

AUDIRE

YEAR 1 ♦ OCTOBER

October Homework Handout

CHARACTERISTICS AND TRAITS OF ADULT CHILDREN OF DYSFUNCTIONAL FAMILIES

- **Denial:** There is an inability or refusal to see reality or a distortion of reality to fit ideals. There is a denial of one's feelings, needs, or desires and a fear that needs or dreams will not be met.
- **Black and White Perspective:** Black/white or either/or thinking predominates with a difficulty or inability to perceive or live in "gray" areas, mystery, or paradox.
- **Low Self Esteem:** Feelings of inadequacy, comparing self to others, and harsh self-criticism result in low self esteem. There is a sense of "not measuring up". Self-esteem is often dependent on providing for others or doing for them or on the approval of others. Hearing praise or positives or affirmations is difficult. and it is difficult to accept honest praise. Low self esteem is sometimes overcompensated by trying to appear superior.
- **Difficulties with Trust:** There is a difficulty with trusting one's self, one's reactions or feelings, and with trusting others. The ability to have "blind trust" in loved ones, peers, or authority figures is lost.
- **Living in Fear:** There are constant battles with fear, fear of losing control of one's feelings, behaviors, or circumstances, fear of abandonment, fear of rejection, fear of being vulnerable, fear of conflict, fear of not being good enough or "getting it right", fear of criticism or judgment, fear of failure.
- **Control Issues:** There is a great need to be in control of things and a fear of losing control of situations or ourselves.
- **People Pleasing Issues:** Because of the need for the approval of others, there is a desire to please others even at the expense of one's self.
- **Fear of Feelings/Inability to Feel Feelings:** The environment has created a belief that feelings are wrong or shameful, that it is inappropriate to share one's feelings so feelings should be hidden or kept inside, especially feelings of inadequacy, sadness, pain, and anger. Often in this environment, feelings become numb or frozen and are unable to be felt.
- **Fear of Anger/Conflict:** There is a fear of anger being expressed or conflict of any kind. Physical or emotional withdrawal occurs at the first hint of conflict. Even assertiveness is perceived as threatening. Angry people and criticism are frightening.
- **Identity Issues:** Identity is formed by other people's opinions of us. There is a sense of being different from others and no sense of knowing what "normal" or "appropriate" is. There is a tendency to create a façade that is acceptable to others.
- **Intimacy Issues:** The ability to be intimate is severely challenged, if not impossible, when there is no ability to trust, inability to be vulnerable, lack of awareness of feelings, afraid to reveal one's true self because of fear of rejection or abandonment, identity issues, and low self esteem.
- **Responsibility Issues:** There is a sense of responsibility for others' feelings and behavior and a sense that "I'm supposed to take care of everyone and everything" or "it's my fault when things go wrong". Sometimes there is a refusal or inability to take responsibility for anything.
- **Over-Reaction:** Repressed and suppressed emotions are often triggered by current situations and emotional reaction is exaggerated and out of proportion to the current event. There is a tendency to react rather than act and reactions are based on feelings rather than thought out responses and actions.

- **Play/Fun Issues:** Fear of appearing foolish, difficulty with spontaneity, difficulty or inability to let go, relax, and have fun, and a lack of knowledge about how to play and have fun. Life and one's self are taken very seriously.
- **Caretaking:** Life is lived from the viewpoint of helping others. There is an attraction to weakness in love and friendship relationships. Personal values are put aside in order to connect with another. Giving is used as a way of feeling safe in relationships. Responsibility is assumed for others' feelings, behaviors, dress. Self-esteem is bolstered by caring for others or relieving their pain.
- **Boundary Issues:** There is a lack of knowledge and awareness about personal rights. Other people are seen as extensions or reflections of one's self. It is common that there is a greater awareness of and attention to the needs, feelings, desires, dreams, and struggles of others than of one's own self. Boundaries are rigid and fixed or are non-existent rather than being flexible. There is a great need to self-protect and hide. The right to make mistakes or be imperfect does not exist or is greatly diminished. Standing up for one's self or taking care of one's own needs causes great feelings of guilt.
- **Perfectionism:** There is a great drive for perfectionism and harsh criticism of less than perfection. There are unreasonable expectations for one's self and for society. Failure is feared, but success is often self-sabotaged.
- **Obsessiveness:** There is a strong attraction to obsessive, compulsive personalities as well as compulsive and obsessive traits in oneself. Relationship patterns tend to be repeated. There is a tendency to become addictive or to marry addictive personalities.
- **Manipulative Behavior:** Manipulativeness is a way of life. Speaking or asking directly and clearly is often perceived as aggressiveness.
- **Isolation:** There is a sense of being different from others and not "fitting in" that creates distance and isolation. Protective barriers are also predominate and create isolation. Depression is epidemic, which further increases a sense of isolation.
- **Loyalty:** Loyalty and steadfastness are prized, even when loyalty causes personal harm to one's self or when the loyalty is unjustified. Excuses are made for others weaknesses out of a sense of loyalty.
- **Self-Neglect:** Attention is focused on solving the problems of others, helping them to realize their dreams and goals, protecting them, living by their values, getting involved in their social circles, comforting their pain, and tending to their hobbies and interests at the expense of one's own social circle, feelings, hobbies, needs, and values. There is a greater awareness of the feelings, needs, values, and dreams of the other than of one's own. Pleasing the other and neglecting self is a way of life.
- **Impulsiveness:** Impulsiveness, impatience, and a need for immediate gratification are usually present.
- **Loss:** There is a deep sense of loss and grief for the family that was not present emotionally or in a supportive way and for a lost childhood and lost dreams and hopes.
- **Neediness:** There is a great need for the love, affirmation, affection, and gratification that was not received in childhood, creating needy, dependent personalities. There is an expectation that relationships should and will fill every need. Approval is needed to feel good about one's self.