

THE REFRIGERATOR LIST

SUGGESTIONS FOR DECODING BEHAVIOURS -- POSSIBLE EXPLANATIONS BY ROBERT SPOTTSWOOD, M.A.

VIOLENCE, PICKING FIGHTS

- I've a chronic fear of being deserted. Feeling abandoned triggers rage. The surest way to prevent desertion is to keep you mad and yelling at me for fighting.
- Please stop me! I'm begging to feel contained and safe.
- I need closeness but don't deserve it; hitting is the safest way to be close, while disguising my shame.
- My endless sadness, loneliness and fear only gets a moment of relief when I put it into other people and then laugh at them for feeling it for me. That temporarily numbs my own anguish -- when I can laugh at others.

'HIDING' BEHAVIOURS (SNEAKING, STEALING, HOARDING, CHEATING, TRICKING, LYING, SHOPLIFTING, ALL QUITE ANNOYING!)

- I know I'll be kicked out again, so I have to practice hiding and sneaking stuff for when I must survive on my own.
- Depending on adults is like volunteering for prison; not possible, not on my radar, this can't happen ever again!
- Since I am a shameful being, but you think I'm good, I'll try to preserve our doomed relationship as long as possible; I will protect you from the horrible reality of who I am because you are nice.

BIZARRE GOOFINESS, WHINING, ENDLESS PESTERING

- I have to be in your thoughts all the time or I'm afraid I'll disappear. I feel empty inside; don't even know who I am. Are you thinking of me now? How about now? Now? Still? What about now?....
- I didn't have much for role models, so I provoke other people to react so I can observe them and try to learn.
- I'm so undersocialised, this is the best that I can do. I'm so used to being called 'weird' it feels normal.
- Closeness terrifies me. This behaviour keeps people annoyed and at a safe distance. Not hard at all.

OPPOSITIONAL DEFIANCE

- I need to feel safe by maintaining control. So whenever you suggest something, I immediately say NO to create some safe space to think it over. Then maybe I can say Yes. This is me coping. And it starts over every time.
- Saying 'I'm not coming!' and then screaming 'Don't leave me!!' recreates a primal conflict drama, over and over. I'm trying to work it out, and need help, but can't accept help. (If that doesn't make sense, then welcome to my world!) I must project all my shame about this onto you: you're wrong, you're mean, you're stupid; I have to make my failure be about you. (It hurts too much that it's really about me.)

LETTING ADULTS DOWN, DISAPPOINTING THEM

- Positive adults make no sense to me. All I can do is humour them until I run away or fight again, and watch their fragile dreams for me crumble over and over. Are they stupid?
- The horrors I lived through (including neglect) are not even in the middle class vocabulary of conceivable experiences, so what do I do with these nice people? Let them think their big thoughts and make their big plans for me, until I have to act out my real shame, letting them down over and over. Sorry, nice people.
- Get over your disappointment and stop caring about me. I did.

AVOIDING

- You're moving too fast. First I need emotional safety. Second I need co-regulation of emotions. Lastly I might talk about all your great ideas.... But make me feel safe first.
- Getting involved with closeness or even conversation means getting vulnerable. I can't let it happen ever again, thanks to my past.
- I never learned normal conversation, so I feel stupid when you talk to me. Just leave me alone so I don't feel stupid.

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