



THE WHALE WATCH

*"Looking Out for Yourself and Others"*

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Issue #1



## How Healthy is My Family?

Let's face it, no family is perfect.

For many of us families can represent a source of support and unconditional love. For others, the family experience may be unhealthy or dysfunctional where relationships or communication may be impaired and family members are unable to attain closeness and self-expression.

The list below identifies many of the unhealthy behaviors that, when clustered together, can lead to a dysfunctional family system that can negatively impact the wellbeing for the members of the family.



# Characteristics of a Dysfunctional Family System

## **Addiction/Mental Health Problems**

The presence of addiction or significant mental health problems with parent figure(s) in a family can significantly impair the health and development of family members and, if left untreated, can lead to significant maladaptive behaviors.

## **Control**

When a parent figure exerts their will through the use of power or guilt onto other family members by restricting their activities/behaviors.

## **Unpredictability/Fear**

When a parent figure's behavior is emotionally unstable and unpredictable to the point their behavior incites fear in others.

## **Abuse**

Presence of verbal, emotional, or physical abuse.

## **Perfectionism/Criticism**

A parent figure can be highly critical of certain family members and reinforce unrealistic or even excessive expectations toward them, leaving these family members to feel inadequate that they can never 'measure up'. This can often

lead to a cycle of shame and blame.

### **Lack of Effective Communication/Boundaries**

Presence of aggressive, passive (nonexistent), or passive aggressive communication styles and lack of healthy boundaries.

### **Lack of Empathy/Emotional Support**

Family members are unable to demonstrate perspective taking and empathic understanding. They may also struggle with expressing love and support to others, as well as have a lack of intimacy or connectedness with other family members.

### **Conditional Love**

A parent figure only demonstrates love to another family member when they want something in return. This person's behavior often stems from place of insecurity or self-focused/anxious behaviors often in an effort to change another's family member's choices/behavior to align with their ideals.



## ***What is the potential impact of growing up in a dysfunctional family system?***

Growing up in a dysfunctional family system can lead to some symptomatic behavior that can become unhealthy. These behaviors can include the following, but are not solely indicative of growing up in an unhealthy environment:

- People pleasing tendencies
- Perfectionistic tendencies
- Feeling constantly guilty
- Lack of effective communication skills

- Feeling responsible for others
- Being constantly hard on yourself
- Presence of high levels of anxiety
- Difficulty connecting or trusting others
- Feeling isolated and alone
- Constant state of dissatisfaction
- Feeling unappreciated
- Feeling hopelessness



## Steps to overcome the Negative Impacts of a Dysfunctional Family system

If you find that many of these characteristics may be or have been part of your experience in your family, do not worry! There is still time to heal and grow from those experiences. Here is some general guidance to get started in working through your concerns:

- **Take responsibility for your own wellbeing.**
- **Determine what steps you want to take to be healthy.**
- **Seek professional help to process your thoughts, feelings and experiences**

Our counselors ([counseling@neomed.edu](mailto:counseling@neomed.edu)) are available to talk to you about your concerns and sort through your feelings, help you to identify your personal goals that align with your value system, and identify healthy strategies to manage your feelings and difficult situations.

Check out the next Whale Watch newsletter on

***How to effectively communicate and build boundaries with family members when conflict does arise.***

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# Links & Resources

Cost of Growing up in Dysfunctional Family

Dysfunctional Family: What It Is And What It's Like To Grow Up In One

Dysfunctional Family Relationships

Dysfunctional Family – Characteristics and Effects

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***Need to Talk?***

**The Center for Student Wellness and**

# **Counseling Services**

Provides free and confidential direct individual counseling and psychiatric services for a variety of concerns including, stress, burnout, time management, relationship problems, anxiety, depression and other matters related to a student's overall mental well-being. We are committed to helping you connect to a variety of support options that will meet your particular needs.

We are located in Suite A-200 next to the library.

***330.325.6757***

***[counseling@neomed.edu](mailto:counseling@neomed.edu)***

***[www.neomed.edu/cswc/](http://www.neomed.edu/cswc/)***

## **National and Local Crisis Resources**

**(Local) Coleman Professional Services 330.296.3555**

**National Suicide Hotline 800.273.8255**

**Crisis Text Line 741-741**