

# ***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.***