

Enmeshment

- 1) Enmeshment is a term used to describe when boundaries are either very weak or non-existent in a relationship, most commonly within a family. Enmeshed families aren't simply close. Closeness is healthy, but enmeshment is not. It can cause a myriad of problems for the children.
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- 3) Enmeshed families share very similar traits. The children are expected to think & act like their parents, to work in the line of work their parents want them to & basically live the life their parents want them to live rather than what they want to. Children are also usually the only close "friends" of sorts that the parents have. The parents demand or guilt trip their children spend plenty of time with them rather than create an environment that would make their children want to spend time with them. Children, no matter their age, aren't supposed to do things they want, such as spending time with people other than their parents. In fact, enmeshed parents don't want their children to leave home. Many adult children from these families didn't leave home at an appropriate age. Instead they lived with their parents well into their 20's, 30's or maybe never even moved out. These children also feel responsible for their parents, starting at a very young age. This can cause them to put their parents' needs & wants over their own, & later also over their spouse's needs & wants. It creates a tremendous amount of stress in a marriage.
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- 5) Children in enmeshed families frequently grow up feeling out of place when they aren't with their families. They also lack a real identity beyond who their parents tell them they are. Their self-esteem is usually quite low as well. Other common problems include a lack of relationship skills & lack of understanding of healthy boundaries. They also tend to be very distrustful of people who aren't related to them, yet tolerate any abuse their family members heap on them. Many of these adult children seek out romantic partners who need caring for, which is a pattern they learned in childhood from their needy parents.
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- 7) In order to end this dysfunctional behavior, the child of enmeshed parents needs first to recognize just how dysfunctional & harmful enmeshment is. It can be very hard to do this after a lifetime of believing the lie that the enmeshment means their family is closer & healthier than others, but it still must be done.
- 8)
- 9) Next, some distance must be set between parent & child. This is also very hard, I know, especially since most likely the parent will shame the child for wanting some space, but it can be done. Start small, such as not answering their call sometimes. If your parent complains, just say you were busy (which you were.. taking care of yourself) & couldn't get to the phone. Also don't spend as much time with your parent as you have. Pull away a bit. Don't be so readily available to your parent. If they need your help, unless it's a true emergency, tell them you can't do what they need now but you can in a few days. These small ways to start

setting boundaries will strengthen you & enable you to set bigger & better boundaries in the future.

10)

11) Learn who you are, too. Pay attention to what you truly want, like, think, feel... you may discover you are much different than what your parents always said you were. Or, you may have some similarities. Either way, get to know the real you & enjoy who you are.

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13) Recognize the false guilt. If your parent does their best to make you feel guilty for not taking their call one day or not visiting them, that is ridiculous. You're an adult with your own life! Don't accept that false guilt!

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15) If you have close friends who understand your situation, discuss it with them. Let them support you. And if you don't, check online for support forums. No doubt you can find one that helps you.

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17) Mostly, turn to God. Pray about your situation & let Him help you to heal. He loves you & will be glad to do that for you!