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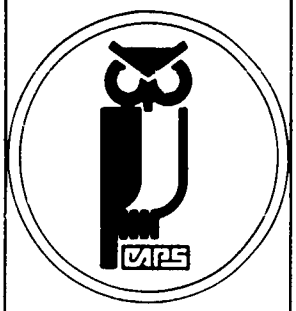
ABSTRACT

This monograph was written to help teachers, counselors, and parents who live and work with adolescents. It explains the psychological tasks of adolescence, separation from parents, and identity formation. Guidelines are provided for adolescent and parental development in several areas. An overview of regressive adaptation focuses on expressions of anger; depression and despair; rigidity; alcohol, sex, and drugs; envy; adolescent self-centeredness; and adolescent lack of appreciation. Stages of family life are described, with attention to the individual within the family, the family life cycle, the family system, the midlife stage of family development, loss of self, triangulation, adolescent pressure to achieve, family negotiation, and sibling influences. Sources of dysfunctional family patterns are considered, including parental needs, negative attitudes toward change, unresolved separation issues, responses to adolescent behavior, and views of common problems. A section on facilitating adolescent growth examines helping relationships outside the family, idealization of significant others, parental resistance to help, transference reactions to a counselor, appropriate responses to adolescents in conflict, and family history. The monograph concludes that helping adults need to understand the authority and control conflicts of adolescent development, the conflicts and dynamics of the adolescent's family, and the influences of social and cultural affiliations. (NB)



INNER WORLD, OUTER WORLD:

UNDERSTANDING THE STRUGGLES OF ADOLESCENCE

David Klimek and Mary Anderson

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by

David Klimek and Mary Anderson

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PREFACE

When commissioned to write a monograph on understanding and working with adolescents, our first question was, "Who is going to read it?" When we learned it was to be geared primarily toward teachers, counselors, and parents, we readily accepted the challenge of trying to write an informative publication for adults who work and live with teenagers. Professional therapists and counselors who work primarily with adolescents and for one reason or another are unable to include their parents may find this book too social, relational, and family-oriented. Conversely, strict adherents to a "systems approach" toward understanding teenagers and children may find that we place too much emphasis on the unique development of the individual and therefore may appear to minimize the wide array of influences involved in family dynamics.

While working with teenagers and their parents, we methodically undertake deeply to understand the unique feelings, defenses, compensations, attitudes, and conflicts of the individual *as well as his/her parents.* It is our belief that if we can understand the influences of *all* the important players in the youngster's life, then we can creatively intervene and eventually help each family member resolve his or her conflicts and pain so as to proceed forward toward a higher level of growth and health. The bottom line of our understanding of the human condition is that we are all "object seekers"—that is, we all seek human relationships and interactions with significant objects of love and dependence on the basis of personality factors, the way we feel about ourselves, and the way we perceive others and the world. Anyone who has helped a teenager make radical changes for the better knows that such transformations are not likely unless the helping person genuinely understands the youngster and has earned the privilege of having an honest and caring relationship with him or her. Few things are more meaningful for helping adults than the realization that they have helped a teenager and his/her parents live a far better life than any of the family ever thought possible.

We will be deeply gratified if the material contained in this monograph enhances the understanding and effectiveness of adults who work with teenagers in the school setting. A general adage that is heard among staff members at our office seems significant: "If it doesn't help enhance the overall quality of life, what good is it?" It is our wish that reading

these pages will in some small way help provide deeper understanding of teenagers which results in the facilitation of growth and maturity. If it doesn't, what good is it?

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INTRODUCTION

If parents, teachers, counselors, and therapists do not understand the inner world of teenagers, they are not likely to be effective in relating to them or helping them grow. This fact is borne out many times daily across the country in terms of parent-teenager conflicts, teacher-teenager conflicts, and, of course, whenever anyone in authority attempts to work with teenagers. Most secondary school administrators are astutely aware of the teachers who have the most trouble with the students and those exceptional teachers whom teenagers seem to like and respect. The latter are usually the people who have a thorough understanding of their own inner adult world, as well as the inner world of adolescence. Strange as it may sound, some of the adults who are most effective in working with adolescents have not necessarily studied adolescent psychology, but seem to know the feelings and needs of teenagers and what they are trying to communicate by their behavior. Conversely, many of the so-called experts, that is adults who have studied the psychology of adolescence, may believe they know teenagers, but in spite of their knowledge are ineffective in assisting them through the relatively vulnerable and fragile phase called adolescence.

Frequently, the most difficult aspect of living and working with teenagers is the frustration incurred by adults who are trying to teach them, control them, or interact with them in the context of adult reality. Teachers, for example, often become frustrated when they try to teach subject matter that in some way is important to them, and the students fail to see the relevance or importance of the course. This makes some teachers angry and critical, which most teenagers detect and react to negatively. A vicious cycle is then created whereby the teacher holds to an attitude of anger and criticism and the teenagers respond to their rejection with further resistance. As a result, many teachers "hate the kids" and the kids in turn "hate" the subject, the teacher, and sometimes school in general. The basic error in the above paradigm is the assumption on the part of adults that teenagers go to school *primarily* to learn subject matter. There is no evidence, anywhere, to show that the primary focus of teenagers' minds is on school work.

Parents often run into similar difficulties while forcing adult orientation to reality onto their teenagers, who may in fact be operating quite effectively and successfully in their own adolescent world—that is, adhering to an adolescent-level reality and orientation to the world that is quite different from the reality of adulthood! Yet parents, teachers, and well-

meaning adults seldom accept or relate to teenagers "where they are at," but instead tend to reject adolescents by foisting *their* attitudes, feelings, perceptions, and behaviors upon them. In short, the attitude transmitted in many adult-adolescent interactions is one of rejection and dehumanization of the youngster for who he/she really is during this phase of life. Ironically, parents, teachers, or other helping adults who harbor unaccepting attitudes toward adolescents are often the same people who become extremely upset over minor rejection and criticism from their own superiors and/or peers.

Failure to recognize adolescents as legitimate young people, in and of itself, sets the stage for serious disservice to parents and children. It tends to do irreparable damage to the youngster who has little choice but to retaliate directly or indirectly and become overly dependent upon peers for acceptance, approval, and much-needed feedback about the emerging sense of self. It is equally ironic that the parents who are the most unaccepting of their own teenager often are the most upset because their youngster does not "respect" them and wants to spend most of his/her time away from home. Similarly, the parents whose lives are the most out of balance and/or emotionally disturbed are the same people who tend to have the most trouble with their teenagers. This is not an accident, for those adults who are the most out of balance tend to resent adult responsibility and feel overworked and underappreciated. As a result of their own imbalance, they tend to resent spunky, carefree, somewhat irresponsible teenagers and often spend their time trying to force their teenager to be as overburdened with responsibility and hardship as they.

Well-balanced adults often find delight in the spontaneity, happiness, and carefree attitudes of their adolescent children. They realize that it is because of *their* hard work and effort that their children are able to enjoy their teenage years to the utmost. These parents view their children's spontaneity and lack of burden as the result of successful parenting. After all, it is their love that has made it possible for their youngster to enjoy each day of his/her teenage years. Many parents and teachers who relate to their teenagers quite well and are the most facilitative of their growth tend to enjoy them as real and legitimate people. Living with and working with teenagers can serve to stimulate inner vitality, enthusiasm, spontaneity, sexuality, laughter, finding humor in life's absurdities, and the importance of lying around doing absolutely nothing—an art that many burdened adults have long forgotten. Frequently while conducting workshops and seminars on healthy family life, we are surprised that we need to remind the majority of parents that if their teenagers actually became everything they wanted them to become, they would probably be seriously disturbed, for they would no longer resemble spunky, vital, and enthusiastic youngsters,

but instead, old, overly-responsible, stagnant, downtrodden geriatric patients with no mind of their own!

In addition, they would have failed the primary task of adolescence—to separate from their parents and to come fully into their own with all the uniqueness and diversity implied in becoming one's own person. Some overly compliant teenagers become exactly what their parents want them to be. This is a failure of the tasks of adolescence, for the youngster often is seriously disturbed as he/she has had to renounce the real and authentic self in order to become a clone of the parents' desires and needs. Although some of these youngsters manage to "get through" their adolescent years by turning the self over to the wishes of the parents, they often enter adulthood with a seriously defective sense of self.

CHAPTER ONE

THE REAL WORK OF ADOLESCENCE

The psychological or inner life chore of adolescence is not much different from the psychological work required of adults throughout life. The primary difference is that adolescence is partially precipitated by biological changes which render the individual a sexual creature for the first time in his/her life. With the sexual/hormonal apparatus set in place the youngster for the first time is biologically drawn *away from the parents* for gratification of the deeper level human needs such as love, support, recognition, attention, and affirmation. Similarly, the adolescent, although he/she will seldom discuss it directly with adults, is both consciously and unconsciously drawn *away* from the parents and *away* from the family of origin in an attempt to seek sexual excitement, affirmation, sexual intimacy, and to establish an identity as a "nonchild" of the parents who previously raised him/her. Most parents feel a combination of anxiety, fear, and even panic over the realization that their teenager is being pulled away from the family. Some parents have similar feelings over the realization that their child is becoming sexual. In a later chapter, the unresolved separational and sexual feelings of the parents will be discussed. Suffice it to say at this juncture that the more unresolved and conflicted one or both parents are in terms of sensitivity to separation, loss, and abandonment—and the more conflicted each is with his/her sexuality—the greater will be the conflict between the parent and his/her teenager.

The pulling away from the family for affirmation, identification, and self-esteem is a direct function of biological pubescence. It is amusing to walk the hallways of most junior high schools and note the differences in maturation. Some 7th graders are as developed as many 9th graders. Interspersed in the 9th grade are some youngsters who have yet to reach puberty. They walk the halls not unlike self-conscious elementary age children who feel out of place in their yet-to-mature bodies. Generally, however, the late-maturing youngsters tend to have less conflict with their parents because they usually are delayed in the process of separation/individuation.

Early puberty may throw some kids into social situations for which they are unprepared. Yet, early maturation also provides opportunity for greater psychological maturity as well as leadership capability and self-esteem. Seldom, for example, do the late-maturing junior high school students become the leaders or the most socially desirable or

sought-after students. Commonly, the most physically developed students associate with one another and the less developed kids also associate together. Biological factors and their social interpersonal influence tend to impact greatly the way a teenager feels about him/herself, as well as forcing him/her into a role of leadership. The well-developed 7th grade girl, for example, is sure to have more social and sexual interactions and experiences with 8th and 9th grade boys than the immature 7th grade girl who has not developed sexually. Similarly, the well-developed 7th grade boy who is strong, handsome, and athletic is going to have different social responses from others and a different opinion of himself based upon sexually-tinged responses from the girls than is the undeveloped 7th grader. Although nearly all teenagers are pubescent by the time they are in the 11th and 12th grades, the early maturers and leaders among a specific peer group in the 8th and 9th grade tend to retain their popularity, desirability, and leadership throughout high school. This is especially true in the public school setting where the emphasis is on *physical* attractiveness and *physical* prowess in terms of athletic ability. In the public school setting the youngsters who are the most physically attractive and athletic tend to be the ones who are the most socially desirable.

Some parents realize that their child may be somewhat limited by diminutive size or late maturity, and look for private schools in which the physical attractiveness criterion has been deliberately altered by administrative philosophy. For example, some private schools are known for their intellectual or creative orientation or some other criterion in which their child may have more of an advantage for acceptance, leadership, success, and enhanced self esteem. Behind the scenes of such private schools, however, the most physically mature and attractive teenagers are still the most popular, desired, and highly esteemed.

Some parents remain oblivious to the importance of physical, sexual, and social attractiveness in the adolescent world and try to ignore the importance of peer conformity as it relates to the youngster's feelings of being accepted and not standing out as being too different from others. Other parents become exasperated because their teenagers want all the "in" things in terms of clothing and hair style. They do not understand that adolescent reality is a reality of its own. Nor do they comprehend that being accepted by peers and holding to contemporary peer language, behaviors, and attitudes is far more important to them than remaining open to the old-fashioned adult attitudes and behaviors of their parents.

Once puberty is underway and the gonads begin to impact the youngster's needs and interests, the separation process from the parents begins. Our research shows that

approximately 70-75 percent of the teenagers navigate this phase fairly well, while the remaining 25-30 percent experience the gamut of emotions and turmoil ranging from delinquency to acting out, to drug dependence, to self-destructive behaviors, to school failure, to sexual involvement, to parental conflicts and anger, to depression. There appears to be a tendency among late junior and senior high boys to act out with direct expression of anger and aggression, while the girls at this age tend to "act it" with powerful mood swings, depression, and vacillating self-esteem. Interestingly, these gender patterns that come to the forefront in adolescence are repeated fairly consistently throughout adulthood—namely, that women suffer more from deeper and longer periods of depression than men, while men act out their emotions in a variety of ways.

The Nitty Gritty Work of Adolescence

The following chart depicts the psychological work of the adolescent. Sensitive adults will recognize the psychological process as a phenomenon that occurs repeatedly in themselves. As mentioned earlier, those families that report the highest incidence of parent-child conflicts are usually those where one or both parents are not adequately resolved in their own adolescent issues. Figure 1 shows the adolescent work in detail.

As adolescents experience increasing separation from their parents and family and begin to relate to as well as learn about the larger world, they undergo a mourning process which in essence is psychological loss. Technically, *adolescence proper*, for the sake of ensuing discussion, is thought to occur between the ages of fourteen and a half and seventeen and a half. It is during this "in-between" age that the youngster is unconsciously experiencing psychological loss as well as the reality of being caught between child and adult. All teenagers in a normal course of development must go through this grief phase en route to strengthening and becoming their own person. Under the heading of loss in Figure 1 are the multiple emotions experienced by teenagers as they go through *adolescence proper*. During these phases teenage emotions vacillate between periods of separation anxiety and periods of abandonment depression. Figure 2 shows the vacillating emotions of each constellation.

Figure 1. The Essentials of Growth or Deterioration

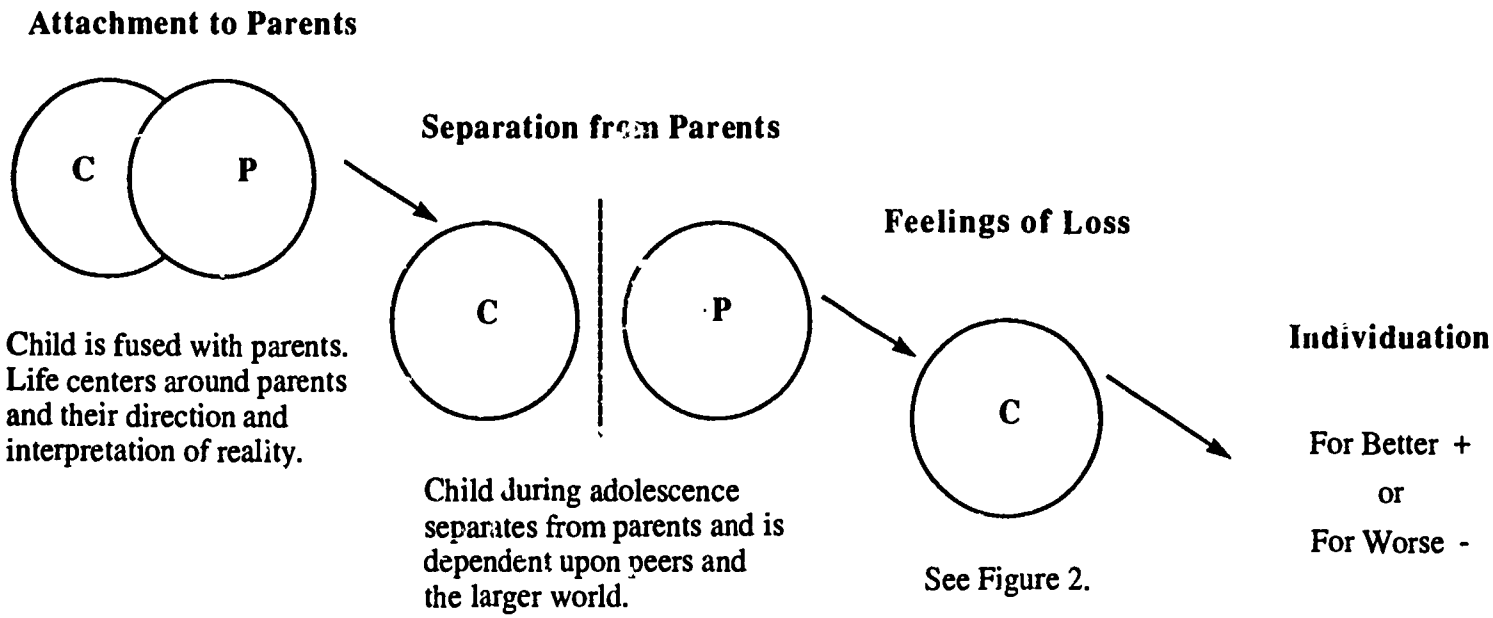


Figure 2. Loss-Mourning Cycle

Separation Anxiety	Abandonment Depression
• Hyperactivity	• High vulnerability
• Anger	• Depression/grief
• Denial	• Self-anger/self-blame/guilt
• Resistance-rebelliousness	• Passivity
• Attack/control	• Withdrawal
• Physical illness	• Extreme sensitivity/caution/fear
• Increased self-focus	• Physical illness

Many sensitive, emotionally well-attuned parents easily recognize the emotions described while their teenager is in the throes of the loss-mourning grief cycle. Some parents become angry and annoyed when their child shows signs of separation anxiety with hyperactivity because they are loud, noisy, active, argumentative, inconsiderate, boisterous, and tend not to listen to their parents. Conversely, many parents become worried when their teenager is showing some of the classic symptoms indicative of the underlying abandonment depression. Few parents enjoy the resistance, the bickering, the noise, or their child's desire to be away from home and with friends all the time, but they enjoy it less when their child shows signs of obvious depression. It frightens most parents when their child shuts them out and hides in his/her room, appears uninterested in talking decently to anyone, and feels frightened, cautious, defensive, and doubtful. It is difficult for most parents to see their child unhappy, sad and miserable, and showing little or no sign of usefulness, initiative, or productivity. In view of the burgeoning adolescent suicide rate during the last few years, most parents would rather see their child in the hyper-obnoxious phase than in the depressed-withdrawn phase of the grief cycle.

Despite the fact that many parents and teachers would rather see their children in the hyperactive phase (and in fact encourage it) than in the depressed phase, both cycles are extremely important for optimal self-development. The hyperactive phase may ostensibly appear more healthy in today's society, but because it is made possible by psychological denial and avoidance of deeper feelings and struggles, the result tends to be superficiality, arrogance, and excessive narcissistic development. Periods of depression, for example, are necessary because they accompany withdrawal, increased sensitivity, vulnerability, caution, and doubt, all of which facilitate introspection and a serious journey into the self for evaluation, resolution, and self-understanding. In short, it is the painful depressive phases that facilitate honest consideration and evaluation of many important aspects of life,

as well as death. (It is fairly common for adolescents to talk about death and dying among themselves.) It is during the depressive phases that an individual attempts to resolve the loss of his/her previous life as a child and unconsciously mourns the loss of parental (adult) protection, as well as the prior years of comparative irresponsibility and childlike dependence. In short, the mourning and direct experiences of loss and sadness during these depressive phases pave the way to the emergence of a new, separate, and real self that is becoming increasingly autonomous. Through the process of experiencing the feelings of loss and mourning and the simultaneous emergence of an authentic, real, new self, the youngster begins to become his/her own person—a process which is absolutely necessary for successful navigation of adulthood.

Aberrations or interruption in the depressive and mourning processes of adolescence are evidenced in several pathological states seen in adults who have by-passed the normal mourning en route to adulthood. The youngster, for example, who for complex reasons cannot tolerate the depressive phases of adolescence and becomes addicted to drugs to keep high rather than experience the psychological work required while low, flagrantly violates the major tasks of adolescence. The result of such escape is a grossly underdeveloped and immature individual in adulthood. Nearly all adults who needed the assistance of alcohol and other chemicals to get through adolescence remain underdeveloped in their coping mechanisms as well as in the construction of a solid and positive sense of self.

Another violation of the normal loss and mourning process of adolescence is seen in the highly conforming and compliant child who seldom if ever presents a problem or even a disagreement to his parents. Most often such youngsters never really psychologically separate and individuate (establish their own autonomous identity), but instead adopt a passive, compliant role during adolescence to which they adhere for a lifetime. Although most parents and nearly all teachers enjoy the cooperative, compliant teenager, primarily because they are excellent students and do all the "right" things, few submissive, compliant youngsters truly mature from within. Their adaptation to their parents, to their teachers, to peers, and to life in general is seldom a real and authentic adjustment that emerges from deep within the self. Instead, such youngsters quit growing because they have turned the self over to their parents. In short, they fabricate a role, a false self, which in turn is reinforced by parents, teachers, and society. The tragedy of this type of adolescent development—the too-good-to-be-true role—is that life adjustment, especially the development of honest intimacy and creativity, is severely curtailed in adulthood.

Such people, while in adulthood, unconsciously tend to play out their adolescent conflicts with their spouse. Many become severely depressed and disturbed adults because they had not successfully individuated during adolescence. When the lives of the too-good-to-be-true teenagers are examined in adulthood, one sees the residual feelings of adolescence demonstrated by an almost chronic level of depression, loss, and despair, as well as an empty conformity that looks good on the outside but is devoid of deep personal satisfaction and meaning.

A third flagrant violation in the loss/mourning process is found in the youngster who is unable to accommodate the separation, loss, and abandonment of adolescence and becomes prematurely involved with sexual relations. Some youngsters who have not had satisfactory or dependable relationships with their parents *prior to adolescence* are unable to handle the loneliness of adolescence because they did not have the necessary foundation of love and closeness during their early years. Nearly always, these youngsters become prematurely involved with love relationships and sexuality in order to get through the pain of their abandonment depression. The unconscious motivation for premature sexual involvement is often the desire to fall head-over-heels in love so as to "lose" the self in another person. This is usually an unconscious desire for merger and symbiosis with nearly anyone who will cooperate. Clinically, however, falling deeply in love during adolescence is often little more than an anesthesia against the pain of depression, loneliness, and loss. Such individuals usually become extremely dependent upon love, romance, and sexual excitement rather than developing inner strength and ego coping mechanisms.

Quite accidentally, another group of youngsters tends to fall into this category of violating the natural growth opportunity of adolescence. The extremely attractive or handsome teenager who is socially desirable, sought after, and readily receives a deluge of recognition frequently tends to become overly dependent on admiration. Although many parents would prefer their children to be socially desirable, it can be an injustice to the process of successful separation and individuation because they tend to command an overly enthusiastic response from others based entirely on external (sexual) appearance. In short, the positive response is not earned or learned, nor does it require strength from the interior; it is a superficial/exterior response that tends to short-circuit genuine strength. The extremely socially desirable youngster usually develops a well-packaged false self solely oriented toward eliciting attention and recognition from others. If this response tendency is carried into adulthood, as it often is, the person may remain psychologically immature in

that he/she is unable to tolerate stress, is superficial, and is highly dependent upon the attention of others for feelings of well-being. Nearly always, such adults feel empty, unfulfilled, and unhappy despite the fact that they appear to have all the things that are supposed to make them happy.

For Better or Worse--The Issue of Identity

Figure 3 shows the potential for teenagers genuinely to strengthen, to worsen, or merely to get through. It may be helpful for parents and helping adults to study this chart as it may assist in self-appraisal as well as in the appraisal of the adolescent. While conducting seminars for parents or workshops on adolescence for professionals, we encourage parents not to overreact to adolescent behaviors and "symptoms." Overreacting to teenagers causes an opposite negative reaction which can cause the youngster to worsen. But more important, overreacting to nearly every "abnormal" behavior of adolescence may dangerously cause the youngster to fortify his/her role of conformity and obedience. Such a role, demanded by adults in their anxious attempt to be perfect parents, is the antithesis of a healthy and positive real self or real identity. It is only through the acquisition of a solid real self, even if it does not conform to parental standards, that the individual will be free to develop deep levels of intrinsic motivation and enthusiasm for living.

To help adults not overreact to their teenagers, we usually have them become familiar with psychological factors of separation, individuation, and identity, not so much during early adolescence but during *adolescence proper*. During *adolescence proper* (ages fourteen and a half to seventeen and a half), we recommend that the parents take a quarterly inventory of whether or not their child is moving toward a higher or a lower level of inner strength. That is, instead of overreacting by being critical, controlling, and rejecting, parents should adopt a loving, caring, positive, accepting attitude and response style toward their teenagers, and panic or relax only after they do a careful quarterly appraisal. About once every three months they might objectively attempt to evaluate the process of successful or unsuccessful individuation in their teenager (and themselves) by checking the attributes of the following list.

Figure 3. Individuation: For Better or Worse

Higher Level	Lower Level
• Self-containment	• Hostility/anger
• Self-knowledge	• Resentment
• Self-fulfillment	• Depression/withdrawal/despair
• Appreciation capability	• Rigidity
• Openmindedness	• Obsessions (alcohol, chemicals, sex)
•	• Bitterness/criticism of nearly everything
• Peace of mind	• Envy
	• More self-centeredness
• Skill acquisition	• No signs of gratitude/appreciation
• Self-direction/increased ability to plan and be responsible	• Decreased ability to plan and be responsible

It is natural for parents to want to stay on top of their teenagers' activities and behavior, but to do so often means that they may inadvertently contribute to conflict and appear to reject their son or daughter. As the adolescent goes through the pain of separation, loss, and individuation, he/she needs all the understanding, affirmation, and acceptance possible in order to successfully negotiate a positive, healthy identity. Frequently, overly critical, overly controlling, cynical, and nonaffirming parents force their child away from the family toward others, some of whom may be of questionable influence. Teenagers need acceptance and affirmation that they are fine people just as they are. If they cannot be affirmed at home, they have little choice but to move toward others to seek the acceptance and belonging they need in order to survive emotionally.

As mentioned, rather than day-by-day parental overreactions to adolescent behaviors, we recommend a quarterly inner life appraisal. Under the scrutiny of daily evaluation, it is doubtful anyone could pass the test of growth. On a quarterly basis, however, it is not difficult to evaluate whether a youngster is advancing forward toward higher levels of successful individuation or whether he/she is regressing and worsening. In our family dynamics seminars, we also encourage parents to evaluate themselves and their own emotional development for signs of improvement and signs of regression. Because one aspect of adolescence is to develop a high level of social-interpersonal awareness and sophistication, many above-average teenagers lose respect for their parents if they have quit growing and maturing, or if they are alcoholic and/or otherwise conspicuously disturbed. Psychologically, teenagers are free to grow and succeed in approximately the same

proportion that their parents are psychologically growing and maturing. Wellness in the parents tends to beget wellness in the children.

The obsolete adage, "Do as I say and not as I do," often creates more conflict and parental disrespect than it is worth. Our adage for parents is to do a quarterly psychological appraisal on themselves and to make a commitment to health which entails that they eventually resolve enough of their own issues that their teenagers can see them as living well and loving well. In short, the healthier, more loving, and more well-adjusted the parents, the healthier and more well-adjusted the children. To date, our research has shown that it can be no other way!

CHAPTER TWO

EVALUATION OF CHILD: EVALUATION OF SELF

The purpose of parenting is not merely to get through the day, week, or month without hassles. The purpose is to help each child grow, become more real, and be all that he or she can be.

This chapter is designed to provide approximate guidelines for adolescent and parental development. The limited size of this monograph does not permit a fully detailed account of the principles of human growth, but it is hoped that the reader will derive enough information from the following pages to prove helpful. (For a detailed account of inner life development in adolescents and adults, see David Klimek, *Narrow is the Way: An Analysis of Successful Living*, 1987, manuscript submitted for publication.) Figure 3 has shown the indications of becoming stronger from within and, as stated before, each individual should be compared only against him/herself on a quarterly basis.

Self-Containment

A major feature of successful inner life development of adolescence is self-containment. This is the ability to show self-direction and planning, and to spend time alone without feeling aggressive, anxious, bored, or depressed. Much of the sibling rivalry in families is related t the youngsters' underdeveloped capability to experience aloneness and quietude without becoming angry, restless, or destructive. Rivalry is basically negative interactions wherein youngsters relate to one another with aggression and destruction, primarily because they are unable to contain the self. Most parents realize that sibling rivalry intensifies when one or both children are bored, which is a derivative of the feeling of underlying depression related to loss.

Signs of self-containment in *adolescence proper* are evidenced in less bickering between teenager and parents and between the teenager and other siblings. Other signs are a better grasp of reality which results in better planning, doing things for the self (excluding taking out the garbage, cleaning up after one's self, loading the dishwasher, and cleaning one's bedroom), fewer mood swings, less negativity, more optimistic outlook about life, fewer demands on parents, and greater ability to tolerate frustration, loneliness, and quietude. Self-containment also shows up in greater capacity and willingness to cooperate

with others as well as increased occurrences of spontaneous compliments toward others who possess admirable traits.

Self-Knowledge

As teenagers (and adults) advance through life they should become increasingly interested in their own feelings and the feelings of others. They should also begin to recognize their own contribution to problems and to personal failures without blaming others. Extremely defensive adolescents and adults are unable to accept full responsibility for their own actions, and in essence for themselves. Instead, they remain blind to their own *real* feelings and the *real* feelings of others. This lack of self-knowledge keeps them immature and dependent to the degree that they assume others are causing them to feel bad, or that others are the reason life is becoming difficult, or that other people get the breaks in life because of *luck.*

As the real self is successfully individuating and maturing, the adolescent is less apt to blame teachers for poor grades while simultaneously utilizing self-knowledge for increased direction and responsibility. Caution must be exercised at this juncture in the appraisal of teenage development. Some parents mistakenly assign improvement in this area to the passive, obedient, compliant child who gets straight A's and is obsessed with doing all the "right" things. Many successful students are not well-rounded at all, but fearfully hide their problems and social anxieties behind their books and good scholarship. Such youngsters seldom show increased self-knowledge and other-knowledge because they have anxious, strained, and faulty peer relationships. Their forte is compliance. Even though these adolescents are often pleasing to parents and teachers, they may not be developing internally. Accurate appraisal for such youngsters needs to be done in terms of moving toward healthier peer relationships and in finding more well-rounded interests. Perfectionistic students need to evaluate progress in terms of being less upset and more accepting of an occasional B or even a C in some classes. For others it will mean occasionally showing signs of defiance and disobedience.

Self-Fulfillment

Self-fulfillment automatically follows the rudimentary onslaught of self-containment and self-knowledge. For if a teenager cannot accept the real self and his/her uniqueness and needs, it is not possible to experience true self-fulfillment. Without legitimate self-

fulfillment, living (for adults as well as teenagers) becomes increasingly burdensome and depressing. Yet many parents, especially those who are extremely authoritarian, deprecating, and controlling, are unable to love and support their child and let the child be his or her own person. Instead, they are constantly teaching, training, guiding, directing, and generally orchestrating their child's life. Some invasive parents stultify the child's separational process by needing to know everything he/she does. Such parents often pride themselves on their communication with their teenager. Their children are seldom able to complete the primary work of adolescence, however, because the parents are constantly invading the child's real self.

Self-fulfillment is seen in youngsters who show increasing capacity to be genuinely interested in things, and to participate in them in such a way that they feel comfortable, relaxed, and fulfilled after the event is over. During early adolescence, many teenagers fill their days with numerous activities, but don't often feel genuine self-fulfillment. They become engaged in such activities because their friends are doing them and/or because "it's exciting." When interests and events are engaged in for these reasons, they are not signs of self-fulfillment but instead create an additional craving for more activity and excitement. In short, the youngster is *driven* toward activities which do not fill the self or provide contentment. Instead they create more discontent and emptiness.

As teenagers navigate adolescence, one appraisal point is their ability to experience genuine satisfaction and fulfillment which temporarily *quiets* the inner life rather than keeping emotions running in a constant state of turmoil and excitement. To expect teenagers to experience periods of self-fulfillment at 13, 14, and 15 years of age would be a mistake. There should be obvious signs of it, however, at 16, 17, and 18. Needless to say, if a youngster's parents are lacking in fulfillment and live a hectic lifestyle in which they are attempting to find happiness by frantically seeking excitement and material things outside the self, the youngster is not apt to experience self-fulfillment.

Greater Ability for Appreciation

Parenting is a near-to-impossible task and to be perfect parents *is* impossible. As adults attempt to navigate their own life cycle they frequently become overwhelmed with burdens, some of which are similar to those experienced by their teenagers. Everyone from adolescence onward must struggle with the burden of his/her own aloneness, the burden of reality, and the burden of responsibility. From the overburdened adult

perspective, most teenagers appear irresponsible and unappreciative. Some parents call their kids lazy, slobs, irresponsible, or ungrateful leeches. The truth is that the more the parents are suffering from the burdens of adulthood, marital discord, or their own unresolved adolescent conflicts, the more they either despise their teenagers and/or try to force them into the role of giving *them* love and providing *them* with signs of appreciation. Both of these antics interfere with the youngster's development of the real self. In our parental workshops we commonly tell parents, "Any teenager under 15 or 16 who openly shows love and appreciation toward his parents is revealing that something is terribly wrong!" To acquire such responses, the parents have had to train the child to fake affection and appreciation and/or they would have to have had periods of illness and dysfunction that traumatized the youngster so deeply that he/she was forced into the role of parent and caregiver. This is not a real appreciation, but a desperate response born out of fear of loss, guilt, punishment, or abandonment.

Real and authentic appreciation evolves from the inside only after a teenager has managed to grow from the pain of separation/individuation and has come to recognize the self as a unique and separate person. Through this separation and loss, he/she then becomes capable of viewing the parents as unique and separate entities. Usually the first signs of naturally expressed love and appreciation show up in the 16th year and increase thereafter if the child is growing. An occasional "Thanks, Mom," "Thanks, Dad," or "I love you, Mom," "I love you, Dad" that comes spontaneously and deep from the youngster's heart is enough to cause most parents to weep for joy. Such signs of authentic love almost make the self-sacrifice of parenthood worthwhile. On the quarterly assessment, most 16- or 17-year-olds may deliver at least one or two expressions of appreciation and gratitude. If a youngster is slipping downhill, there will be signs of anger and resentment toward the parents over "not giving me enough," or "not doing enough for me." In short, regressed 17-year-olds will not show love and appreciation to parents but instead will show anger, hatred, indifference, inconsideration, and will blame them for all they did wrong.

Openmindedness

Many adolescents, not unlike the overwhelmed adult, tend to shut out new knowledge or new ideas or new experiences so as to hold their own emotionally. When a youngster is in the throes of adolescent grieving and loss, there is an obsessive tendency to seek excitement and/or to shut out new knowledge, new learning, and new experiences.

Some adolescents may appear to be seeking new experiences, but a closer look will reveal that they are merely driven to seeking various stimuli for the excitement, not the learning. Although this may appear true, they nevertheless remain shut off from numerous learning experiences which require effort as they chase after exciting but meaningless adventure. Successful individuation in the typical 15- or 16-year-old will reveal itself in less constriction and defensiveness, and more openmindedness to new thoughts and ideas. During the quarterly review, it is an excellent idea to evaluate the nature of the new things the parent has learned and to derive a calibration of parental openmindedness. The second checkpoint is to evaluate any new learning, interests, or ideas in the youngster that reflect openmindedness. Rigid, defensive, angry, and defeated parents who do not have the strength or courage to be openminded will surely stultify the overall development of their teenager. Parental rigidity and defensiveness nearly always result in similar attitudes in the child—even if the youngster appears openminded. The exception to this paradigm is found in the family where the parents are extremely rigid and closed-minded in their behavior and attitudes, and yet have a negativistic and rebellious child. In some cases the youngsters appear extremely openminded by being intellectually interested in all the things that upset their parents. This type of openmindedness is not real, but born out of anger and resentment. The purpose of such "openmindedness" is to rub the parent's nose in their own rigidity and intellectual obstructionism. Technically, when people's minds are shut down and they avoid new experiences and new ways of looking at things, they in essence become stagnant. Nearly always, such people worsen with advancing age.

Peace of Mind

If all of the above characteristics have received a positive ranking in the self and child evaluation, there is increased likelihood that the youngster will show extended periods of emotional well-being and peace of mind. It would be unlikely to acquire a plus on the previous aspects of successful individuation and then score a negative sign on this characteristic. If it does happen, then the child's identity may not be authentic but forced, miscalculated by the parents because of personal bias, or faked in order to "look good." Some overcritical parents attempt to raise perfectly behaved children and in doing so produce little more than frightened robots who are out of touch with their emotions but behave extraordinarily well.

If the youngster scored a plus on each of the above characteristics but shows signs of headaches, stomach aches, absenteeism, general malaise, agitation, irritation, eating disorders, anger, bitterness, envy, jealousy, excessive sensitivity to criticism, or excessive cynicism, it is likely that he/she is making a bogus adjustment. If all "looks good" on the outside, but the above symptoms persist, concerned parents need to seek competent professional help from a child- and/or child/family-oriented therapist for themselves and their youngster so as to help the family make the necessary changes to help each individual in the family unit grow from within.

Skill Acquisition

An important aspect of the psychological work of adolescence is increasing self-motivation in the steady acquisition of new interests, knowledge, and skills. It should be considered a danger sign if 17- or 18-year-olds do not have some enthusiastic interest in something constructive and are willing to sacrifice idle time to develop skills and competencies in this area of interest. On the quarterly review, parents need to ask, "Is the child acquiring skills or losing them?" This is often a delicate appraisal for some parents because it is possible that the child is developing many skills, but *none of them is what the parents would want.* This is not the place to discuss all the child-parent conflicts verbatim, but when a child is developing *self*-motivated skills which do not meet with parental approval, the youngster is very likely to respond vehemently with "Whose life is it!" Many over-anxious and over-controlling parents hear this plea or something similar but fail to listen. They are often the parents who mean well but are inadvertently hindering the development of a real and authentic sense of self in their teenager because they believe they know what is best or right for their child and proceed to do what they can to make the child conform to *their* wishes.

One extremely bright 16-year-old girl (I.Q. over 130) who was getting mediocre grades in school poignantly demonstrated this point in one of her family therapy sessions. During a moment of openness, she turned to her mother with a pleaful "Mom, believe it or not, I want to get good grades and use my brain more, I really do. But don't you see that *you* want good grades for me more than I do and you never let up. So if I get good grades now, I feel *it will be for you, not for me.* If you could quit being interested so much in me and my grades, and let it be O.K. with you and Dad if I would get C's and D's with no

bitching, my grades would improve. After all, *whose grades are they*! If you are so interested in grades, go back to school and earn your own, but please let me alone."

The parents heard her plea and did bow out of her academic pursuit. She let her grades slip to D's and E's for a half term just to see if her parents could let her alone. When they upheld their promise, she began to study and got mostly A's and B's. She graduated from high school with excellent grades and is now doing well in college. But to do so, her parents had to let her become her own person to the degree that they were willing to love her despite the fact she was not pleasing them. When she felt their acceptance she said to me, "I guess they do care more about me than they do my grades. I'm now free to do my best and it's for me, not them!"

The second appraisal issue relates to skill acquisition pertaining to the conspicuous loss of skills during early adolescence. Often the rapid loss of previous interests and skills (unless a youngster is severely regressing or worsening on most of the factors shown in the next section on unsuccessful individuation) means that teenagers are leaving behind the skills that were learned during earlier years because of parental motivation, interest, and pressure. As teenagers separate and become their own person, they may discover that earlier ideas and skills were "not really me, but my parents." To separate and individuate successfully, many teenagers rid themselves of "not me" skills and behaviors in order to find the "real me" interests and skills that provide personal meaning and satisfaction.

When parents see their child disregard valuable skills and talents acquired during earlier years, they often become upset and frightened. From the parents' vantage point, people need as many skills and talents as they can acquire in order to be successful and live happier, more fulfilling lives. No one (at least no adult) will argue that point, but as mentioned earlier, teenagers operate in their own reality and often their reality makes little sense and is unacceptable to responsible, frantic, achievement-oriented, highly efficient adults who organize every minute of their day in order to accomplish something they believe is important. Such parents see no value in "hanging out" with friends and "wasting time." But psychologically, hanging out and wasting time is extremely important for teenagers as it helps them better integrate an authentic and positive self, as well as develop social skills that are separate from those encouraged by parents and other family members.

Academic failure is the one thing that frightens most parents, but it is an extremely complex phenomenon. When youngsters have done well academically but begin to regress in the 11th or 12th grade, they may be trying to make a complicated statement that they are not able to articulate. We have found psycho/educational evaluations to be extremely

helpful in uncovering the cause of the youngster's regression. Nearly always, some sort of individual and/or family therapy is extremely helpful in bringing the unconscious feelings of the youngster to the surface. Once these feelings are exposed, many parents and their teenagers are able to make a healthier adjustment to each other so as to continue the process of growth more constructively.

Self-Direction/Greater Capacity to Plan Ahead and Be Responsible

The quarterly check on this trait may remain unmarked for quite a few years depending upon the perception of the parents. Many parents—especially those who feel pressured and overwhelmed by adult responsibilities—cannot let themselves accurately evaluate their teenager according to adolescent reality, but instead impose their frenzied adult standards. If so, they are usually furious at their child for appearing irresponsible!

Reasonably balanced and understanding parents who see their child as a unique individual are able to evaluate the child on his/her own merit and therefore objectively evaluate the youngster against the self. A healthy way to approach the appraisal of this trait is to look for signs of self-direction and planning that were not evident or not well-defined during the previous evaluation. To compare a teenager against adult standards, or against the standards of another child, is to reject the essence of that youngster's growth.

Each of the above aspects of successful individuation is best evaluated on a per child basis—that is, comparing each youngster only against him/herself. Whenever parents compare a child's attributes and personality development against the attributes and development of another, they have violated the most elementary aspect of human life: that everyone is unique, different, and develops at his/her own pace and in his/her own way.

CHAPTER THREE

THE DECLINE OF THE SELF

If an individual is not growing, he/she is probably worsening.

When a teenager is sinking into the lower levels of adaptation or is engaged in unsuccessful individuation, many of the destructive characteristics and behaviors are obvious. These signs and signals are inner life (psychological) mechanisms that manifest themselves in a variety of behaviors. Because most regressive symptoms are obvious and are the fear of every concerned parent, they need no further definition. They will be discussed briefly, however, because understanding some of the regressive symptoms in teenagers may help parents relate to the regressive tendencies in themselves. Out of this comparative knowledge may emerge deeper levels of understanding and empathy between parents and teenagers.

In this brief overview of regressive adaptation, we again recommend a quarterly review not only for the presence or absence of various traits, but for a self-comparison in terms of diminution or intensification of the various characteristics. Everyone has phases when he/she experiences symptoms of psychological regression. The difference between successful and unsuccessful individuation, however, is that in successful adaptation regressive symptoms are transitory and relatively infrequent. Some people realize they are slipping and deliberately work at getting back on track, while others badly deteriorate and don't seem to know or care. They let themselves go (because it requires less strength) to a point where they are unable to return to a level of satisfactory life adjustment.

Anger/Hostility/Resentment/Bitterness

Psychologically, nearly all expressions of anger are in fact indications of self-anger. The less adequate the youngster feels about him/herself, the greater the likelihood that he/she will reflect this inner hatred by projecting it outward onto others. Expressions of anger, hostility, resentment, bitterness, and criticalness toward others are often outward manifestations of the internal workings of the individual. During adolescence it is possible that the youngster has been the brunt of negative emotions (consciously and/or unconsciously) from the parents, and is merely reflecting what he/she has experienced at home. Teenagers raised by successfully individuated parents who feel good about

themselves, good about each other, and are readily accepting of everyone in the family, seldom have children who are angry, hostile, critical, resentful, and bitter. If most of life has gone fairly well for the parents and the youngster feels loved, valued, appreciated, and respected, there is little reason for adolescents raised in such families to feel hostile toward themselves, others, and the world at large.

An exception is noted which may attenuate parental anxiety on the one hand, while increasing it on the other. Our research on adolescent anger has shown that some parents who are fairly successfully individuated may in fact have angry adolescent youngsters. When this is the case, the early development of the child is worth careful consideration. For example, if the mother was depressed, physically ill, or experienced a severe emotional trauma during the child's first two or three years of life, it is possible that the necessary foundations of emotional and psychological health were weakened. Such youngsters are sometimes able to do fairly well during their early years, but have extreme difficulty during the separation/loss/individuation work of adolescence. In such situations, the task of adolescence stimulates unconscious developmental vulnerabilities and exacerbated feelings of separation, loneliness, depression, and loss from early childhood which, as teenagers, they react to violently.

If a child has experienced repeated emotional separation from the parents during the first two or three years of life, or if the youngster was ill during much of his/her early years, or if the mother was emotionally unavailable, deep-rooted separation/loss/ individuation vulnerabilities exist that are likely to surface in adolescence. We have also noted that many adopted youngsters have a difficult time during adolescence and often require psychological treatment in order to navigate successfully the pain of separation/loss/ abandonment. Many adopted youngsters feel vulnerable to rejection, separation, and abandonment during these years because their "real" mother did reject and abandon them. They also go through an extremely difficult time with numerous struggles related to "Who am I?" Nearly all adopted youngsters cannot be satisfied with who they are because they do not know who their "real" parents are. Many have a deep desire to know the reasons they were abandoned. They also have a persistent desire for reunion with the mother so they can learn who she and the father really were as well as the "real reason" for the abandonment. Often the rage and frustration of their abandonment by the "real" mother is played out against the adoptive mother.

In the above situations the youngster's anger is not episodic but tends to be present most of the time. Regressed adolescents (and adults) give the impression that they are

angry most of the time and experience only a few hours per week when they feel happy or indifferent. When parents have to tip-toe around the youngster because everything they say tends to evoke anger, it is a sign of severe disturbance, and professional help is recommended for the parents and child. The same recommendation is of course applicable to parents. If a spouse feels he/she must walk on eggshells or walk a tightrope or be on guard lest he/she upset the partner and experience his/her anger or rage, it is highly unlikely that anyone living under such precarious circumstances can develop normally.

Depression Despair

As described earlier, periods of withdrawal and depression are quite normal in adolescence (as well as in adulthood), as they allow the individual to turn inward, to think, to contemplate, and to do important work in understanding themselves and "what they are about." Periodic depression can be a time of soul-searching and self-understanding which leads the way toward higher levels of value acquisition as well as a more solid and real identity. The type of depression and despair that should serve as a panic alert is the type that the youngster cannot seem to resolve or shake by the resources that are available. For example, if a youngster appears depressed *while in the presence of peers*, or if peer relationships result in depression, it is likely that other problems are impinging upon him/her to the degree that he/she is not able to develop satisfying emotional connections with them. Such alienation and isolation are indeed a danger sign which must be taken as seriously as suicide talk and suicide gestures.

If a youngster appears chronically depressed and is unable to feel better in the presence of friends, or if he/she is making suicidal gestures, professional help by a qualified child/adolescent therapist must be considered. Accidents and suicide are the leading causes of death in teenagers in America, and both are reaching astonishing proportions. Furthermore, many adolescent deaths attributed to accidents involve drinking, drugs, or other self-destructive behaviors which could be classified as suicidal in their psychological meaning.

Some parents, for personal reasons, become angry when their teenager displays suicidal symptoms or threatens suicide. They accuse the youngster of doing it only for attention and negate the importance of the gesture as a signal that something is seriously amiss. Our findings reveal that if an adolescent (or adult, for that matter) is showing suicidal signs "only for attention," something is still seriously out of balance in terms of

successful adaptation. The rhetorical question to parents who dismiss their child's depression and/or suicide feelings by claiming that they are doing it only for attention is, "What is wrong, psychologically, that the youngster cannot get the attention he/she needs by doing something positive and self-affirming?" More important, however, when professionals are attempting to understand such parents is to ask them why the need for attention and affection seems negative. Most often, it will be discovered that the parents' supportive, nurturing, and affective needs are not being met, and because of this deprivation they are unsympathetic to the same needs in their child. The need for love is so deep in humans that if a parent feels "love starved," he/she is not likely to be empathic to the teenager's need for extra love and support.

Rigidity

Rigidity, perseveration, and stagnation are earmarks of developmental arrest in teenagers as well as adults. Commonly, while working with disturbed adolescents we are amazed at their rigid attitudes and beliefs. Disturbed people tend to hold to extremely rigid, defensive, and rejecting attitudes toward others, life, and themselves. When a teenager is disturbed, there is usually an accompanying underlying depression and loss of esteem that causes him/her to fear change. Most often, such youngsters have neither the psychological and intellectual energy nor the creative flexibility to acquire new knowledge about much of anything. Instead of perceiving the world as a place of opportunity, challenge, and discovery, they instead think of it as a place of restriction, frustration, and oppression. Most often the persistent underlying depression and accompanying negative attitudes cause them to hold on defensively to what little they have. Seldom are disturbed teenagers able to alter their rigid and negative attitudes so as to advance forward.

Most clinicians and parents trying to help teenagers change their minds about the self, peers, or life attitudes will be in for a great disappointment. Nearly always, when teenagers are in a regressive, self-defeating mode, their negative feelings about themselves and others have been set in place eons before their behavior reflects these emotions. As will be shown in later sections, rigid, regressed adolescents often come from negative, defeated families in which parental attitudes are equally inflexible. Hence, some adolescent rigidity is the direct result of trying to get through to the parents, often to no avail. They have learned by experience that talking to parents "doesn't change a damn thing." Diagnostically, the rigid, angry adolescent is nearly always experiencing deep feelings of

futility, hopelessness, and passivity. Many have a "What's the use?" attitude about themselves and their ability to facilitate change for the better. They have begun a lifestyle of angry cynicism indicative of resigned defeat. Adolescents need to see their parents' lives change and become healthier in order for them to believe that they can change, grow, and get what they need from life and others in order to be happy.

Obsessions: Alcohol/Sex/Drugs

Some obsessions can be positive and healthy during adolescence, such as those seen in the youngster who is obsessed with getting the best grades attainable or being the best musician or athlete, or developing the healthiest peer relationships he/she can manage. The regressed youngster will not see much value in any of the above "obsessions," but instead will tend to rigidly criticize peers and self-righteously defend his/her negative identity. It should be obvious to adults that it takes less skill, less intelligence, and less inner strength to participate in almost any destructive obsession than it does to succeed.

Obsessions involving negative behaviors and attitudes might be most accurately interpreted as self-prescribed medication against psychological dis-ease. Obsessions are essentially pain relievers, usually against the adolescent work of separation/loss/ individuation. As shown repeatedly, the phase of loss is extremely painful and many teenagers do not have the psychological, familial, and peer resources available to "ride out" low times. In short, because the inner psychological resources are not adequate, they require resources outside the self to get through the pain. Alcohol and other drugs are the easiest way to dull the pain either by numbing the central nervous system (alcohol) or by fighting against the depression and fear by "getting high" (marijuana, stimulants, and mood-elevating or hallucinogenic drugs). The obsession with extremely loud, blasting music serves much the same purpose, but is more adaptive than mood-altering chemicals. The loud, invasive, and blasting music that gives most adults headaches serves to drown out the underlying depression, loneliness, and emptiness en route to a more substantial sense of self. These self-prescribed medications (obsessions) are used not only by struggling teenagers but by some parents as well.

Many adults do not consider dating and sex as obsessions, but desperately seeking love, sex, and somebody to love them is a readily accessible way of combating the pain of separation. To fall in love and to think about the lover who is "always on my mind" is in fact an obsession not unlike alcohol and other chemicals. It gets the mind off the self,

arouses sexual feelings, and focuses attention toward something outside the self which makes it a little easier to get through the pain of each day. Although many adults may think nothing of the 16-year-old who is obsessed with being in love, with dating, sex, and possibly getting married and having a child, such obsessions in adolescence are most often a sign of regression and negative identification.

Obsessions such as sex, love, loud music, alcohol, drugs and too much or too little food are addictions whether used by adolescents or adults. One indication of the suffering that is subdued by addictions and obsessions is the amount of pain experienced when obsessions are ceased or their use discontinued. The teenager who, after breaking up with a boyfriend or girlfriend, becomes suicidal or dysfunctional is revealing the inner core of unsuccessful individuation. These teenagers are as addicted to love and sex as an escape from the necessary work of adolescence as the drug addict is to chemicals. Both become desperate, angry, and dysfunctional when their "supply" or "fix" is unavailable.

Envy

Envy is a telltale indication of unsuccessful individuation in both adolescence and adulthood. It is anger and resentment toward the perceived external attributes and possessions of another. In many ways, it reflects a superficial, materialistic orientation to life and is a sign of extreme dissatisfaction with the self and perceived limited potential for a better future. Adolescents tend to be more honest with their envy than socialized and appropriate adults. Their honesty is not straightforward, nor is it owned, but is psychologically reversed and displayed in open antagonism and hatred. "Oh, she makes me sick," or "I hate that jerk," or more directly, "I hate that snob who has everything; he thinks he's better than me," are expressions of envy. This reversal is often seen in teenagers who, upon first meeting a particular youngster, decide they "hate" him/her. This assessment frequently changes when, following an argument, fight, conflict, or merely associating with the enemy, the teenager discovers that he/she "really likes" the person after all. Seldom will an adolescent own up to envy by recognizing his/her anger. For example, it is highly unlikely for a teenager to say," I guess the reason I am so critical of her is because I envy her." Disturbed teenagers are especially unlikely to possess such honesty for they tend actually to believe that happiness *is* related to superficial, external belongings. They also tend to believe that they are incapable of obtaining material things based upon their own limited resources.

In terms of the quarterly evaluation, decreased signs of envy, jealousy, and criticism or cynicism may indicate a higher level of genuine self-acceptance, especially if it is accompanied by periods of emotional contentment and indications of additional competence and skill acquisition. Nearly always, envy and derivatives of envy are seen in people who feel terrible about themselves. It makes sense that if a youngster is doing his/her psychological work properly and is feeling better about the self, signs of criticism and contempt for others would subside. It is a psychological truism that anger, criticism, and contempt are a thinly veiled mask for self-anger, self-criticism, and self hatred. Such symptoms, whether displayed in adolescence or adulthood, should be carefully evaluated. If these symptoms continue to worsen month by month and year by year, they are signs of serious psychological regression and unsuccessful individuation which require competent professional help if one is to reverse the destructive trend and to advance forward in strength and health.

Increased Self-Centeredness

Nearly all adolescents between the ages of 15 and 18 will appear to be extremely self-centered when compared with parental or adult standards. Some parents become infuriated by the fact that they always seem to be giving and doing for their youngster, while their teenager does little or nothing in return. Our research has shown that parental evaluation of their child's level of self-centeredness is seldom accurate or objective. For example, when parents expect their child to show appreciation or be eager to do dishes, clean their room, take out garbage, or pick up after themselves, they are likely to be sorely disappointed. Such parents are certain that their son or daughter is self-centered and selfish and often tell them so, trying to shame their youngster into being more considerate of parental needs and wishes. But the concept of adolescent selfishness is not as simple as many parents seem to believe.

One the one hand, "self-centeredness" or "selfishness" is a natural by-product of separation/individuation in that self-centeredness is not really selfish, but a manifestation that their parents' home is not their home because they are in the process of looking to the outside world for meaning and satisfaction. During *adolescence proper*, some parental accusations of self-centeredness may in fact be toward the youngster's enthusiasm for life, fun, friends, and interest away from the parents and family. The needs and wants of the parents should in fact become less prominent in the youngster's mind as he/she becomes

psychologically less dependent upon them for love and approval and more reliant upon peer relationships and self-affirmation. It is part of the emotional process of "leaving home." Some parents boast to friends about the obedience and compliance of their son or daughter and how helpful he/she is at home. More often than not, when a 16- to 18-year-old is more interested in pleasing the parent than in pleasing the self, the process of successful separation/individuation is in serious jeopardy.

Often overlooked from the adult perspective is the fact that when a teenager separates/individuates and feels the loss of the parents, the parents, especially the mother, are also in a state of crisis or psychological imbalance. No two people who are psychologically bonded or attached should be able to have the loved one pull away without feeling loss, anxiety, vulnerability, and abandonment. Because loss and separation often evoke unconscious feelings of loneliness and death, some parents fight their feelings of grief and mourning over the loss of their teenager by trying to control his/her activities. They fear that if their teenager gets too free he/she will be killed. Most often serious arguments and parent-child battles ensue when the youngster needs to get away from home and into the world, and the parents are trying desperately to hold on and control the child because they are experiencing feelings of vulnerability, fear, and fantasies of their child's brutal death. Such parents need to do their psychological work more honestly and learn to suffer the pain of loss more directly rather than to avert these feelings by trying to force their child to stay home. In short, many parents unconsciously fight against their own pain of separation, loss, mourning, and fear of their child's death by setting rigid curfews and by trying to keep the youngster close to home. Because they are in direct violation of the principles of human growth, they usually end up in conflict with their child, which does little more than drive him/her further away.

Between the ages of 16 and 18, legitimate self-centeredness disturbance is reflected in ruthless insensitivity to others and excessive signs of "me first" or "I am the greatest" or "to hell with anyone else." In its most serious forms it is seen in youngsters who are sadistic toward others and generally lack empathy or caring either because they are too "out of it" to notice, or because they are filled with anger and enjoy being cruel. Some teenagers in the disturbed range of self-centered pathology are unable to have a reasonable sense of fair play with parents, siblings, and peers. When parents, for example, try to be honest, sympathetic, and caring so as to reach their teenager, such vulnerability falls on deaf ears and the youngster appears to have little or no capacity for interpreting the pain and concern

of the parents. It is as though their human connection, caring, and empathy functions have gone dead.

Some youngsters appear always to be in trouble. They are hours late in returning home and seem to care less about the feelings of their parents. They seem to care only about immediate gratification and have little or no capacity to delay their impulses, tensions, and desires. They want and need everything they see and tend to demand it. They become upset when they cannot get exactly what they want, when they want it. They act as if their parents and society owe them the world and that they are entitled to the love and possessions of others without doing anything in return. Some teenagers act this out by stealing, burglarizing, and shoplifting. Seriously disturbed adolescents hold to a self-centered role which is primarily geared toward taking, using, and consuming. They have little capacity to consider the possibility that they may have to earn the love, respect, and gifts by their own effort, responsibility, and cooperation. Their disturbing life attitude is, "What's mine is mine and what's yours is mine."

Little or No Evidence of Appreciation

As previously shown in Figure 2, on the positive side of the evaluation ledger, teenagers between the ages of 15 and 18 who are successfully individuating only occasionally show signs of spontaneous respect, empathy, love, and appreciation toward their parents. Also shown was the fact that unsuccessfully individuated adolescents either remain compliant and submissive or remain psychologically dependent and demanding. Because of these dynamics, they are seldom able to show authentic indications of love, appreciation, and gratitude. The natural empathy that emerges from experiencing their own separateness and autonomy helps them become aware of the fact that life is psychologically difficult for everyone, including their parents. As teenagers separate and try to become their own unique and responsible persons, they begin to identify slowly with some of the things their parents have done and, as a result, come to feel gratitude toward the parents for their self-denial and care.

It can be a gratifying and meaningful experience for teenagers and parents alike when they come to reunite after the period of adolescent separation/individuation. Our research has shown that if parents can fully understand and accept the psychological work of adolescence, and love and respect their teenager and his/her choices, even if these seem foolish according to adult standards, the youngster will eventually display more loving and

appreciative attitudes. Hundreds of times over the years we have heard parents relate stories with tears of joy about their teenager, who while impossible from 14 to 18, becomes a loving, empathic, and caring young adult that enjoys spending time with them. Nearly always such parents are grateful that they did not become part of the problem by fighting and rejecting their child, but continued to love and accept him/her in spite of the nasty self. Even though they may have questioned the wisdom of their love, they learned that they did the right thing. Teenagers, as well as every healthy adult, need a lot of love and support when going through the hard times. When love, care, and support are received, the individual usually comes through these phases stronger, more caring, empathic, and appreciative.

As discussed previously, when a youngster is worsening, he/she tends to act as if he/she were a bottomless pit that wants, expects, demands, and manipulates everything, but gives nothing. In such cases, gratitude and appreciation are not possible as the youngster is incapable of feeling separate and good about the self. He or she demands and expects to feel good, but as soon as the object of gratification is used or consumed, the youngster wants something else. Because this type of teenager is in fact seriously disturbed, he/she seldom if ever feels emotionally satisfied or psychologically *gratified*; hence there is little chance that he/she will be able to show *gratitude*.

Throughout the process of honest self- and child-evaluation, it cannot be stressed enough that the quarterly reviews be done in the context of comparing each child against him/herself. At the risk of sounding redundant, evaluations must *never* be done by comparing one child against siblings, the child against a neighbor's child, or the child against parental standards or the standards of the "perfect adolescent" that one hears about from boastful neighbors. Whenever a comparison is made against anyone other than the self, there is little choice but to reject individuality and authenticity—which is to reject the youngster's uniqueness and growth. Every living thing grows at its own rate, in its own way, towards its own end. Pushing, forcing, manipulating, threatening, and punishing have not been shown to help with real growth and individuation. Ample room, nutriment as needed, and excellent growing conditions from the immediate environment tend to be the best insurance for facilitating the growth of a strong, healthy and beautifully unique individual.

CHAPTER FOUR

STAGES OF FAMILY LIFE

The Individual Within a Family

An essential part of understanding, supporting and working with an adolescent is having a dynamic understanding of his or her family. An adolescent's family of origin is a powerful influence that cannot be overlooked as it can effectively interfere with the youngster's development of independence and ability to separate/ individuate in a healthy way. This is especially true if the developmental needs of the adolescent's family as a unit are in conflict with the developmental needs of the adolescent as an individual. In other words, what is good for the adolescent may not be good for the family or vice versa. Some adolescents may actually stop growing emotionally and sacrifice themselves psychologically in order to save a family that cannot adjust to the separation that is a natural outgrowth of the adolescent stage of development.

Healthy families promote growth and change in the individuals in them and should be able to sustain themselves during sometimes painful transitions from one stage of family development to another. Families like individuals have their limitations, however, and some are not strong enough or stable enough to adjust to the requirements for change the adolescent stage of individual development brings into the family. Issues of emotional separation vs. interdependence, distance vs. closeness and intimacy, and self-autonomy vs. responsibility to others represent some of the issues that need to be re-negotiated within the family during this time.

The Family Life Cycle

It is helpful in these negotiations to view the adolescent's growth and development against the backdrop of the family's life cycle. It is important to determine where an adolescent's family is in its developmental life cycle in order to assess difficulties the family may be experiencing in accommodating, restructuring, and changing in support of the individual developmental needs of the adolescent.

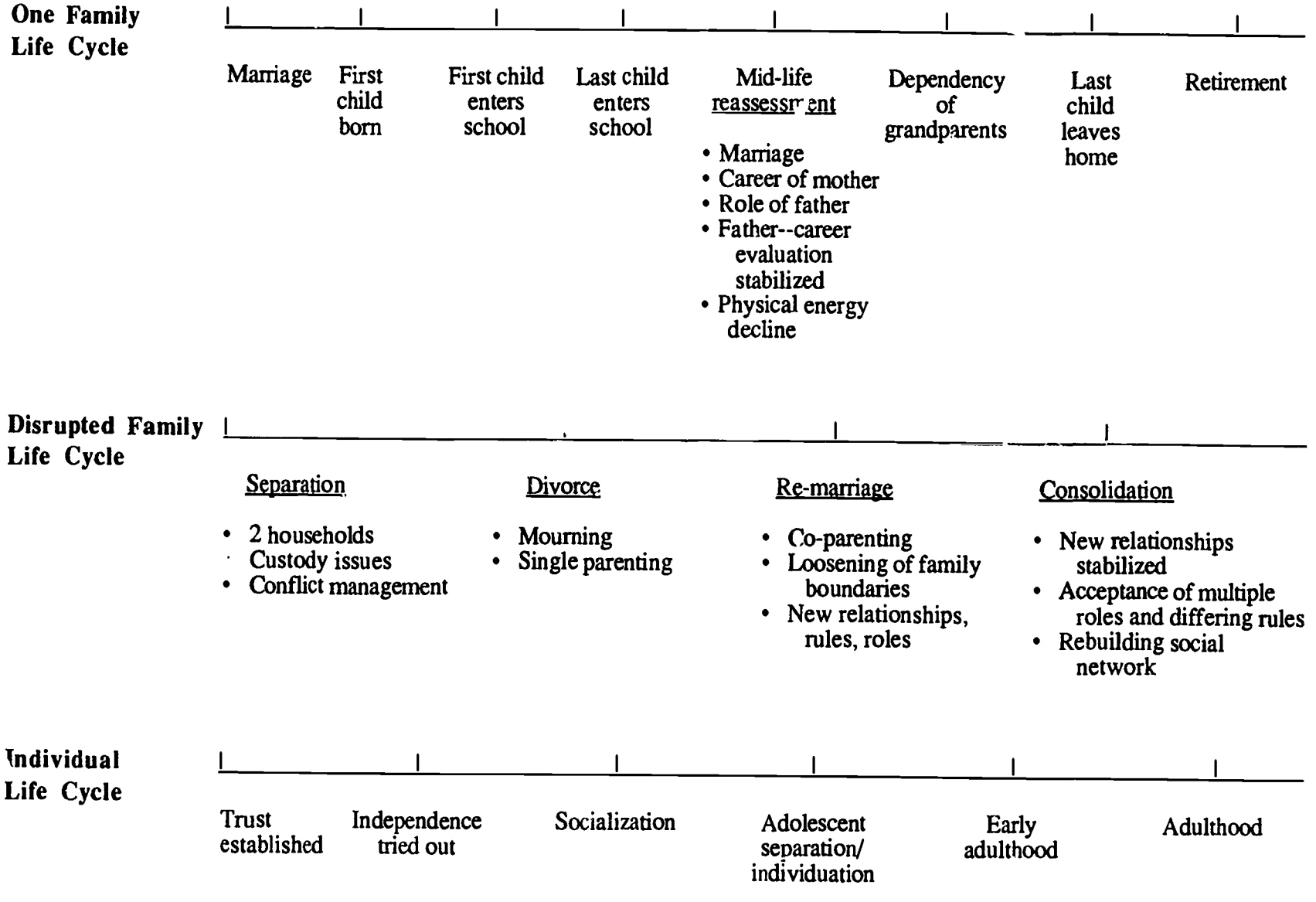
A typical one-family life cycle would include a progression through marriage, birth of the first child, first child entering school, last child entering school, mid-life reappraisal, dependency of grandparents, last child leaving home, and retirement. Where divorce

occurs, there will be an additional cycle of events in the family which may include a separation period, legal divorce, remarriage, and consolidation of the new family. With increased incidence of divorce and remarriage it is not unusual for the initial family developmental cycle to be disrupted and split into several separate life cycles. Individual developmental cycles must then emerge in the context of several family life cycles represented by more than one marriage. Roles of parents multiply in these additional cycles from biological parenting to step-parenting and from custodial parenting to non-custodial parenting. Adolescents may reside in several households and must adjust to these larger family sizes which include step-parents, step-grandparents, and step-siblings.

Anyone working with adolescents must become familiar with the various types of life cycles that have impact on them in order to assess the adequacy with which they support or inhibit their developmental needs (see figure 4). Adequate support is particularly difficult to come by in a new or reconstituted family that is trying to consolidate. The flexibility required by an adolescent that is moving in and out of family life can put too great a strain on the family system. Identity confusion can occur as a result of loyalty and attachment conflicts around the adolescent's relationship to four parental figures instead of two. In these situations, adolescents experience a double loss of their identity as a child, plus the loss of their original family. Additional pressures to accomplish the tasks of developing more adult roles in their family while learning the new roles associated with membership in a second family may add too much of a burden to adolescents and precipitate temporary regression in their psychological development.

Modulation of intense feelings and moodiness associated with adolescence may be especially difficult in these situations as anger toward parents, as well as abandonment fears, could inhibit natural expressions of feelings. Sexual anxieties and conflicts may also become an issue for an adolescent in the new family where the incest taboos of the initial family do not exist. Step-parents in these families can become the objects of intense anger if the adolescent has a particularly close relationship with the parent of the opposite sex. Each developmental change in the life of these families will require some adjustment to accommodate the parallel development of the individual stages of growth. Each stage will produce dramatic changes in intellectual capacities, emotional attachments and social relationships in addition to the multiple demands of adjusting to new family life patterns. The point at which the developing family and the emerging individual intersect may stress either one. Typically, the adolescent stage of development intersects with the family stage of midlife reappraisal that some theorists refer to as midlife crisis.

Figure 4


One Family Life Cycle
Marriage
First child born
First child enters school
Last child enters school
Mid-life reassessment
• Marriage
• Career of mother
• Role of father
• Father--career evaluation stabilized
• Physical energy decline
Dependency of grandparents
Last child leaves home
Retirement
Disrupted Family Life Cycle
Separation
• 2 households
• Custody issues
• Conflict management
Divorce
• Mourning
• Single parenting
Re-marriage
• Co-parenting
• Loosening of family boundaries
• New relationships, rules, roles
Consolidation
• New relationships stabilized
• Acceptance of multiple roles and differing rules
• Rebuilding social network
Individual Life Cycle
Trust established
Independence tried out
Socialization
Adolescent separation/ individuation
Early adulthood
Adulthood

The Family as a System

To understand and utilize these developmental lines (see figure 4) it is useful to look at families from a systems frame of reference. In a family system everyone has to play a part or role to maintain the life of the system. Change in one part requires change or accommodation in another so that there is an on-going balance. If there are too many difficult issues associated with a particular stage of family life, a family may not be able to accommodate or adjust to the demands placed on it by the adolescent stage of individual development. This may produce an imbalance in the family system.

The Midlife Stage of Family Development

For many parents the midlife stage of family development is just such a stressful time when the family can get out of balance. For the majority of men it is often a period of internal and external struggling and questioning. According to Levinson (1978), developmental issues of males during their adolescence are reactivated during this midlife stage. Questions about their identity, level of success and achievements, and future career concerns may absorb a great deal of their energy as they make the transition from early to middle adulthood. Loss of energy may also result from intense reassessment of the marriage commitment that frequently takes place during this stage of family life. The parents of the adolescent may be struggling with what many women experience as a renewed opportunity and interest in their own careers outside the family and home environment. Such a career concern for the mother places additional demands for adjustment and accommodation on the family. A wife's growing assertiveness and freedom through career expansion may reduce the husband's feelings of authority, power, and self-esteem within the family or increase them if his presence is more needed. Depending on how well the parents of an adolescent are able to work through these critical adult issues at this stage of family development, they will have more or less time, interest, and energy to devote to understanding the needs of their children. Midlife stress often may hinder the parents from taking the time needed to carefully appreciate and negotiate a new way of living together in a family with an adolescent. Viewing adolescents in simplistic, narrow ways becomes tempting as it takes less energy away from parents' preoccupation with uncertainties in their own lives. When the needs of the parents and adolescents come into conflict over such narrowness or rigidity, the parents may not be able to adapt or

change enough to progress to a stage of family life that can more appropriately support and nurture the changing needs of the adolescent.

How Adolescents Respond to Family Rigidity

Many adolescents raised in rigid, defensive, and over-controlling families feel imprisoned and stifled. They may love their parents but not be able to appreciate them or feel their support. In extreme cases rigidity in the parents causes equally rigid attitudes in the children. When this occurs, family rigidity can erode love as well as enjoyment.

Loss of Self

Some adolescents raised in this type of stressed family feel a loss of who they really are or want to be and are able to be real and authentic only when away from the family. Other adolescents will lose touch with who they really are as they allow themselves to be exploited for the sake of the family and willingly give themselves (identity and all) over to their parents. Parents' needs for support, companionship, or achievement satisfaction may be particularly apparent at this stage in the family life cycle. Adolescents who choose to sacrifice themselves in such a family might well be able to bolster the fading self-esteem of their parents or at least assure the unity of the family over and against their own needs for individuality and separation. This phenomenon typically shows up in terms of intense sports activities, over-investment of energy in scholastic achievement, passive, compliant participation in church, and reluctance to engage deeply in relationships or experiences that mean physical or emotional separation from the family. Some students would rather let their parents choose their academic courses or colleges than feel the anxiety that would accompany choosing a course or college that their parents did not approve of or value. Some would go so far as to let their parents choose their career and major course of study. Others might be reluctant to marry unless their parents approved of the person, time, or place of residence. These types of sacrifices of the self are only a temporary solution at best.

The Triangulated Relationship

Some adolescents may get caught in a triangulated relationship with their parents at this point. Bowen (1978) termed this common process in disturbed families as "triangulation." As mentioned, many parents during the midlife years may be taking

another look at their marriage commitment. Marital conflict may well be a part of this reassessment. Being placed in the middle of an unresolved marital conflict, adolescents can become locked into the parents' struggle to the degree that they actually take on the emotional pain of their parents. This can stabilize marital conflict, but it also can prevent its resolution and halt family growth.

Being caught in the parents' conflict also means that if adolescents are allowed to separate enough from the family to leave their important triangulated position, the parents will have to reengage the emotional pain of the marital conflict. Adolescents who are developmentally compromised in such a family may not understand what has happened until they have their own family and are parents of an adolescent. Their own child's struggle may very well activate their original struggle with identity. At this point, without significant work on their own life history, which may require therapeutic intervention, the cycle of exploitation is likely to repeat itself in the next generation. This is often what keeps the family stuck, sometimes for generations, and unable to move on in the family life cycle.

Adolescents Overloaded with Achievement

Some youngsters sense their family's inability to accommodate their adolescent developmental needs and experience an overload of pressure to excel. In this case, their parents more than likely are not knowledgeable, or are unable to apply their knowledge, of developmental needs for separation/individuation and end up pressuring their children to achieve for the sake of the family, as opposed to achieving for their own future and individualized development. The parents of youngsters who experience the achievement overload are often admired in their community as "super-parents." They are commonly very involved in every facet of their children's lives, including daily schedules of rising, eating, organizing and cleaning their bedrooms, and particpating in sports events, studies and social life. A typical "super-mom" might go through the following activities in a single day: carpool to swim-team practice at 5:00 a.m., pack a super-nutritious lunch of home-baked goodies to deliver to the child at school, work on posters and banners for booster club section at the next swim meet, phone parents of other team members to remind them of upcoming meetings, check out library books needed for her child's history term paper, go to school to consult with her student's counselor to make sure the grades and credits are up to snuff, shop for the "right" prom dress with her child after school, attend this week's

open school board meeting or PTO, and end the day typing a term paper for the exhausted student who needs to get to bed early for swim practice the next day. How could an adolescent say no to such a parent after "all they've done for them?" Most of these high-pressured parents are dissatisfied with their own lives and feel like failures. They have probably not fully realized the rewards of early investment of energy in their own unrealistic goals for success and achievement and hence exploit their child to make up for the disappointments of the past. Society will reinforce such efforts by glorified admiration for these committed super-parents who will then reap the rewards of great satisfaction in a parenting job well done. Parental achievement is then measured by the accomplishments of their child. The cost of this achievement too often is paid by the child who misses the rewards that come with self-motivation, and who loses out on the security that grows from the knowledge and acceptance of who they are apart from their parents. To accomplish good grades, athletic success, and social satisfaction because an adolescent chooses to and is able to make it happen on his/her own is the experience that can produce lasting self-confidence.

Search for New Families

The pressure to succeed for the sake of the family may provoke a loss of loyalty to the family which goes far beyond the natural need for separation and encourages the adolescent's involvement in powerful alternatives to a supportive family life. Examples of current alternatives might be represented in certain cult, punk and revolutionary organizations available to kids. The unconditional acceptance of these groups can bring relief from the pressure to serve the needs of the family, as well as from the loneliness of leaving it prematurely. In the same way, intense religiosity or excessively possessive peer relationships can develop as a reaction to the family's inability to support the adolescent's needs for separation and individuation.

Roots of the Struggle in Previous Generations

As mentioned earlier, the causes of some adolescent struggles to separate/individuate in a healthy way from their families can sometimes be rooted in the problems of previous generations of family members. Before an individual can really achieve a distinct and separate identity from his/her family, previous generations must have led the way. A very real and sometimes quite powerful transmission and projection process occurs between

generations in certain families. Often certain attitudes pertaining to autonomy are carried over from one generation to another and repeat themselves until an effective intervention is made. "Family Rules" is a term often used by Satir (1964) to describe nonverbal agreements family members make over the years and may explain the mutual historical, yet powerful expectations family members may have of one another. These unwritten and unspoken rules governing families across generations can impact positively or negatively on an individual's decisions concerning education, location, career, and marriage as well as styles of communication, values, and involvements outside the family. Unless designed and evaluated in light of individual uniqueness and potential, as well as current social and cultural conditions, such rules can inhibit maximum health and development of an adolescent's potential and ability to contribute in a positive way in society.

Family Negotiation

Many adolescents challenge their family's history, traditions, values, and rules as a natural part of individuating. Parental toleration for this questioning may be limited by fears and anxieties regarding their own reassessment, particularly if the parents are experiencing lowered self-esteem during this period. A healthy family should be open to the influence of their adolescent in terms of family experience, identity and structure. An adolescent's increased awareness of and natural interest in new ideas and ways of living may lead him/her to want to try out new lifestyles. This may mean suggesting changes in family meals, family vacations, church affiliations, association and attendance at certain family and friendship events, as well as in how decisions are made about all of these issues. Conflict in these families can help the members redefine rules, roles, and relationships related to the family's current life together. Knowing how to negotiate in these conflict situations is a valuable skill for families to learn in preparation for this period of family adjustment, as well as for providing communication skills for all of life's problems.

During this time parents must be willing to adjust many aspects of their lifestyle to make room for the changing habits of the adolescent. They may need to be open to more discussion and negotiation as they make the transition from being in control of a child to supporting the child's being in control of him/herself. If such self-control has not been gradually encouraged over the years, this transition can feel abrupt, awkward and overwhelming for both parents and adolescents.

In summary, a healthy family will be able to adjust, to accommodate, and to encourage the adolescent's need for separation and individuation. Because adolescents are increasingly able to conceptualize past experiences, pain, and family conflict in clearer ways, the family must be willing to develop new ways of negotiating differences and agreeing on new ways of living together. As an example, some adolescent problems may have their roots in painful childhood experiences which will not surface in a clear, verbal, or conscious manner until the late adolescent stage of individual development occurs. The adolescent's increased intellectual capacity, cognitive development, and emotional attachments within the family, as well as social relationships outside the family, all contribute to the need for more direct expression of such feelings. The fact that historical feelings are out in the open puts pressure on the parents to genuinely understand their youngsters as well as let go of them, without rejection. Parents also need to readjust and to accommodate the family lifestyle to the adolescent's increased needs for separation/individuation. It is a delicate balance for a family to maintain enough support to facilitate the youngster's new identity and to provide the needed stability and flexibility to encourage healthy separation.

Sibling Influences

Parents are not the only influence on development. Identity is also shaped by feedback from siblings. In families where a particular child has excelled or been the recipient of an inordinate amount of parental attention and support due to special gifts, talents, or disabilities, the other children in the family can take on an identity in response to the specialness of this child. For some, to follow in the footsteps of a high achiever may seem an impossible task. To others, to let down and do anything less than achieve may seem impossible, as it would only add to the parent's discouragement over the lack of achievement in the other child. In these cases the identity of the adolescent takes on the attributes of one who will make up for the mistakes of the sibling. In either case, the true identity of the adolescent may be in danger of being compromised.

The identity of a child, adolescent, and adult is poignantly shaped by the relationships he or she experiences and the way other people respond to and define the individual. If the older child in a family is a "super-star," that is, attractive, athletic, socially powerful, a good scholar, and/or highly skilled in several areas, it is likely that a younger sibling will notice all these characteristics and feel overwhelmed by the older brother or sister to the

extent of developing an opposite identity. It is as though "the good guy" slot is already taken in the family so the only identity slot remaining is the "not-so-good guy."

Psychodynamically, a word of explanation is in order. Seldom are children able to cognitively understand "shades of grey." They typically approach the world from four and one-half years of age onward in terms of polarized cognition (as do some adults!) in which they see and understand only good-bad, right-wrong, black-white, etc. As frail, vulnerable, and impressionable children in a family relate to each other and work to establish their own identity, the good guys in families often overpower and use the other siblings to prove their own identity. This may help the good guy facilitate a good identity, but the less powerful child, over many, many days, months, and years of being the loser and the bad guy, develops a less-than-adequate, inferior identity. One becomes the winner, so to speak, while the other becomes a loser.

Such good-guy, bad-guy dynamics tend to continue to influence the individual while the rivals are in the same family interaction unit. During early adulthood, when the original family unit disperses and is less influential in shaping the youngster's identity, it is surprising to see the high number of familial bad guys who surpass their rivalrous brothers or sisters in accomplishment, self-esteem, and self-actualization. The so-called good guy may be the victor only within the confines of the family unit and not in the world at large. When the family unit loses its potency during early adulthood, the good guy is sometimes unable to generalize his/her privileged status to the outside or real world. Simultaneously, when the bad guy is removed from the negative definition of siblings, he/she becomes free to become re-defined by peers, friends, and others, and may do well enough to excel far beyond his/her own expectations.

CHAPTER FIVE

SOURCES OF DYSFUNCTIONAL FAMILY PATTERNS

Parents' Needs as Individuals

Minuchin (1974) has stated that families who respond to developmental stress with rigid inflexibility are displaying dysfunctional patterns. Some families become stuck in their inability to make the adjustments necessary for supporting the adolescent's increased needs for separation/individuation. Many times the needs, conflicts, and pain of the parents greatly limit their abilities to utilize the resources they may have to respond to the developmental needs of their children. If such an imbalance occurs when the children are young, the children may begin to feel there is something wrong with them and that they are "bad." They are not able to perceive the adult level reality that their parents have problems and unmet needs or are anything less than perfect. When parental imbalance causes the youngster pain during elementary school age, the child will more than likely blame those outside the family, those in the neighborhood, or those in the school for life's difficulties. If this occurs during adolescence, however, the youngster will be more prone to blame his/her parents.

The midlife reappraisal stage of adult development may focus too much parental energy on the career crisis, midlife loneliness, and/or empty-nest anticipation. As we have stated previously, unresolved parental issues can significantly limit parents' capacity to support the separation of the adolescent because of their own needs for support, caring, and encouragement. So much of the parents' psychological energy during these times can be expended in coping with the numerous midlife frustrations and conflicts, that they unconsciously hold precedence over the adolescent's need for support and nurture of the emerging identity and career development. Midlife struggles over careers, for example, may represent the last opportunity for one or both parents to achieve their full potential. The adolescent, however, is just beginning life, so to speak, and is also just beginning to enjoy the opportunity of achieving as a separate individual. There is sadness in the dilemma of life and achievement opportunity for many parents—especially for those who were unable to mobilize their achievement motives early in life. The sadness evolves when they become aware that their choices and opportunities are severely limited, while life and opportunity for their children may well be thought of as unlimited. As mentioned in the

second chapter, many career-frustrated parents will be in constant conflict with their youngster because teenagers love to "hang out" and to "lay back," which the parents interpret as misdirection, laziness, or lost opportunity.

Negatives Associated with Change

Parents may be highly resistant to changing nearly any significant aspect of life at this stage of family development. To some, changing how the family lives together and negotiates differences may suggest that what they previously agreed upon was wrong. Defensive parents stuck at this point need to widen their perspective to include a developmental view of the family which assumes that changes do not negate or devalue previous agreements for living together, so much as they redefine them as no longer appropriate to the individual needs of the adolescent. There is a big difference between being age-inappropriate in one's parenting and being wrong altogether. To some parents, any change in family attitudes and behaviors that supports increased separation/individuation is frightening. What will the adolescent become apart from the family? What will become of the family apart from the adolescent? Will the teenager reflect well upon the parents if he/she becomes his/her own person? Will the adolescent get too far off the straight and narrow path if he/she makes all his/her own decisions? And most frightening of all, what will parents do if the child gets in an accident or gets killed? Again a view of the family as a dynamic unit and in process over time can help parents have a more flexible, appropriate, and realistic orientation to family life. Healthy families are not locked in cement, but tend to be engaged in on-going dialogue which fosters the developmental process in each of its members. They are flexible, encouraging, open, and dynamic, not static. Some parents compare the transitions an emerging adolescent goes through with illness or pathological states. Such parents feel that the adolescent's increased abilities to negotiate differences, argue a position, bicker, and push for further separation and privileges mean there is something wrong with the youngster rather than something right with the process of becoming a stronger and more unique person in his/her own right.

If parents can accept the fact that much of the psychological work and confusion occurring in this transition stage is necessary and normal, despite the fact that it may not feel good, they will be much more able to accept the changes in family life that are necessary to support optimal adolescent development. Many parents ask how something that feels so painful to them can in fact be healthy and developmentally beneficial for the

adolescent. The truth is that if parents do not feel the natural pain of their child's separation/individuation, it could indicate that this necessary step in the youngster's development is being seriously compromised or inhibited. A compromised adolescent enables the family to remain static. The parents might feel better with such stagnation, but the child then is not able psychologically to leave the family and to advance to the next stage of development.

When the emotional pain from any transition in the family life cycle causes too much stress in the parents, they are often unable to support the struggles of their teenager. For example (see figure 4), when the parents are feeling too much of the loneliness that accompanies the 40s and wish for more love from their spouse, they may be unsympathetic to the dating problems and anxieties of a son or daughter. If a parent should happen to lose his/her job during the midlife phase of development, the urgency of the career situation and family livelihood could produce so much stress that the parent might not have the emotional clarity or energy to make the necessary accommodations to support the struggles of their child. Typically, during midlife parents experience a loss of physical superiority in comparison to their adolescent children. Depending on their self-image, this can be a threat to some parents and create denial or a series of compensating behaviors in an effort to solidify their sense of authority and power which may have been too closely associated with physical size and strength. If the parents also feel inadequate, powerless, and exploited in their careers, they may react in unnecessarily dictatorial and controlling ways to the questioning of their authority that often accompanies adolescence. Some parents may be additionally stressed at this point in family life with the onset of the dependence of their own aging parents. Parents facing these issues may not be as available to change and adjust in ways appropriate to both the dependency of their parents and the independence and separation of their adolescents. They may be in need of support themselves as they try to address the polarized demands that both generations bring to bear on the family unit.

Parents' Unresolved Separation Issues

Perhaps the primary source of difficulty for many families is the direct challenge of accommodating the needs of the developing adolescent, when in fact the parents lack adequate levels of separation from their own family of origin. For some adults, even though they have physically left their family of origin, married, and begun a new family, their emotional and psychological separation from their own parents is incomplete.

Investigation into their own families of origin will reveal to these parents ways in which their family relationships were emotionally fused or rigid, and for complex reasons were unable to support them as they attempted to leave and establish a separate and distinct life. Few experiences are capable of changing to any great degree the amount of differentiation these parents were able to accomplish at the time they physically left their families. If this is the case, it will be necessary for such parents to study their families of origin so as to gain a deeper understanding of their own lack of familial differentiation/separation. This type of understanding may not only help the parents work out a more complete and satisfactory emotional separation from their own adolescent issues, but also assist them in becoming more successful adults. In other words, they must psychologically return to their own families to accomplish the necessary but unfinished separation tasks that will enable them to let go, redefine themselves and their parents, and then allow their own adolescent to separate.

Parents who have not successfully achieved a very high level of differentiation and autonomy from their family of origin will find it difficult to support this basic task of adolescence in their own children. Bound by their own anxiety about independence from their parents, they may have adopted a rather rigid, inflexible orientation to life and often fear that they are doing something wrong if they accommodate their adolescent's push for change and autonomy. In this respect, Plato's words are most appropriate: "Those who do not understand the past are destined to repeat it." If parents are unable to gain an honest view of their own family and their own personal development, the real tragedy will be the stagnation of their children's full and complete emotional development and the perpetuation of the lack of differentiation to yet another generation.

Short-Sighted Responses to Adolescent Behaviors

Some undifferentiated parents who are frightened by their own unresolved adolescent issues unconsciously tend to be rather short-sighted in understanding others. Some parents, for example, focus on the negative behaviors associated with adolescence and develop an overreaction to these behaviors because they believe such behaviors are predictors of a youngster's future. Some parents successfully convince themselves and others that their child is deteriorating when in fact the adolescent may be attempting to salvage some semblance of self in the face of a rigid, fused family system. Such families tend to look at surface issues as the problem rather than as very poor solutions to an even

broader family developmental problem. Chronic conflict over relatively minor issues, as an example, may indicate an adolescent's effort to defend against the threat of complete loss of individual identity within a fused family system. The problem in this case is not so much the negativistic attitude of the adolescent as the stifling of a child's uniqueness and separateness in the service of a family that cannot change to make room for more than one or two well-defined family members. In these cases the adolescent may be at risk of sacrificing his/her identity for the sake of preserving family unity.

Yet such dynamics are indeed understandable if the parents are "stuck" at their own adolescent level of conflict. Unless parents have experienced some aspects of successful individuation--such as change and separation adding to happiness and opportunity—they will adhere to rigid beliefs that adolescent behaviors are the precursors of adult behaviors. Families who become overly anxious and fearful because of periodic oppositional and negativistic behavior may also be able only to see it as a predictor of future negative orientations to society. Developmentally, however, oppositionalism may also be a healthy red flag waived in a stifling family by an individual who is grasping for supportive, individuative space. Some parents may experience some of the choices made by their adolescents as personal, hurtful rejections rather than as attempts at increased self-identity, separateness, and independence. Parental rejection of adolescent choices may in fact provoke a real rejection of the parents in order for the child to achieve the freedom to have his/her own thoughts and ideas. Parents may also view differences of opinion as an indication of failure rather than a useful vehicle for emotional distancing which can support individual emotional growth as well as facilitate changes in the family life cycle. It is ironic that many parents want their child to have a mind of his/her own, but do not welcome such mindfulness in their own family where everyone must be the same! Rebellion may not be negative and can aid productively in the separation process. If parents can accept certain types of adolescent rebellion and differences of opinion, it can well reduce stress for families confronting this sometimes unpleasant aspect of adolescent growth and development.

In thinking through the important features of adolescence, parents may need to emphasize the process involved in the adolescent's separation in order to approach this crucial phase of family development objectively. Loving a child does not necessarily guarantee that parents will know what that child needs, wants, or feels during the adolescent years. Engaging in accepting dialogue which facilitates mutual respect and understanding, however, will yield more consistent information about what is needed in

order to support growth and change beyond the family itself. In other words, focusing on the process of family transitions and changes as well as individual development will help the parents adapt to the adolescent's needs at any given moment. When a youngster feels accepted and understood, yet free to develop in his/her own way, there will be fewer episodes of severe parent-child conflict and generally a more harmonious family life for everyone.

A Shallow or Narrow View of Common Problems

Disregarding or underestimating the importance of the developmental process for either the adolescent or the family can lead to a limited understanding of common problems displayed by typical adolescents. A lag in growth socially or intellectually may be distressing to some parents. Parents may wonder why their teenager doesn't participate in athletics or school clubs, why he/she doesn't go to parties or school dances, or is reluctant to get a job, or won't study hard enough to make good grades in school. Some adolescents may choose friends that do not appear to have as many opportunities or as much potential as they. Some of the friends adolescents choose might be from homes that have different values concerning academic achievement or financial success. Other adolescents may spend hours in front of the television or "hanging out" in video game places. Instead of pressuring children to grow up in these areas, parents might take a broader perspective and ask how the family would be different if their child did grow and develop socially and academically. If adolescents begin to go to parties, for example, they may begin to date, become sexually active and ultimately transfer some of their family feelings to someone outside the family. Would the parents be comfortable dealing with the issues of sexual behavior that are associated with such change? Could the parents share their child emotionally with someone outside the family without experiencing tremendous feelings of loss, jealousy, or sadness? If their adolescent feels confident enough and can be aggressive enough to approach a prospective employer about a job, will he/she exercise that same confidence and courage at home when it comes time to decide who is to carry out the garbage or who gets the car on Saturday night? If teenagers start earning their own money, will they begin to make plans for self-support and leave the family home? If they choose friends who encourage achievement and provide a challenge to compete at a higher level, will they then begin to challenge and compete with mom and dad? Some parents might be surprised to discover that by addressing some of these questions, they are not as ready to

accept and support some of the changes in behavior that growth in their children might produce. The changes just might prove too painful for the parents to bear. If this is the case, the parents will have to grow and develop before the child can be released to move forward socially or academically.

Some parents get very concerned about their child's passivity, lack of initiative, and tendency to "follow the crowd." A broader view of this problem might involve looking at the ways the family has trained their child to fear loss of support over individual differences. Such a child has learned to compromise the self, his/her differences, and his/her individuality in order to preserve the family unity and guarantee his/her place in it. When it comes to social relationships, such an adolescent simply transfers these deeply entrenched family principles to peer relationships and generalized life attitude. As shown in chapter two, nearly all parents wish for signs of successful individuation and growth in their adolescent. Unfortunately, however, the spoken and unspoken rules of many families in terms of the way the child is raised militate against successful separation/individuation. Some parents may encourage their child to individuate just enough to guarantee relationships outside the family but not enough to be able to leave the family and marry. Unfortunately, they discover in time that they can't have it both ways. Successful individuation will not only make possible healthy relationships outside the family, but will enable the adolescent to separate and leave the family as well.

Some adolescents try to make a statement to their parents by blatant disobedience. This frequently results in tighter parental controls, re-established hierarchies of authority, and firmer inhibitions against separation. A broader view of these problem behaviors might suggest that the unconscious purpose of the behavior is to establish just such reorganization to defend against the anxiety the adolescent may feel during the separation. That is, some youngsters will feel so much anxiety in separation and autonomy that they need the parents to get more involved and lessen their freedom by making more rules so as to slow down the separation panic. It might also be helpful to assess what happens to the marital relationship during these episodes of misbehavior. Is the focus of the parents taken off unresolved marital issues during these times? Do the adolescent's problems help the parents avoid dealing with their own conflicts and thereby stabilize the family? A broader and perhaps more insightful view is at least to wonder if the youngsters aberrant behavior might not be serving a useful purpose in terms of stabilizing the marital relationship.

In general, adolescent problem behaviors are rarely simple and to some degree need to be evaluated in light of the entire spectrum of family issues that may be interfering with

the natural progression of individual development. To broaden the perspective of adolescent problems to include unresolved family issues will often result in more appropriate responses and increased ability to negotiate a healthy resolution for all family members.

CHAPTER SIX

FACILITATING ADOLESCENT GROWTH

Helping Relationships Outside the Family

Reliable, significant others in a community are important sources of support to adolescents during the complex process of separation from parental authority. Healthy, productive relationships with concerned, trained adults outside the family can go a long way toward reducing the stress, pain, and sometimes family dysfunction associated with the separation process of adolescence. Through carefully engineered relationships and challenging growth-facilitating programs sponsored by a variety of community resources, a pool of concerned adults can provide socially sanctioned ways to help teenagers navigate the important rite of passage known as adolescence. Health-promoting and respected adults like teachers, counselors, clergy, relatives and parents are often able to facilitate the transition from adolescence to adulthood. Relationships with such concerned adults can help minimize the threat or fear of loss of emotional stability, rejection of the family, or compromise of the adolescent's unique potential for productive and successful living.

Importance of Being Appropriate

Once these significant people outside the family have a comprehensive understanding of the developmental tasks facing the adolescent, both as a unique individual and as a member of a dynamic family system, they can begin to relate in a manner that is sensitive and appropriate. Thorough knowledge of individual growth and development as well as family structure and process is only as valuable as its appropriate, sensible application. It is in the union of knowledge, skill and the art of developing a helping relationship with adolescents that real competence is put to the test. Can the counselor, teacher, or significant other in the adolescent's life appropriately utilize the information that has been acquired intellectually to help an adolescent navigate this stage of life in a healthy, productive manner? That is the key question that needs to be addressed if any personality research and study of the family and culture in a particular adolescent crisis is to be of significant use in the long run. This is perhaps the most difficult component of the helping process, as it involves evaluating and understanding the emotional life and health of the

person who is attempting to help. The informed use of the self in a helping relationship with an adolescent is crit.ally important, as most teenagers can "spot a phoney a mile away." Adolescents, not unlike all of us, respond best to acceptance, caring, and genuineness that are couched in an atmosphere of wisdom.

Idealization of Significant Others

Adolescents will idealize popular heroes, leaders, counselors, and teachers who offer them a supportive relationship because of the loneliness they sometimes feel during the process of separation from their family. Adults working with adolescents need to realize, however, that the allegiance associated with this idealization, though strong, may be temporary and even capricious. The family of an adolescent ultimately has more staying power. In other words, an adolescent's allegiance to an idealized, significant adult, such as a helping therapist, should not be construed by the parents as total rejection. It is probably more accurately understood as a significant, but temporary, relationship outside the family that seems to enable an adolescent in the process of separating from the family.

Parental Resistance to Help

It is important that helping adults working with adolescents keep the youngster's family in mind as they monitor and interpret his/her struggle for independence and identity. Not to do so is to lose professional objectivity. Helping adults must keep in mind that each adolescent is in some way responding to a set of invisible demands from his or her family. If adults engaged in significant helping relationships with adolescents are not cautious and aware of specific family dynamics, they can become part of the adolescent's family system. This will weaken their ability to help an adolescent truly to separate/individuate. A counselor, for example, who offers too much caring, dependence or indulgence to a teenager can unbalance a family system organized around parental needs to be depended upon. In this instance the helping adult outside the family can provoke resistance and even jealousy from the parents. If this occurs, many parents will marshal their anger against the helping relationship and cause it to discontinue. Similarly, adults who support adolescent rebellion against parental authority can upset the family hierarchy of authority and also create parental resentment and resistance to the helping relationship. Both of these common but unbalancing interventions contribute to frequent premature termination of a helping relationship. These dynamics can be extremely useful in the facilitation of greater family

health, but the counselor needs to be skilled and prepared to work with the entire family in order to help them construct a more functional, age-appropriate family response to various conflicts and pressures of adolescence. This professional approach is quite different from the counselor's becoming part of a family system in that he or she helps the family actually change the system.

Transference Reactions to the Counselor

Counselors and significant others can be confused by a family's reactions to the helping relationship with their adolescent if they are not aware of family dynamics or are not attuned to the negative transference reactions that an adolescent might be feeling toward them. Transference reactions are common in all helping relationships when unresolved emotional attachments from past significant relationships in the family get played out in the current helping relationships. Transference problems can be particularly significant for adolescents who have prematurely separated from their families and are trying to work out their unresolved separation issues with a significant adult. In these cases, exaggerated hostile and suspicious reactions, doubts about whether the caring is real or feigned, as well as unrealistic expectations of what the counselor can actually accomplish, need to be understood as representative of attitudes, feelings, and needs transferred from the past and containing the youngster's perceptions of the present relationship. An appropriate response to negative, distorted or idealizing transferences requires acknowledgment of such projections by the helping adult at the very least, and when the timing is right, helping the youngster become aware of the parental situation in which he/she felt the same way so as to help trace those irrational feelings to their point of origin. Counselors and significant others who do not understand the complexity of transference issues in these helping relationships find it difficult to resist being critical, defensive, or rejecting of the youngster's negative emotions. When those feelings are suppressed by the counselor, little is really done to help the child. Instead, the feelings are driven deeper into the youngster's unconscious only to carry out their negative effect later. Many well-meaning adults may also have a tendency to over-identify with adolescent transference reactions if they themselves have too many unresolved separation issues and adolescent conflicts with their families of origin. Fundamental to effective work with any adolescents is having one's own adolescent house in order in terms of separation from the family of origin. Successful counselors will also have resolved the issues of their own sexuality, capacity to feel loved,

positive identity, authority conflicts, capacity for recreation and leisure, as well as a healthy sense of industry, creativity and general satisfaction with their own work and careers.

Appropriate Responses to Adolescents in Conflict

Making the best use of the self in a helping role with an adolescent requires that one's responses to their conflicts must be appropriate to them, not necessarily to adults. One example of the disregard for the adolescent's needs is adults' overemphasis of certain rules and regulations in the planning of adolescent programs. An overly strict approach typically satisfies some of the adult sponsors' personal anxieties over loss of control but may provoke more problem behaviors than it prevents. Adolescents have fundamental needs to be in control of some aspects of their lives and behaviors. Too rigid a response to this basic need can lower the adolescent's self-esteem and provoke more acting out than if the adult uses a minimum number of guidelines with maximum opportunities for self-regulation and negotiation for control.

This same principle can help families negotiate a less conflictual age-appropriate orientation to the growing need of adolescents to take more charge of their own lives. To help teenagers effectively achieve a higher level of autonomy, adults must have a clear understanding of semi-conscious conflicts over control, submission and respect that may be residues from their own family of origin. If helping professionals desire to exert excessive control, or punish and discipline teenagers, they must be able to suppress these natural responses in order to give appropriate guidance or to help the adolescent achieve a higher level of self-discipline. Periodically, it may be necessary for counselors and significant adults to back off from the relationship with the adolescent in order to analyze their own needs which may be unwittingly influencing the youngster negatively rather than positively. A counselor's own need to be depended on, for example, could cause him/her to provide quick, clever answers to a youngster's complex problems. The adolescent may like this sort of counselor, but the needs of the adult may ultimately be more gratified than the needs of the teen.

The counselor's unconscious encouragement of an overly dependent relationship with an adolescent may appear effective over the short haul, but ultimately it will stifle the genuine growth and self-esteem which are so important to the emerging positive identity of an adolescent. Such an approach may gratify some adults but it does little in terms of facilitating the real work of adolescence. To invite, solicit, or encourage too much

dependency in a helping relationship may also backfire if over-protection or over-control has been a significant dynamic issue in the adolescent's family. How much dependency is too much will depend on the counselor's knowledge of the family system of the individual adolescent. A counselor in this situation should avoid giving advice. It is tempting to say, "If I were in your shoes, I would. . . ." This is seldom appropriate as there is no way an adult can really place him/herself in an adolescent's shoes, developmentally, culturally, or as a family member. The best most counselors can do is actively work at understanding and taking seriously what adolescents are trying to express and walk with them emotionally to help them get through a particular trauma or conflict.

Once a counselor truly understands, he/she will have to resist the temptation to "fix it" with regard to the difficulties associated with the adolescent's adjustment. An adult with real understanding of a particular youngster knows he/she can't talk an adolescent out of a developmental dilemma any more than an adult can talk a depressed or angry friend out of being depressed or angry. A more fruitful approach to helping an adolescent through a dilemma is a relational one in which the adult can be there psychologically for the youngster, consistently and appropriately listening and responding in a nonjudgmental fashion. This sensitive, relational approach over time is particularly important to adolescents who have compromised themselves in a family that is not able to adjust to the needs of a growing, individuating member, and to children being raised by parents who are too busy and/or too negligent to be attuned to their needs. Youngsters who have passively adjusted to parents need to experience themselves differently in an outside-the-family significant relationship in order to make substantial developmental progress. This may at times mean intervening in some dramatic way into the family system, or it may mean helping the adolescent survive in spite of the family system.

Family History

Making family members aware of family themes and patterns through time, from generation to generation, can be a powerful intervention—a step away from repeating old problems and a step toward genuine separation. Separating from a dysfunctional family pattern by gaining an objective view of it across several generations can encourage and promote a healthier separation during the adolescent years. A family genogram can be a helpful tool for those youngsters significantly stuck around separation issues. As described by Hartman (1978), a genogram is a "simple picture of a family through time

which captures and makes available for observation the life history of a family and helps surface the family transmissions, assignments, secrets, and projections." Use of this map of a family can help adolescents locate and identify factors that influence their self-image, their responses to life, and particularly the inappropriate reactions in relationships that stem from their family histories. Once such patterns are understood, parents and their adolescents may be better able to unhook from those aspects of their family histories which may be stifling their capacity for productive and healthy enjoyment of current life demands, opportunities and relationships. Family rules, roles, and habits devised over generations may no longer be necessary or appropriate for a particular individual in his/her current space and time. What once worked and was necessary in one family may not work or be necessary in the next. Understanding the generational picture can be tremendously liberating and valuable to a young person whose development is temporarily stifled.

In taking the family of an adolescent into consideration, counselors and significant adults need to be careful not to confuse a family in transition from one stage of family life to another with a dysfunctional family system. A family that appears dysfunctional may be temporarily struggling with growth into the next stage of family life which can better accommodate the needs of an adolescent as well as younger siblings. Should the family fail to navigate the developmental changes necessary for growth of its individual members, a symptom will characteristically develop in one of the family members. We refer to this family member as the identified patient or the one unconsciously chosen to bear the psychological suffering of a family unit that is too dysfunctional to progress to the next stage of family life. Some adolescents with signs of excessive anger or depression need to be understood in terms of a dysfunctional family in which they bear the pain for everyone. In these cases a well-trained adult trying to help the identified patient will need to engage the whole family in order to most effectively help the adolescent through his/her rage and/or depression. Helping a dysfunctional family progress developmentally is a powerful way to assist an adolescent in achieving a healthy level of strength, identity, and autonomy.

Many adolescents can benefit from personal assistance apart from work with their family, however, to clarify how unresolved family issues complicate peer relationships, stifle their growth, influence them in self-destructive choices, or generally contribute to confusion or chaos. This knowledge and experience can be very freeing and growth-enabling to an adolescent. Teenagers who have prematurely left their families often present significant adults with stressed peer relationships. Helping adults with a developmental and family orientation can help such adolescents clarify how they have managed

unconsciously to duplicate their unresolved family issues in their peer relationships. In many of these cases, peer relationships have become too intense, conflictual, and demanding and seldom stand up well under stress. It is critical that helping adults be able to encourage premature, self-dependent youngsters to understand their original family conflicts and help them work through the conflicts with the original family members instead of with the peers who represent psychological substitutes. A reasonable personal goal with adolescents in premature separation dilemmas is to help them gain control over their emotional reactivity to family dysfunction and become more objective observers of themselves as well as of their families. The experienced adolescent therapist or counselor will surely know that trying to help some teenagers relate in a healthy, healing way to their parents is not possible. In many dysfunctional families, the parents are too overwhelmed by their own burdens of life and simply do not have the strength or ego resources to handle adolescent conflict. Some dysfunctional adults are too angry, depleted, defensive and vulnerable to tolerate working with an outsider who is in alliance with their child "against them." Regardless of the initial impressions of hopelessness, we have been impressed and encouraged by the turn-around of such parents when they are approached in a caring, supportive, factual and nonjudgmental way about their child's problems. Some of these parents, if they feel that their resources are limited, will gladly accept recommendations for help with their children and themselves if they know where to go and how to get it. Carefully and professionally making the referral to a helping agency or person by discussing the need in detail, giving the parent the telephone number, and even calling the referral agency in the presence of the parents often feels like caring and support to those who are overwhelmed by their own developmental dilemmas.

Summary

In summary, individuals engaged in helping adolescents need to achieve and maintain emotional neutrality, be able genuinely to enjoy the uniqueness of the youngster, and adhere to the larger developmental perspective if they hope to facilitate authentic adolescent growth. The effectiveness with which helping adults are able psychologically to work through the struggles of adolescence will be determined by their knowledge of adolescent dynamics as well as their capacity to relate genuinely to teenagers. Adolescents are relational creatures who are hungry for psychological connection with others in order to attenuate the pain of their separation. In short, they need and demand emotional contact

from those who claim to offer help. But facilitating growth does not end with the capacity to relate. Helping adults need to know the authority and control conflicts of adolescent development, the core conflicts and dynamics of the youngster's family, as well as the spoken and unspoken rules of his/her cultural and societal affiliation. Any intervention devoid of the above requirements not only may be less than optimally helpful in facilitating healthy adolescent development, but also may inadvertently inhibit real growth. With the prototypically rebellious attitude of a cynical adolescent, we conclude with, "If helping doesn't really work, what good is it?"

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