

A family can be very close and not be enmeshed. It's not necessarily the behavior that makes a family close v enmeshed, but how it impacts the family members individually and as a group. Close families will feel supported and like they are able to be themselves without losing love or their position in the family. Only the "right" performance is met with love or acceptance in enmeshed families. Anything else may result in abandonment.

The difference between a close family and an enmeshed family is how they try to prevent individuality in the name of sameness. Family members who prioritize their own needs on any level are often considered to be going against the family and maybe a threat. In contrast, close families empower their members to express their individuality and personal needs. They will also support members in difficult times and offer unconditional love.

Enmeshed families, on the other hand, tie love and support into doing what the parents or elder family members want. The child is often shamed or experiences guilt and manipulation for trying to express themselves individually or take care of their needs. This can have a detrimental effect on the child's emotional well-being. The child may also be blamed for the feelings or needs of another person in the family.

For example, in some families, having dinner together every week is a normal and expected occurrence. Everyone in the family may enjoy this tradition and want to keep it going. In a close family, someone could miss dinner, and it would not threaten their role in the family. In an enmeshed family, missing the dinner could be met with complaints, guilt, or ridicule from the other family members. Close families enjoy being close. Enmeshed families feel obligated to be close and feel they risk losing their identity or these relationships if they don't participate in family norms or activities.