

## **“Open Cards”**

### **What are “Open Cards”?**

*Open Cards* is a treatment kit specifically designed to be used with incest families, but its use is also effective with a wide range of individuals, couples and families where there are communication difficulties and/or a lack of openness and intimacy.

### **Guiding Principles of “Open Cards”**

“*Open Cards*” was developed after over ten years of treating incest families at the Shiluv Institute for Family and Couple Therapy in Jerusalem. Families in which there has been sexual abuse are generally very closed, defensive, and opposed to outside intervention. They come to treatment in a state of crisis and feel they cannot trust anyone. Feelings of shame and aversion engulf them and alienate them from the community. Their desire to protect their family as a functioning unit contributes to their protective secrecy, making effective treatment very difficult.

The complexity of treatment with these families drove us to search for additional and creative ways to help them exit the world of secrets and enter a world of open and direct communication. The goals of “*Open Cards*” is to give families the opportunity to touch the pain, to 'put the cards on the table', to cope with the crisis and to find the motivation for treatment in the hope of rebuilding a healthier, stronger family unit which will protect its members in the future. We also hoped that, through creating a 'user friendly' tool, we could encourage therapists to engage in this difficult work.

Many cards in the kit show normative life events and allow of the building of trust and an honest discussion between the family and therapists. The kit eases the way for therapists and clients to identify problematic areas in the family, but also to recognize strengths and even proud moments. These are needed to reduce defensiveness and closing up by family members as well as to heal emotional wounds and to create a new, more hopeful definition of the family. Using the cards also helps in formulating a treatment plan, in deepening the treatment, in follow-up, and in evaluating treatment at its end.

### **Description of the Kit and its Use**

The kit is composed of three decks of cards and a timeline board. The first two decks of cards and the timeline board are appropriate for working with abuse as well as with non-abuse situations, and may be used in individual, couple, or family therapy.

### **1. Life Event Cards:**

The cards depict, both graphically and in words, personal and family life events, among them traumatic/disruptive events like illness and death as well as positive events like celebrations and successes. It is important to have positive events as part of the family's discussion in order to enhance the functional aspects of the family and to strengthen them in coping with the trauma.

*Goals:* To promote an open and honest discussion. We invite family members to speak in their own voice, thereby minimizing the enmeshment so commonly found in these families. We invite them to discuss the significance of life events and to begin to share their experience-sometimes for the first time- with the therapist and other family members.

### **2. Emotion Cards:**

These are cards that represent feelings and relationships via colored drawings of a panda family. These cards can be used on their own or applied to the timeline with any of the other decks of cards.

*Goals:* To allow expression of feelings through the introduction of a playful element. Especially effective in bringing children into the conversation.

### **3. Thoughts and Feelings Cards:**

These are cards which present sentences expressing thoughts, feelings, and symptoms which are common in situations of sexual abuse. These cards are aimed especially at working with victims, perpetrators, and others who were impacted by the abuse, both within and outside the family.

*Goals:* To allow for discussion about what happened in the family prior to and following the abuse. To convey psycho-educational messages. To help the victim experience family support. To help others develop empathy for the victim. To help the perpetrator better understand and get emotionally connected to the victim's experience. To promote the perpetrator's understanding of his distorted thinking and then to take responsibility for the abuse.

### **4. Timeline Board:**

A large paper board that has two axes: a horizontal axis that represents the passage of time of time and a vertical axis to represent the fluctuation of emotion—positive emotions above the horizontal axis and negative emotion below. This component is used to show personal and family life events over a

*Goals:* To enable the organization of important life events for the family on a continuum of time and emotion. To touch painful emotional content in a less threatening manner. To give space for normative and positive events to

exist alongside difficult or traumatic events. To make the process easier for children and others who have trouble communicating verbally by introducing this visually oriented game.

We conduct **orientation workshops** for therapists all over the country and help them learn creative ways to use the cards in a wide variety of applications.



