’t lose two boys. I lose you and another baby. My children are very important to me. I want all of them. It hurts just as much to take them—When I adopted a baby, I meant like it killed me. I’m not giving no more babies up, not unless I just can’t get around it. It hurts just as much for you to take that child as to me have these children leave. I’ve given up one. I’m not giving up anymore, Betty. Not unless I just have to.

SATIR: Were you hearing that bottom line with him?

BETTY: That unless it comes down to it, that he’s not giving up any more children. I feel very strongly it will come down to it, and that the decision will be yours. And it’s not a matter of testing love, or what love is stronger, or who loves who the most. It’s a matter of I won’t jeopardize the baby.

SATIR: Now, I hear your bottom line coming up again. Can you appreciate the bottom over here?

BOB: I can appreciate the fears. But I don’t always appreciate you presuming that that’s the way it’s going to be. You’ve already made up your mind that that’s what’s going to be. And now what you’re doing is filling in the information to make it correct.

SATIR: Am I hearing you correctly, Bob, that Betty, at this moment, sees no way that Robbie and Aaron can change. And so therefore she will have to put up with this horrible, horrible decision that she has to take her baby and herself away from you. Is that what you think she’s talking about?

BOB: Yeah.

SATIR: Ask her if that’s what it is.

BOB: Is that the conclusions you’ve already drawn?

BETTY: That is the conclusion I’ve drawn.

BOB: That in seven months you’re just going to have to go? You’ve already decided that.
**BETTY:** That in the time that we’ve been together with the boys, almost a year, and to these therapists, then nothing has changed. I mean, they reached a point where they were getting better. And they stopped. And they’re stagnant in their growth. And they aren’t getting better. And now they’re regressing to where they aren’t minding again.

**BOB:** They appear to be stagnant. You only choose to see the negative.

**BETTY:** I can see only what I can see.

**BOB:** You see what you want to see.

**BETTY:** I see what there is.

**SATIR:** Now—sorry. I’d like to separate this out a little bit, because then I can be on both sides with you. You are talking about three children. And Betty is talking about one. And you are talking about a situation which was pretty miserable for you before this.

But Betty is also talking about a miserable situation in which life was not respected. It wasn’t respected. Betty, in her marriage, didn’t feel respected. And you in your marriage.

And I imagine if you were you the kind when you got drunk that you beat up people? You weren’t like that. OK, but this whole thing is rising out of some pretty horrible feelings of low dignity of people. And I hear the rising here of saying, “It’s not going to be that way anymore. I don’t want it that way.” I hear you saying that, and I hear you saying that. Do you believe that? You don’t want to have any more of this kind of—

**BETTY:** I believe I won’t let it be that way.

**SATIR:** And I think you know that for sure.

**BETTY:** I do.

**SATIR:** OK, now from Robert’s point of view, I’m not clear whether you know that he has the same resolve. He may not be able to carry it off quite as well, because he’s not always around. But that he has the same resolve. Do you believe that?

**BETTY:** I believe he intends for that. The kids do a lot of things at home that he never thinks anything about.
SATIR: Like what?

BETTY: Like when they start arguing, and fussing, and running around the house, and raising hell in the other room. It’s like he never notices it until everything is at such a high volume that there’s no way you could not notice it, I mean, until they’re just tearing the roof off of the place, just going nuts in the other room. And then he goes in the other room, “Hey you guys, settle down.” Which, by that point, I’ve already spanked them 45 minutes before, you know, if I would have been watching them. But he lets this stuff go for so long. And I feel like if he does it now, why would this change if a baby were here? I don’t see—

SATIR: OK, I think I hear what you’re saying now. First of all, you’re talking about a different level of when people pay attention. You pay attention at a beginning time. And you pay attention at a later time. You’d like to have his attention come before so that it can be more preventive. Does that make any sense to you?

BOB: Mm hmm.

SATIR: Tell me something in your own growing up, were there any of these kinds of things, issues, going on in your own growing up?

BETTY: No.

SATIR: Beating people and things like that?

BETTY: No, none.

SATIR: What happened with you and your father and mother? How was that?

BETTY: It was a perfectly normal, healthy, happy childhood. I was the baby of the family, spoiled rotten. Everything I wanted, I got. That was how life was to me.

SATIR: Do you have brothers?

BETTY: I have three brothers.

SATIR: What happened to them?

BETTY: They’re all married with children of their own now, happily married. I have a sister that’s happily married.
SATIR: Do you have any idea how many of those people managed with their anger toward each other, when they got angry, how your father and mother managed with that? Or when they came across each other’s bottom line, do you have any ideas about that?

BETTY: No, I don’t.

SATIR: What do you think happened?

BETTY: I don’t know. I don’t know what any of them do. I know my brother and sister-in-law sometimes scream at each other when they just reach something where there’s no—but I don’t see where that is the bottom line or settling of the dispute.

SATIR: So that whole level of things you didn’t know what happened when your mother and father disagreed, or someone—

BETTY: No.

SATIR: And so in a way, what you’re describing to me is a world that you grew up in in which you only knew positive things, not much about the negative things.

BETTY: That’s right.

SATIR: What was your growing up like?

BOB: It wasn’t bad. But it wasn’t good. My dad had tuberculosis. My dad was a nothing. My mom did all the raising.

He just was there. He wouldn’t even go out and play baseball with me. But he was really nothing.

My mom did everything. My mom did all the fighting, got us everything. Got me 12 years of Catholic education, three and 1/2 years of college. They had to fight for every bit of it.

SATIR: Fight your father?

BOB: Yeah, it’s cheap.

SATIR: And your father sounds like he was afraid that he’d—

BOB: You better not let him see this.

SATIR: —that he’d lose a lot, somehow. He was afraid of losing things, money or something like that?
BOB: Money.

SATIR: Are you an only boy?

BOB: No, I’m one of five. I’m the second oldest.

SATIR: And what happened to the rest of the kids?

BOB: My older brother is married. He’s mentally retarded. And then my younger brother is a salesmen. And I got my little sister is going to college, and my other sister is married and got a kid.

SATIR: Are you in contact much with your own family members now?

BOB: No more than I have to be. No, they are not a support group.

SATIR: Do you have good feelings about Betty?

AARON: No, around my mom and dad, they make—Robbie makes me mad, because he—

SATIR: Look at me now. I’m asking you about you and Betty.

AARON: My mom and dad gets me a nice, nice—big wheel.

SATIR: I like the way you touch my face. Touch it really gently. Could you touch Betty’s face gently like that? Gently?

ROBBIE: Mm hmm.

SATIR: I’m going to put this away. Look at me now and touch my face again gently. Does that feel good to you? Let me touch your face gently like that. Does that feel good?

AARON: Mm hmm.

SATIR: Look at me now.

AARON: Hey!

SATIR: You don’t have to worry about him right now.

AARON: OK.

SATIR: But I would like for you, if you know how—and I’ve shown you how now—to put your hands on Betty’s face gently, and to have her feel the good feeling of your hands. And you can feel her hands. Could you do that?
AARON: OK.

BETTY: Just sit down here for a minute now. Robbie, come here, honey. Take your finger out of the cup. I like that when you do that. Look at me now.

Can you put your hands on my face? Both hands on my face like this, like that. Does that feel good? Does that feel good?

ROBBIE: Yes, yes.

SATIR: All right, now let me put my hands on your face. Look at me, hon. Does that feel good? OK, put it down now.

ROBBIE: But he can’t!

SATIR: Now, I’m going to ask your mommy to come up here, Betty— Now, now would you take your beautiful little hands and put them on Betty’s face like that. Would you do that just like that? Do it some more like that. Just hold her, beautiful, just hold her little face. Now, could you give her, at this moment, let her feel you, too?

ROBBIE: Now let me feel—

SATIR: Wait, wait, wait one minute. Now, do you think that you could many times a day come up to this lovely lady and give her your hands like that? Could you do that? OK, now would you come over here Robbie and Aaron will you sit over here, right here?

AARON: Could I stand by here?

SATIR: And you just stand where you are. Now, could you lean over and put your lovely, soft hands on your mother’s face? And feel it, just feel it.

ROBBIE: Is that pretty?

BETTY: Mm hmm.

ROBBIE: Now feel mine.

AARON: I can—I’ve got my—on.

SATIR: OK, now, you like that. And I saw Betty liked that, too.

ROBBIE: No, let’s shake hands, mom.
SATIR: All right.
ROBBIE: You shake hands, too.
SATIR: Yes, OK. Now, what I’d like to find out from you is could you remember that you could put your hands so beautifully on your mother’s face?
AARON: Mm hmm.
SATIR: Both hands like this. So you hold her, hold her face.
AARON: Can I hold you?
SATIR: Now, I’d like to have your daddy come in. Now, your daddy has a lot of hair on his face, if you notice. What you’d like to just make those pretty hands to go around his face like that so you could feel the touch.
ROBBIE: Is that pretty, daddy?
BOB: Mm hmm.
SATIR: Now, could you ask your daddy if he’d do that with you?
ROBBIE: Would you do that with me?
BOB: Sure.
SATIR: All right, now, this may sound very strange. Yes, it’s time for you, too. If you put your hands on your daddy’s face, both of them, like you were holding something very special. Because that’s there, too. Those little hands know a lot of things. They need to be re-educated, OK? Now, there’s a lot of energy in both these youngsters, like there is in both of you. And I’m going to talk to your therapist about making some room for you to have some respite. But use every opportunity you can to get this kind of physical contact.
And what I would also recommend that you do is that the two of you are clear about what you expect. And if you could learn from Betty how you can get a little attention more quickly. I’d like you to be able to get over your message without a “don’t” in it, without a “don’t.” And that your strength of your arms, when you pick them up—I don’t know if I can illustrate it to you. But let me have your arm for a minute. I want to show you the difference. Pick up my arm like you
were going to grab me. All right. Now, when you do that my muscles all start to tighten. And I want to hit back. Now, pick up my arm like you wanted to protect me. I feel your strength now, but I don’t feel I want to go back like this.

And what I’d like you to do is to do lots and lots of touching of both of these children. And when things start, then you go over, don’t say anything. Go over to them and just take them. But you have to know in your inside that you’re not pulling them like this, but you’re taking them in a strong way like you saw the difference. I’ll demonstrate it to you, too. First of all, I’m going to grab you like that. You see? You want to go back. Now, at this time what I’m going to do is I’m going to give you some strength, but I’m not going to ask you to retaliate. Now, this is the most important thing for you to start with. Now, I’d like to do the same with you. So take my arm really tight. Yeah, that’s right. Like you really wanted to give me what for. OK. Now, give it to me that you want to really give me support, but you also want to give me a boundary. It’s a little bit tight. A little bit tight. Now, try doing it from the bottom and putting your other hand on top. Now, you’re squeezing me a little bit too much. But I won’t react. I don’t feel like I want to do that. OK, these are how bodies react. So the next time that you see anything coming, what you do is go and make that contact. And then let it go soft. Now, would you get up here so I can demonstrate something to your mother for a minute?

AARON: OK.

SATIR: Just move over here for a side. You won’t have to go too long. Now, let’s suppose in a moment I’m not thinking and I just take you like that. Do you see what you want to do?

Now, I’m going to do it another way. I’m giving you the same message, but I’m doing it like this. And I’m looking at you. And I’m giving you a straight message.

OK, now your body at that point is not going to respond negatively to me. It’s going to feel stopped, but not negative. And then I will take you like this.

I’ll just get up now. I take you like this. I’ve got you like this. And now
I will hold you like that for a little bit.

SATIR: I’ll hold this chair. Would you stand on it? Now, I want you to look at his face. To look at his face. Now, do you have stair steps, or something at home? Now, do you notice that he looks different to you up here?

BETTY: Mm hmm.

SATIR: Quite a bit different. Now, you have to find ways to make the eye contact in a comfortable position. So as you look now, you can see something here now that you can’t see when you’re down here looking up. And it isn’t even the same if you’re sitting, because you’re not feeling you’re standing on your own feet.

Now, when you first came in, what I heard you say, “I will use all my energy to be sure that nothing happens to my unborn child.” Now, I’m going to ask you to do another thing. I want you to use all the energy and everything you can learn to make a new set of contacts here, and use yourself differently in relation to those children. Because it can pay off.

Now, here you are looking at him. I’m asking you to do the same. You are two adults who have lots of stuff from behind, that—your body’s too, are educated in negative ways.

BOB: You got that one right.

SATIR: Think about where you’re going to stand when you have anything. Are you handy with your hands?

BOB: Yes.

SATIR: I’d like you to make a nice stool, a nice big stool that’s big enough for Betty to be on it so she can eye-level you on your own feet. Now, what I heard you say is, “I’m going to use all my energy to keep this thing together.” And what I know you’ve used are all the intellectual things you’ve had.

AARON: Put me in the circle.

SATIR: We’re going to come in a minute with you. But right now, would you like to stand on this chair and watch?
AARON: Yeah.

SATIR: OK. Whoops, you watch from over here.

AARON: —from both feet.

SATIR: All right, you can stay right here with me. And then we’ll come together. That’s right. We’ll come together, because that’s going to be what we’ll do. Right now, let’s—

AARON: I’m gonna get a drink out of my—I get a hot water.

BOB: Settle down.

SATIR: OK, and pick out only the things that need to happen, so you don’t get to be nagging parents. You made your commitment. I’m going to use all my energy to see that this holds together. And that’s a very brave and important thing. And Betty is doing the same in relation to this one. But I know, from what I’ve heard, that she would, if she has the slightest hope begin to feel that things could change. She won’t get it from up at you. She’s got to look across at you. Now, I’d like you to look at him right now. And what do you feel when you look at him from up here?

BETTY: I feel loved.

SATIR: Yes.

BOB: That was nice.

SATIR: And this is important. And what do you feel as you look at her right now?

BOB: Love.

SATIR: Yeah.

NARRATOR: Following this interview, Virginia met with Dr. Ramon Corrales of the Family Institute of Kansas City to discuss her impressions of the session.

DR. RAMON CORRALES: Hello, Virginia.

SATIR: Well, hi.

CORRALES: I enjoyed watching the tape as usual. And I was curious. You mentioned that this family, in particular, is a young family and
needing a lot of support. Would you comment on that a little bit more?

**SATIR:** Well, from the initial information I had, knowing for instance that Bob had been alcoholic—and you know how much kind of support one needs when you have alcoholism that you’re trying to overcome. And in the interview itself, you also saw how Betty, who was the wife and about to be mother, felt very unsure about herself having come from a previous marriage where she had been abused. And my hunch is also previously that she didn’t feel that able with herself.

And what I saw here was these two people needed a lot from each other. But they need so much for themselves that there wasn’t that much to give to each other just in the way of support. And so one therapeutic goal would be to offer that, to help them to have that. And, of course, you could see that as far as the children were concerned, being partly in relation to their own biological mother, which their biological father, Bob, had many concerns about. I could just imagine Bob thinking, “Well, if they go there, what kind of horrible things are going to happen to them?”

And I could see all these people sitting on top of very, very great deal of unsureness. And so, as I went into the interview, I could see it even more and more. And then there was another piece to it. And I also could see—and I’ve seen so many families like this—where there really isn’t anybody in the outside world much, person to be helpful, just to be like a friend.

**CORRALES:** To connect with.

**SATIR:** Yes. And I didn’t—maybe there was more—but I didn’t see that Betty had very much with her own family. Bob had, what kind of good support you can get from the AA. But there wasn’t that much in the environment for them, even outside of their home. So one of the big things was to help them at least to have that opportunity.

**CORRALES:** Yes. Could you say a little bit more about the role of touch in your own work, especially with a family like this.

**SATIR:** Well, let me preface this just a little bit by saying, see, there had been so many things happening and the fear was so strong in
relation to these children that if you thought of one image, it was like they were monsters, on one level. So one of the things that I wanted to do was also to see that they had also the capacity to respond with a touch. And also using myself in that regard, by having them put their hands on my face, that it was a kind of a mirror for the family itself, then the people in the family. And then allowing them and encouraging them to do that with their own parents.

See touch that comes out of that kind of ambiance, which was there at that time, says things that no words can say. And that whole part of where there was a gentleness, that too is part of the whole thing. Now, for me, my touch is not going to send much to you unless I am integrated myself. Unless I really feel whole myself, then energy moves out. If I feel I have to touch, or I have to be careful about touching, that won’t work. Because it’s not a gimmick. And it’s not a strategy.

**CORRALES:** It’s living.

**SATIR:** It’s a living kind of passing back and forth energy. Now, when that condition is there, then I know that one touch with energy passing back and forth, a real feeling of one human being really touching another in a literal sense, is probably worth hours and hours of something that doesn’t contain that. You see, you know Ramon, you know about throwing the baby out with the bath?

**CORRALES:** Mm hmm.

**SATIR:** Well, some touch is used for sex purposes and aggression purposes. All right, and so many people have thrown touch out because it got used for those purposes instead of saying, “OK, that’s not the touch we want.” No more than we want to come out blaming in such a way. So we don’t throw out our words because we don’t use them, we find different words. And I frankly have to say that if I couldn’t have the energy that comes out with touch, I am certain I could not have the kind of really good results that I have.

**CORRALES:** The piece that I have found is that your energy is not one of investing in them, of attaching yourself to them. And that’s giving me a little bit more of a piece of how you then don’t encourage them to depend on you. But you share of yourself. And then they can go from
there to use their own resources. For you as I watch, that’s a very real, personal experience of sharing your energy without clutching onto them. Does that help them, in their own way, move on beyond the therapy without depending on it? Is that one way to look at it?

**SATIR:** Let me—several things were flooding my mind when you were talking. Let’s look at a frequent kind of thing where the child feels that they are the window dressing for the parent. And that when they behave and all that, Mama or Papa can feel good. When they don’t behave, Mama and Papa feel bad, and that they feel that they’re the center of the world’s universe. Well, that’s a big burden. Now, my value of myself is not dependent on what you do, whether you are a patient, a client, or whatever. Because if it ever gets to be that way, then I’ve got to work hard to make you do it.

**CORRALES:** Very hard.

**SATIR:** And that’s just a duplication of the other thing that we had when we were growing up. Young people often say to me, “What does happen then?” And I want to say it in a metaphor.

Let us assume that I have a candle in my hand. And the candle is lighted. And it’s lighted because I took a match and lighted it. Now, I have the candle in my hand. And you look at me, and you see the light. Now you probably, because you can see the light that’s in my hand, you can feel some light around you. Now, if I never help you, or help you to distinguish between the fact you’re seeing the light here, which could help you to light your candle. If I can’t help you do that, then the only time you have light is when you’re around me. That’s the same thing as dependence.

So what I do is, when I say that I’m in a wholeness, that’s like the candle is lighted. That’s like me and my relationship to their self-worth so that I can be modeling for someone else, so they can say they feel good around me, if that’s how it is. And often it is, as they tell me. For you to feel good, if the only way you can is be around me, that’s very nice for my ego. But that’s not very good for you.

**CORRALES:** That’s right.

**SATIR:** So that delicate kind of set of transactions which says, “Now,
you have light. Now, you can light your own.” And that is, to me, a very important piece.

So for me, the important thing is I’ve said many times, when you have the stars in your eyes from your own light, then I think we’ve done something together. And I have the stars in my eyes from my light.

**CORRALES:** And you take something with you.

**SATIR:** I take my light with me. You take your light with me. And when our lights are going together, we just double the light.

**CORRALES:** Yes. And I was wondering from there, Virginia, if you imagine yourself as the ongoing therapist for this family, and you’ve had just an interview, you just had an interview like this, what’s going on in your mind about what you would like to do with this family further, say in the next few days or weeks.

**SATIR:** All right, there were two other people mentioned, let me start there. One was Marcia, who is the egg mother of Aaron and Robbie. And the other one was Betty’s mother. And I would want to get to know those people and see if there was some possibility of some kind of support. That might help to reduce some of the scare that was involved. And I would, at a certain point in time, do a great deal with Bob and Betty as a couple, instead of just as parents, to begin to have some joy and light in their own lives.

As I suspect, and I think—I am not sure whether that happened or only I suspect it—Bob isn’t connected with his family. Betty isn’t with hers. But maybe some new connection could happen. And I would be looking all over for who else could come in, and who could be part of this. And maybe there would be some old connections that were very negative that we might be able to do something about.

You know, I’ve worked a long time, 46 years, working, helping people. And I know lots and lots of strategies, interventions, and all kinds of things, and I keep learning more. But again, like in a family like this, it’s so important, and of course, I feel so much about that little self inside of each one which has gotten covered up, or stunted, or something in their growth, and is waiting there to be opened.

Sometimes when I talk like this to people, especially certain
professionals, they think I went off the deep end. But that’s what we’re playing with all the time in a good way is helping the energy of each person to begin to open and to flower. And so, that feeling of being connected and helping that life force to show itself.

**CORRALES:** And those flowers may have some rocks around them.  
**SATIR:** They sure do.  
**CORRALES:** And that’s OK.

**SATIR:** And see, what’s also interesting in this family, they will have to have lots more reinforcements of the flowers, because the rocks have been so heavy.

**CORRALES:** Hello, I’m Ramon Corrales. And it has been my privilege to have known Virginia personally and to participate in a project to put her work on video. And here we are 20 years later looking at her work hopefully with some additional perspectives about her own genius and her own contribution to the field of therapy.

In the process, this tape probably brings out more than any other of the tapes we have on Virginia’s work. More than any other, it brings out her touch, movement, spatial sensitivity. How she puts Betty the wife on a chair so that they can see each other eye to eye, the physical context, how she uses touch to engage the children, and to educate the parents on how to engage the children, and retrain their skin, and their emotion, and their muscles, and their way of responding.

Virginia’s general theoretical approach you might categorize, or at least capture in the following terms: experiential, integrative, developmental solution focused, and spiritual with an in-depth spiritual perspective that is purposive. Along the experiential lines, we will later understand it better when we look at her personal creativity. But she has to be fully engaged in this setting with people and with the system in order for her approach to truly come out.

And her development, I should say, her integrative mode, you will see how, in this particular interview especially, very comfortable going from individual to system, from the internal world, the feeling, self-esteem to the external world of behavior and interaction. And all of those always in the context of a development view. Not asking
the question, “What’s wrong?” But, “What’s next? What’s possible?” And therefore, making her work tremendously solution-focused, potential-oriented, not pathologically-oriented. If we understand these dimensions about her theoretical assumptions, and also that she’s engaged always in a kind of large, in-depth, spiritual view that’s purposive, she engages families with a sense of their capacity as individuals and as a system to cope with their situation.
Video Credits

Special thanks to Virginia Satir for sharing her expertise.

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Virginia Satir (1916–1988) was an American author and psychotherapist, known especially for her approach to family therapy and her work with family reconstruction. She is widely regarded as the “Mother of Family Therapy.” She is also known for creating the Virginia Satir Change Process Model, a psychological model developed through clinical studies. Her most well-known books are Conjoint Family Therapy, 1964, Peoplemaking, 1972, and The New Peoplemaking, 1988.

Ramon G. Corrales, PhD, Interviewer, is a renowned author, self/leadership development expert, corporate consultant, and life/executive coach. Dr. Corrales received his doctorate degree in sociology from the University of Minnesota, with specialization in family sociology and organizational dynamics. He devoted the first part of his career to family therapy and family business. More recently, he has developed his own method for coaching and leadership team building. Dr. Corrales has devoted his career to the pursuit of several main passions: self-mastery, leadership mastery, relationship mastery, and spiritual mastery.

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**Therapeutic Issues**

ADD/ADHD                                 Grief/Loss
Addiction                                Happiness
Anger Management                         Healthcare/Medical
Alcoholism                                Infertility
Anxiety                                  Intellectualizing
Beginning Therapists                     Law & Ethics
Bipolar Disorder                         Parenting
Child Abuse                              Personality Disorders
Culture & Diversity                      Practice Management
Death & Dying                             PTSD
Depression                                Relationships
Dissociation                             Sexuality
Divorce                                   Suicidality
Domestic Violence                        Trauma
Eating Disorders                          Weight Management
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adolescents</td>
<td>Latino/Hispanic</td>
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<tr>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>Men</td>
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<td>Asian American</td>
<td>Military/Veterans</td>
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<td>Athletes</td>
<td>Older Adults</td>
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<td>Parents</td>
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<td>Couples</td>
<td>Prisoners</td>
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<td>Families</td>
<td>Step Families</td>
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<tr>
<td>LGBT</td>
<td>Therapeutic Communities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inpatient Clients</td>
<td>Women</td>
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