

Nuclear Family Emotional Process
Adult Formation: In Relationship
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Nuclear Family Emotional Process

There are four common relationship patterns that govern family problems. Tension increases the activity of one or more of these processes.

1. Marital Conflict (Intimate partner conflict)

- As family tension increases, spouses will externalize anxiety onto their marital partner
- Focus on what is wrong with the other, try to control the other, resist the other's efforts at control

2. Dysfunction in one spouse (Problematic behaviors or concerns in one partner)

- One spouse pressures the other to think or act a certain way, exerting control over their partner
- Overfunctioning and underfunctioning comes into play with this relationship pattern.

3. Impairment of one or more children (impaired functionality in children)

- A parent may focus their anxieties on one or more of their children
- The more the parents focus on the child, the more the child focuses on them (more reactive to attitudes, needs, and expectations of the parents)
- *More on this next week, when we talk about Family Projection Process

4. Emotional distance (emotional distance)

- Family members will distance themselves from one another to reduce the intensity of emotions that may arise from the tension

Over Functioning and Under Functioning

When a relationship has an increased amount of anxiety or stress, it will often appear to work, usually because one person takes on responsibilities for the twosome. The two people slide into over-adequate and under-adequate roles or over-functioning and under-functioning roles

The more anxiety one person or one relationship absorbs, the less other people must absorb. This means that some family members maintain their functioning at the expense of others

“Normal” Functioning

Our ability to manage life (make decisions, manage time and stress, etc); to be responsible for the things we are involved with; and to operate as autonomous beings.

Keeping a good schedule, staying on top of things, meeting deadlines with work and school, making decisions for ourselves even if some advice is sought, not taking more than our share of responsibility, and successfully fulfilling life roles like parent, employee, and partner

Under Functioning

Rely on others to manage things for them, have problems maintaining progress on goals, and are often under-employed. Often seen as “having so much potential but wasting it”

Common characteristics: relying on others for advice on making decisions, communicating a sense of distress or need to others, self-sabotaging, frequently asking for or alluding to needing help, zoning out to TV or video games, making unwise career, relationship, or parenting decisions, appearing to others as lazy or unmotivated, and being somewhat immature for their age

Over Functioning

Detail oriented, organized, and reliable, and are typically viewed as being reliable workers, partners, and parents. Often seen as “have it together”

Common characteristics: being overly focused on another person’s problems or life situation, offering frequent advice or help to the other person, actually doing things that are part of the other person’s life responsibilities (and believing that “if I don’t do it, then it won’t happen”), feeling anger when help is not “appreciated” or the UF doesn’t change (or even want to), the OF believing he/she knows a better way for an UF to be living, and frequently feeling overwhelmed, stressed, and neglecting self-care