



Dysfunctional vs. Functional Family Rules

When God created Adam and Eve, they had a functional and healthy relationship. After they sinned, their relationship became dysfunctional and unhealthy. The first family was full of all kinds of problems. One of their sons even murdered his brother and then was banished from the country. Adam and Eve lost two sons. We can easily imagine the internal dynamics in their family and know that they weren't any different than what we experience today.

Dysfunctional families have five unhealthy rules that are usually unspoken but are still accepted and followed by all in order to maintain the status quo in the family. Here are the five rules:

- ❖ Don't talk.
- ❖ Don't trust.
- ❖ Don't feel.
- ❖ Don't be selfish.
- ❖ Don't rock the boat.

You can make profound changes in your family relationships by doing the opposite of each of these dysfunctional rules.

Don't talk. Instead, talk about what is going on. Speak the truth. Communicate to the other people that you want to hear their thoughts. Be open to what they believe and think, even if it is difficult to hear and accept. Create an environment where honesty is valued.

Don't trust. Instead, offer trust when it is deserved and be willing to believe someone has changed when they demonstrate it. Be a trustworthy person. Keep your word. Don't make promises or threats that you don't keep. Don't tell others things that were told to you in confidence. Learn to be consistent and predictable in your behavior, so others can trust you.

Don't feel. Instead, feel your emotions. Process them. Learn from them. Own them. And then choose how to react to them rather than be controlled by them. Encourage others to share their emotions. Avoid communicating the message that

their emotions are “bad” or “wrong.” Accept that others have the right to feel their own feelings, but that you don’t cause them to feel a certain way, and they don’t cause you to feel how you feel either.

Don’t be selfish. Instead of believing the lie that it is selfish to take care of yourself, value yourself by taking care of your needs and developing your passions. Communicate to others that they matter, too, and that it is their responsibility to take care of themselves. Give out of your own choice rather than compulsion.

Don’t rock the boat. Instead of being afraid to do things differently and point the finger at the real problems, rock the boat by confronting the things that need to change wisely and carefully. Communicate to others that you want them to confront you with the truth about your actions, so you can be open to making positive changes.

These are simple yet profound actions that can change your family rules from dysfunctional to functional.

By Karla Downing

Relationship Prayer:

God,

Help me recognize whether these dysfunctional rules are operating in any of my relationships. Help me do my part to undo them by acting in ways that are healthy.

Relationship Challenge:

- ❖ Do a quick assessment of your most important relationships to see if they are dysfunctional or functional.
- ❖ Identify at least one way you can begin to change the dysfunctional dynamic to a functional dynamic.
- ❖ Commit to doing your part to make these relationships healthier.

Scripture Meditation

Matthew 7:24-27

“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.” (NIV)

If you have any questions you would like to ask Karla, please feel free to e-mail her. Portions of your e-mail and Karla's response to you may be used anonymously in future materials. By e-mailing her, you are giving your implied permission.

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