

GROWING INTO AN EMOTIONALLY MATURE ADULT

Do you know how old you are on the inside? Even though you're growing physically, sometimes you can get stuck at certain stages of emotional development. This can lead to significant personal and relational problems in your day-to-day life.

Think of a recent situation in which you experienced strong emotions. Then, read through the following list and mark each statement that you feel represents you best in that specific situation.

Emotional Infants

- Look for others to take care of them
- Have great difficulty entering into the world of others
- Are driven by the need for instant gratification
- Use others as objects to meet their own needs

Emotional Children

- Are content and happy, as long as they receive what they want
- Unravel quickly from stress, disappointments, and trials
- Interpret disagreements as personal offenses
- Are easily hurt
- Complain, withdraw, manipulate, take revenge, and/or become sarcastic when they don't get their way
- Have great difficulty calmly discussing their needs and wants in a mature, loving way

Emotional Adolescents

- Tend to often be defensive
- Are threatened and alarmed by criticism
- Keep score of what they give so they can ask for something later in return
- Deal with conflict poorly, often blaming, appeasing, going to a third party, pouting, or ignoring the issue entirely
- Become preoccupied with themselves
- Have great difficulty truly listening to another person's pain, disappointments, or needs
- Are critical and judgmental

Emotional Adults

- Are able to clearly, directly, and honestly ask for what they need, want, or prefer
- Recognize, manage, and take responsibility for their own thoughts and feelings
- Can, when under stress, state their own beliefs and values without becoming adversarial
- Respect others without having to change them
- Give people room to make mistakes and not be perfect
- Appreciate people for who they are and not for what they can give back
- Accurately assess their own limits, strengths, and weaknesses and are able to freely discuss them with others
- Are deeply in tune with their own emotional world and able to enter into the feelings, needs, and concerns of others without losing themselves
- Have the capacity to resolve conflict maturely and negotiate solutions that consider the perspectives of others

Adapted from Peter Scazzero's *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*

SIGNS OF PERSONAL HEALTH AND AUTONOMY

Are you a healthy person? Its normal to want to know if you are normal. Most likely, you're like other people and spend time comparing yourself to others, looking for any sign that something might not be quite right.

There's only one problem—**You're comparing your self to other flawed people.** When you do that, you gravitate to the lowest common denominator (which usually is no where near healthy).

The following list are characteristics of individuals that see themselves and the world around them in healthy ways. Read through the list and mark the ones you feel you do well. The ones you leave blank will show you areas that you may want to focus on as you continue to grow.

- I can identify and expresses my feelings in appropriate ways.
- I have confidence in my identity. I know who I am.
- I feel lovable and acceptable.
- I can clearly identify my strengths and weaknesses.
- My self-talk is appropriate and realistic.
- I feel like I have mastery over my story. I know how my past affects me.
- I'm able to discuss my story openly and completely with others.
- I have found a healthy balance between work, rest, and play.
- I am able to practice good self-care when necessary.
- I can comfortably ask for or seek help when needed.
- I am able to engage in and resolve conflict appropriately.
- When I make mistakes, I am able to grant forgiveness to myself.
- When others make mistakes, I am able to forgive them.
- I am comfortable standing up for myself when necessary.
- I am able to choose when it is appropriate to disappoint someone else.
- I am plugged into a community and have a good support system in place.
- When stressful things arise I am able to manage my anxiety.
- Power is equitable in my personal and romantic relationships.
- My body's somatic responses are under control and managable.

Note: I often refer to this list as a *Signs of Closure Checklist*. I use it as a way to measure if my client is ready to be done with the counseling process. Whenever you enter into counseling, **make sure your therapist has an objective way to measure your growth and progress.**

ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES DEFINED

When you grow up as child, whatever you experience within your family is considered normal simply because you don't have any other experience to compare it to. Yet, sometimes what you experienced may not actually be normal, but hurtful.

Below is a list of definitions explaining the differences between abuse, neglect, and dysfunction. Read through each one to see which, if any, of your childhood experiences would fit into the specific categories.

ABUSE

Emotional Abuse

When a child is regularly threatened, yelled at, humiliated, ignored, blamed or otherwise emotionally mistreated. For example, making fun of a child, calling a child names, and always finding fault are forms of emotional abuse. Emotional abuse is more than just verbal abuse. It is an attack on a child's emotional and social development, and is a basic threat to healthy human development.

Physical Abuse

Sometimes, often, or very often pushed, grabbed, slapped, or had something thrown at you and/or ever hit so hard that you had marks or were injured.

Sexual Abuse

Any time that a child is engaged in a sexual situation with an older person. It can include actual physical contact, such as fondling or rape, but it also includes making a child watch sexual acts, using a child in any aspect of the production of pornography, or making a child look at an adult's genitals. When the child is being used for sexual arousal of the adult or another person and when that person is in a position of power over the child, it is considered sexual abuse.

NEGLECT

Emotional Neglect

When parents relationally abandon a child, inattention to the child's needs for affection, refusal of or failure to provide needed psychological care, or simply have no time to spend with the child, in essence leaving the child to raise himself.

Physical Neglect

Failure to provide for the child's basic physical needs such as withholding, or failing to provide, adequate food, shelter, clothing, hygiene, medical care, education, and/or supervision, such that the child's physical, mental or emotional condition is impaired or at imminent risk of being impaired.

DYSFUNCTION

A dysfunctional family is one in which conflict, misbehavior, and often abuse on the part of individual members of the family occur continually and regularly, leading other members to accommodate such actions. Origins include untreated mental illness, co-dependency, and parents emulating or over-correcting their own dysfunctional parents. Dysfunctions usually arise from either inside or outside the family unit.

Internal Conflicts

Relationships within the family that include verbal, emotional, or physical abuse between parents, between siblings, or between parent and child.

External Conflicts

Elements outside the home that affect its stability include alcohol or drug abuse, extramarital affairs, gambling, unemployment, etc..

WHAT HEALTHY FAMILIES LOOK LIKE

Nothing shapes your life as much as your family. To find out what experiences were the most helpful while you were growing up, read through the following list of Healthy Characteristics Of Families. Mark the items that you may have missed out on.

My Family Communicated And Listend To Each Other

- Both parents were able to share their feelings freely with each other.
- Both parents shared equally in decision-making and discipline.
- My family limited the amount of time we watched television.
- Family members listened and responded to each other.
- My family encouraged individual feelings and independent thinking.
- Family members avided put-downs and hurtful talk
- Family members were able to participate equally in family discussions.
- My family communicated love and acceptance through non-verbal gestures (i.e. hugs and smiles).
- My family did not allow conflict to linger on, but dealt with it immediately and completely.

My Family Affirmed And Supported Each Other

- Both parents felt good about themselves.
- Each family member encouraged the others.
- My family didn't pressure members to succeed.
- Outside pressure did not destroy the positive mood of our family.
- My family exhibited loyalty to one another in the face of outside opposition.

My Family Taught Respect For Others

- Family members respected individual differences within the family.
- Family members showed respect to those who choose different lifestyles.
- My family respected individual decisions.
- Family members showed respect to those outside of the family.
- Family members were respectful of each other's property.

My Family Had A Sense Of Trust

- Both parents were able to trust each other.
- Children were gradually given more responsibility at they got older.
- Family members avoided embarrassing each other for the amusement of others.
- Family members were forgiving when trust was broken.
- Both parents and children were trustworthy.

My Family Had A Sense Of Play And Humor

- My family spent time together doing fun things.
- Family members did not allow outside activities to steal away time together.
- My family found inexpensive ways to have fun.
- My family's sense of humor was positive and uplifting.

My Family Exhibits A Shared Sense Of Responsibility

- Parents structured responsibility to age and ability.
- Parents used phrases like "Thank you", "You did a good job", and "I'm proud of you."
- My family expected members to live with the consequences of their actions.

My Family Taught A Sense Of Right And Wrong

- Parents agreed on what things are most important.
- Parents taught clear and specific guidelines about right and wrong.
- Children understood that they are responsible for their own actions.
- When judging behavior, parents looked at the intent as well as the action.
- Parents gave guidance in helping children make choices about right and wrong.

My Family Had A Strong Sense Of Family In Which Rituals And Traditions Abound

- My family treasured its stories and family history.
- My family had a place where we gather together as a people (extended family included).
- My family made plans to get together on a regular basis.
- Family roots and extended members were viewed with honor and importance.
- We valued family members of all ages, young and old, with equal respect.

My Family Had A Balance Of Interaction Among Members

- My family didn't allow work or other activities to take away from time spent with the family.
- My family discouraged cliques within the family.

My Family Had A Shared Religious Core

- Faith was acted out in daily family life.
- My family shared a common set of religious beliefs.
- Parents felt a strong sense of responsibility for passing on the faith, but did so in positive ways.

My Family Respected The Privacy Of One Another

- Parents enjoyed their children at every stage of growth (even the teen years).
- Rules became more negotiable as children grew older.
- Sexuality was recognized, but it was never the basis for prejudice or favor.
- Family members respected each other's friends, confidences, privacy, and time to be alone.
- Parents helped their children move toward independence.

My Family Valued Service To Others

- My family was concerned for others outside the family.
- My family served others in active ways, even as a unit.
- My family sought to simplify its own lifestyle to serve others better.
- My family was generously hospitable.

My Family Fostered Table Time And Conversation

- My family valued regular meal times together.
- Meal time was characterized by discussion of events and ideas.

My Family Shared Leisure Time

- My family balanced time spent together with outside activities.
- My family valued opportunities to spend time alone with each other.
- My family set aside time for family activities.

My Family Admitted To And Sought Help With Problems

- My family expected problems and considered them to be a normal part of family life.
- My family did not hesitate to see outside counsel when a conflict required extra help.

Adapted from Dolores Curran's *Traits Of A Healthy Family*