

Is that the reason why our family does not communicate well?



*Learn how to overcome the
effects of a dysfunctional family*

By Jef Gazley, M.S., LMFT
www.asktheinternettherapist.com

Is that the reason why our family does not communicate well?

This lecture is about the dysfunctional family and the child within. Both, unfortunately, are buzz phrases. Whenever one tries to describe a very complex concept, they tend to use buzz phrases, but that often causes simplification, and it also tends to cause backlashes, eventually. When I use the word dysfunction or dysfunctional families, what I mean is abusive families. When I'm talking about abuse, it means *ab-use*, or not useful. In other words, there is something that is not helpful occurring in the family system. It is much more accurate to think and talk about a continuum of any problem, rather than either a problem state or a non-problem state.

Any family is going to be somewhat abusive or somewhat dysfunctional. Everyone could become a more sophisticated and quality parent, and that's the way that I would ask you to view this. Historically, the whole idea of dysfunctional families emerged in the very early 1980's and it came out of chemical dependence education. At first, the only person who was being treated was the chemically dependent person, and the theory was that if the staff would just fix them and return them to the environment that things would be fine, which was a very naïve and simplistic way to view the problem. It is more accurate to perceive problems in a systemic fashion. There are a number of people involved in any difficulty, and one can't take the person out of their milieu and expect to fix the problem, as if the problem was only inside of the individual. In other words, the interaction is often the problem.

Eventually, treatment was broadened to include the co-dependent or the enabler, the person who was overly focused on the alcoholic, and began to address their being addicted or caring too much about the chemically addicted person. It took us several more years to realize that if there were two very immature people who were over-involved with each other, their kids grew up in essentially what would be a parental power vacuum, and those children would become what's termed adult children of alcoholics, or parentified kids. These children suffer from varying degrees of post-traumatic stress disorder because their childhood needs had to be suppressed, and only later would those childhood needs erupt in very often immature ways when they were adults.

OLD SHAME BOUND FAMILY RULES

- **Always be perfect.**
- **Always be in control.**
- **If you are not perfect and in control, blame yourself and/or someone else.**
- **Don't feel.**
- **Don't talk About feelings directly.**
- **Third party communication - talk through another person to get your message across.**
- **Have unrealistic expectations for self and others.**
- **Always be responsible.**
- **Never be selfish - do for yourself.**
- **Don't play.**

Old Shame Bound Family Rules

It was also realized that the families of alcoholics tended to operate under particular rules, some of which were stated outright, and most of which were understood silently by everyone in the family. When therapists began moving out of working with chemically dependent families, and started to work, or returned to work as I did, in the early 1980's with families that were devoid of chemical addiction who displayed regular family problems, they became startled by the similarity of the family rules. The family rules for so-called "normal families" with problems were very much the same as alcoholic families or chemically dependent families. The reason for the similarity is that in our particular culture, Western Society, these rules are the norm. These old shame bound rules are imbedded in the culture. These are those "good old family values" that are discussed so often in politics. While reading these rules remember how it was to be a child growing up. Think of the culture, or TV, the way that people act, and I think the similarity will be readily apparent.

The first rule in a shame bound family system is always to be perfect. And that "always" is just as crazy as the "perfect." No one who is human