

Family patterns

TIP SHEET

Relationships Australia WA's education team have developed a range of tips to help support you during difficult times. As a free resource, we encourage you to share this with your community.

Your past begins in a unique unit known as the Family of Origin. The experiences you had and the stories you tell about those experiences form the building blocks of much of your current reality.

Your perceptions, expectations, attitudes, beliefs and values are all built and maintained on foundations that were established in the past. The good news is you can modify this influence in the present so that things can be different in the future.

Here are some suggestions that may help you to explore the influences of your Family of Origin:

1. Encourage yourself to have an open mind

If you did not have a happy start in life, it can be very easy to fall into a pattern of criticism, blame and judgement. These ways of thinking result in being closed-minded. Open-mindedness is produced through curiosity, observation and seeking to understand. All the elements of a situation are needed in order to see the bigger picture.

2. Understand emotional responses

Many people's first response to a crisis is an emotional one. You may become angry, afraid or sad. Emotions are a normal part of life and give you information about your interpretations of the world. Expressing emotion can bring deeper connection and a sense of belonging. To explore your emotional responses, you could ask the following questions:

- What is the emotion I am feeling and where am I feeling it? i.e fear, my stomach feels tight.
- What are the thoughts beneath the emotion? i.e I'm afraid of what the future might bring.
- Do I allow these difficult emotions or do I try to push them away?
- How were difficult emotions handled in my family when I was growing up?
- How does this influence the way I handle emotions now?

3. Gain insight into individual and family coping mechanisms

A sense of security in the world is extremely important. When you feel insecure, a threat response is triggered in your brain and you go into survival mode. This is an adaptive response that is designed to enable us to survive. Just as the physical body has adaptive responses, each individual has mental adaptive responses that come into play during a crisis. These are also known as coping mechanisms.

To explore your coping mechanisms, you could ask the following questions:

- How do I cope in a crisis?
- How do I manage the stress I feel? Do I have healthy ways of coping, like exercise, meditation, soothing activities or do I comfort eat, watch too much TV, consume alcohol etc?
- How were crises handled by individuals in my family?
- How does this influence the way I cope now?

4. Explore responses to demands for change

A crisis usually means change, and demands for change produce a specific reaction or response. The following questions may help you explore change:

- Do I embrace change? Or do I want everything to remain the same?
- Do I focus on moving forward or do I get stuck in criticism, blame and judgement?
- Did my family embrace change?
- Did my family focus on what was going wrong or did they have the ability to be grateful for what they had?
- How does this influence me now?

5. Develop acceptance and compassion

Acceptance is not condoning what happened in the past, it is the realisation that it did happen and can't be undone. Acceptance enables you to let go of blame and resentment and gives you the freedom to move forward. Compassion helps you to understand mistakes and difficulties are part of the human experience. It also gives you the desire to try to make a difference. It's important to have kindness for ourselves and each other because we are human and fallible.

As we journey through these challenging times, please reach out for support and connection amongst your community or if you'd like further support from Relationships Australia WA you can call us on 1300 364 277.

Our Education team are continuing to facilitate Relationship Australia WA's seminars, workshops and courses face-to-face and online.

If you'd like to register your interest in attending a course on **Family Patterns**, or any of our other courses, please email education@relationshipsaustralia.org.au or call 6164 0200.