



FAMILY STORIES FROM REAL LIFE

Presenting

Friday Bowen Family Systems Shorts

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#3. Managing Self in Emotionally Reactive Patterns Lingering from Childhood

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Bowen observed: "Every human infant begins life fully dependent on others, specifically the family of origin." Think of that. Being "fully dependent" is a deeply rooted fact in the origins of the human experience. These deeply rooted attachments are initially necessary for physical as well as emotional survival. Bowen further observed: "Growing up involves progressive development of individual characteristics, and aspects of increasing independence."¹

For your consideration:

- Each of us has some degree of unresolved emotional attachment to our parents, some degree of emotional dependency developed in childhood that continues into adult life.
- To become more aware of your lingering patterns of dependency, think about the following:
 - The degree to which you look to others to regulate yourself.
 - The sensitivity you have to others that emanates from adapting to your parental family in childhood.
 - The degree to which you are unsure of self – or the conditions that trigger unsureness in you.
- When thinking about these emotional dependency patterns, can you see how emotional dependency on others for our own well-being can generate anxiety?
- Here's an action thought: The more one can be a self and be in good, respectful, and kind contact with others, the less anxious one becomes overtime.

Differentiation, the process of growing up, "deals with working on one's own self, with controlling self, with becoming a more responsible person, and permitting others to be themselves."²

Thoughts or comments? Please email selden.dunbar.illick@gmail.com.

1. Murray Bowen, MD. 1991. "Diversity from Unity." In E. Joseph (ED.), *Individuality and Cooperative Action*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.

2. Murray Bowen, MD. 1978. *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*. New York: Jason Aronson. p. 409