

# Fighting the Forces of Evil: Dealing with Dysfunction in the Home

## Headline:

Feeling like your family is dysfunctional is normal. Beating yourself up and comparing yourself to other families who seem functional, is also normal, but it's not likely to help you become a more effective parent.

## Objective:

Parenting is tough for everyone. Every family is at a different point in their journey to becoming a well-functioning, healthy family system. Some parents have learned more effective skills for managing behavior and have worked hard to develop a culture of accountability in their homes. Some parents are just starting out, beginning to learn these new tools. The fact is every single family is a work in progress.

You may be dealing with a dysfunctional family if one of the parents has an addiction like alcoholism, drug addiction, sex addiction, abuse issues, or mental illness such as Bi-polar disorder, schizophrenia, or depression. A dysfunctional family may also be caused by a child with similar problems. Almost all families go through a period once or several times where the situation is dysfunctional for the family, it is a normal occurrence and can be worked through when the parents are responsible and take corrective actions to fix the problem. Other times a situation might get so out of hand that only professional intervention can remedy the problem.

There are many forces, both societal and spiritual, that are attacking the family. Having a strong faith life and living a righteous life are vital in confronting issues that weaken the family.

**Suggested Song:** Prayer of St Francis

## Bible and Catechism Readings:

### Proverbs 11:29

Whoever brings ruin to their family will inherit only wind, and the fool will be servant to the wise.

### Ephesians 6:4

Fathers do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

### Catechism 1657:

It is here that the father of the family, the mother, children, and all members of the family exercise the priesthood of the baptized in a privileged way "by the reception of the sacraments, prayer and thanksgiving, the witness of a holy life, and self-denial and active charity." Thus, the home is the first school of Christian life and "a school for human enrichment." Here one learns endurance and the joy of work, fraternal love, generous - even repeated - forgiveness, and above all divine worship in prayer and the offering of one's life.

### Catechism 2207:

The family is the *original cell of social life*. It is the natural society in which husband and wife are called to give themselves in love and in the gift of life. Authority, stability, and a life of relationships within the family constitute the foundations for freedom, security, and fraternity within society. The family is the community in which, from childhood, one can learn moral values, begin to honor God, and make good use of freedom. Family life is an initiation into life in society.

**Saint:** St Joseph

Isn't it likely St. Joseph had a few moments when he was utterly confused, even if only momentarily before the Angels were right there to provide support, reassurance and to guide him?

Maybe St. Joseph did not have to summon the Angels. Maybe their response was clear and quick. The thing is we can summon Angels, Saints, Mother Mary, and St Joseph, himself, to ask for help.

**Vignette:**

Vicky has been married to Michael for 10 years, they have 3 children. Michael has always enjoyed a beer or three after work and on the weekends. Vicky has noticed more and more that Michael isn't interested in being involved with the kids' activities and it's harder to get him to attend family functions. Veronica knew before they got married that Michael abused alcohol, but she thought he would stop when he became a father. Vicky finally got the courage to confront Michael about his abuse of alcohol and his lack of connection to her and their kids, telling him he had to choose between booze or his family. Michael was "blind-sided" since he never remembered her making a big deal out of it before.

**Questions for Large and Small Group Discussion**

How does dysfunction affect your family?

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What methods do you use to build family unity and strengthen family bonds?

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How is the communication among your family members regarding difficult issues?

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Has a longstanding dysfunctional issue been left unaddressed in your family?

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When is it time to seek professional help?

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**Action Plan:**

1. This week would be a good time to start addressing a problem within your family before it gets too big
2. What one change can you make in yourself to make your family better functioning?

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## Other Resources

1. <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/god-s-mercy-in-messed-up-families>
2. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/rachel-finn/4-signs-you-may-be-living\\_b\\_6156276.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/rachel-finn/4-signs-you-may-be-living_b_6156276.html)

Here are four signs you may be living with dysfunction:

### 1) You're always having to give up something.

Most people will tell you having to compromise is a sign of a functional and beneficial relationship -- and they're right. But are you really compromising, or are you just always having to give something up? Do you give up your values, your beliefs, your power or your passions because you have someone in your life you're either trying to manage, appease or keep around?

This is not "compromise" -- this is dysfunction. Compromise is going to the Mexican restaurant your partner chose when you felt like Italian because you knew you'll get Italian next week. Dysfunction is when you *never* get Italian. Compromise is the settlement of differences by mutual concessions. So, are you the one having to always make the concession? If so, that's not compromise.

If you are always having to give something up, it's worth your while to reflect on why you do. It's on us to examine why we accept the behaviors we do: What you choose to put up with is a very good indicator of your self-worth.

### 2) You, or others, keep talking about the same problems repeatedly.

If you have a person in your life who is only ever talking about their problems, or you are that person, then you're living with dysfunction. Continually hearing the same problems from the same person without anything changing has the listener feeling powerless to make a difference. They know the only person who can change it is the one who is offloading -- not only that, but it also leaves them frustrated and defeated.

Relationships should be in a constant state of growth, not stifled, and you shouldn't only be bonding over problems: Healthy relationships will bond over all of life's events. If you're the listener, you must first look at what benefit you believe you get from doing it: there is always a payoff from our habitual behaviors.

And if it's you who is the one continually sharing your problems, and you believe that's because you can never seem to be free of them, then that's also a clear sign you are living with dysfunction in other areas of your life. And only you have the power to change that.

### 3) Somebody in your life refuses to take responsibility.

Most people's ears close over when they hear the word responsibility -- like it's some dirty word. Personally, I believe it's the best word in existence and the most powerful -- when it's employed it's got the power to change your life. Some of the more detrimental ramifications from someone refusing to take responsibility include: a child ending up having to assume the role of the parent; a spouse becoming a "single parent" by virtue of their dysfunctional partner becoming, in effect, a child. A good example is when grandparents end up raising their grandchildren because the parents are not stepping up emotionally or with care giving.

Anybody who has had, or has, someone in their life who refuses to take responsibility will very likely relate to the experience of having their life put on hold due to that person's problems or, at the very least, having their life extremely affected because of them.

If one person's life dominates the family system, and that person has the capability to take responsibility for their behavior but chooses not to, then you're living with dysfunction. If somebody else's life disturbs the normal functioning of YOUR life, then you're living with dysfunction. Period.

### 4) Somebody is overstepping your boundaries and you're not doing anything to stop it.

A personal boundary is an invisible line that marks a limit, and allowing somebody to overstep your boundaries is a clear sign of dysfunction. We all have internal boundaries, but issues can arise when we've lived too long with dysfunction and have started accepting unacceptable behaviors. One way to re-establish

your boundaries is to get present to the feelings in your body when such a situation arises.

You don't need to consciously know what boundary is being crossed -- you just need to know when something doesn't sit right for you. When you get that feeling, there's a good chance someone's pushing your limits. The overstepping of boundaries is likely to become regular when you either remain ignorant of your boundaries or continue to not enforce them.