

Dysfunctional Family

QUICK REFERENCE COUNSELING KEYS Excerpt

Transformation at the Deepest Levels . . .

“Recovery from dysfunctional family patterns is not easy. It requires a transformation at the deepest levels. . . . God has promised to be actively involved in this transformation.”

—Dale and Juanita Ryan¹

*“The LORD passed before him and proclaimed,
‘The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious,
slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness,
keeping steadfast love for thousands,
forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin,
but who will by no means clear the guilty,
visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children
and the children’s children,
to the third and the fourth generation.’”
(Exodus 34:6–7)*

Q: “I grew up in a messed up family, and I am now repeating many patterns from the past. What should I do?”

Identify which patterns need to be changed, then focus on several action steps that will enable you to move toward emotional health and healing. Tell the Lord and those closest to you that you want to give up unhealthy, childish patterns, and ask them to help hold you accountable.

*“When I was a child, I spoke like a child,
I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child.
When I became a man, I gave up childish ways.”
(1 Corinthians 13:11)*

Dysfunctional Families Produce Dysfunctional Families

The Chaotic Family (Proverbs 28:2)

- Both household and individuals are poorly organized.
- Family is plagued by problems.
- Parents are inconsistent and indecisive.
- Children are emotionally abandoned.

The Controlling Family (Ephesians 6:4)

- Structure is overly rigid.
- Tone is authoritative and dictatorial.
- Parents tend to be faultfinding and critical.
- Children are task oriented. . . . value is placed on their performance.

The Coddling Family (Proverbs 13:24)

- Parental authority is lacking.
- Feelings are overprotected.
- Disagreements are avoided.
- Children are the center of attention.

The Codependent Family (Deuteronomy 6:5)

- Conformity is strong within the family.
- Self-direction is lacking.
- Parents are overly possessive.
- Children are smothered.

“Bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.”
(Colossians 3:13)

Test for Unresolved Conflicts from Your Past

- Do you fear personal criticism?
- Do you give to others to the extent that it is harmful to you?
- Do you constantly seek approval?
- Do you suppress your emotions?
- Do you feel you must rescue others?
- Do you confuse pity with love?
- Do you find yourself easily manipulated?
- Do you have unresolved anger toward any family member?
- Do you avoid taking personal responsibility for your actions?
- Do you fear abandonment?

Key Verses to Memorize

“If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”
(John 8:31–32)

Key Passage to Read and Reread

Genesis chapters 37, 39, 41, 42, 50

Cultivate Your Family for the Future²

Emphasize the uniqueness of each family member.
(1 Corinthians 12:14–17)

Seek togetherness, but also encourage individuality.³
(1 Corinthians 12:4–7)

Maintain consistency in the messages you communicate. (James 3:10–13)

Practice immediate but appropriate discipline.
(Proverbs 13:24)

Allow a generous margin for mistakes. (Ephesians 4:32)

Encourage the appropriate expression of feelings.
(Proverbs 20:5)

Promote and develop natural talents and abilities.
(Proverbs 22:6)

Require family members to take responsibility for their own attitudes and actions. (Galatians 6:4–5)

Treat everyone with love and respect.
(1 Corinthians 16:14)

“I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead.”
(Philippians 3:13)

Putting Away the Past⁴

Give yourself time to grieve your past.⁵ (John 16:20)

Give up your need to be controlling. (Psalm 55:22)

Give Christ first place in your heart. (Luke 9:23–24)

Give God thanks for your past. (1 Thessalonians 5:18)

Give attention to how you responded to your circumstances as a child. (Proverbs 18:15)

Give thought to your present dysfunctional characteristics. (Psalm 139:23–24)

Give consideration to your God-given rights. (Acts 5:29)

Give yourself boundaries.⁶ (Galatians 1:10)

Give up resentment. (Ephesians 4:32)

Give time to restoring healthy family relationships. (Matthew 5:23–24)

Related Topics . . .

- Anger:
Controlling the Fire Within
- Alcohol & Drug Abuse:
Breaking Free and Staying Free
- The Blended Family:
God's Recipe for Success
- Conflict Resolution:
Solving People Problems
- Forgiveness:
How to Forgive . . . When You Don't Feel Like It
- Reconciliation:
Restoring Broken Relationships

1. Dale and Juanita Ryan, *Recovery from Family Dysfunctions: 6 Studies for Groups and Individuals*. Life Recovery Guides (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 12–13.

2. For this section see David Mains, *Healing the Dysfunctional Church Family* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1992), 145–46.

3. David Field, *Family Personalities* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1988), 153–54.

4. For this section see Jim Conway, *Adult Children of Legal and Emotional Divorce: Healing Your Long-Term Hurt* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1990), 127–240.

5. Nancy LeSourd, *No Longer the Hero: The Personal Pilgrimage of an Adult Child* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1991), 173–74.

6. LeSourd, *No Longer the Hero*, 175–77.

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Dysfunctional Family:
Making Peace with Your Past.

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