

SUICIDAL IDEATION



UNDERSTANDING DEPRESSION
FOR THE

VICTIM
FAMILY
AND FRIENDS

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INTRODUCTION

This booklet might induce hurt feelings but as they say “No Pain - No Gain”. Just as athletes train their physical bodies, pushing them and discovering through the pain of exercise and exertion the limits of their abilities and how they can obtain the best results and performance by it. We too need to understand our own mental and emotional limits. We need to know ourselves and we need to have a sense of identity. We need to develop our own self-esteem and how to respond to other people in a way that draws the best advantages to ourselves.

Our ability to interact with others i.e. our behaviour is largely determined by what we learn *from others*. This education and process of learning begins at birth and continues throughout our lives. In this way LIFE can be seen as a journey. How comfortable that journey is and how much we enjoy it depends upon how well prepared we are to undertake it. This preparation is comprised of many things, some of which are inherited factors but most of our behaviours and coping mechanisms are learned.

This booklet will explore some of these factors; how they are learned and who taught them to us during our formative years. This teaching forms our preparation for the journey of our LIVES.

From the moment a child is born certain milestones are expected of it, both physical and mental. All of these milestones such as teething, talking, crawling and walking are given a general time-frame in which to be completed. What we are as adults, how well we function, how well we handle stress or grief even how successful we are, can be said to be the result of our mastery during these milestone stages of our early development. Our ability to achieve these milestones however does not merely depend on our ability to learn them but also on the expertise of those who teach them to us.

We have many teachers; Parents and significant others, relatives; Brothers, Sisters, Uncles, Aunts & Grandparents; Non-Relatives; Baby-sitters, pre-school & school teachers, friends, neighbours, strangers. Non-People; pets, insects and animals, TV, movies, cartoons, and events the list goes on. In fact the experience of life itself is our teacher.

If we experience traumatic circumstances during the years of our early development our mastery of the expected milestones may be impaired. The result of such impairment creates a behavioural handicap for us and in response to such a handicap we often develop a coping mechanism or defence mechanism to compensate.

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MILESTONES

Erik Erikson the behavioural scientist listed various stages of normal development and postulated their outcomes and effects on adult life. He poses four basic ego strengths as the necessary components of a healthy childhood: **HOPE**, **WILLPOWER**, **PURPOSE** and **COMPETENCE**.

HOPE is the product of the infant's coming to feel a greater sense of trust than of mistrust in his caretakers.

WILLPOWER results from the struggle of the infant to separate from the Mother's bond and gain a greater sense of autonomy than of shame and doubt.

PURPOSE accrues when the pre-schooler's sense of initiative is stronger than his sense of guilt.

COMPETENCE is achieved when the school aged child develops a greater sense of industry than of inferiority.

If we successfully navigate all these childhood stages we begin to cultivate our own healthy attitude and responses to life's situations but if our learning during one of these stages is impeded, then the responses we develop to compensate for it will affect our personality and attitudes, possibly for the rest of our life. Our journey under such circumstances therefore will not be as comfortable as we would like.

PERSONALITY

Our **PERSONALITY** is created by ourselves during the course of our childhood in response to meeting the criteria of these developmental stages. If we have a poor personality or a personality defect or no personality at all, *we cannot blame any other person for it but ourselves*, it is the result of how *we* adapted to the stresses of life and how *we* continue to adapt to this stress.

Any crisis during any of the early stages of development whether it be due to poor tuition, ill health, traumatic situations or any other cause, will affect our responses, not only to the situation but to **LIFE** in general. Our personality will also bear the imprint of the hardship.

COPING SKILLS

We learn to cope with things from an early age and the coping skills we learn as children (if they are successful then) stay with us for the rest of our lives. They become rigid and non-adaptive if they are born out of a fearful situation or crisis and so our personality is formed bearing such scars.

From the time we are born we want our own way. As infants we want to be fed when we are hungry, changed when we are dirty and cuddled when we are feeling alone. We want things done our way but we don't always get what we want and so we must learn how to cope when things don't go to our plans.

It is important to realize that infants attempt to train their parents as vigorously as the parents attempt to train the infants. The child who throws a tantrum in order to get its own way is exerting its will on the parents. If it wins and the parents give in to this naughty behaviour the child will almost certainly try the same tactic again at some future date. The child has learned a *coping behaviour* in order to get its own way and the child's personality will include tantrum throwing as one of its aspects.

Such aspects stay with us as we grow into adults. We might mask it or disguise it somewhat in order to hide our darker nature from others but it remains there beneath the surface only now as adults we call it by a different name and instead of admitting that we are throwing a tantrum we simply say that we've "*got the sh*ts!*".

This is the way that we sometimes behave when things don't go the way we like.

When there are traumatic circumstances during our early childhood we respond by developing specialized coping skills. Nobody gave us these coping skills we developed our own abilities and techniques to deal with the world around us. So we **should not blame others** for the way that we are as adults. Passing the buck is only another poor coping skill which prevents us from accepting responsibility for our own actions and decisions and hence prevents us from maturing.

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If the eruptive behaviour of tantrum throwing carries over into adult life, it is seen as unacceptable. Aggressive behaviour is a personality dysfunction.

Of course not all ways of coping involve “*acting out*” behaviours such as aggression. There are many other forms of maladaptive behaviour, e.g. depression, compulsion, addictions and obsessions to name a few that form an innate shadow of our personality and attitudes. These behaviours were all learned and employed when we were children in response to a world we had little or no control over.

As a child this maladaptive behaviour gave us some form of power, comfort or control and therefore we allowed it to continue to grow into a behavioural technique to deal with the world around us.

As adults however these techniques often fail us because other people's expectations of us as adults, is different from their expectations of us as children. Therefore we may be at a loss to know how to deal with adult situations. We may feel rejected by others or feel that we don't 'fit in' with our peers or even feel 'used' by people.

How can we find out if we have a **wounded** personality?

What can we do if we feel our personality has been affected by a disruption during an earlier stage of development?

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Outlined below is a brief description of these developmental stages.

INFANT TO 9 MONTHS **TRUST vs. MISTRUST**

TYPIFIED BY

1. Oral needs are of primary importance.
2. Adequate mothering necessary to meet infant's needs.
3. Acquisition of **HOPE**.

Above we mentioned that the developing child adopts coping mechanisms in order to deal with the world around them but what exactly are *coping mechanisms*?

Coping mechanisms are sometimes known as defence mechanisms because they are behaviour patterns employed by a person in response to situations which may be threatening or stressful. They are particularly potent behaviours because the child discovers them by itself and being self-taught they become very fixed within the child's personality. Age also has an influence in the type of defences a person develops. A new born infant can do very little but cry if it is under stress. It may be hungry or wet or cold or tired or in pain or might just want to be picked up and cuddled but its only communication skill is vocal.

Nevertheless a pattern of behaviour can be established even at this very early age depending on whether the child trains the parent or the parent trains the child. By crying the child can tell the parent that something is wrong or not to its liking it is then up to the parent to guess what is wrong and fix it. Under normal circumstances this process works fine but what happens to the child if the parents are not caring? What if the parents are addicts or perhaps irresponsible and leave the child alone for long periods of time. What if there are no regular parents but a long stream of strangers. What if the child is abused or suffers some other traumatic occasion?

The infant stage of development (Birth to 9 months) where Trust (or Mistrust) is established is perhaps the most crucial of all stages. The

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child is most vulnerable at this age and consequently most dependent. This is a time of bonding, of having total trust in its caretakers that its needs will be met. The child HAS NO CHOICE but to receive whatever physical care (good or bad) and emotional care (love or abuse) that its caretakers give it. Even if the child dislikes the care there is little it can do about it but remember it in the form of an emotional imprint. This imprint carries over into the next stage of development and thus influences the entire future of the child's development.

In a healthy relationship the child will develop trust in its caretakers and consequently in the world also but under traumatic conditions this confidence does not develop as it should. If the infant is unable to bond with the parent then it may develop a fear of being separated from its mother (separation anxiety) and the child learns anxiety and feels this emotional grief not understanding what it is or why it feels it. Such grief at this early age cannot be expressed until the child is older and by then its cause has been lost and only the fear and anger remain to manifest itself in the form of personality dependencies. The anger may be expressed as tantrums or outbursts of aggression or even as episodes of sadness and withdrawal.

The infant stage of development is also oral in nature. That is as Freud; the father of psychiatry suggested the most powerful need the child has is oral in nature i.e. to be fed. The most powerful form of expression is also oral. i.e. vocal, crying. If this aspect of the child's development is threatened then the child moves on to the next stage of development with feelings of being unfulfilled orally. Such deep set unfulfilled needs can manifest itself in adulthood as a need or desire to find alternative satisfaction through **oral** addictions e.g. smoking, drinking alcohol, eating or talking type behaviours or disorders. This dependent type personality also affects the way we bond with other humans. A dependent personality is always craving for a mother figure for the reassurance that it never received in the crib. Their relationships with partners are always based on *their own* needs rather than true respect for the other individual. They frequently harbour magical belief systems about their partners for instance they may believe that they could not possibly live without their chosen partner and therefore often contemplate suicide when a relationship ends rather than accepting the end of the relationship in the confidence that life continues and they will no doubt find another partner.

TODDLER STAGE OF DEVELOPMENT
9 MONTHS TO 3 YEARS
AUTONOMY vs. SHAME AND DOUBT

TYPIFIED BY:

- 1/ Anal needs are of primary importance.
- 2/ Acquisition of **WILL**.

If we have achieved our infancy milestones satisfactorily we then head into our next test which is known as the separation stage. From age 9 months to three years we develop skills that give us more freedom i.e. we learn to crawl and to walk; we learn new communication skills with special emphasis on the "NO" word (the first word in the English language). This new freedom also brings with it decision making but toddler decisions are all based on what the toddler wants NOW! Toddlers have no concept of consequence. They are ruled entirely by their immediate needs, desires and emotions.

We have all heard of the "Terrible Two's" as being the age where children begin to exert their own powers of independence; to be defiant and even disobedient. During this period the child is testing the limits of the parents disciplining actions and hence learning the limits of its own power and influence. This is necessary. Without opposing the parent's authority and protectiveness, the child cannot establish its own sense of identity and separateness.

Nevertheless discipline, (not abuse) at this stage is very important both for the parent to maintain situational control and for the child to discover acceptable behavioural limits.

At this age children begin to learn to 'act' like their parents e.g. if parents swear then the child will learn swear words; if the parents fight and argue then the child will learn to fight and argue as a means of resolving conflict or of getting its own way (Monkey see; Monkey do).

Children are our biggest admirers and most ardent imitators during these impressionistic months.

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To the toddler, Father is Godlike and Mother is everything else. Children of this age have no concept of what cruelty is and are therefore in the unenviable position of having to accept whatever treatment is dished out to them. They are totally dictated to by the will (and whim) of the parents or caretakers.

It is not surprising therefore; that toddlers begin to explore their world and consequently attempt to win some form of independence for themselves. Even so, they still require love and protection and their caretakers or parents are the ones who supply it.

The toddler years are a period of intense learning and mastery of milestones.

Some of the physical milestones of this age include:

A/ Learning to walk.

B/ Learning to take solid foods.

C/ Learning to talk.

D/ Learning to control elimination of body wastes (Potty training).

E/ Learning sex differences and sexual modesty.

F/ Achieving physiological stability.

G/ Forming simple concepts of social and physical reality.

Mixed into all this brainwork is PAIN! Real pain and fears never before experienced; from cutting teeth (physical pain) to controlling the bowels (the emotional pain of potty training) the world is both amazing and frightening to the toddler. It is a time when the toddler needs the MOST patience and understanding, soothing and reassuring from the parents that it can get but if the parents are experiencing hardships of their own (of which the child is oblivious) they will have too many distractions to remind themselves of their child's emotional needs. The hardships and demands of existence become the parent's main concerns.

Again the child has to develop coping skills in order to deal with the stresses of the world which is imposed on it. Simple situations to the parents can become a real source of trauma to the child. A bee sting, the growling dog next door or being left in the car (deserted) while Mum ducks into the bank, can be a terrifying experience to a toddler. Much worse if the toddler is left in the car-park of the Casino or is left for cold, hungry hours if the parents are alcoholic and

unconscious to the child's needs or more horrible are inconsistent or sadistic, and frequently physically abuse the child. There are other situations even more terrible to contemplate for example that of loving parents who are suddenly snatched away through a car accident.

The child experiences all manner of shock and hardship which are usually invisible to the parents even in the most average of families. Nevertheless the child must find some way to cope and to carry on because suicide is not an option to a toddler who has no concept of finality or of death or of anything outside the realm of its own existence.

The acquisition of WILL, (the "terrible two's") becomes therefore a survival skill and the rapid learning curve of the toddler necessary to ward off the threats looming in the future.

Now although the child has little or no control over the world around it there remains the formation and direction of its own will. A child does dictate its own will on the parents. It has learned from the cradle that screaming and tantrum throwing or defiance can change a situation in its favour. If the parents are loving but passive (or naive) and allow the child to demand things at this stage of development then the child will turn to rely on this technique in order to get its own way in the future, even as an adult!

This can be just as harmful to the child's adult life as it is perplexing to the parents who see their gorgeous child grow up to become an impatient, intolerant, arrogant and demanding adult full of resentment!

The right balance of discipline and relaxation of rules is very difficult for any parent to achieve and a lesson people usually fail to appreciate until they become parents themselves. Unfortunately too many children, adolescents and young adults BLAME their parents for the awful lives they *choose* to lead. They say things like "*We used to be belted as kids*" or that "*So-and-so was too miserable to buy us a bike for our 5th birthday*". The same people fail to recognize that they themselves were probably naughty and deserved to be chastised or that So-and-so was probably too poor to purchase a bike but had bought necessary clothes or shoes instead. These people also fail to recognize the amount of self-sacrifice their parents had done over the

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