

Parental Values, Expectations and Beliefs

This exercise is designed to help you become aware of some of the parental expectations and values you learned as a child. Your parents' "shoulds" and values were an important building block in the image you formed of yourself when you were young, and may still play a role in your self-esteem today.

Points to remember as you do this exercise:

- Parents try to do their best when raising children. Looking at their values and beliefs is NOT a judgement against them.
- Parents, friends, teachers, religious leaders and society taught you about the things that worked for them, at that time. They had no way of knowing who you would be and what the world would be like once you became an adult. Just because it worked for *them* then, doesn't mean it will work for *you* now.
- As a child you had no power to meet your physical and emotional needs, so you learned to obey your family and friends' messages and expectations in order to gain love, physical and emotional safety and approval, and avoid rejection.
- Your parents instilled expectations and values in you that may or may not fit the adult you are today.
- Old parental beliefs and expectations often interfere with your ability to meet your own emotional needs as an adult now.

Under each category list the opinions and attitudes you believe your parents held about the following concepts. Remember, they may not have ever actually said a word about these subjects for them to communicate strong feelings about them.

Try to recall their facial expressions and body language as well as their words. Be sure to focus on what you picked up when you were young, even if their thoughts and feelings on these issues have changed over the years. Write about the messages that stand out as the strongest and most influential on you when you were a child.

FAMILY

YOU

OTHER PEOPLE

CHILDREN

MONEY

PETS

WORK

GOALS

SEXUALITY

PHYSICAL AFFECTION

DISCIPLINE

NEEDS (YOURS AND OTHER'S)

WANTS

FEELINGS

YOUR BODY

SPIRITUALITY

RELIGION

MARRIAGE

FRIENDS

DEATH

BOOKS AND EDUCATION

NATURE

HEALTH

PLAY/LEISURE TIME

MUSIC

FOOD

WOMEN

MEN

DRUGS (PRESCRIPTION AND ILLEGAL)

ALCOHOL

TOBACCO

MY INNER SELF

PERSONAL BOUNDARIES

Now that you have clarified the values you were taught as a child, take note of any that may be holding you back or not fit who you are and the life you wish to lead as an adult.

Then, in a different color pen, go through the list again and write the expectations and values you choose to live by now.

Remember that you have the right and power to change any of these to better fit who you are today and the goals you want to achieve.