Session 19: Family Systems: The Roles We Played

Duration: 60 minutes • Recovery education group. Ensure all participants are seated and ready

Materials: Whiteboard; workbook family-map page; the Session 19 handout (My Family Map)

Learning objectives — by the end of this session, participants will be able to:

- Describe how a family adapts around addiction — roles, rules, and unspoken agreements
- Identify the role they played and one role they refuse to resume
- Name one family pattern they can influence and one they cannot control

Opening (3 minutes)

Newcomer bridge (60 seconds): This is Phase 3 — Rebuilding. The one idea today is that families organize around addiction in roles and rules that can be seen and refused. You are welcome here without earlier sessions; everything you need for today is in this session. Families organize around addiction the way a body compensates for an injury — other parts take on extra load until the compensation feels normal. Today, learn to see the system: the roles, the rules, and the part each of you played — so you stop being run by it.

Check-in prompt (8 minutes)

Name, craving 0–10, one word for your week — then: “Growing up or in your using years, who handled the crises in your family — and who pretended nothing was wrong?” Log every craving score on the roster.

Passing is honored — you may pass any question, prompt, or practice without explanation, step out and rejoin, and choose a partner-only option where one is offered.

Teaching (20 minutes)

Families organize around addiction the way a body compensates for an injury: other parts take on extra load, develop their own pain, and eventually treat the compensation as normal. Common adaptations include the enabler who shields, the hero who over-achieves to balance the shame, the scapegoat who absorbs the blame, the lost child who disappears, and the mascot who defuses with humor. The rules underneath are usually: don't talk, don't trust, don't feel. Recovery disrupts all of it — which is why families sometimes resist the very change they prayed for. Our work is modest and powerful: see my role, own my part, stop playing the old part on cue, and let other adults have their own reactions and their own recovery. We influence patterns; we do not control people.

- **Roles are adaptations, not identities** A role learned to survive a system can be retired when the system changes — including by us, one response at a time.
- **The three don'ts run the old house** Don't talk, don't trust, don't feel kept addiction safe. This program runs the opposite rules on purpose.
- **Change invites counter-change** When we stop over-functioning, others may escalate, guilt-trip, or test the old role. Expecting it — and having support for it — keeps us from caving or exploding.

- **Children are members, not messengers** Whatever the family work ahead, children are never couriers, spies, or judges between adults. Naming that here protects people who are not in the room.

Sources & Evidence — Facilitator background — do not teach

Group and family work in the practice literature treats the group as a place to learn new relational behavior, with cohesion and interpersonal learning as active ingredients (Yalom & Leszcz, 2020). Key sources for this session: Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (2006), TIP 47; Yalom & Leszcz (2020); Najavits (2002). Evidence strength: Moderate. Spiritual practice: Fellowship in family repair — correlates with interpersonal learning and corrective group experience; evidence: Moderate (Yalom & Leszcz, 2020). Full citations: Appendix H. The session's Scripture material is in its optional handout (Appendix I), as theological foundation, quoted from the King James Version.

'Evidence strength' grades the correlated mechanism, not the spiritual practice itself

Pause midway through teaching: ask, "What part of that sounds most like your life right now?" Take two or three answers, connect them to the teaching, and continue. Teach in your own words — the bullets are your map, not a script to read aloud.

Discussion questions (10 minutes)

1. Which role fits you best — and who taught it to you?
2. Which of the three don'ts was strongest in your house?
3. How has your recovery already changed a family pattern, for better or for friction?
4. What is one old-role invitation you can already see coming (a call, a holiday, a favor) — and what is your new response?

Skill practice (12 minutes)

Facilitator draws a simple genogram-style map on the whiteboard with a fictional family and labels roles and rules. Participants then sketch their own family map in workbooks — names, roles, rules — at headline level. In pairs, each person shares one pattern they can influence and one they are releasing to the other adults involved.

Personal application — homework (5 minutes)

This week, notice one moment the old role invites you back. Do not play it. Write what happened, what you did instead, and how it felt an hour later. Participants write it in their workbook before leaving. Facilitator: name the homework again at the door as people leave.

Facilitator notes and cautions

Family content surfaces loyalties and blame fast. Keep the frame on patterns, not verdicts about named relatives; redirect 'my mother is a narcissist'–style labeling to observable behavior and the participant's own choices. Any disclosure of current violence, child safety concerns, or exploitation follows program reporting policy the same day — privately, through the Program Director.

Closing (2 minutes)

Roles are adaptations, not identities — and an adaptation can be retired. This week, when the old role invites you back, do not play it. Write down what happened instead. Next session: boundaries — where I end and you begin.

Fidelity check for this session: objectives named at the start ☐ craving scores logged ☐ skill practice completed in full ☐ homework written down by participants ☐ session note filed today ☐