



Family Matters

Introduction

Welcome to the Family Matters session of the *Living in Balance* program. This session provides information about growing up in families in which family members have developed dysfunctional (unhealthy) ways of interacting with each other. Specifically, this session will focus on issues that occur when people grow up and live in families in which there is a very serious problem (such as addiction, mental illness, or abuse), and in which family members have developed unhealthy ways to deal with the problem.

The session will examine the kinds of things people in such families learn to believe and the types of roles they often take on within the family. The session will also consider how these beliefs and roles continue to affect individuals as they become adults. It will also review ways to overcome hurt, anger, and fear, and to engage in forgiveness and reconciliation.

What is in this session?

This session has three major parts: (1) Dysfunctional Families, (2) Dysfunctional Family Roles, and (3) Overcoming Family Dysfunction.



SESSION 22 HAS THREE MAJOR PARTS:

1. Dysfunctional Families
2. Dysfunctional Family Roles
3. Overcoming Family Dysfunction

- ✓ After participating in part 1, you will be able to
 - Understand what makes a family dysfunctional
 - Recognize the dysfunctional rules that some families have

- ✓ After participating in part 2, you will be able to
 - Understand the various dysfunctional roles that children who grow up in unhealthy families often take on so they can cope
 - Understand the negative influence those roles have on people as adults

- ✓ After participating in part 3, you will be able to
 - Understand the importance of overcoming hurt, anger, and fear
 - Understand the importance of engaging in forgiveness and reconciliation

What will be asked of you?

You will be asked to consider what it was like growing up in your family, and review whether your family's behavior was healthy or dysfunctional. You will be asked to look closely at your own beliefs and actions and see if they fit a pattern common to these families. You will be asked to examine ways in which you can overcome hurt, anger, and fear, and to engage in forgiveness and reconciliation. If you come from a family with dysfunctional roles, this may not be easy. It may bring up painful memories. However, by examining your past, you will be in a better position to understand your addiction and take steps to ensure that your past does not come back to endanger your sobriety.

Part 1: Dysfunctional Families

Codependence

Treatment and recovery are built on a foundation of *interdependence*, a state in which people are dependent on one another in order to work together for a common good. Ideally, interdependence among people includes (1) open communication, (2) shared decisions, (3) joint action, (4) trust, and (5) concern for each other. These are the characteristics (or at least the goals) of healthy families.

For addicted people, their drug of choice becomes more important than nearly anything else, including important people in their lives. Relationships suffer. Talking about and sharing personal information can be difficult because addicted people fear letting others know who they really are. In many families, parents and children don't share their real feelings. Poor communication can promote a fear of intimacy.

Indeed, many people have a fear of intimacy because they are afraid of what would happen if they did share their real feelings. For example, someone might think, "She wouldn't love me if she knew how scared I am." Others simply didn't have a good model or example about how to share feelings.



EXERCISE 1

Please answer the following questions:

1. Why do you think intimacy is an important part of recovery?
Why is interdependence an important part of recovery?

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LEARNER OBJECTIVES FOR PART 1:

You will

- Understand what makes a family dysfunctional
- Recognize the dysfunctional rules that some families have

Interdependence among people includes

1. Open communication
2. Shared decisions
3. Joint action
4. Trust
5. Concern for each other

2. In general, how would you describe your family's approach to sharing real feelings? What kind of "style" do you think that you developed in relation to sharing feelings? How will that help or hurt your recovery?



All families have problems. But some families have serious problems that cause tremendous stress on all family members. For example, some families have a family member who has a substance use or mental health problem. Some families have a family member who engages in physical, emotional, or sexual abuse. Such problems have a strong and negative effect on *all* family members.

For people living in a family with a serious problem, family relationships can be difficult and unhealthy. Family relationships and roles in unhealthy families can be called dysfunctional.

The word *dysfunctional* means that the relationships among family members and the roles that family members take on are unhealthy, and they help the family to function or behave in a way that is not healthy.

Addiction causes trauma in a family. (*Trauma* is an emotional state of extreme discomfort and stress that results from a major painful experience.) To protect themselves from emotional harm, family members take on certain roles and engage in certain behaviors. Unfortunately, these roles and behaviors are often rigid and inflexible. They often cause as many problems as they solve.

These unhealthy ways of coping are often referred to as *co-dependent* behavior, because each member's problem is developed in response to the problems of the other family members. Psychologist Sharon Wegscheider-Cruse defined this process, known as codependence, in the 1970s.

Five common elements are associated with codependence:

1. Currently or recently living with an actively addicted person
2. An obsession with the needs and behaviors of the addicted person
3. A tendency to please the addicted person while depriving oneself
4. Confusion over one's own identity
5. Very low self-esteem

According to Dr. Claudia Black, who has studied families with dysfunctional roles and behaviors, there are also five common characteristics that can be applied to family members. They learn (1) not to talk, (2) not to trust, (3) not to feel, (4) not to think, and (5) not to ask questions.

Dysfunctional families may develop unspoken rules to avoid bringing attention to the central problem of addiction. Psychologists have found that these unspoken rules often make family members (1) act rigidly, (2) be silent, (3) be in denial, and (4) experience feelings in isolation.



**DEFINITION OF
DYSFUNCTIONAL:**

Relationships or roles among family members that are unhealthy and that help the family to function or behave in a way that is not healthy.



**DEFINITION OF
TRAUMA:**

An emotional state of extreme discomfort and stress that results from a major painful experience.



EXERCISE 2

Please check the answer that seems most true for your family when you were growing up:

1. Which of these better describes communication in your family?
 - Open communication was normal.
 - Silence was normal.

2. Which of these better describes decision making in your family?
 - Family members shared feelings in decisions.
 - Family members acted in isolation.

3. Which of these better describes the way people acted in your family?
 - Family members acted together toward common goals.
 - Family members did things only because they were told to do so.

4. Which of these better describes the level of emotional trust in your family?
 - Family members trusted one another with their feelings.
 - Family members rigidly tried to control their feelings.

5. Which of these better describes the level of caring in your family?
 - Family members had genuine concern for one another.
 - Family members had superficial concern for one another.

The Family as a Healthy System

Families can be thought of as systems. Family members are linked together by rules that in healthy, balanced family systems promote the safety and growth of family members. In healthy family systems, communication is open and rules are flexible and enforced fairly and consistently. Children develop healthy values, healthy ways to communicate, and healthy roles. Children feel cared for and cared about. Children are encouraged to express their desires and needs. Since they are made to feel worthy, they can develop a healthy sense of self.

The Family as a Dysfunctional System

In an unhealthy, imbalanced family system, communication is closed and rules are rigid, unrealistic, and enforced inconsistently and unfairly. Open communication and personal growth are discouraged. Children can have a hard time emotionally bonding with their parents. Children may feel shamed and abandoned. They may learn unhealthy and compulsive behaviors to deal with the emotional pain and stress of this situation. They may develop low self-esteem and a vulnerability to addiction and other problem behaviors.



EXERCISE 3

Please answer the following questions:

1. What kind of rules did your family have about openness and communication? Could you share your feelings with your parents and other family members? Could you get into trouble for doing so?

(more writing space on next page)

In healthy family systems, communication is open and rules are flexible and enforced fairly and consistently.



2. In your family, were rules enforced consistently and fairly or inconsistently and unfairly? Explain.

Were you made to feel safe, protected, and valued? Explain.

Dysfunctional Family Rule Number One: Act Rigidly

Addicted people often behave unpredictably, inconsistently, impulsively, and erratically. In response, other family members become frustrated because they do not know what might happen next. As the addiction progresses, the behavior becomes increasingly unpredictable. In order to deal with the chaos, these families adopt a set of unspoken rules. As the addiction worsens, the family may cling even tighter to these rules for safety, because the rules seem like a source of stability.

In a healthy family, family members can grow, mature, and experiment with social interactions. Other family members are flexible and let each other make some mistakes.

In a family with a dysfunctional style, there may be little flexibility or emotional growth. Children in these families can become emotionally stunted as adults because they learn to believe that life is extremely serious and people are very rigid. This damage can be repaired, though. Through healthy relationships in which there is the ability to compromise, children of dysfunctional families can learn to relate more easily and naturally with other people.

In a family with a dysfunctional style, there may be little flexibility or emotional growth.



EXERCISE 4

Please answer the following questions:

- 1. How does your family react when something unpredictable happens? How does it make you feel?

Has anyone told you that you overreact to things over which you have no control?

- Yes No *(If yes, please explain.)*

2. What kind of unspoken rules does your family have?

3. What happens when someone breaks these unspoken rules?

4. How does your family react when a family member makes a mistake or causes a problem?

Dysfunctional Family Rule Number Two: Be Silent

Dysfunctional families typically have a major problem. The major problem may be addiction, mental illness, sexual abuse, or domestic violence. The problem affects all family members. However, dysfunctional families go to great lengths to avoid talking about the major problem. If the parent is addicted, mentally ill, violent, or abusive, the parent’s behavior is likely to be erratic. Thus, children and other family members take great pains to avoid upsetting the parent. Hence this rule: Don’t talk about the problem.

The rule of silence includes not speaking with other family members about feelings, emotions, or behaviors. Family members learn that talking about certain things upsets the family balance. Since they can’t talk about what they see and feel, family members are forced to endure their fears, anxieties, and anger in silence. They are forced to repress these feelings, although they may blow up from time to time.

Children of dysfunctional families usually repress their personal feelings as adults, just as they did as children. They can break this tendency, though, by talking about what happened to them and expressing these repressed feelings.



EXERCISE 5

Please answer the following questions:

1. Are there times when your family seems upset but no one says a word?

Yes No *(If yes, please explain.)*



The rule of silence includes not speaking with other family members about feelings, emotions, or behaviors.

2. How do you react when a crisis happens? How do you feel about your reaction?

3. Do you sometimes have to guess what's normal behavior?

Yes No *(If yes, please explain.)*

4. As a child, did you often "feel" that something was seriously wrong, but didn't quite know what it was?

Yes No *(If yes, please explain.)*

5. Were you ever punished or told to be quiet for simply saying something that seemed obvious?

- Yes No

If yes, what happened?

Dysfunctional Family Rule Number Three: Be in Denial

In the average, healthy family, problems that come up are discussed. Solutions are reviewed and attempted. In a dysfunctional family, major problems may be ignored. No one will admit that there is a problem. Thus, no one will discuss the problem or come up with solutions. Sadly, the more severe the problem, the more likely the family will be dysfunctional and deny that the problem exists, is serious, and affects the family.

Children growing up in dysfunctional families are faced with a serious problem. Even when something really bad happens (drunkenness or violence), these children are told that nothing is wrong. They are taught to ignore what they see, hear, and feel. For instance, children may see their parent get drunk and act violently with another family member, and then be told that “everything is all right, go back to sleep.” As a result, children growing up in dysfunctional families have a difficult time understanding what is real and what is not, and what is bad and what is not.

Children growing up in dysfunctional families have a difficult time understanding what is real and what is not, and what is bad and what is not.

You can learn to identify and express painful emotions to others.

If you were raised in this type of family, you may have a hard time expressing painful emotions because you were taught to ignore them and to believe that they were not real. Through active participation in a healthy group process, such as group therapy or a self-help group, you can learn to identify and express painful emotions to others.



EXERCISE 6

Please answer the following questions:

1. Did you ever have a painful experience but were told not to worry, because “everything is okay”?
 Yes No

If yes, please explain and give examples.

2. Do you find it easier to avoid certain problems and hope that they will simply go away rather than deal with them?
 Yes No

If yes, please explain and give examples.

3. How do you normally deal with painful experiences?

Do you want to change this?

Yes No *(If yes, please explain.)*



You can learn to trust by sharing feelings with others and finding support for sharing those feelings.

Dysfunctional Family Rule Number Four: Feel in Isolation

Dysfunctional families typically have a rigid set of rules that keep family members from discussing important behavior and emotional problems with each other. Because of this, each family member can feel emotionally isolated.

These rigid rules also prevent family members from effectively communicating with people outside of the family. The dysfunctional family tries to avoid revealing its problems to others as well, and so it keeps a distance between itself and the rest of the community.

Dysfunctional families may appear self-sufficient and independent. They try hard to look “normal” to the outside world. But dysfunctional families are really afraid that outsiders could identify the family’s problems and the ways that it is dysfunctional. Family members believe that if outsiders knew what was going on, the family would be exposed to ridicule, or people might even try to break up the family.

Since the family isolates itself from others and the community, family members do not learn to trust or be open with others. Luckily, if trust is not learned during childhood, it can be learned as an adult, such as during recovery. You can learn to trust by sharing feelings with others and finding support for sharing those feelings.



EXERCISE 7

Please answer the following questions:

- 1. Did your family ever act like it was “us against the world”?

Yes No *(If yes, please explain.)*

2. As a child and teenager, did your family encourage you to bring your friends over to play or have dinner?

Yes No *(If not, please explain.)*

3. Did you ever get punished for sharing “family secrets” with people outside of your family?

Yes No *(If yes, please explain.)*

Evaluating Family Dysfunction

Family dysfunction ranges from mild to severe. However, there are certain characteristics that dysfunctional families share. In order to better understand the level of dysfunction in your family, complete the exercise below.



EXERCISE 8

Please check each statement that seems appropriate to your family. Add up the number of statements you checked and put the total at the bottom.

- We had many family secrets and skeletons in our closet.
- We tried to keep outsiders from getting too close to our family.
- People in our family had no flexibility, and rigid rules were very important.
- Our family endured change very poorly.
- Members of our family were made to feel guilty if they wanted to leave the family.
- In spite of the need to stick together, there wasn't much unity in our family.
- During crises, our family often fell apart or didn't support each other.
- Family members often attacked or ignored each other.
- Problems and conflicts between members of our family were often ignored or denied.
- Our family often went from one crisis to another.

Total number of statements checked: _____



Part 2: Dysfunctional Family Roles

Unhealthy Roles

The unhealthy or dysfunctional family can be a very explosive environment. Living in it can be like walking through a minefield, where one wrong step may result in a dangerous explosion. In order to survive in this unhealthy environment, family members often adapt by acting in certain ways, which can be seen as typical roles in a dysfunctional family.

In a way, unhealthy family roles grow out of the unhealthy family rules. Because these roles are rigid and predictable, they make the family seem less chaotic and provide a sort of temporary stability. These predictable roles also make it easier to ignore the real problems in the family, such as addiction or abuse.

These roles have both good and bad aspects. By accepting these roles, family members can survive in difficult situations. Unfortunately, these roles eventually cause problems because they make it hard for the individual to communicate effectively or experience and express feelings. Keeping to these roles as adults will limit emotional and psychological growth.

As adults, people can more easily recognize the values of, as well as the problems with, each role. By becoming aware of the roles, people can identify aspects of them that they would want to keep, as well as aspects that they would like to let go.

Researchers have established that there are certain common roles that people in addicted families take. One psychologist, Dr. Claudia Black, was the first to break down the roles into the following categories: (1) the hero, (2) the placater, (3) the lost child, and (4) the scapegoat. Other psychologists have built their own definitions around these roles, and there are many different versions.



LEARNER OBJECTIVES FOR PART 2:

You will

- Understand the various dysfunctional roles that children who grow up in unhealthy families often take on so they can cope
- Understand the negative influence those roles have on people as adults

There are certain common roles that people in addicted families take:

1. the hero
2. the placater
3. the lost child
4. the scapegoat



EXERCISE 9

Please answer the following questions:

1. Have you ever found yourself behaving in a particular way because people expect you to act that way?

Yes No

Did you ever think of this as taking on a role? Explain.

2. Why do you think people take on particular roles? What would they lose by breaking out of them?

The Hero

The dysfunctional family may be rigid, but it is not always predictable. As the problem of addiction or abuse in the family gets worse, parents may neglect their responsibilities.

The family hero is the person who takes over. The hero is a child who assumes adult responsibilities, such as organizing the other children, making certain that they are fed, clothed, and ready for school and bed. The hero is likely to do much of the cleaning and cooking. Although still children, heroes become little adults.

The hero grows up fast. He or she learns organizational skills, learns how to make and reach goals, and accepts large responsibilities. Because of this, the hero often develops real leadership skills. So the hero may become good in school and at work, and this helps the family appear good and healthy.

As a child and later as an adult, the hero is often very serious and may not be much fun to be around. He or she often feels the need to be in charge and in control.



The family hero is the person who takes over.



EXERCISE 10

Please answer the following questions:

- 1. What are the advantages for the family of having someone in the hero role? Why?

2. What are the advantages for the child of being in the hero role? Why?

3. What are the disadvantages for the child of being in the hero role? Why?

The Placater

In a dysfunctional family, there is often one child who becomes the family social worker. As the placater, this child tries to take care of everyone else's emotional needs and reduce conflicts in the family by smoothing things over.

As a child, the family placater is often considered to be the most sensitive of all the children. This child's feelings seem to be easily hurt, even though he or she also spends tremendous energy trying to make others feel good. When there is a crisis in the family, the placater goes to the other children to comfort them, trying to reduce tension in the home.

As an adult, the family placater seems to be a “nice” person who is a good listener, and who never seems to disagree. This person often feels like other people need comforting. As a result, the individual may apologize for small, unimportant things, or even for things he or she is not responsible for. For instance, the placater may apologize for someone else’s feelings—such as by saying, “I’m sorry you feel bad.”

Family placaters appear to be very warm, caring, sensitive people who don’t want to cause anyone problems. However, their own needs are unmet, and their own emotions are unexpressed.

As a child, the placater survives by focusing on the needs of others and reducing the fears, anxieties, and sadness of other family members. As an adult, he or she may have a hard time focusing on his or her own needs, problems, and emotions.

The placater survives by focusing on the needs of others and reducing the fears, anxieties, and sadness of other family members.



EXERCISE 11

Please answer the following questions:

1. What are the advantages for the family of having someone in the placater role? Why?

2. What are the advantages for the child of being in the placater role? Why?

3. What are the disadvantages for the child of being in the placater role? Why?

The Lost Child

One way of reacting to an unpredictable, stressful, dysfunctional family is not to question, not to think about, and not to respond to anything. By detaching emotionally, socially, and even physically, the lost child doesn't try to change or even deal with the events that are going on in the family.

The lost child will just try to accept simply whatever happens in the family. This child will do as he or she is told without a fight or comment. The lost child believes that nothing can change the family problems, so you just need to accept whatever happens.

From the parent’s perspective, the lost child is not noticed as much as the other children. To the other children, the lost child may seem more selfish because this child tries to ignore what goes on with others. The child is more detached from the family than the others.

The lost child survives by not being noticed and by not making waves. At school and later at work, the lost child performs about average, not drawing attention for good or bad work. The lost child usually does not take on responsibility or leadership roles, because he or she wants to remain detached and out of the spotlight.

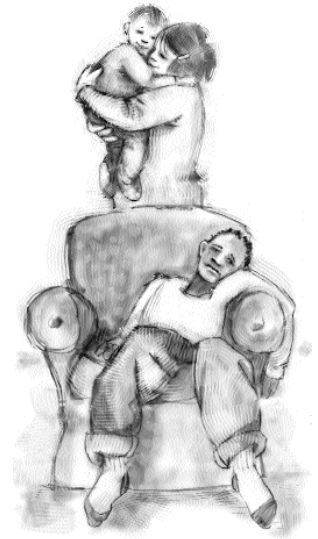
As an adult, the lost child is able to endure difficult periods of change easier than most. This adult may be good at riding out the storm, but tends to act without thinking or feeling.



EXERCISE 12

Please answer the following questions:

1. What are the advantages for the family of having someone in the lost child role? Why?



The lost child survives by not being noticed and by not making waves.

2. What are the advantages for the child of being in the lost child role? Why?

3. What are the disadvantages for the child of being in the lost child role? Why?

The Scapegoat

A dysfunctional family often has children who try to survive by not drawing attention to themselves or their family. However, there is one unhealthy family role that does just the opposite, the family scapegoat.

All children in an unhealthy family experience confusion, anxiety, and fears. The scapegoat gets into trouble because of these feelings. In a way, the scapegoat becomes an obvious sign that something is wrong with the family.

The scapegoat will often become the focus of attention for the dysfunctional family. The family will focus attention on the problems caused by the child, thus taking the focus off of the core problem of addiction or abuse. Instead of looking at the parent's addiction, violence, or sexual abuse, family members may blame all of the family's problems on the scapegoat. However, the scapegoat's behavior is the result of the family problems, not the original cause of problems.

The scapegoat may break rules at home, at school, and in society. This child will attract attention to himself or herself through bad behavior. Unfortunately, the scapegoat often has a hard time expressing feelings in a less destructive way.

While other children may repress their feelings and focus on other things, the scapegoat will release emotional energy in unacceptable ways. In response, parents and other family members may respond with punishment, inappropriate discipline, and teasing. As a result, this child develops low self-esteem.

The scapegoat will often become the focus of attention for the dysfunctional family.



EXERCISE 13

Please answer the following questions:

1. What are the advantages for the family of having someone in the scapegoat role? Why?

2. What are the advantages for the child of being in the scapegoat role? Why?

3. What are the disadvantages for the child of being in the scapegoat role? Why?

Being an Adult from a Dysfunctional Family

The roles developed as a child in a dysfunctional family continue to affect people as adults. Children learn from their families how to behave in a social situation and how to think of themselves. Adults who grew up in dysfunctional families often share certain ways of acting. These behaviors, as described by Dr. Janet Woititz, are listed on the next page.

- Frequently guessing what is normal behavior
- Frequently having difficulty finishing a project
- Lying when it would be just as easy to tell the truth
- Judging themselves harshly and without mercy
- Having difficulty relaxing and having fun
- Taking themselves too seriously
- Having difficulty with intimate relationships
- Overreacting to changes over which they have no control
- Constantly seeking approval and affirmation
- Generally feeling different from other people
- Being super-responsible or super-irresponsible
- Being extremely loyal, even when that loyalty is undeserved or inappropriate
- Acting without feeling or thinking about consequences



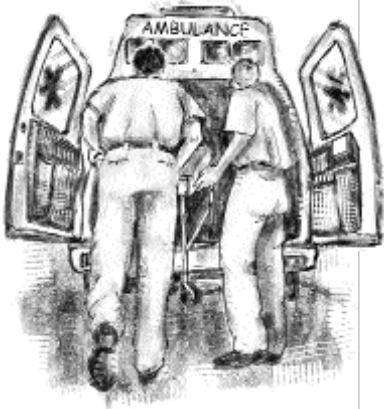
EXERCISE 14

Please answer the following question:

Do any of the characteristics listed above apply to you?

Yes No

Circle the ones that apply to you. Select one to write about using a specific example.



Every family will suffer from some traumatic events, such as a death in the family, divorce, financial problems, or an accident.

Reaction to Trauma

Every family will suffer from some traumatic events, such as a death in the family, divorce, financial problems, or an accident. In a dysfunctional family, trauma is also caused by the behavior of one or more family members. In these families, traumatic events might also include public intoxication, the police stopping a fight, or an episode of incest.

The immediate reaction to a traumatic event may be shock, in which emotions are suppressed for a time in order to deal more effectively with the event. After the immediate problem of the traumatic event has passed, emotions and feelings begin to come back. Sometimes there is enough of a delay that someone doesn't even realize where the emotions are coming from.

In healthy families, the family members will talk about the traumatic event and try to make some sense out of it.

Strong feelings come up through talk and discussion, and they are dealt with in a positive manner. If a traumatic event, such as an accident, has injured a family member, the healthy family will support and care for that person. At this time, the healthy family will pull together and support one another. Through discussion and support, members of a healthy family will resolve their feelings about the traumatic event and be able to go on with their lives.

In dysfunctional families, emotions and feelings may return after the initial shock has passed. However, there is no discussion of the traumatic event. Family members, especially children, are too scared to talk about it or ask questions about their parents' behavior. Since these feelings cannot be expressed, they are suppressed. Family members often take on their family roles as a way of coping with the traumatic event, and with each new trauma, the roles become more and more fixed.



EXERCISE 15

Please answer the following questions:

1. How did your family respond to a crisis? Did you talk about the problem or try to ignore it?

2. As an adult, how do you respond to a crisis? Do you still respond the same way you did as a child, or have you developed new ways to deal with a crisis? Do you think you respond in a healthy way? Why or why not?



LEARNER OBJECTIVES FOR PART 3:

You will

- Understand the importance of overcoming hurt, anger, and fear
- Understand the importance of engaging in forgiveness and reconciliation

Growing up in a dysfunctional family often leaves people feeling hurt.



Part 3: Overcoming Family Dysfunction

Overcoming Hurt

Growing up in a dysfunctional family often leaves people feeling hurt. They may have been abused, neglected, abandoned, put down, disrespected, or unloved. All of these things hurt. Sometimes the pain is on the surface. Sometimes it is buried deep below the surface. But the pain rarely goes away by itself. Generally, people need to talk about it, cry about it, and sometimes even re-experience the pain before they can get over it. If the pain is there, it usually comes out one way or another. Sometimes people use drugs or alcohol to avoid or dull the pain. This is a form of self-medication. Sometimes the pain comes out by causing other people pain. But if the pain is there, it will find a way to express itself in either healthy or unhealthy ways.



EXERCISE 16

Please answer the following questions:

1. Do you have unresolved pain from your family experiences of growing up?
 Yes No

What role do you think this hurt or pain has played in your addiction?

Do you have someone that you can talk with about this pain?

- Yes No

2. Describe some of the experiences or memories that you associate with this pain or hurt.

Overcoming Anger

When people grow up in a dysfunctional family, they often grow up feeling a lot of anger. Sometimes this anger is directed toward others. Sometimes this anger is directed inward, which can lead to depression or self-hatred. The anger usually comes from the hurt and pain other people in your life caused you. The anger, like the pain, may be close to the surface, or it may be buried deep inside. But also like the pain, it usually finds a way to express itself.

People who grow up in a dysfunctional family often have difficulty finding healthy ways to express their anger. They may feel guilty about expressing their anger, especially to a parent they also love. It is possible to love someone very much, but still be angry with that person for something he or she did or didn't do. It is important to talk about this anger and find healthy ways to express it.



It is important to talk about this anger and find healthy ways to express it.



EXERCISE 17

Please answer the following questions:

1. Do you have unresolved anger from your family experiences growing up?

Yes No

What role do you think this anger has played in your addiction?

Do you have someone that you can talk with about this anger?

Yes No

2. Describe some of the experiences or memories that you associate with this anger.

Overcoming Fear

Pain and anger are common experiences for people who grow up in a dysfunctional family. These experiences often leave a person feeling fearful of intimacy and close relationships. People are afraid they'll have to go through more pain and anger in new relationships. They may be afraid of what other people might do to them. Or they might be afraid of what they might do to other people in these new relationships. They may also be afraid to face all of these feelings of pain, anger, and anxiety.

If people do not face these unresolved feelings, they will not be able to complete their recovery process, and they will have a greater risk of relapse to deal with these unpleasant feelings.



EXERCISE 18

Please answer the following questions:

1. Do you have unresolved fear or anxiety from your family experiences growing up?

Yes No *(If yes, please explain.)*

What role do you think this fear or anxiety has played in your addiction?

Do you have someone that you can talk with about this fear?

Yes No

2. Describe some of the experiences or memories that you associate with this fear or anxiety.

Forgiveness and Reconciliation

The process of recovery requires that early or current family conflicts that continue to cause pain, anger, fear, and anxiety be dealt with and resolved, at least to some extent. You may never resolve these conflicts completely. But if the feelings are there, either close to the surface or buried deep inside, they will continue to have a strong impact on your life.

It is important to find healthy ways to express these feelings in order to complete the healing process. For most people, this healing process involves reaching a stage of understanding and forgiveness for the harms that were done. This may not be easy, and it may take a long time, even years. But with forgiveness comes freedom from the oppression of these strong feelings. Once you reach a stage of forgiveness, then real reconciliation is possible.

What is reconciliation? *Reconciliation* is coming to terms with these feelings and with your family members and reaching some sort of peace with them and yourself. Sometimes you can reconcile or make peace with the family members you grew up with, but sometimes they are no longer alive or around, so you must reach this peace inside. Reconciliation also means reaching some sort of peacefulness inside. It means finding some level of harmony. Not perfection, but acceptance.



DEFINITION OF RECONCILIATION:

Coming to terms with these feelings and with your family members and reaching some sort of peace with them and yourself.



EXERCISE 19

Please answer the following questions:

- 1. Have you forgiven others for your hurtful family experiences growing up?

Yes No *(If yes, please explain.)*

What role does forgiveness play in your recovery?

Do you have someone that you can talk with about this forgiveness?

Yes No

- 2. Describe how you would like to reconcile with your family members, either in person or inside yourself.



Reconciliation also means reaching some sort of peacefulness inside.



Session 22 Summary

In this session you have looked at what makes a family become dysfunctional. You have reviewed the things that children who grow up in dysfunctional families learn to believe about themselves and other people. You examined the specific “roles” in a family that these children take on, and how these roles continue to influence them in adulthood. You also examined ways in which you can overcome hurt, anger, and fear and engage in forgiveness and reconciliation. If you come from a dysfunctional family, you may have found it painful to look at the past, but in dealing with these things that you may have tried to ignore as a child, you can strengthen your sobriety today.