

Subtle Signs Of A Dysfunctional Abusive Family

Today's podcast is about the more subtle signs of a dysfunctional, abusive family.

No family is perfect, but some families are less perfect than others. Many of those "less perfect" families are downright dysfunctional & even abusive. Today I'm sharing signs of the dysfunctional & abusive family.

Parentification is a big indicator of a dysfunctional & abusive family situation. This is when the parent & child roles are reversed, & the child is supposed to care for the parent. Children in this position are supposed to do things no child should have to do, such as being their parent's emotional caregiver including such inappropriate things as listening to their parent's woes about their marital problems or sex life, nurse them back to health after a hangover or overdose, or even care for younger siblings as a parent should do. Parentified children are often described as growing up so fast because their role has forced them to behave as adults rather than allowing them to be children. They also lack healthy boundaries, tolerate one sided relationships & continue to keep their parents as their top priority over their spouse, children & even themselves. When they are growing up, people on the outside often think these children & their parents are close, & praise this relationship. This leads the child to feel confused & even ashamed that they are unhappy with this role.

Unmet needs are another sign of a dysfunctional, abusive family situation. Children have a lot of needs that go beyond the basic food, clothing & shelter such as nurturing, teaching & caring for their emotional health. Many abusive parents meet those basic needs, yet neglect those other important needs. Children who grow up this way have trouble with being inappropriately clingy in relationships & overly dependent or they go the opposite way & become very cold & aloof. Either way causes problems in their relationships.

Unrealistic expectations definitely point to a dysfunctional & abusive family. Some parents hold their children to higher standards than adults. Those children are never allowed to be in a bad mood or fail a test, yet their parents are allowed to yell or even hit the child just because they had a bad day at work or someone cut them off in traffic. This puts incredible stress on the child who feels they must be perfect as a way to earn their parent's love.

Parents who often fight in front of their child are creating a very dysfunctional & abusive situation. I grew up this way, & can tell you from experience it is a horrible way to grow up! I felt so insecure when my parents fought & also like I should do something to help them stop fighting. This is so typical of how children in this situation feel. It leads to these children feeling intense anxiety at any hint of conflict & also feeling overly responsible for the other people in their lives, as if they must take care of those people.

People who grow up in such environments grow into dysfunctional adults with a lot of relationship troubles. They may become controlling people who will do anything or hurt anyone they deem necessary to avoid further pain. More commonly though, they also may go the exact opposite way & become extremely submissive. They become people pleasers who will do anything for anyone even at the expense of themselves.

If any of this describes you, please remember some things.

You are only responsible for yourself. You are not responsible for meeting the needs of other people. Yes, you can help them, but doing so to the extent of harming yourself is dysfunctional.

There is nothing wrong or bad about caring for yourself & having reasonable boundaries. You need to take care of yourself just as much as & even more than you are willing to do for other people.

Family shouldn't demand all of your time, energy, finances, etc.

Healthy relationships are a two way street. Toxic relationships are not. They take while giving nothing back.

Love should be unconditional, never conditional. In other words, someone should love you based on who you are, not what you do for them. Conditional love is one of the signs of abusers.

Thank you for listening to my podcast!