

Part 4: Other forms of emotional abuse

So far, the focus of our considerations has been on "replacing a partner" as emotional abuse. Other forms of emotional abuse in the family have similar consequences that are also extremely detrimental to personality development. They are described below. These emotional problems can be resolved in therapy using similar approaches to those described in the previous fairy tale interpretation.

Narcissistic abuse

As a rule, parents have the need to encourage their children. This is natural and necessary. Their affection is also expressed in the fact that they **support their children and help them to find their own way**. However, parents with strong feelings of inferiority regarding their own professional or social position easily fall into a typical trap. According to the motto "If I was not able to achieve something myself, then at least my child should become something (very) special" or the well-known precept "I want my child to be better off than me!", the child's true needs are completely ignored: son or daughter is abused!

The crucial difference is often not easy to recognize from the outside. Are the parents concerned about the child's needs or their own? To what extent are their actions determined by selfish goals? Children have a fine antenna for these differences and sense exactly what their parents really want. By becoming failures, they sabotage their parents' intentions. Unconsciously they take revenge with their own failure for the fraud that is committed against them or direct the anger that should actually be directed at the abuser, the perpetrator, against themselves.

Mr. M. is a committed patient. After a short time, he took on various positions in the therapeutic community. He addictively attracts positions and tasks without considering his real needs.

The narcissistic abuse by his mother is clear in his life story: As a child, Mr. M. was often left alone by his hard-working parents. His mother showed him affection primarily by checking his performance. She checked his school work with strictness and severity. His mother wanted him to study and become a teacher. Because her brother was the only one supported in her family of origin, she was unable to complete a qualified education herself. She was unable to deal with this narcissistic injury. She tried to heal the inner wound by demanding from her son everything that she had wanted for herself. As a result, her son felt constantly driven to achieve enormous things.

Mr. M.'s life was marked by various defeats. Everything he worked so hard to achieve, he ultimately destroyed himself. He became addicted and repeatedly ended up doing jobs that were far below his capabilities.

People who were narcissistically abused by their parents take on the role of "driver" insofar as they drive themselves. Because they were unable to satisfy their mother or father, they remain chronically dissatisfied with themselves. Like the previous perpetrators, they now carry a narcissistic wound within themselves, which they are very likely to pass on to the next generation.

The terror of suffering

The psychoanalyst Ferenczi called a form of emotional abuse in the family the "terror of suffering". What does this mean? The illness or great suffering of an adult in the family always has an impact on the entire family system. Sometimes children become victims because the pain and the aggression about the suffering is unloaded on them. Even a small child can become a willing caregiver for a sick mother. It is not uncommon for children to take on the role of therapist for their emotionally disturbed mother as early as ten years of age or earlier. They are knowledgeable conversation partners, help where they can, and take on the upbringing and responsibility for their younger siblings. They learn to pay attention to the needs of those around them, put their own feelings aside or no longer perceive them at all. They develop a »victim and helper identity« . They only feel valuable when they can help, because they have only experienced their right to exist as helpers.

Suffering in the family can be terroristic: the mood is depressed; happiness and exuberance are viewed as a serious offense. Joy is blocked as a feeling. It is not uncommon for children to be blamed for pain and suffering:

- If I had aborted you, I could have continued my career and would be in a good position today. It's your fault that I'm miserable.
- I should never have married your father; it was only because of you that I stayed with him.
- You were always a burden to me and ruined my whole life.
- If I have to accept that you are here , then you should at least try to make my life as comfortable as possible.

Self-esteem is the feeling that a person has about himself: a feeling that accompanies him constantly, that sometimes fluctuates, but to which he always returns. It is easy to understand that the self-esteem of children who have to hear these or similar sentences is disturbed. If they represent the climate of a family, they are an expression of profound lovelessness and hatred.

It can be assumed that children unconsciously adopt the attitudes and opinions of their parents and into their soul ¹¹. I have found that some addicts carried a strong self-destructive energy within them: as if they had been ordered to destroy themselves. This energy was still effective even after they had long since given up addiction. They had tried to mitigate the negative energies with the help of the addictive substance.

A mechanism that many victims of terror have to develop is called "identification with the aggressor. "The fear is so great that the only way out is to submit, to give up one's own person, one's own will, and to identify with the aggressor. In order to survive psychologically, they will believe the aggressor that they themselves are guilty and bad. This then feels like a relief!

Having a good mother or a good father seems much more important than one's own person. Children sacrifice their own selves for their parents, they bend themselves to please them (false self). We see how the princess in the fairy tale gives up her role without resistance, becomes an inferior goose girl and leaves everything to the chambermaid (the mother). Emotionally abused people who have been exposed to the terror of suffering often feel guilty simply because of their "existence".

During psychotherapy, it is important to recognize that negative "attributions" have been adopted from the parents. Many characteristics of the dependent personality structure that we identified in the case of the goose girl are apparent. Very similar principles apply to healing. They too will have to go into the iron furnace - figuratively speaking - so that they can learn to set boundaries - develop their own ego and dissolve their victim identity.

Dealing with deep feelings of hatred is sometimes particularly difficult. Brutal and cruel acts committed against the body and soul seem unforgivable. Psychodynamically, hatred always turns into self-hatred . Hatred is always a form of dependency: the memory remains , and the bad feelings keep coming back and poisoning the mood, ultimately the soul. Whether you want it or not, an emotional fixation remains. Every person who reminds you of the hated person will reopen the old wound. Contact with that person will always be difficult.

My mother, who has done so much to me, is completely indifferent to me, said one patient . He continued: She could die next to me, I would be completely indifferent. His words were full of hatred and contempt. Only those who have learned to forgive are truly free. This is often only possible with psychotherapeutic help.

Sexual abuse in the family

A dramatic form of exploitation is sexual abuse, which can only be mentioned briefly here. The consequences for the soul are similar, but usually more severe than is the case with emotional abuse. Physical and mental integrity is violated. If the sexual abuse is committed by close relatives - father, mother, siblings - the consequences are usually more serious than if the perpetrator is further away from the victim. Here the person responsible for love is the one committing the betrayal. The consequence for many of those affected is that whenever relationships become closer, sexual disorders in the form of fear, disgust, frigidity, etc. arise.

The drama of sexual abuse is reflected in the Grimm's fairy tale Allerleirauh ¹². The victims often show a typical victim identity with psychological impairments, develop psychosomatic disorders and not infrequently become suicidal.

Child abuse

Child abuse is a form of emotional exploitation that occurs in all social classes much more frequently than is generally assumed. Parents who abuse their children are usually themselves victims of excessive violence or extreme devaluation and injury by their parents. They carry a wound within themselves that refuses to heal. Child abuse can best be understood as parents projecting their own injured parts onto the child and fighting them there. They try to relieve themselves by taking out their self-hatred on their own child.

As with sexual abuse, the abused child is faced with the physical power of a parent to whom it is helplessly at the mercy. Often it is minor or deliberately motivated reasons that lead to uncontrolled feelings of anger and hatred being acted out in the form of physical and mental violence. Abusers justify their violence with flimsy arguments. It is not uncommon for a "loss of control" to be evident. The abuser hits his victim blindly and without self-control, who then actually experiences fear of death. Children dissociate, i.e. they separate themselves from reality and "switch off" their feelings. They literally leave their bodies and no longer feel fear and pain. The soul is shattered and the consequences for many are fatal and life-defining. From then on, such children carry a similar wound within themselves to that of the abuser and will look for "vents" to relieve themselves.

One way of (seemingly) coping with the cruel experiences is to identify with the aggressor: the abused child becomes convinced that it deserves punishment because it is bad. It identifies with the perpetrator and literally absorbs the anger and hatred that the perpetrator directs at his victim. Ultimately, it is the perpetrator's hatred of himself that is being implanted in the child.

Often the victims are left with a deep hatred for their tormentors that they cannot let go of. Here too, a form of emotional dependence can be recognized.