



FAMILY SECRETS REVEALED: SIMPLE TRUTHS ABOUT HEALTHY FAMILY DYNAMICS

**A WEBINAR FOR EMPLOYEES FROM YOUR
EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM**

August 11, 2021



Federal
Occupational
Health



INTRODUCTION



OBJECTIVES

- Review dynamics of dysfunctional vs. healthy families
- Discuss the effects of dysfunction
- Highlight the habits of healthy families
- Share some “secrets” to building and maintaining a healthy family

DEFINITIONS



A dysfunctional family unit is one in which relationships or communication are impaired and members are unable to attain closeness and self-expression

A healthy family unit is one in which each member is equally valued, needs are met without judgement or criticism, and love is unconditional

SECTION 1

DYNAMICS OF FAMILY DYSFUNCTION

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1. Imbalance

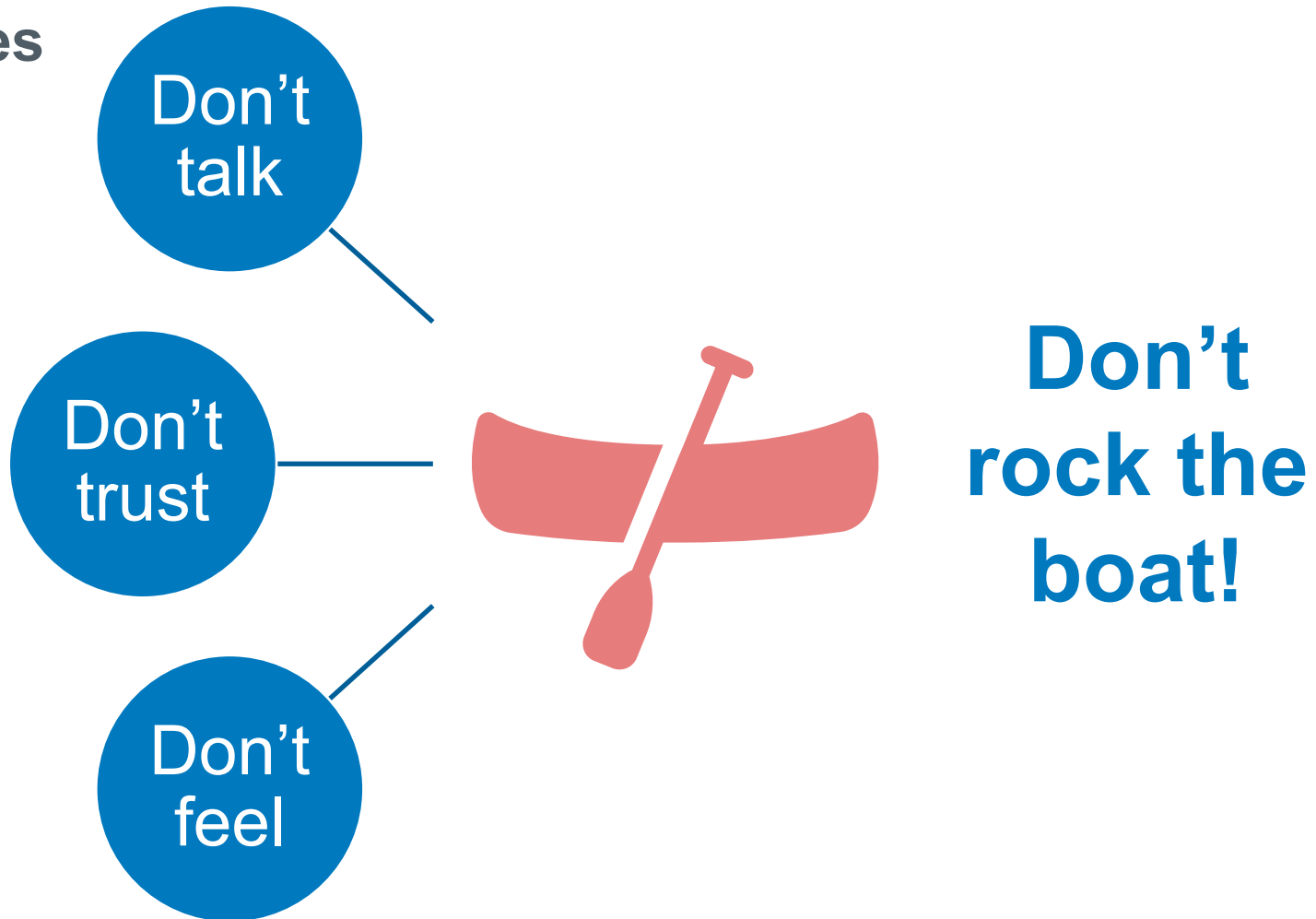
- Addiction
- Chronic/terminal illness
- Mental illness
- Developmental delays
- Parenting/discipline style

2. Characteristics/behaviors

- Abuse, neglect, violence
- Teaming up/taking sides
- Tag team
- Criticism
- Inconsistent discipline, unpredictability
- Codependency, enmeshment

DYNAMICS OF FAMILY DYSFUNCTION

3. Rules

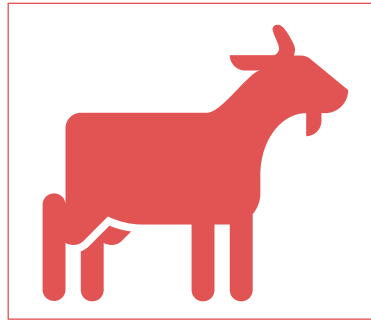


DYNAMICS OF FAMILY DYSFUNCTION

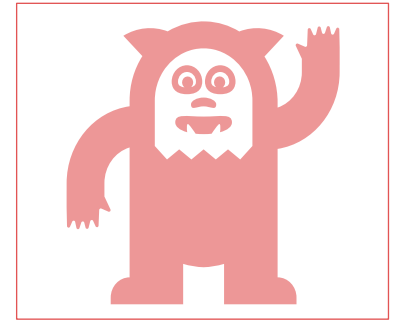
4. Roles



Hero



Scapegoat



**Mascot/
Clown**



Lost child



Enabler

ROLES

An example of how they might develop

Mom has four children, all two years apart in age. As each child turns two years old, she begins bringing them with her to the grocery store.

Sitting in the cart, the child grabs a box of cereal from the shelf...

Child #1

Looks at the box intently

Child #2

Gets his hand slapped as he reaches for the box

Child #3

Shakes the box, listens to sound, looks at pictures

Child #4

Takes the box from shelf

Mom

"Oh my gosh! She is already reading!"

Mom

"Give me that, you thief! You're going to end up in jail one day!"

Mom

"You're so funny! You make me laugh!"

Mom

is preoccupied and doesn't notice

EFFECTS OF DYSFUNCTION

- **In general**, it's common to see Involvement/intervention from police, mental health or medical professionals, and/or social services
- **Adults or children who experience neglect or abuse** tend to lose their sense of trust or connection
- **Youth**
 - Are often susceptible to becoming at-risk
 - May exhibit a loss of interest in extracurricular activities, let their grades drop, and become truant
 - Often run away from home, experiment with or abuse drugs and alcohol, engage in promiscuity and risk-taking, become enmeshed with toxic relationships, and show signs of suicidal thoughts and gestures

EFFECTS OF DYSFUNCTION

– Adult children of alcoholism/ dysfunction may:

- Become isolated and fearful of authority figures
- Be approval seekers who lose their identity in the process
- See themselves as victims
- Feel guilty when they stand up for themselves
- Lose the ability to feel or express feelings
- Judge themselves harshly or have very low self-esteem
- Develop dependent personalities and will do anything to avoid abandonment

– Health issues

260%

More likely to have chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)

240%

More likely to get hepatitis

460%

Higher rate of depression

1,220%

More likely to attempt suicide

SECTION 2

DYNAMICS OF A HEALTHY FAMILY

DYNAMICS OF A HEALTH FAMILY



Open communication
– Healthy conflict resolution



Trust
– Freedom to safely express emotions



Respect
– Appreciation of differences



Boundaries
– Co-parenting as a team



OPEN COMMUNICATION

Two kinds of conflict:

1. Perpetual

- Political and social issues
- Disagreements with your teenager
- Family feuds over favorite sport's teams
- Differing hobbies

Resolution

- Just let it go!
- Compromise
- Agree to disagree

2. Solvable

- Balance of time you and your partner spend with others or doing activities
 - Visiting in-laws vs friends
 - Nights in vs nights out per week
 - Weekends spent catching up on errands vs weekends spent catching up with each other
- Differing parenting or spending styles
- Who does which chores

Resolution

- Soften the conversation start-up



OPEN COMMUNICATION

Other tactics

- Relationships trump winning
- Stop the argument, take a break and come back for a redo
 - Reconvene when everyone has calmed down
 - Acknowledge each others' perspective and/or ask for clarification
 - Apologize for misunderstandings and behavior (e.g., *"I was wrong when I _____."*)
- Soothe yourself and each other
- Compromise
- Remain open to outside assistance from:
 - A therapist or spiritual counselor
 - Ongoing education
 - Support groups



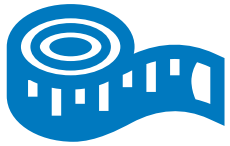
TRUST

- Be true to your word and follow through with your actions
- Remind yourself that building trust takes time
- Slow down and think before you act
- Value the relationship by being consistent
- Consider your family as part of the same team
- Always be honest
- Be helpful and authentically kind
- Be transparent with your feelings
- Show appreciation
- Do what you believe to be right
- Admit your mistakes



RESPECT

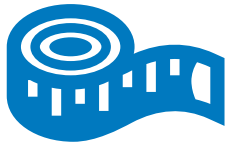
- Foster a safe environment where practical needs are met
- Approach one another with patience, concern, and empathy
- Teach through behavior modeling and constructive mentoring
- Discipline appropriately
- Celebrate strengths and encourage potential
- Make use of support from others



BOUNDARIES

Ways to approach

- Model boundary-setting in your relationships
- Firmly but kindly say “no” when needed without feeling responsible for the other person’s reaction
- Openly show and model respect for everyone’s time, space, and belongings
- Expect others to show respect, and correct when needed



BOUNDARIES

Relationships

- Be respectful of friend's, spouses, or partner's family
- Setting and vocalizing appropriate boundaries between core relationships is essential such as between your family and in-laws
- Initiate inclusion when making introductions, having conversations, and conducting activities between your relationships
- Be a life-long ambassador between your relationships and your family of origin

ARE DYSFUNCTIONAL FAMILIES DOOMED?

No! Here are some tips to initiate a change:

- **Start small:** Require respect for all family members, pay more attention to each other, and acknowledge what others are going through or dealing with.
- **Add structure and expectations:** Address physical safety and security by implementing boundaries. All hitting, pushing, property damage, and criticism must stop immediately.
- **Educate yourself:** Read as much as you can about healthy family traits and encourage your partner to read the same materials.
- **Use counseling or therapy:** Individual, couples, or family therapy can support your family's change process. Consult with the EAP and seek community resources for you and your family.

SUMMARY



- Take home what you’ve learned today and share it with your entire family
- Cultivate and maintain a successful, healthy, and happy family unit through:
 - Effective communication
 - Conflict resolution
 - Mutual trust and respect
 - Setting and enforcing boundaries
- **Remember:**
 - There is no such thing as a perfect family and no two families are exactly alike
 - There’s also no such thing as a completely flawed family

RESOURCES

Books

- ***Healing The Child Within: Discovery and Recovery for Adult Children of Dysfunctional Families***
 - C. L. Whitfield, 1987
- ***The Secrets of Happy Families: Improve Your Mornings, Tell Your Family History, Fight Smarter, Go Out and Play, and Much More***
 - B. Feiler, 2013

Website

- National Council on Family Relations
 - ncfr.org

Online Articles

- 39 Unhealthy Signs of a Dysfunctional Family
 - liveboldandbloom.com/09/relationships/dysfunctional-family
- The New Normal – Healing From a Dysfunctional Family
 - everydayhealth.com/healthy-living/healthy-home/new-normal-healing-from-dysfunctional-family

Podcast Episode

- The Terri Cole Show
Is Your Family Dysfunctional?
 - terricole.com/is-your-family-dysfunctional

THANK YOU



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