



This is an exercise that can be helpful to understand yourself, your family that you grew up in and subconscious beliefs, roles and behaviors that may be playing themselves out in your day to day life. My recommendation is that you would look over this exercise and go slow with it. Allow the questions to “sit” in your mind and heart for a day or two. Then, when you are ready sit down with a journal, a special pen that makes you feel good (pink ink, gel pen, a silly pen). Let your thoughts come out on the paper. Go slow with the questions. Choose a different one each day. Choose the one that “speaks” to you, you don’t have to go in order.

This activity may stir up difficult feelings. Please reach out to a therapist if you begin to feel overwhelmed as you reflect on these. If you need help or a referral you can always contact Hope Embers and even if we cannot help you, we can support you in finding one.

### **Activity 1**

Before you read these questions it may be helpful to understand. All of us have assigned roles in the families we grew up in. I remember years ago hearing a podcast of a very popular psychologist talking about how his wife had told him how every time he got around his family he became a different person, and it frustrated her. He went from a very confident man, to acting small and childlike. This happens with many of us, and in fact some of us stay in the role we had in our families. It is good to identify your role in both the family you were born into and also the family you now have. The following are different roles people are subconsciously “assigned” to in their family. One individual may have more than one role “assigned” to them. You may have your own words to describe your role, feel free to stray from this list if it feels right.

**Parentified Child:** Is never a healthy role. Is where the child is the caretaker for the parents. They are emotionally supportive, and are not emotionally supported by the parents. They may pay bills, worry about bills/food, care for siblings, care for parents particularly in addiction situations, they are good listeners when parent is distressed and they learn to ignore their own feelings.



Emotionally incested child: This is not the same as sexual abuse, but can be damaging. It is when the parent turns to the child rather than the spouse for emotional closeness.

**Care Taker:** Unlike the nurturer, caretaker role is the role of the enabler. They try to “fix” others robbing others the opportunity to grow by “fixing” themselves, or figuring things out on their own. The Care taker rescues others from facing consequences to bad behavior. They make excuses, deny any problems and have poor boundaries. An example of this could be the helicopter parent who raises a spoiled child. Or the enabler with an addict who calls in sick to work for another family member.

The identified patient or addict: The family ignores their own issues, and focus on supporting or helping this person

**Scapegoat, Troublemaker, Black Sheep:** May double as the identified patient or the addict. All of the blame for the families problems are usually put on this person. This person may have mental illness, physical illness, they may act out, have disobedience issues, or they may just be “abnormal” which brings attention to themselves. They may just be different and therefore ostracized by the other members in the family. Whatever the details are, the important thing to understand is that this person’s “issues” help the family focus on them, while ignoring the bigger issues in the family.

**Golden Child:** This child is the direct opposite of the above two. The goldens child is the favorite child. They can do no wrong, and the are usually great at everything they do. They are above average with grades, sports, behavior, accomplishments, or other things. Their “success” helps the family ignore problems that need to be dealt with by focusing on how the family must have done something right because they produced this great individual.

**Lost Child:** When there is a “loud personality” in the family, this child is lost. By loud I am referring to the scapegoat, trouble maker, addict, identified patient, black sheep and I am also referring to the golden child who is so great at everything the attention is focused on him/her. The lost child learns to rely on themselves because their needs are not important. They do not learn how to express their needs or ask for help. They tend to feel lonely even as adults.



**Peacemaker:** This person is in the middle of arguments. As a child, this person may have been pulled between two parents and forced to try to make peace, or to take sides. This role keeps the individual from self reflection and growth, because they have learned to constantly read the room, and avoid confrontation at all costs, while sacrificing their own needs.

**Mascot/Clown:** This individual avoid conflict and tension by lightening the mood with humor. They deflect any uncomfortable emotion so everyone can feel more comfortable. Their humor minimizes or denies the real problems the family needs to deal with. They also become great at reading the room.

**The Doer:** This person gets everything done. They are the schedulers, cooks, cleaners, they are involved in every activity, PTO meeting etc. This may be a parent who does everything around the house for everyone else, or it may be an older child taking on extra responsibility for the family. The Doer does not know how to “just be”. They are usually exhausted, they don’t know how to rest and care for themselves, and they can become resentful and angry at the people they are doing for.

**Martyr:** Is the doer who is not quiet about all they sacrifice. They are good at making others feel guilty for all that they do for others.



## Reflective Questions

- 1.) What role did you play in your family? If you are in a relationship, what role did your partner play in their family? How do these roles show up in your individual life? How do they show up in your romantic relationship?
- 2.) How has your role “stunted” your emotional growth? What did you accept about yourself because of your role?
- 3.) How do you believe your family role attracted you to your partner? How do you believe your partner's role attracted them to you?
- 4.) What other characteristics attracted you to your partner? Does anyone in your original family have similar characteristics? If so, who and how?
- 5.) What did you learn in your family about emotions? How did your family handle conflict, or hard conversations? How did your family comfort one another during situations with difficult feelings?
- 6.) What did you learn in your family about power dynamics? What did you learn in your family about how to be emotionally close with someone? What did you learn in your family about how to feel about yourself?
- 7.) Who in your family told others what to do? Did they tell others what to do in a way that felt demanding, or respectful?
- 8.) As a child and teen, how did you go about getting things you wanted? How, if at all, has this changed? How did other family members get what they wanted?
- 9.) When you communicate your wants, desires, needs, are you passive? Aggressive? Passive aggressive? Or are you assertive and in control of your emotions and words? Does this approach work for you? Does it work for your partner, coworkers, friends, other family members?
- 10.) For the following list of emotions, name how you adequately deal with them, and name how you can be destructive in the way you deal with them: Anger, resentment, envy, fear, grief, shame, guilt, hurt.



## Activity 2

Reflect on these unhealthy social values that are often in families. Which ones are true for your family.

One must obey, and agree with elders at all times

It is modest and appropriate to have a low opinion of the self

Parents are always right. Don't question their authority

It is wrong to express strong feelings

Act nice no matter what, if you don't feel nice ignore the bad feeling, you are wrong for feeling that way

Pretend to feel grateful, even if your not.

Pretend things are fine, even if they are not

Be strong. Be tough, don't show weakness, don't depend on anyone

Avoid hard emotions from self or others. They are dangerous

You are "duty bound" to your parents. Look at all they have done for you



We all have subconscious family patterns that are passed down from generation to generation. What are yours? Here are some, but this is by far not an exhaustive list.

### Subconscious Family Patterns that can be repeated

Repeating unresolved parental traits

Co-dependent family relationship

Repeating your parents relationship patterns

Parental disapproval

Getting even

Self-condemnation

Acting weak or helpless

Verbalizing a chronic belief that life is a struggle

Sexual repression/or over expression

The parentized child

Fear of success

Fear of unknown

Chronic worry of the “worst case scenario” leading to a lack of courage to live life