

The Influence of Our Families

The most important things children learn about relationships are learned in the family. They learn mostly through their experience of being part of the family and by observing how relationships in the family are handled. All families have their own rules about the way things should be done and the way people should be treated.

Some of these rules are explicit such as “everyone must contribute” or “education is the top priority”. Other rules are unstated and implicit but nevertheless powerful. Every child must learn the rules of their own family to survive. Children learn such things as what can be talked about and what they must keep to themselves. They learn how emotions are expressed or concealed, how to behave, how conflict is handled and how partners relate to one another. Although we are not always able to articulate what we have learned, these lessons have a powerful effect on our lives.

We tend to think of the way our families behaved as “normal”. When we have learned to behave in a particular way we feel comfortable behaving that way. Not only can it feel like the like a good way of doing things but it can sometimes seem like the “right” way. We can get quite a shock when we find out that our partner sees things differently. Our partners often feel as comfortable and sure that their way is the “right” way as much as we do. It is important to realize that there are many ways of doing things and that our preferred way is just that—our preferred way.

“Those who have become mature adults, able to be themselves...have worked at untangling the roots, identifying who they really are, and deciding what they are responsible for. They have learned to be more accepting of themselves and others in spite of their differences.”

Some great courses on the topic are presented by Relationships Australia.

- “Family of Origin – understanding its influence and impact” is held at various times throughout the year, you can visit their website www.relationship.com.au.



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