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# **SIGNS YOU WERE RAISED IN A TOXIC FAMILY**



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The family is the smallest unit where we can build a community. For some of us, our family became a source of trauma. Healing from a difficult childhood can be challenging and most of the time, we carry those burdens as we become adults. One way to move forward first is to acknowledge if you are raised in a problematic environment. Here are five of the most common signs you grew up in a toxic family.






## **BOUNDARIES ARE HARD TO CONSTRUCT WITH OTHER PEOPLE.**

In Psychology, this term is called Enmeshment. **Enmeshment** is when the boundaries are unclear between two individuals, typically with family members. While it is important to be close to family members, boundaries must still be respected. For instance, some family members invade our privacy in ways like reading our journals, tracking our every move when we go to certain places, and more while still defending themselves by telling us that it is a normal thing since we are a family. As we become grown-ups, we find ourselves second-guessing when someone is trying to invade our boundaries. This can also lead to distrust, which will be our second point.



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## **YOU HAVE ISSUES WITH FORMING TRUSTING CONNECTIONS WITH OTHERS OR BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS.**

Have you ever felt a struggle in trusting other people? Trust issues can be common, but if you find it more difficult than an average person to trust others, it results in poor quality of relationships. Moreover, it is not just about giving trust to others, but it is also about trusting oneself. For someone raised in a toxic family, promises and expectations are not often fulfilled during childhood creating distrust and insecurities. As an adult, you feel like people around you will always fail you even though they might have good intentions.



## **YOU CANNOT DIFFERENTIATE YOURSELF WELL FROM OTHERS WHICH CAN MAKE YOU A PEOPLE PLEASER.**

Low differentiation of the self happens when you cannot have your own stand on certain things. You tend to conform and you find it hard to decide based on your own needs. As a result, you depend greatly on the acceptance and approval of other people, making you a people pleaser. The decisions you make are not for you but based on what can make other people feel better. This stems from childhood when the caregiver is: unavailable, physically or emotionally; dismissing the child's emotions; and manipulative.



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## **SELF-CRITICISM IS ALWAYS PRESENT.**




When a child's wrongdoings are constantly noticed more than the right things that they do, they develop a sense of perfectionism. For some, they believe that in order to gain their caregivers' love, they must work hard. As adults, we have the tendency to be too hard on ourselves and find it difficult to appreciate even small wins. A small mistake can feel like it's the end of the world and the word failure does not exist in your vocabulary.

## **PEOPLE MANIPULATE YOU AND YOU MANIPULATE OTHERS IN RETURN.**

If you see people's behaviors as transactional, chances are, you have experienced manipulation. Manipulation is a common trait in toxic families. For example, in order to control a child's behavior, a child must do something in order to get a specific thing. While this can be used as a reward system, some family members use this in a way that is abusive. Growing up in this kind of family dynamic can make you feel that manipulation is normal, allowing you to be manipulated and manipulate other people as well.



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These signs might be present in some of us but thankfully, we can always move forward. Since we are able to identify some characteristics of a toxic family, we have to take a step towards self-work.



Now, let's consider these five ways to move on from our traumatic past.

## **BE AWARE OF YOUR TRIGGERS.**




Like any other mental health issue, the first step in coping with a traumatic past is acknowledging it and knowing what triggers you. When we're able to identify how we react to certain situations, we can change the way we see them and build a better perspective.

## **LEARN HOW TO SET BOUNDARIES.**

Not just with family members, setting boundaries is an essential component of healthy relationships. Remember that you have the right to create guidelines on how you should be treated. Start by doing some self-reflection, establishing your limits, and later on practicing communicating your preferences to others.



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## PRACTICE SELF-EXPRESSION.

Speaking of communicating our preferences, we have to practice expressing our needs and wants. Most individuals who had a rough childhood do not have the ability to fully express themselves because of the fear of being judged or rejected. Start somewhere where you feel comfortable. For example, some people feel at ease writing their thoughts using a journal. For others, they feel supported when they join certain groups or communities with the same experiences, knowing they are not alone. Look for the healthiest way to channel your thoughts and emotions so that later on, you will feel more comfortable sharing them if needed.






## ANCHOR YOURSELF AND YOUR WORTH.

As we mentioned earlier, people with unhealthy family dynamics do not have a clear understanding of who they are as a person, so they tend to anchor their worth on other people. Self-worth means respecting and accepting yourself. Bear in mind that you are valuable not because you are capable of doing certain things, but because you are you. Identify the things that do not determine your self-worth, for example, money, status, titles, attractiveness, and so on. After that, work on the way you talk to your inner voice (who criticizes you a lot!), and don't let it win.



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## LASTLY, LET GO. DETACH YOURSELF FROM THE PAST.

Letting go does not mean we are invalidating our experiences. Detaching ourselves from the dark past means that this phase is done and it is time to move forward. Moreover, according to a psychologist named Daniel Kahneman, humans are risk averse and so we are more inclined to stay in the status quo. Thus, moving forward or staying where we are can be both challenging. There are various ways to do this such as seeking professional help but small steps like managing our thoughts, setting boundaries as we mentioned, and knowing our self-worth can be a good start.



Remember that when we cling to our past, we will never fully enjoy the beauty of the present. Let's start creating our own lives no matter how difficult our past environments may be. Lastly, when we are able to move forward, we are also cultivating a better environment for our future family.

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