

HOW INEFFECTIVE PATTERNS OF LIVING ARE DEVELOPED

Ineffective patterns of living can emerge from any family system where certain unwritten, even unspoken, rules exist.

It is a dysfunctional pattern of living and problem-solving which is nurtured by a "set of rules" within the family system. These rules make healthy growth and change very difficult.

Some common characteristics of ineffective patterns of living are listed below:

1. Difficulty in actually identifying feelings—"Am I angry?"; "Am I lonely?"; "Do I feel hurt?" Or what?
2. Difficulty expressing feelings—"I am feeling hurt", but how might others act toward me if they know how I feel? And worse, what might they think of me if they knew my true feelings?
3. Difficulty in forming or maintaining close relationships—"I want to be close to others but I am afraid of being hurt or rejected by them.
4. Rigid or stuck in attitudes and behavior—even though it hurts to live this way, it's the only way I know.
5. Difficulty adjusting to change.
6. Feeling overly responsible for other people's behavior or feelings—I am embarrassed by what someone else does.
7. Constant need for others' approval in order to feel good about myself.

8. Difficulty making decisions--worrying or thinking so much that you get "stuck".
9. General feelings of powerlessness over one's life--nothing I do makes any difference.
10. A basic sense of shame and low self-esteem over perceived failures in one's life.

Patterns of living develop through practice. By practicing a set of rules which we learn as we are growing up, or in some cases, after we have grown up, we become ineffective in our way of living.

Basically, how we treat ourselves and others is a direct result of the rules that we learned to follow as we were growing up. How we handle things like stress and conflict as adults is the result of how we learned to handle them as kids. How we choose to handle them in the present is up to us.

Let's examine some of these rules which keep us stuck in ineffective patterns of living:

1. It's not okay to talk about problems.
2. Feelings should not be expressed openly.
3. Communication is best if indirect, with one person acting as messenger between two others.
4. Unrealistic expectations--be strong, good, right, perfect. Make us proud.
5. Don't be "selfish."
6. Do as I say, not as I do.
7. It's not okay to play or be playful.
8. Don't rock the boat.

If you look more carefully at these rules, you will begin to see that they all have something

to do with protecting or isolating oneself from others by not taking the risk to get close. People growing up according to these rules don't realize that there are actually many families that do allow each individual to talk about problems outside the family, or to express emotions openly, or to make mistakes without undue criticism. They don't realize that in many families, being vulnerable and asking for help is both routine and okay. That isolating and denying oneself is not the best way to be.

CHECKLIST TO IDENTIFY INEFFECTIVE PATTERNS OF LIVING

PEOPLE PLEASING

1. I make excuses for other people's shortcomings.
2. I am a loyal friend even when that loyalty is harmful to me.
3. I feel guilty when I say "no".
4. I have sex with you even if I don't want to.
5. My fear of rejection determines what I say or do.
6. I fail to tell you what I want because I want you to be happy.
7. I rarely tell people when I'm angry. I'm passive, not assertive.

CONTROLLING

1. I blow off steam alot. I'm aggressive, not assertive.
2. My self worth increases when I solve your problems for you.
3. I like to make sure everything goes smoothly.
4. I am perfectionistic.
5. I am concerned about what you wear, how you look, or what you say in public.
6. I desperately want control and hate situations where I feel out of control.
7. I usually know what's best for other people.

AVOIDING

1. I am afraid of criticism and anger.
2. I try to avoid conflict situations.
3. I don't talk about my personal problems.

4. I don't like having to depend on other people.
5. I'd rather be alone.
6. I feel different from other people.
7. I tend to withdraw when there is conflict in my relationships.

EMESHED

1. We do everything together.
2. We don't have to talk to each other. We know what the other is **thinking**.
3. When you're upset, I'm upset.
4. If you left me, I don't think I could go on.
5. I put aside my own interests and hobbies and spend my time sharing yours.
6. I usually don't know what I want so I ask you.
7. It's very important that my son/daughter make this family proud.

Remember, everyone has certain behaviors that can fit some of these and everyone can fall into these behaviors at times. That doesn't mean it is unhealthy--it is the repeated pattern that can make it unhealthy. If these behaviors effect you; then it becomes a problem. A problem that can change, by first becoming aware of these behaviors in yourself.