

Handouts



Characteristics of Life Experiences

In 1979, Jane Middleton-Moz and Lorie Dwinell identified the following 21 characteristics adult children of alcoholics may exhibit. These characteristics may also be exhibited by anyone that has suffered any painful experience. Because of our unique experiences growing up, we all react differently to different traumatic events in our lives. In fact, what one person finds to be extremely traumatic, another person may not find traumatic at all. Without healing intervention of some kind, when traumatic experiences happen in our lives our behavior may be affected and we may begin to exhibit some of these characteristics.

1. **Fear of trusting.** Some people grew up believing that others are unpredictable and cannot be trusted. They found when trusting others, they were let down and hurt. These people may have great difficulty in trusting others or trusting that their feelings or needs will be taken care of.

2. **Continuing sense of guilt.** Some survivors of trauma believe they caused the trauma in their lives and are responsible for the behavior and actions of others. They generally won't do anything to "rock the boat" for fear that they will be blamed for any failure, but this also means they will not take an opportunity to create positive change.

3. **Hyper-responsibility or chronic irresponsibility.** Some people become extremely responsible at an early age, the "20-year-old-eight-year-old." These individuals often feel if they do not take responsibility for getting everything accomplished, it will not get done. Conversely, some have learned not to accept responsibility for anything. That way, if anything goes wrong, "It was not my fault. You cannot blame me for anything."

4. **Perfectionist.** Depending upon the trauma, some individuals grew up believing they must do everything perfectly. They developed a fear of making mistakes or doing something wrong because when mistakes were made previously, there were severe consequences. They may spend way too much time on inconsequential details, drawing attention away from other important issues.

5. **Counter-dependence or fear of dependency.** Some people may learn through experiences that, "I do not need to depend on you, I can do it myself," while some may learn to fear depending on others and, as a result, will not share responsibilities or emotions.

6. **Need to be in control.** Because of feelings of not having any control of life in younger years, some people overcompensate in later years by wanting to control everything. This can lead to micro-managing, overbearing parenting, etc.

7. **Difficulty hearing positives.** Because of poor self-images, some individuals have difficulty accepting positive feedback from others, asking themselves, "What do they really want?" or feel pain or loss upon hearing others speak positively about them.

8. **Overachievement or underachievement.** Individuals may try to improve their self-esteem and sense of not being loved by seeking praise for accomplishments. This could be getting good grades in school, joining every club and excelling in sports, or spending extra time at work and volunteering for every committee. Conversely, some may attempt to do very little so they cannot fail and cannot be blamed for anything.

9. **Poor self-images.** If people internalize the abuse, neglect, or emotional distance that others direct toward them, self-images may be damaged, feeling they just are not good enough. This could greatly impact motivation to accomplish positive things.

10. **Compulsive behaviors.** Some individuals become alcoholics or workaholics, compulsive gamblers, over-

eaters, over-spenders, or behave in other compulsive and unhealthy ways. These behaviors are often avoidance to feeling grief and pain from the past traumas.

11. **Need to be right.** Sometimes the need to feel loved is replaced with the need to be right. People may fear being wrong or inappropriate because of baggage from the past. Sometimes being right is more important than relating well with others.

12. **Denial.** Through denial people protect themselves by ignoring the pain of reality, choosing denial over dealing with issues concerning those around us, because that may lead to the end of a relationship and feelings of abandonment and failure.

13. **Fear of conflict and anger.** Avoiding conflict often develops due to fears of the consequences or fear of an individual's own unexpressed rage. This could include isolating from others or always accepting blame, but ultimately losing that person's own identity in the process.

14. **Chaos junkies.** If chaos was the norm growing up, some people find themselves more comfortable with chaos and conflict than with peace and cooperation. Some use chaos to hide from other feelings and some choose professions that are always dealing with chaos.

15. **Fear of feeling.** Some people were not able to safely express or allow feelings, because if they did, getting hurt or abandoned was a result. They learned to withhold feelings or lost the ability to feel or express emotions. Without intervention, they may continue to act cold or emotionless today.

16. **Frequent periods of depression.** Depression is when expectations are not met and individuals begin to believe that they never will be. Eventually feelings of anger or disappointment are turned inward against oneself and may show as symptoms of depression.

17. **Fear of intimacy.** We may have learned that intimacy leads to being emotionally or physically hurt. We may become unwilling to feel close to anyone and find ourselves pushing others away.

18. **Fear of incompetence.** This may also be called the "impostor syndrome" when one begins to believe that if people really knew them, they would not like them. This person may act in ways that do not feel true to his/her nature, putting on a false face hoping to be more acceptable to others.

19. **Hypersensitivity to the needs of others.** Some learned to make life safer by being extremely aware of the changing moods of others. These individuals may scrutinize the behaviors of others in an attempt to predict how they will behave next. This affects one's ability to focus on other issues.

20. **Repetitive relationship patterns.** This may be an attempt to recreate the painful experiences of childhood by returning to what was normal. This could also be a reflection of feelings of low self-esteem. Individuals may look to find or create unhealthy relationships over and over.

21. **Inability to relax or let go and have fun.** When others were playing and having fun, some children were learning to survive in difficult situations. Not only did they not learn how to relax and play, but may have a fear of doing so.

Hunters and Gatherers

-Recognizing Gender Differences-

If we make the analogy of men as hunters and women as gatherers, many aspects of our collective behavior seem to make more sense. Understanding this analogy provides insight of some current generalized differences between men and women. If we can recognize what it takes to be a successful hunter or gatherer, many interesting correlations can be made when learning to understand each other.

If we consider men as hunters, this generally solitary activity takes place in nature and away from the confines of the village. The hunter must be silent and well focused upon the task at hand. Becoming distracted could result in loss of prey, which could lead to people going hungry. The hunter is defined by his ability to hunt and it is essential that he excel in his task. Through his hunting experiences, he has found successful techniques and he sticks with them.

If we were to convert this into modern behavior today, we may find that men tend to be silent or less talkative. We may also find that men become so focused upon a task that they tune out other things going on around them. We may see that men define themselves by their accomplishments and feel the need to excel at something to reflect their sense of value. We may find that men develop routines based on a previous success and then they stick with it. Does any of this seem familiar?

If we consider women as gatherers, this was usually a group activity where young children were not only included in the activity, but were also cared for simultaneously. This is no surprise as these women were breast-feeding their children as they gathered. They had to keep an eye out for potential danger, but did not need to be silent like the hunters. The day was spent in cooperation as gatherers shared the activity and shared conversation. If we were to convert this style of thinking into modern behavior, we may find that women are much more comfortable communicating than men, and are willing to share in greater detail. We see women as highly capable in multi-tasking, able to accomplish many activities at the same time – different from men. Women accept the major role in watching the young children – different from men. Women are more cooperative working in a group setting – different from men. Does any of this seem familiar?

Men and women approach problems differently, seek solutions differently, express love and affection differently, think about things differently, perceive things differently, and prioritize differently. As we acknowledge that these differences are normal and supposed to be there, we gain insight into how we may better relate to our partners. Instead of men treating their women as hunters, learn to treat them as gatherers. Instead of women expecting their men to respond as another gatherer, expect them to respond as a hunter.

Giving Effective Feedback

Feedback is two-way communication between people to better assure clear communication. It is most effective when feedback is specific and provides a balanced description of the situation. It should take into account the needs of each person and should involve something that can actually be changed.

Get to the point.

- I wanted to talk to you about...

Describe what you know and how it is a problem for you.

- I saw...
- I was told...
- I found...

Describe how you feel about what you know.

- It upsets me when...
- I feel hurt that...
- I'm concerned by...

Encourage the other person to share their perspective.

- Why did you...
- What were you thinking when...

Ask as many questions as you need to understand their perspective.

- Who? What? Where? When? Why?

Discuss specific solutions that can meet both of your needs.

Select the one that you will both agree to work on.

Check in to be sure that you are both clear on whether your preferred solution is working. If necessary, select a different solution.

What is Conflict?

Perhaps the simplest way to think of conflict is to think of a specific instance when differences are getting in the way of what you want and it's drawing an emotional or physical reaction from you. In this way, a conflict can be one person's internal dilemma, a disagreement between two or more people, or a war between countries. Conflict can be based on any number of differences.

Gender Differences

While any two people can have a different interpretation of the same set of circumstances, this can happen even more readily between men and women. By nature and by upbringing, men and women often have different ways of looking at and responding to the world.

Cultural Differences

Being raised in different cultures can give people dramatically different interpretations of situations, behaviors, and conflicts. We may also respond to conflict in significantly different ways based upon these cultural differences. What one person sees as a huge issue may not be so important to the other. The physical or verbal reactions might be dramatically different and yet each one feels appropriate in how they behave.

Value Differences

We can readily understand that what is important to one person may not be important to another, especially if we are not directly involved in the conflict. Consider a husband who grew up taking risks and enjoying the excitement of it. Now consider a wife who grew up in a traumatic family situation and all she wants is safety and security. These two may have grown up with different priorities and very different values. These differing values must be addressed for a relationship to evolve and last.

Perceptual Differences

Interestingly enough, there doesn't have to be a conflict in real life; we may simply believe there is a conflict. Have you ever blamed someone for something important that went wrong? You were absolutely certain that this person was at fault. You may have been accusatory, only to find out that someone else was at fault.

Competition for Limited Resources

How many times have people and countries gone to war because there were not enough resources to go around, or because one wanted what the other one had? This concept has many variations. People may compete for a job. Children can fight over a toy they both want, while keeping anyone else from playing with it. A husband and wife may argue over how money is spent.

The Seven Fs of Conflict

Our Habits During Conflict

Here are seven typical responses to conflict. Our life experiences have generally taught us to respond to conflict in one of these seven ways (with minor variations). We can also develop different responses for different circumstances. For instance, a conflict with your boss might cause you to behave differently than a conflict with your children.

Fight - We may have grown up in family systems that taught us to fight for whatever we needed. If we were not willing to fight for something, we may not have gotten it. Or, if we were not willing to fight for ourselves, somehow we ended up losing something we did not want to lose. Sometimes we ended up hurt.

Flight - For some of us in times of conflict, it was easier to leave. If we stayed around, something worse would happen. At the very least, if we left, we would not have to deal with the emotions involved in the conflict.

Fold - The simplest way to get past conflict may be to surrender. We give in or give up and allow the other person to “win.” This is another way of avoiding conflict. The problem is the more we keep giving in, the more we give up any sense of our own value or self-worth. Alternately, some may surrender as a way of saying, “See how good I am? I’ll be a martyr and give in to you.”

Fake - Are you familiar with the couple who acts very loving and affectionately towards each other in public, but once they’re behind closed doors they fight like cats and dogs? Sometimes it’s very obvious a couple is having problems, but they feel compelled to put on a fake front in public. These individuals likely grew up in families that taught them to keep their true feelings hidden from others.

Fudge - I’ll give a little if you give a little. Maybe we can negotiate a resolution we can both live with. At first glance, this seems to be an effective means for resolving conflict (and it can be), but it doesn’t necessarily get you where you want to be. It means we both might be giving up something we do not want to give up. It can also allow some people to secretly think, “You gave in a little bit. That shows you were wrong.”

Freeze - Rather than taking a more active approach, regardless of whether that would help or hurt our relationships, a person may simply do nothing. Like a deer in headlights, whether based in fear, indecision, or confusion, this person can be surrounded by conflict and not respond to it.

Fair - Let’s take the time to find out what our real needs are in the conflict. We can explore alternate solutions that may allow both of us to walk away feeling like we’ve got what we wanted. This recognizes that we may not know what the other person needs to resolve the conflict and we should communicate better.

Collaborative Conflict Resolution

Here is one step-by-step process for collaborative conflict resolution.

Be specific about the problem, and each other's needs.

- Define the problem in terms of each other's specific needs, not the specific solution you are seeking. It is important to stick to resolving one problem at a time to make this most effective.

Brainstorm the possible solutions together.

- There are no points lost for creativity. Each of you can contribute to the possible solutions. Reinforce that everyone's participation and input is valued and respected and that one person isn't dominating the process over any others.

Jointly select the solution(s) that may meet both of your needs.

- Again, one person shouldn't be controlling the process. Together, consider the possible consequences of all your possible solutions.

Agree on a plan for who is going to do what toward resolving the conflict.

- Each individual is responsible for being a part of making positive change. Make sure that each of you is clear on who is going to do what, and when.

Begin making the changes you have agreed upon.

- The sooner you can begin, the better. Get started.

Evaluate both your efforts.

- Did you each do what you said you would do? Is the problem solved or do you need to improve on some steps of this solution? Do you need to try another solution?

As you move through the collaborative conflict resolution process, keep in mind that you are working toward a worthy goal. You may find a need to change the path you are on to get there, but keep the goal in mind – it is still worthwhile.

Six Words for Clear Communication

One key to healthy and effective communication can boil down to six words:

open	want	direct
mean	clear	say

Think of them like this:

- Be OPEN about what you WANT.
- Be DIRECT about what you MEAN.
- Be CLEAR about what you SAY.

While these words may seem easy to follow, we communicate with our habits dragging behind us. These communication habits can often get in the way of clear communication so practice is essential.

We may learn to not be completely open. We might be afraid of what other people may think about us. We may have been taught that openly wanting something is greedy or self-centered. If others choose to, how could they help us get the things we want if we do not share what that is?

Another poor communication habit is trying to get people to understand our meaning when we are not being direct. Examples include trying to be so subtle that people can't catch our real meaning, for instance, telling someone else instead of the person intended with hopes that it gets back to them, or saying something but hoping our tone of voice or body language conveys something else. We can waste a great deal of time and energy being indirect and still not get our message across.

While we may understand how important it is to be clear in our communication, poor communication habits can still send us off-track. We can even use the same words while trying to describe what we want, but two people could still interpret those words differently.

For example:

Mike: "You are always making us late."

Sharon: "We're not always late."

It is important to check with the other person to assure that our messages are being received in the way intended.

Positive Parenting

A healthy/loving/positive parent:

Lets go of baggage. Growing in wellness allows us to recognize that our experiences of the past do not have to limit our choices in how we feel and behave today.

Shares unconditional love and affection. At times, we may not agree with the choices and behavior of our children, yet we can still love our children unconditionally.

Learns and practices patience. With our children or in any other part of our lives, patience helps us to make rational choices based on caring, respect, and love.

Practices good coping skills. Make sure that you are including stress-release activities as a regular part of everyday living. Share this with your children to help build their resiliency.

Is fair and consistent. Consistency helps us to establish trust, and when children know what to expect they can build and practice their behavior accordingly.

Practices open communication. Effective communication is an ongoing and vibrant process requiring attention and practice. It is also great role modeling for our children.

Encourages growth and healthy risk-taking. Encourage your children to take chances in a safe way. Find the balance between being protective, and allowing them to struggle and grow.

Learns about age-appropriate development. There are many free resources available to learn more about what to expect at every age and stage of your child. Take advantage of them.

Practices emotional self-control – is emotionally open. This is another area for great role modeling with your children. Learn to share your positive feelings in a good way, and to express your negative feelings in a healthy way. Show and teach this to your children.

Establishes clear boundaries. Be a proactive parent. Teach your children where their boundaries are and your expectations of them.

Does not accept inappropriate behavior. This brings us back to the consistency issue above. On those days when we are too tired or distracted, we may allow behavior that we otherwise would not, sending mixed messages to our children.

Identifies clear and appropriate consequences. Our children should understand the direct connection between their unacceptable actions and the resulting consequences.

Positively reinforces behavior. Catch your child doing something good and make sure that they know how pleased you are that they have made good choices on their own.

Loving Discipline

Be the parent. Do not worry about being a best friend, a buddy, or being “hip.” You are their teacher, protector, role model, and much more. Above all you are their parent and the influence that shapes their lives.

Establish priorities. Are you expressing love or anger? When facing conflict with your children over their choices or behavior, you may feel yourself becoming angry. It is okay for you to share that you are angry, but make sure that your words and actions are demonstrating that you love them.

Exit or wait. Whatever the emotion – anger, sadness, grief, or something else – if it is preventing you from thinking clearly about loving discipline, then wait to handle discipline when your thoughts are calm and collected.

Verbalize, do not criticize. Speak with your child in a good way about whatever the problems are, but protect your child’s self-esteem. Be a role model for communication that can be open and caring, even in conflict.

Get your child’s input. Discuss the concerns you have, but find out what your child’s thoughts are about what happened. Together, discuss the appropriate consequence, and what changes are needed to prevent the same problem in the future.

Stop what does not work. If you have told your child “a thousand times” and the unacceptable behavior continues, your approach clearly is not working. Change your approach. If your child is old enough, work together to find a lasting solution.

Keep it short. Children have shorter attention spans. Length does not reinforce or make the lesson more effective. Instead, keep it short but meaningful.

Stay in the present. Deal with one issue at a time. Reminding our children of past problems does not contribute to solving today’s concern. It isn’t proactive or productive, but instead focuses on blame, shame, guilt, and our inability to solve our previous problems.

Put it in writing. If your child is old enough to read and write, put your resolution in writing as a visible and clear reminder of the changes that are expected. When it is clear that the problem is in the past, get rid of the paper as it would only serve as a reminder of an earlier problem.

Restore good feelings. Remember the priorities – your children should always understand that you love them. Address the issues, solve the problems, but help them feel good by reminding them of all the things they are doing well. The conflict of the moment is only a circumstance, not a reflection of who they are.

Seven Gifts

Our cultural traditions taught us lessons for living successfully. They helped us understand the world around us, taught us how to relate to the world, and guided us in our relations with other people. Some of those lessons are reflected here.

The gift of the Mind includes:

Joy for learning	Creativity	Decision-making	Continued learning
Mental health	Vision	Goal setting	

The gift of the Body includes:

Physical health	Rest/relaxation	Hygiene	Exercise
Proper nutrition	Sleep	Physical affection	

The gift of Spirit includes:

Prayer	Energy	Purpose	Spiritual health
Ceremony	Happiness	Passion	

The gift of Culture and Community includes:

Cooperation	Family	Values	Empathy
Teamwork	Traditions	Charity	

The gift of Self includes:

Emotional health	Meditation	Beliefs	Motivation
Ethics	Morals	Contentment	

The gift of Earth and the Elements includes:

Connection	Renewal	Song	Growth
Balance	Cycles	Teachings	

The gift of the Creator includes:

Wisdom	Love	Compassion	Empowerment
Peace	Joy	Forgiveness	

Three Steps to Changing a Habit

Step One: Interrupting my patterns of behavior.

Recognizing the pattern you have created and continue to follow.

Step Two: Creating positive and negative emotional leverage.

What will I gain? What will I lose if I do not change? Who will it affect?

Step Three: Determining my new, empowering behavior.

What new behavior do I want to replace my old behavior pattern?