

FAMILY ROLES

In an addictive or depressed family system the disease becomes the organizing principle. The affected person becomes the central figure from which everyone else organizes their behaviors and reactions, usually in what is a slow insidious process. Typically family members do what they can to bring greater consistency, structure and safety into a family system that is becoming unpredictable, chaotic or frightening. To do this they often adopt certain roles or a mixture of roles.

Original work regarding family roles was by Virginia Satir, then adapted by Claudia Black and Sharon Wegscheider Cruse to fit the addictive family. Over the course of years the names vary, yet the descriptions fit. You are welcome to rename that which best describes you. ♦



FAMILY HERO ♦ RESPONSIBLE ONE

STRENGTHS

Successful
Organized
Leadership skills
Decisive
Initiator
Self disciplined
Goal oriented

DEFICITS

Perfectionist
Difficulty listening
Inability to follow
Inability to relax
Lack of spontaneity
Inflexible
Unwilling to ask for help
High fear of mistakes
Inability to play
Severe need to be in control

PLACATER ♦ PEOPLE PLEASER

STRENGTHS

Caring/ compassionate
Empathic
Good listener
Sensitive to others
Gives well
Nice smile

DEFICITS

Inability to receive
Denies personal needs
High tolerance for inappropriate behavior
Strong fear of anger or conflict
False guilt
Anxious
Highly fearful
Hypervigilant



SCAPEGOAT ♦ ACTING OUT ONE

STRENGTHS

Creative
Less denial, greater honesty
Sense of humor
Close to own feelings
Ability to lead
(just leads in wrong direction)

DEFICITS

Inappropriate expression of anger
Inability to follow direction
Self-destructive
Intrusive
Irresponsible
Social problems at young ages (i.e.)
truancy, teenage pregnancy,
high school dropout, addiction
Underachiever
Defiant / rebel

LOST CHILD ♦ ADJUSTER

STRENGTHS

Independent
Flexible
Ability to follow
Easy going attitude
Quiet

DEFICITS

Unable to initiate
Withdraws
Fearful of making decisions
Lack of direction
Ignored, forgotten
Follows without questioning
Difficulty perceiving choices and options

MASCOT

STRENGTHS

Sense of humor
Flexible
Able to relieve stress and pain

DEFICITS

Attention seeker
Distracting
Immature
Difficulty focusing
Poor decision making ability

Claudia Black, Ph.D.

The following are some examples of beliefs we hold that drive our behavior.

Beliefs of the Responsible Child:

"If I don't do it, no one will."

"If I don't do this, something bad will happen, or things will get worse."

Beliefs of the Adjuster Child:

"If I don't get emotionally involved, I won't get hurt."

"I can't make a difference anyway."

"It is best to not draw attention to yourself."

Beliefs of the Placater Child:

"If I am nice, people will like me."

"If I focus on someone else, the focus won't be on me and that is good."

"If I take care of you, you won't leave me or reject me."

Beliefs of the Mascot Child:

"If I make people laugh, there is no pain."

Beliefs of the Acting Out Child:

"If I scream loudly enough, someone may notice me."

"Take what you want. No one is going to give you anything."

Here are some examples of responses to feelings as affected by our roles:

The Responsible Child: "I must stay in control of my feelings."

The Adjuster Child: "Why should I feel? It's better if I don't."

The Placater Child: "I must take care of others' feelings."

The Mascot Child: "I must take the pain away."

The Acting Out Child: "I am angry about it, whatever it is."

Claudia Black, Ph.D.

Another way roles restrict our lives is that they dictate the way shame may manifest itself in our adult years.

The Responsible Child shows shame with control, perfectionism, and compulsivity.

The Adjuster Child shows shame with procrastination, and victimization.

The Placater Child shows shame with victimization, depression, and perfection.

The Mascot Child shows shame with depression and addiction.

The Acting Out Child shows shame with rage, addictions, and procrastination.

While the statements above are subjective generalizations, they describe the reality that many people live.