

CASE #2

JOHNSON FAMILY CYCLE
(cycle of despair)

- Allen is emotionally distant from other family members.
- Stepmother or father reach out in an effort to draw Allen into family functioning.
- Allen resists, sometimes by damaging property, being disrespectful to stepmother or other adults; or otherwise acting out.
- Father allies with stepmother in a coalition against Allen.
- Allen is sent away (bedroom, etc.)

- Parents and Allen react angrily against each other.
- Siblings, Bob and Steve, behave in a boisterous but age appropriate fashion, to draw parents in.
- Father and stepmother focus attention primarily on the younger children.
- Allen is viewed as distancing himself from the family by preferring adolescent or young adult activities and associates.

- Tension decreases, with Allen out of the immediate picture.
- Parents refocus attention on younger siblings and Steve.
- Allen withdraws into himself, with few viable emotional outlets, or seeks outside activities to individuate.

- Allen's behavior becomes acceptable.
- Parents accept Allen back into the family circle.
- Allen moves closer to father and stepmother, but does not consistently meet their expectations.

* * *

INITIAL TREATMENT GOALS:

1. Allen and parents will improve their interpersonal communication skills through weekly family therapy sessions.
2. Allen will learn to control his impulsivity and acting out behavior, both at home and at school. Progress will be discussed in weekly individual contacts with family counselor, and reinforced in family meetings.
3. Allen will become more involved in age-appropriate recreational and other activities which build self-esteem and confidence. Counselor will arrange and accompany Allen on some activities, as appropriate.

[NOTE: The foregoing family cycle and goals are based on a real client family, but for illustrative purposes all names have been changed to disguise the the client's identity.]