Dysfunctional Family Rules

Rules and roles in dysfunctional families keep people operating with masks and pretense. Over time this lack of authenticity results in deeply entrenched false beliefs in family members; even after a child is grown these thought patterns might be very difficult to break. Here are some typical spoken or unspoken rules in unhealthy family systems:

* Do what “looks good”, even if it is dishonest
* Don’t be a bother and don’t rock the boat
* Deny things you don’t want to see, and they will go away
* Do what I say, even when I do the opposite
* Express only happy positive feelings
* It is wrong to be angry or sad
* You must never question our behavior, but go along with it
* You must conform to what we expect of you, no matter what
* Your needs are not as important as our needs

Here are some common beliefs and personality traits found in adults from seriously dysfunctional families:

* They feel different than other people
* They are unsure what constitutes normal family functioning and have high tolerance for inappropriate and disrespectful behavior
* They have difficulty in trusting people
* They judge themselves mercilessly and disregard their own needs
* They take themselves very seriously and feel guilty when trying to relax and have fun
* They are “approval addicts”, constantly seeking affirmation
* They have difficulty feeling, identifying, and expressing emotions
* They are terrified by angry people or personal criticism
* They usually attempt to control circumstances and relationships, and overreact to changes over which they have no control
* They often feel helpless, trapped, and victimized
* They unnecessarily take responsibility for people and situations and blame themselves when things go wrong
* They are drawn to relationships with people they can pity and rescue
* They will do anything to avoid the pain of abandonment
* They have problems finishing projects, and difficulties with impulsivity
* They tend to become addicted to excitement and crises