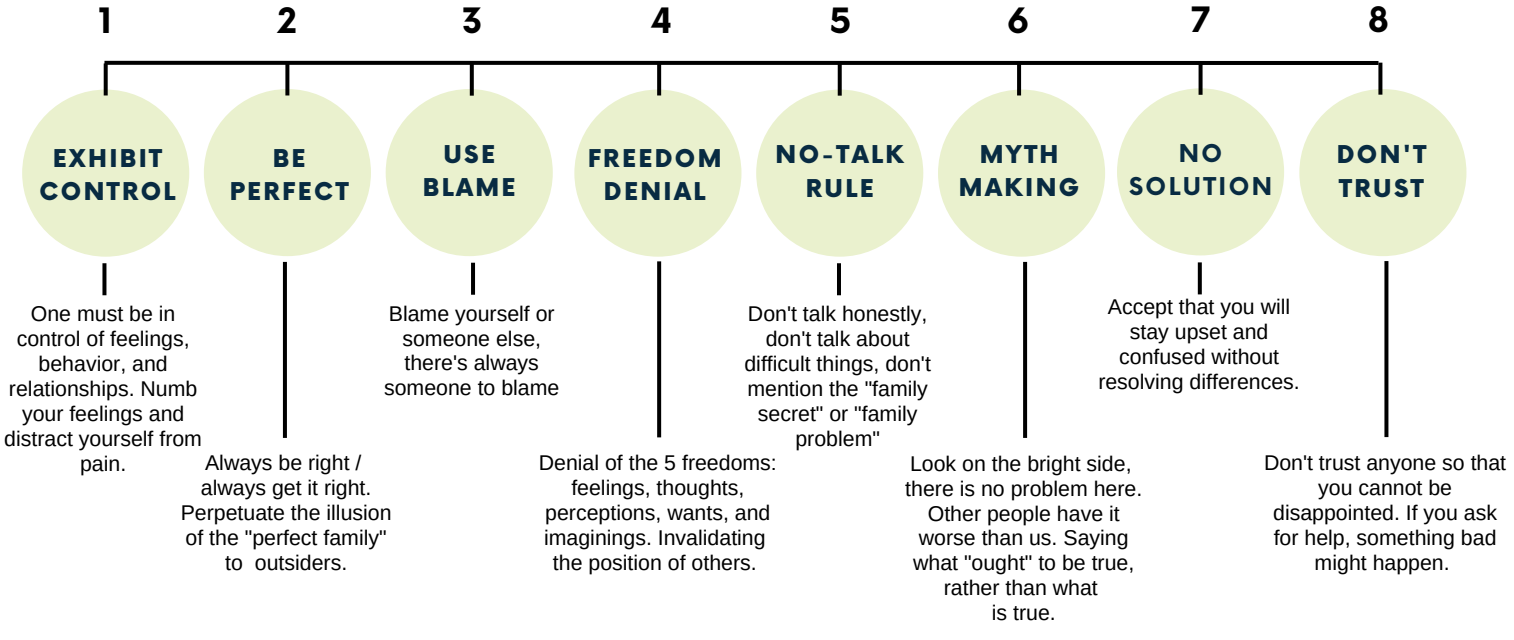
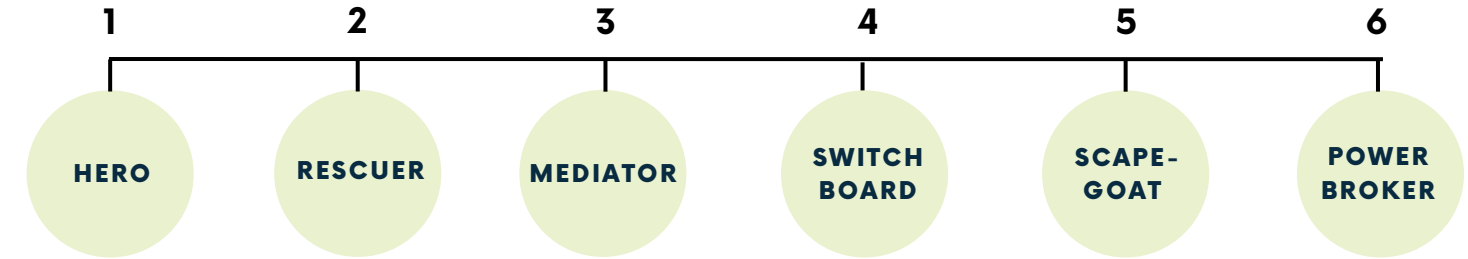
Unspoken Family Rules

Understanding some of the family rules that contribute to challenges in families can help us to break free of these patterns, rebuild self-esteem, and form healthier relationships.



Common Family Roles

Family roles shape how we interact with each other and with the family system as a whole. At times, roles function as a way to maintain balance in the family system. Understanding how well these roles work for family members helps to develop safe, deep, and meaningful connections.



HERO

The “good” and “responsible” child. A high achiever, carries the pride of the family, he/she overcompensates to avoid looking or feeling inadequate.

RESCUER

Takes care of others’ needs & emotions & problem-solves for others. Might have difficulty with conflict. Often performs role to meet his/her own needs, such as relieving anxiety.

MEDIATOR

Can be a rescuer-type although he/she works to keep peace in the family system. Does the emotional work of the family to avoid conflict. He/she acts as a buffer, & does it in the name of helping others, although it may be for his/her needs.

SWITCH BOARD

Keeps track of what’s going on by being aware of who is doing what & when. Strength in being the central person to go to & understanding how the family is doing. Focuses on everyone else’s issues rather than his/her own.

SCAPE-GOAT

The person the other family members feel needs the most help. Often shows the obvious symptoms of the family being unable to work through problems. May strengths such as a sense of humor, a greater level of honesty, & the willingness to be close to his/her feelings. Can be inappropriate expression of feelings, & social or emotional problems.

POWER BROKER

This person works at maintaining a hierarchy in the family with him/herself at the top. His/her safety & security with life depends on feeling in control of the environment around him/her.

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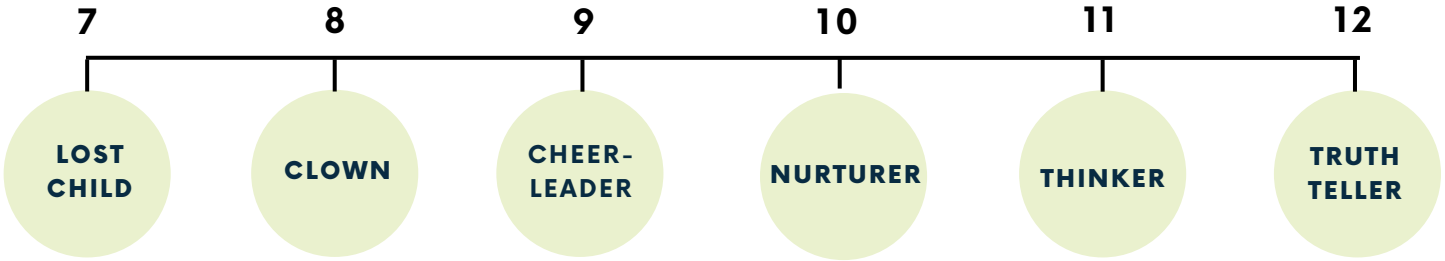

Subservient good child. Obedient, passive, & hidden in the family trauma. Stays hidden to avoid being a problem. Generally flexible & easygoing. However, lacks direction, is fearful in making decisions, & follows without questioning.

Uses humor to offset the family conflict & to create a sense that things are okay. Has a talent to readily lighten the moment but he/she hides true feelings.

Provides support & encouragement to others. There is usually balance in taking care of his/her own needs while providing a positive influence on those around him/her.

Provides emotional support, creates safety, is available to others, & can be a mediator. He/she focuses on having & meeting emotional needs, usually in a balanced manner.

The thinker provides the objective, reasoning focus. Strength is being able to see situations in a logical, objective manner. However, he/she may find it difficult to connect emotionally with others.

This person reflects the system as it is. At times the challenge is how that information is relayed. Other members in the family might be offended or avoid the truth teller because of the power of the truth he/she holds. Strength occurs when this person is coupled with another positive role, such as a nurturer or cheerleader.