

Non-Nurturing Environments

Parentification

- I am responsible for everyone
- I have to be perfect
- I have to please people

Criticism

- I am not good enough
- I am worthless
- I am insignificant
- I don't matter
- Something is wrong with me

Parental Absence/Abandonment

- I am going to be abandoned
- I am insignificant
- Bad things are going to happen
- I am invisible
- I don't matter
- I am worthless

Abuse

- I am at risk
- I am bad
- Bad things are going to happen
- I am worthless

Personality Disorder Parents (Cluster Behaviours)

- I am insignificant
- I am not good enough
- There is something wrong with me
- I am defective
- I am responsible
-

Enmeshment

- I am insignificant
- I am responsible for everyone
- I am helpless/powerless

Coddling

- I am at risk/not safe
- I am helpless

Enabling

- I am entitled
- I am going to fail

Non-Nurturing Early Environmental Aspects

There are many types of non-nurturing elements or events which can occur in the critical early years of development. It is important as clinicians, to be able to quickly identify these in the initial sessions with a client for several reasons:

1. It lends insight into client world view
2. It establishes the family of origin reconstruction patterns
3. It provides likely LBs
4. They are the core, origin issues which need to be addressed 9/10

Sometimes they can be a little tricky to spot, so we have created this helpful list.

1. Criticism

Criticism, especially when chronic, can erode a child's sense of self-efficacy and, if done harshly, can also negatively impact self-worth and identity formation.

The effects are seen in the worth themed LBs and in those involving trust-in-self.

- le. I am incapable
- I am not good enough
- I am worthless
- I cannot trust myself
- I am wrong

2. Parentification

When a child is put into the position of having to care for siblings or a parent for an extended amount of time, without appropriate support or at an inappropriate age-to-task level, they can become parentified.

Often the result is people-pleasing or taking too much responsibility in later life, which can lead to boundary disturbances.

Common associated cognitions:

- I am responsible (for everyone and everything)
- I am a horrible person (guilt at not pleasing)
- I am a disappointment
- I cannot say no/have to please

3. Sick, Rebellious or High-Needs Sibling

Children who grow up with a high needs sibling often get less parental attention or live in a strained family dynamic. Sometimes, this leads to the child attempting to over compensate for parental stress levels by attempting perfectionistic or pleasing behaviours.

This can lead to adult issues with developing a strong autonomous self, boundary implications in relationship or “white knight” syndrome or a lack of voice.

4. Parental Abandonment/Absence (Including Adoption)

The primary attachment relationship features heavily as a child’s first model of security, in a critical period. Any absence can have maladaptive effects. Caregiver absences include:

- Sickness, hospitalization
- Death (incl. suicide)
- Emotional detachment (can be due to mental illness, chronic illness, addiction, etc.)
- Excessive absence due to work, divorce, separation, etc.
- Parental leave (ie. on a vacation, moving, etc.)
- Caregiver employment ending (ie. nannies, etc.)

The attachment trauma piece is created more commonly, also, when the child has less or single attachment figures. If they still feel safe and secure with dad, they are unlikely to be harmed when mom goes on vacation with the girls. (This also highlights the importance of fathers, extended family and close friend circles’ involvement with parenting.)

Common cognitions created by this element:

- I am worthless
- I am not good enough
- I am alone
- I am unwanted
- I am at risk

5. Parental Physical/Sexual Abuse (Can Include Spanking/Physical Discipline)

When the primary attachment figure is the source of psychical threat and fear, a serious disruption in the child’s ability to feel secure occurs. This is because of the attachment trauma which has occurred.

In adulthood, this can cause a range of limiting beliefs, including:

- | | |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------|
| • I am at risk/vulnerable | • I am powerless/not in control |
| • I am worthless | • I don’t exist |
| • I am nothing | • I am an object |
| • It’s my fault | • I am insignificant |
| • I am shameful | • I cannot trust |

It is important to note that this element has been associated with intense pain, panic, anxiety, which can lead to opt-out behaviours and clinical disorders such as:

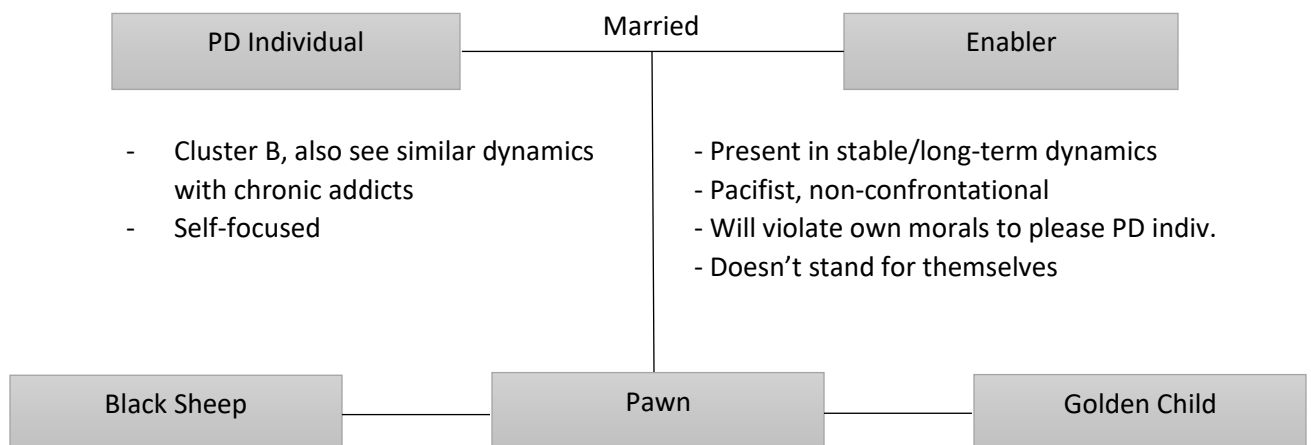
- EDs
- Addiction
- Anger issues
- Binge eating/bulimia
- Borderline PD
- PTSD
- Violence

6. Personality Disorder Parent (Primary Attachment)

Growing up in a PD personality dynamic alters depending on the PD. Some will create the same effects as parentification (dependent, for example) or absence (schizoid, for example). Please see these sections, as this one will focus on Cluster B personality disorders, which include: antisocial personality disorder, narcissistic personality disorder and borderline personality disorder.

The PD parent in a single family dynamic creates a very different pattern than that which results from a marital dyad. The child is essentially completely dependent on an inconsistent caregiver, prone to bouts of rage. Often, elements of emotional, physical or sexual abuse or neglect are present. Consequently, there are often co-occurring non-nurturing elements. In adulthood, the single PD parent often relies heavily on guilt, and sometimes martyrdom to keep the adult child enmeshed in the dynamic. Since they can no longer use money or shelter from dominance, they must switch to emotional tactics due to the increased voluntary nature of the relationship.

In a toxic family dynamic where there is a Cluster B PD, untreated, the following is generally created:



Black Sheep

- Consistently devalued, ignored or criticised
- Seen as the adversary of the PD
- Not “saved” by the enabler
- Triangulated often in the marital dyad
- Sometimes became enmeshed with the enabler
- Apt. to become estranged in adulthood
 - o Problems with attachments
 - o Often angry
 - o Can be perfectionist
 - o Often trust issues

Pawn

- Can be multiples
- Sometimes in each of the other 2 roles
- Ends up confused identity
- Can have pleaser traits
- Put where the PD individual will most benefit at that moment
- In adulthood
 - o Inconsistent identity
 - o Anger vs. hurt
 - o A constant sense of striving to achieve/”be” enough to regain golden position

Golden Child

- Not raised on realistic perspective of abilities
- Spoiled and/or enmeshed
- Always right, protected and seen as an extension of the PD individual
- Often money, obligation or praise/attention are used to enmesh or overvalue
- In adulthood
 - o Fragile egos/ability to deal with failure
 - o Grandiosity/narcissism
 - o Greedy
 - o Lacks perspective on self and their position in family dynamic

7. Enmeshment/Coddling/Enabling

These three items can all result in a limited identity, less self-efficacy, or stagnancy or failure to achieve or move through life stages.

Enabling can look like providing financial support on a level that removes the child's desire/need to find a career/employment, causing continued dependence on the parents. This can have effects on the child's motivation levels and identity formation in adult years.

Enmeshment is the result of poor boundaries or inappropriate roles between the parent and child. It can begin very early on and take several forms. Sometimes it is created following a parental split.

- a. Child becomes confidant
 - Child feels a heightened and limiting responsibility for the parent
- b. Child becomes carer for parent
 - See *parentification
- c. Child/parent's boundaries keep the parent involved in adult child's life in a way that is inappropriate for the developmental/life stage
 - Making lunch for 30 year old son daily or "giving permission" to daughter to date at age 25

*It is important to take culture into consideration when assessing this category, since it is a culturally determined norm affected area.

8. Addiction/Substance Abuse by a Parent Figure

These disruptors have multiple, co-morbid non-nurturing effects, but alone they tend to be disruptive to the calm of the environment and the attachment relationship. Children need a non-chaotic, secure environment.

Addiction can cause an inconsistent presence in the caregiver, which can cause insecure attachment in relationships, especially romantic ones, in adulthood.

Addiction also causes the parent to neglect certain needs of the child, which can lead to:

- Unsafe environments
- Exposure to unsavoury people
- Temporary caregivers/abandonment feelings
- Lack of nurture resources (good meals, hygiene, etc.)
- Anger/inappropriate emotional reactions to child
- Lack of school/learning life skills supports
- Increased rotation of temporary attachment figures (ie. from instability in caregiver romantic relationships)
- Children services interventions (attachment trauma), including incidents of violence/domestic violence

All of these can internalize worth-related LBs and all of those associated with risk.

Another result of addiction/sub. addicted parent presence is the modelling of these maladaptive coping mechanisms, which can be re-enacted in adulthood.

9. Multiple Moves/Relocations

A few of the non-nurturing elements occur after the earliest critical period of development (0-5). One of these is frequent or traumatic relocations. They may occur from a variety of reasons:

- Poverty
- Work of a parent
- Military
- Unstable (mentally) parent (also see attachment)
- Multiple homes (*also see attachment traumas)

Further probing into the school and social experiences coming from the moves, and then listing each is probably good to document in the intake form.

10. Bullying/Ostracization

Usually, bullying is not the first or origin non-nurturing element, but rarely it can be. Often, the parenting or family of origin environment contains the features which internalize the limiting beliefs which create low self-esteem. Low self-esteem, poor self-image or limited social skills, all possibly originating from early family of origin experiences, make kids targets for negative peer interactions.

Exclusion based bullying

- I am excluded
- There's something wrong with me

Violence based bullying

- I am at risk/ danger/vulnerable
- I am alone

Sexual Bullying

- I am at risk
- I am shameful
- I am unwanted

I don't belong

Cyber Bullying

I am trapped

Generalized, ridicule bullying

I am at risk

In-peer bullying

I am vulnerable

I am worthless

With bullying, the chronic non-chronic nature and parental/school intervention make a major difference, as well as the presence of strong, positive peer relations.

If those mitigators aren't present, then the effect in adults can be social anxiety, isolation, self-doubt and trust concerns, as well as depression.

11. Culture Clash/Religion Clash/Immigration

Acculturation issues range in concern depending on a few immigration factors:

1. The age of immigration of the client
2. Presence of language deficits/other challenges
3. The span of culture vs. culture difference
4. Socioeconomic adjustment levels
5. Presence of war, natural disaster, persecution or other traumatic factors

All of these can function as non-nurturing elements, at almost any childhood age. In fact, the critical period of age 6-12 in early school years can be more impactful than 0-5 because of the contrast between peers/school and home.

In the case of 1st/2nd generation Canadians, other non-nurturing elements exist, which often result from the clash between the old world culture (1) and Canadian culture (2).

1. Parent vs. child values conflicts that are non-compromising
2. Child vs. fitting into contemporary culture (ie. fear of not fitting in, or actually not)
3. Parenting attitudes (spanking/hitting = appropriate)
4. Gender valuations (ie. 1st born son worth more, devalues female client: LB I am less than)
5. Religious-based guilt induction/shaming/autonomy removal

12. Controlling Parents/Strictness Overdone (Lack of Autonomy)

Controlling parents often crush the autonomy of their children, which impacts identity formation and can cause a back lash of rebellion. The result is often:

- Diminished self-worth
- Limited ability to self-praise or validate
- Polarized thinking
- Perfectionism
- Hyper-emotional reactions in family of creation
- A strong pretence (inflexible) for order
- A need to control others in adulthood

All LBs associated with control, risk, trapped feelings and lack of trust in others results potentially.

Overly strict parents create the same result, but if socially domineering in a way that keeps their child behind in social progression, they can make them “stick” at one delayed stage, in adulthood. (ie. not being able to date/socialize with boys in high school = a phobic response to dating in a client)

13. Divorce/Custody Issues/Co-Parenting Disputes

Divorce is a disruption to the child's environment, both emotional and often physical, so is considered a non-nurturing element. Some other non-nurturing elements exist within the event, potentially:

- Diminished/absent contact with one parent (see "attachment trauma")
- Parental conflict (visible to children)
- Involvement in parental conflict (by way of guilt, over revealing, emotionally guilt, relying on children, using as a pawn)
- Making children make age-inappropriate choices
- Not informing the child about elements affecting their life
- Improper or too quick/too often introduction of new partners (especially living with)

A wide range of LBs include: unwanted, at risk, insignificant, powerless, at fault, etc. can result. Also patterns of insecurity or aversion to attachment in the future can result.

How to spot 'em

When completing an intake, always ask some indicator questions to forage out the non-nurturing elements. Sometimes, they can be hard to spot, but more often they exist, especially if you are seeing marked dysfunction in your client. Some example questions:

1. What was the method of discipline used in your home?
2. What was each child's role in the family? Was there a favorite?
3. What was your (father's) temper like to look at?
4. What is the least functional thing about your (mother)?
5. Were there multiple relocations and school placements in your childhood?
6. Were you separated from your (caregiver) at any point?
7. What is your feeling about your (adoption)?

Any disruptor

8. How strict were your parents? How so?

** Pick questions that suit the likely story and ask with the purpose of identifying the disruptors.

What to do when ya got 'em

Once you've initially selected the non-nurturing element, ask a few more follow-up probing questions, in order to verify you are correctly identifying it.

This information can be used now, for several purposes:

- a. Can help to inform the selection of the LBs
- b. Can be used to explain the development of certain maladaptive behaviours in the client's current reality.
- c. Acceptance of the negative nature of these elements by the client. Often, society, families, even individuals themselves, dismiss or minimize the effect of the non-nurturing elements they have experienced and identifying them can have the effect of increasing ability to self-validate and accept.

One of the things a Shift clinician should do is share their knowledge of the client's non-nurturing element and the way they work/what they are. Shared knowledge is shared power!