

Dysfunctional Themes

As a result of childhood experiences, we often develop dysfunctional themes that take charge of us and run our lives. Here is a sample of common dysfunctional themes that may have their origins in childhood abuse (sexual, physical, verbal, or emotional).

1. We use external frames of reference. We focus all of our attention on what our circumstances are or on what our partners are doing or not doing, and then we judge ourselves accordingly. We can't see the goodness inside and therefore can't be self-directed.
2. We use our relationships as if they were substances like alcohol or drugs. We treat people as if we were addicted to them, and believe we can't function independently of them or without the relationship we have with them.
3. We cannot define our psychological boundaries readily. We don't know where we end and others begin. We tend to take on the problems of others as our own.
4. We try always to make a good impression on others. This is a way in which we try to control the perceptions of others. We are people-pleasers.
5. We do not trust our own ideas, perceptions, feelings, or beliefs. We will defer to the opinions of others and not stand by our own ideas and opinions, and always seek validation. We are never really sure.
6. We try to make ourselves indispensable to others. We will knock ourselves out to take care of things for others that these same people could actually do for themselves.
7. We play the martyr; we learn to suffer, and we do it gallantly. We will put up with intolerable situations because we think we have to, or because we don't know when enough is enough.
8. We are skilled at controlling others. We try to control everything, but usually fail because it really is an impossible task.
9. We are out of touch with our true feelings. We distort our feelings and express them only when we believe it is justified to do so, when we believe there is a very good reason. As often as not, the very good reason is not the truth or the real reason for the feelings in the first place.
10. We are gullible. Because we are not in touch with our feelings, we lack discernment. We are bad judges of character, and will only see what we want to see.
11. We are fearful, rigid, and judgmental. Black and white thinking dominates our lives- love me or hate me, for or against me. Never any middle ground.