



Dysfunctional Family Roles

Family members play a role in one of the member's addiction to either alcohol or drugs. When a family is dysfunctional, each member assumes different roles to cope. Usually, a family that takes on certain roles suffers from some form of addiction, like drug and alcohol abuse. Although it is not determined that the family itself causes addiction, the family members and their roles contribute either to the wellness of everyone in the family or the deterioration of the relationship among the members. The roles of the family must be determined so that the appropriate action will be taken to make sure that everyone in the family can cope with everything that happens within the home.

Family roles and addiction are closely related to each other. How is this so? Drug and alcohol addiction are just two forms of addiction that afflicts the society, including the family. It is said that the family is the smallest unit of society. Although drug and alcohol abuse do not necessarily start within the family, each member plays a certain role. Family roles are assumed for the members of the family to be able to cope with the problems that the family is facing, and this includes addiction. Codependency happens when the family members make decisions regarding what other members of the family need, and not only their own needs.

What is codependency?

This kind of relationship keeps the people involved, in this case a family, from living full and rewarding lives that they could otherwise enjoy. It occurs when the relationship is more important to you than yourself. All the effort of trying to make the family work is on your part, while the member with a problem exerts no effort at all. In other words, it is over-involvement in someone's life.

Codependency happens when a family member or family members are preoccupied by one's behavior. They feel unnecessarily guilty when they do not take care of that person's needs. The codependent member or members do not consider their feelings important, do not feel that they are good enough, do not feel that they are lovable and deserving of love, and do not think that it is acceptable for them to have problems. They do not think that they have the right to have fun. They feel utterly responsible for a significant other's behavior.

Alcoholics usually develop their alcoholic behaviors from people around them. In alcoholic families, there is usually an alcoholic parent, or both. An alcoholic's behavior is governed by alcohol. People get addicted to it because of the short-term pleasure it gives. People who live in a solitary world or live quiet lives usually turn to alcohol and drugs to feel emotionally numb.

Addiction is the most common reason why family roles are assumed by members. Here is a list of the most common roles that each family member assumes in the midst of a family situation, specifically an addiction among a member or members of the family.



These roles lead to codependency:

- **The Addict**

This is the member of the family who has the problem, either a drug or alcohol addiction. He uses lying and other negative behavior to cover up his addiction. He makes it appear as if other members of the family, and not him, have the problem. His emotional behavior shows no problems at all. He has no connection to family and often does not know of the negative consequences of his addiction. He becomes dependent on the substance. The addict covers his emotions and lets them take control over his life to cover up for his addiction.

- **Enabler**

This role can be in the form of a parent, a spouse, a sibling, or even a friend who tries to help the addict. The enabler constantly makes excuses and denies that the addict has a problem with his addiction. He ends up helping the addict obtain more drugs or alcohol, or both, without realizing that what he does makes the addiction worse. Even in himself, the enabler denies that his loved one is stricken with an addiction that is hard to overcome. An enabling behavior exhibits efforts to keep the family in balance, making sure that everyone is alright, even if it means blocking out the real issue of addiction in the family. Enabling behaviors are those that try to control the situation by doing some things that the addict approves of. These enabling behaviors try to appease or satisfy the addict.

- **Scapegoat**

The scapegoat is one of the roles of the family wherein the member of the family who is considered the scapegoat is the one who makes troubles, grabs the attention to the family just so they will not divert the attention to the other member who is the addict. Most of the time the scapegoat does things which are not good for the addict, like diverting the attention of the parents from seeking medical help and intervention for the addiction recovery. The family members distract from the addiction by putting all the blame to the scapegoat. He is considered to be the black sheep of the family because of the troubles that he causes, often misleading other members that the real problem-maker is the addict.

- **Hero**

The hero is the exact opposite of the scapegoat. He/She is the one who achieves, does good things, and generally takes away the issue of addiction by being an achiever. The hero is usually the eldest child. He does his best by doing good deeds but does not get the recognition or attention that he desires. In fact, heroes in the family resent what they do. The hero refuses to acknowledge that there is an underlying addiction problem within the family. He frequently has feelings of fear, shame and guilt because of what he does to cover for everyone in the family.

- **Mascot**

This role often brings light and humor to the whole family. The mascot uses humor and fun to mask the real situation that is going on in the home. He does this to cover up feelings of guilt, shame and embarrassment. He generally keeps the whole family sane, and makes them forget of the problem they are



facing. Sometimes the mascot goes overboard with his funny behavior but the family lets him be so that the real problem of addiction is masked.

- **Lost Child**

The lost child is just that: lost. He is the member of the family who becomes invisible in all the happenings. He is seldom considered for opinions in the family. He goes with the flow, never making any trouble and not diverting attention towards him. This role may have serious implications in the long run. When the lost child keeps up with this role for a long time, he may find it hard to detach himself from being the lost child of the family. He may find it difficult to become his own person when the time comes to get rid of the role because he has become so used to being invisible and not being recognized

- **Care Taker**

Another descriptive word for this type of codependent family role is “enabler.”

The Caretaker feels like they have to keep the family going. Over and over they take on the addict’s problems and responsibilities. The fact that they have to do this may make The Caretaker angry or frustrated, but they never quite see that by choosing *not* to help they actually could help the addict.

The Caretaker is the martyr of the family, and often supports not only the addictive behavior of the addict or alcoholic, but also the codependent roles that everyone else is playing.