

Common Family Roles in Addictive and Codependent Families

The Addict

- The entire family life revolves around the addict or alcoholic.
- Each codependent role has been taken on in order to “make sense” of, and handle, the dysfunction in the everyday life of the family.

The Hero

- Often the oldest child
- Devotes his time and attention to making the family look “normal” and without problems.
- By overachieving and being successful in school, work or social activities, The Hero feels he can mask or make up for the dysfunctional home life.
- Everyone sees the Hero as kind, helpful and positive. But not inside...
- Heroes often feel isolated inside, and unable to express their true feelings.
- They may have difficulty with intimate relationships in later life, and may suffer from illness related to stress.
- They are often workaholics as adults.

The Scapegoat

- Often the second born.
- Always seems defiant, hostile and angry.
- Perpetually in trouble at school, work or in social situations.
- Their general negative behavior turns the focus away from the addict or alcoholic in the family.
- They may also be reacting to the attention that The Hero child receives.
- Often turns to high risk behaviors as a way to express their inner feelings of emptiness.
- The Scapegoat may experiment with drugs or alcohol. They may become sexually active at an early age, or get into frequent fights.
- They can be very clever, and leaders in their own peer groups.
- Often the groups that they choose to associate with are gangs or other groups that do not present healthy relationships.

The Mascot

- Often the youngest child in the family.
- They are the court jester, trying to get everyone to laugh.
- They do this unconsciously to improve the atmosphere in the dysfunctional household, as well as turn the focus away from the addict or alcoholic.

- The rest of the family may actually try to protect their “class clown” from the severity of the addiction, and whatever other problems exist within the family.
- The problem with this is that The Mascot may run away from problems, even as an adult, or continue to use humor to focus away from problems.
- The Mascot is often busy-busy-busy.
- They become anxious or depressed when things aren’t in constant motion.
- This hyperactivity makes it hard for them to concentrate very long on any one particularly thing, and this makes school or work difficult.
- Some mascots turn to drugs or alcohol to help them “slow down” or handle their anxiety.

The Lost Child

- This family member basically disappears.
- They become loners, or are very shy.
- They feel like strangers or outsiders, not only in social situations, but also within their own families.
- Often they feel ignored, and that they don’t matter.
- Their way of handling the addictive behavior in the family is to draw away from interaction with family members.
- The Lost Child often has a rich inner life. But because they don’t interact, they never have a chance to develop important social and communication skills.
- The Lost Child avoids trouble, even if they truly need something.
- Sometimes they develop physical problems, such as asthma or obesity, in order to gain attention. They may never even realize they are doing this.
- As adults, they may never marry, or may have difficulty having an intimate relationship.

The CareTaker

- Another descriptive word for this type of codependent family role is “enabler”.
- The Caretaker feels like they have to keep the family going.
- Over and over they take on the addict’s problems and responsibilities.
- The fact that they have to do this may make The Caretaker angry or frustrated, but they never quite see that by choosing *not* to help they actually could help the addict.
- The Caretaker is the martyr of the family, and often supports not only the addictive behavior of the addict or alcoholic, but also the codependent roles that everyone else is playing.

Source

Adapted from the Codependent Relationships and Family Roles at

<http://www.recoveredfamily.com/codependency/codependency-and-family-roles.aspx>