**Family Rules Worksheet**

**These are unspoken or spoken dysfunctional family system rules. Many overlap.**

In the space provided, give specific examples of the rule from your childhood and in your present life. You don’t have to identify with all the rules and if you don’t know if it applies to you, ask!

**It is very important to remember what children are like. Children have: boundless energy, curiosity, raw emotion without being able to know what that emotion is, can’t tolerate hyper criticism/terror/intensity/adult issues, think in black and white, need to feel love still exists during conflict/upset.**

1) **Be in complete control.** (Overly responsible for your age? Hiding emotions? Being perfect. Walking on eggshells? Dismissing/forgetting your own needs? Was it ok to JUST BE?)

   Example from childhood:

   Example from adulthood:

2) **Don't rock the boat.** (“Don’t push it.” Were the adult’s stressed? Was there moodiness/reactivity? If you expressed something, could that have terrible consequences? Were other’s feelings more important? Was it ok to take RISKS?)

   Example from childhood:

   Example from adulthood:

3) **Be perfect.** (Were expectation on children age appropriate? Were MISTAKES allowed? and assumed? Could you be a beginner at things? Was love/acceptance conditional? Was it ok to just be yourself?)

   Example from childhood:

   Example from adulthood:
4) **Blame.** (If things went wrong was it someone’s fault? Was there a family narrative/myth about circumstance? “If I hadn’t married your mother!” Did children ruin things for the adults? Scapegoating? Victimization? Was their COMPASSION during upset?)

Example from childhood:

Example from adulthood:

5) **Deny Feelings.** (How did the family manage feelings? Were all feelings tolerated? Did you have to hide feelings? mad/sad/rage/hate/envy/fairness/terror/happiness. If you felt a certain way-how would M&D / other’s respond? Was it ok to ACKNOWLEDGE feelings?

Example from childhood:

Example from adulthood:

6) **Don’t be selfish.** (This is often directly stated or implied. Were basic needs needing to be met construed as being “selfish”? Was there blame/shame used as weapons. Think VICTIM/RESCUER/PERPETRATOR. Ex. “How could you ask for that when I’ve/they’ve/we had such an awful day!” mind reading/rocking boat.

Example from childhood:

Example from adulthood:
7) **It's not okay to play.** (Literal, implied. Did the family value fun? Was their downtime? Was making a mess ok? Was there too much surviving going on and play was not a priority? Was play somehow dangerous or inconvenient to the adults? A child’s job is to play.

   Example from childhood:
   
   Example from adulthood:

8) **Don't Trust.** (Where the adults unhealthy individuals? Was there inconsistency in adult moods/children's needs being met? Could you trust what people said v. how they behaved? Secrets/hiding things? Did you know something was off put had to deny it or put it away? Were the adults afraid? Did M/D show up for you consistently? Did the adults make poor decisions or have distorted views of things.)

   Example from childhood:

   Example from adulthood:

9) **Expect Unreliability.** (Did you gradually learn/accept the dysfunction of the adults. Ex “I shouldn’t assume that M/D can help me with this.” “If I talk to them about it, they will make it worse.” “Of course they didn’t pick me up.” Did you gradually start to anticipate disappointment? Do you do that in the present?

   Example from childhood:

   Example from adulthood:
10) **Do as I say, not as I do.** (What was modeled for you? What kind of examples were M/D. Was this rule said verbatim?) Where the adults **consistent** in words and action?

   Example from childhood:

   Example from adulthood:

11) **It's your fault if things go wrong.** (Were you or siblings scapegoated? Did M/D accuse, blame, or feel victimized by others? Was there finger pointing and or special rules? Abused children often believe that if something goes wrong, they caused it (magical thinking). Spilled milk?

   Example from childhood:

   Example from adulthood:

12) **Don't talk about it.** (Did the family talk about difficult situations/feelings? Would people pretend the elephant in the room didn't exist? Could M/D manage upset, emotions, and children's curiosity? Were major behaviors/feelings/events denied? We don't **process** when we don't talk about it. (repression)

   Example from childhood:

   Example from adulthood:

13) **Communicate indirectly.** (Did the family talk through others instead of directly? Was their triangulation? Passive aggression? How did people communicate? Would things bottle up and explode? Were feelings overly protected? Sarcasm? Character assassination?

   Example from childhood:

   Example from adulthood:
14) **Please me.** (Did you have to perform or be great in some way to make M/D happy or at least feel better? Did you spend time just trying to be a “good kid”? Did you exist for M/D or for yourself? Did the adults take responsibility for their happiness/needs?

Example from childhood:

Example from adulthood:

15) **Be loyal.** (Could things be talked about outside the family? Did you have to be loyal to one parent over the other? Did you protect secrets? Were you encouraged to take sides?) Could you be true to yourself?

Example from childhood:

Example from adulthood:

16) **Try harder.** (Was good enough ok? Did you have to perform at a certain level to be accepted/loved? Did M/D know about appropriate expectations for your age and what you could developmentally handle? Do you feel like your best was/is ok?

Example from childhood:

Example from adulthood:

17) **Read my mind.** (Did M/D test you? Were you expected to be omnipotent in some way? Did you feel shame if you didn’t anticipate moods of your parents. Did you ever feel like a burden? Did M/D think they could read other people’s minds? Assumptions/conclusions. Do you overly think/anticipate other’s needs?)

Example from childhood:

Example from adulthood:
18) **Heal me.** (Did M/D live vicariously through you. Did you somehow feel like you lived FOR them as oppose to being yourself. Did M/D have their own rich full lives or were you that for them? Did you somehow make up for their lost childhood and was it excessive?

   Example from childhood:

   Example from adulthood:

19) **That’s too hard. I’m not doing it.** (Did M/D reject healthy behaviors/resources :12 step, exercise, diet, direct conversations, therapy, divorce, and resources for the children? Did they only rely on themselves out of pride/shame? Was getting help looked at as bad in some way? Did the adults AVOID difficult things?)

   Example from childhood:

   Example from adulthood:

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