

ROLES IN DYSFUNCTIONAL FAMILIES

It's not easy to determine who has been assigned what role in a dysfunctional family, if only as roles do change if only by necessity of someone leaving their assigned role by external factors, forcing a reallocation of the roles. Furthermore, there may not be 'enough' individuals to assign a single role to, and thus multiple roles are bestowed on the individual. Never at the same moment though. Each role has to be fulfilled 'one-dimensionally', resulting in personal internal stress as it's often far from clear which role the other family members demand at any given time.

THE ENABLER

The Enabler protects and takes care of the problem parent so that the parent is never allowed to experience the negative consequences of his or her actions. The Enabler feels he or she must act this way, because otherwise, the family might not survive. The paradoxical thing about The Enabler's behavior is that by preventing the dysfunctional parent's crisis, he or she also prevents the painful, corrective experience that crisis brings, which may be the only thing that makes the dysfunctional parent stop the downward spiral of addiction. Note: In case of an Enabler Parent, the same dynamic as described above applies.

THE HERO

The Hero can mask or make up for the dysfunctional home life. Over-responsible and self-sufficient they are often perfectionistic, are over-achievers and look very good - on the outside. The parents look to this child to prove that they are good parents and good people. Their goal in life is to achieve "success", however that has been defined by the family; they must always be "brave and strong"

THE SCAPEGOAT

The Scapegoat is the "problem child" or the "trouble maker". This family member always seems defiant, hostile and angry. The Scapegoat is the truth teller of the family and will often verbalize or act out the "problem" which the family is attempting to cover up or deny. This individual's behavior warrants negative attention and is a great distraction for everyone from the real issues at hand. The Scapegoat usually has trouble in school because they get attention the only way they know how - which is negatively. They can be very clever, may develop social skills within his or her circle of peers, and become leaders in their own peer groups. But often the groups that they choose to associate with are groups that do not present healthy relationships. The relationships he or she experiences tend to be shallow and inauthentic.

THE LOST CHILD

The Lost Child is usually known as "the quiet one" or "the dreamer". The Lost Child is the invisible child. They try to escape the family situation by making themselves very small and quiet. (S)He stays out of the way of problems and spends a lot of time alone. The purpose of having a lost child in the family is similar to that of The Hero. Because The Lost Child is rarely in trouble, the family can say, "He's a good kid. Everything seems fine in his life, so things can't be too bad in the family."

THE MASCOT

The goal of The Family Mascot is to break the tension and lighten the mood with humor or antics. (S)He is usually "the cute one." This child feels powerless in the dynamics which are going on in the family and tries to interrupt tension, anger, conflict, violence or other unpleasant situations within the family by being the court jester. The Mascot seeks to be the center of attention in the family, often entertaining the family and making everyone feel better through his or her comedy. They may also use humor to communicate and to confront the family dysfunction, rather than address it directly. They also use humor to communicate repressed emotions in the family such as anger, grief, hostility or fear. This behavior is lighthearted and hilarious, just what a family twisted in pain needs — but the mascot's clowning is not repairing the emotional wounds, only providing temporary balm. The rest of the family may actually try to protect their "class clown".