

Autobiographical Egg / Timeline

Repetition Recovery Plan

The following exercise has been adapted from materials created by Patrick Carnes (*Betrayal Bond*), Marilyn Murray (*Prisoner of Another War*), Bonnie Den Dooven (2001) and Anna Valenti-Anderson (2001-2008).

Everyone comes from a family of varying degrees of functionality (interaction health). Dysfunction can simply be used as a term to describe a system that is not perfect. So as you're drawing your Egg, please hear that this is not an assignment by which your therapist wants to demonize your parents or primary caregiver(s). This is not an attempt to list all your parents' wrongs or to blame them for where you are. It IS an attempt to recognize what took place, how you, as a child perceived it, and how it may have impacted you at even an unconscious level. What you uncover is your reality, which in many ways has probably gotten viscerally "stuck" in your ancient limbic system that stores emotional memories (the content, not the memory itself). If you say to yourself, "Why do I keep doing things I know I shouldn't be doing" then there's a good chance that you're stuck in **repetition compulsion**.

Sometimes understanding "why" we "knee-jerk" or think and act at certain times helps us to identify patterns and ways to change self-defeating thoughts and behaviors. It also helps to identify "less than nurturing" or "false empowerment" situations. Understanding repetition compulsion (also sometimes known as Trauma Reenactment or Trauma Repetition) in your life provides you with a chance to realistically empower yourself by modifying your own thinking patterns. Trauma does not have to be "major" trauma either. It can be a seemingly insignificant event that somehow diminished your ability to love and accept yourself as you are: An inherently precious being, with value and worth just for breathing. This means you don't have to do anything or be anything to anyone in order to be precious. You are not here to prove your value. You simply are. Most unhealthy patterns of behavior root themselves in a core sense of shame created by one's perception or actual experience of some type of abandonment. If you lived with, or experienced instances of abandonment or loss, whether or not it was intentional or identified, you likely experienced some degree of sensing minimal attention, minimal safety, minimal parenting, minimal trust, and most importantly, minimal boundaries.

With a shame core present ("I'm not enough just for breathing" and "I'm not safe being totally who I am"), you may not be comfortable letting people in, letting them see "the real you" (if you even know what that is) or maintaining healthy intimacy. You may use defenses and distorted thinking in order to survive and be okay. You will find a way of insulating and protecting yourself so you will not be hurt. This isn't because you're a bad person. It's because as a child, generally, you did not have the psychological resource to cope with something that was perceived (in your core, unconscious limbic system) as hurtful in your life. You learned to defend against the pain and shut down (flight, freeze). Shutting down your feelings (or distorting your thoughts to shut down discomfort and minimizing, rationalizing or justifying "it's okay") is wounding. It wounds your sense of self, self-esteem and integrity. It wounds who you inherently are. And in this wounding you will experience difficulty with limits and boundaries, reality, dependence and moderation.

As you are conditioned in your growing up, by being influenced by people and experiences, you learn where and how to look for satisfaction and fullness (instead of staying in emotional discomfort or pain). If you saw other people reach of something/someone to distract themselves from emotional discomfort, or if you saw someone become "high" by engaging in some behavior then it is easy to think "that" something is really powerful and you may seek it out as well. If you learned that by doing something you got affection, attention and acceptance then that is what you may unconsciously repeat, even if it is not "really" you. You say, "but wait, I know someone from an alcoholic family who ran in the opposite direction of alcohol because he saw what it did to his family." Yes, the human is complex, and often he will find other ways to "act out" or "act in" if not using alcohol. If what you continually search for as a relief agent becomes a habit and then becomes an addiction, you will experience discomfort when NOT using that substance or being involved in that behavior. This is why individuals can become neurochemically and psychologically dependent on food, sex, work, money, drugs, etc.

Recovery DOES require TIME and EFFORT.

PATIENCE, PROGRESS (perfection)

Step-by-step instructions

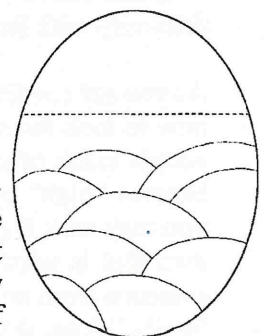
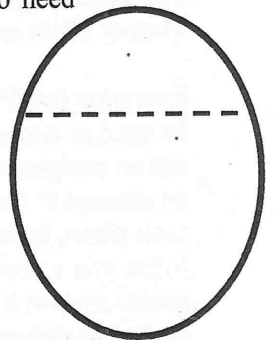
1. Get a **large sheet of art paper** or butcher block paper from a grocery store. You will also need colored markers (narrow felt tip) or colored art pencils.
2. On the paper draw a **large egg-shaped oval** that takes up most of the paper (the writing you'll do can be written on additional sheets of paper and taped to the large piece of paper if necessary). About three-quarters of the way up, draw a **dotted line** inside the oval. **ONLY** if your therapist agreed to your drawing a timeline (a single line, whereby to the left is just before birth and to the right is the present) you may do so. Artwork usually triggers emotional and often repressed memories because it uses a part of your brain that is more creative and less linear (able to rationalize, justify, distract ...).
3. Using the Egg format, at the bottom of the page outside of the oval write **words you think of when you think of your Original Caregivers** (usually mother and father, although these could be nannies, maids, aunts, uncles, grandparents or older siblings). List 5 "positive" and 5 "negative" words associated with Mom on the right and 5 "positive" and 5 "negative" words associated with Dad on the left.
4. Now think of **significant events or situations** in your life that you experienced or remember (usually as "scary, icky, yucky, frightening, painful, lonely, shameful or difficult"). Perhaps when you experienced profound grief or loss. Usually these are events where you remember with some sense of **fear**, disappointment, betrayal, abuse, neglect or abandonment. Think of times when you were embarrassed, let down, disappointed, or when there was some upset or crisis that involved you. Many people remember "feeling a lot of energy" and sometimes "confusion" around these incidences. If you're having difficulty coming up with anything, think of situations that were especially dramatic, exciting, arousing or tense. If you're still having trouble, think of times when you felt especially safe and loved (e.g., I felt safe when my mom let me sleep in her bed).

Examples are starting pre-school, elementary, grade, junior high or high school or boarding school; moving or changing residences and locations; milestones during the teen years such as a first date, first use of alcohol or drugs, first introduction to sexual images or experiences; illness, injury, deaths, births, graduations; and conflicts or accomplishments.

5. Begin with your **pre-birth experience**. You may need to ask your family if your mother had any physical or emotional concerns when she was pregnant with you (e.g., battered or abused, any falls or accidents, personal losses during her pregnancy, being confined to the bed or postpartum depression). **Draw a small symbol** (e.g., car, bed, window, hospital, wheelchair, moon or sun, stick figures) **for each event and separate it by a small curve**. Do not use words — only symbols or "pictures".

Now, think of the **earliest event** you can remember from early childhood. **Draw a small symbol for each event and separate it by a small curve**. Do not use words — only symbols or "pictures". Next, think of the **chronological events** early childhood through age 17. Continue to add events throughout the various phases of your life — preschool, elementary school, teenage years, and young adulthood. **Draw a small symbol for each event and separate it by a small curve**. Do not use words — only symbols or "pictures".

With all these events recorded your oval will look like a honeycomb. Include experiences past 24 years of age if you perceived them as important. **Fill the oval up to the dotted line**. **Most people have at least 10 – 15 events** (which you'll share in your therapy session). The most recent event will be near the top and the earliest at the bottom. Take your time. Most individuals do a few years at a time and finish the "Egg" over the course of a week. Talk with your support system if you begin to feel overwhelmed and take time-outs to relax, play and refuel.



6. After completing your "Egg" step back and take a look at the overall picture. Ask yourself **what feelings seem to be the most prevalent**: Fear, Pain/Loneliness, Guilt, Shame, or Joy, Passion and Love? Write those feelings at the bottom of the drawing. Ask your support friends or group if they are willing to spend some time having you show them your work. Sometimes they will ask questions that "prompt" you to remember more or elaborate on specific events. Ask them to look for common themes. Events may represent some type of "abandonment" or "neglect" with feelings associated with a sense of loneliness or pain, or sadness. Write down some of the themes (e.g., abandonment, neglect, being put down, being let down, verbal/emotional/physical/sexual impropriety). Something to also watch for is "emotional incest" and "entitlement" or a sense of being "special" or "favored" or "better than" or "on-up" in your family. Some experience a sense of their family being entitled (e.g., arrogant, grandiose, over-confident, opinionated, always right, perfectionistic).
7. In the upper-right corner outside of the oval list **"Your Roles" in the family** (hero, scapegoat, clown, mediator, perfect child or angel, loyal kid, bad or good boy, good or bad girl, Daddy's Little Girl or Momma's Little Man, rescuer, savior, parent, surrogate spouse, parent's confidant). If you're unsure of what these "roles" are, that's okay. You'll explore this in session.
8. In the upper-left corner outside of the oval list **"Family Rules" that affected you** (such as "don't show feelings," "only be happy," "don't talk unless you're spoken to," "work hard and keep your nose clean," "always look good" "family is the most important thing in life," "always act nice," "if you can't say something nice don't say anything at all," or "don't make waves").
9. Below the "Family Rules" list your brother(s) or sister(s) if you have any and write down words that come to your mind. (These may be deceased, older, younger, stepsiblings, or adopted siblings.) What were their roles in the family? What kind of relationship did you have with them? What is your relationship like today? If you're aware of any significant conflict or enmeshment with them, write that down.
10. Next, outside to the right of the of the oval write thoughts about **"masculine and feminine"** qualities. Begin by thinking about what you learned, thought, believed about men and women when you were growing up. Fill in the sentence for "All males or men ..." and "All females or women ...". Just below that, write words to describe "Males" and "Females", and then a "good" or "real" man, or a "good" or "real" woman. You might think of this statement, "If I am a really good man/woman, then I must ...". What you may have trouble with is identifying what "automatic" thoughts you had growing up because as an adult your attitudes may have (probably) changed a bit, becoming more balanced perhaps.
11. After reviewing your Roles and Rules, please write above the dotted line in the top quarter of the oval your **"Mission Statement" (what you think might have been your family's spoken or unspoken marching orders were for you)**. Write what you believed (still believe?) your family wanted you to do with your life or who they wanted you to be. For example, "What I was supposed to do with my life" in order to be successful or make them happy and proud? If you chose the timeline, write the Mission Statement at the top of the page.
12. Today, consider if you're in a place of self-esteem rather than external esteem (a tendency to "go up" or "go down" as you compare yourself to others)? Have you been conditioned to "feel good about yourself" when you're getting, giving, taking or abstaining from sex, money and power? Are you giving freely to yourself and to another without trying to manipulate or control? Are you naturally giving who you are instead of a mask? Are you neither depleted or elevated in giving and sharing? If you experience a sense of depletion or elevation, you set yourself up for resentment either way and you are really care-taking someone else. This often leads to depression and anxiety, rage or out-of-control outbursts, or extreme and excessive behaviors. Until you are sure about who you are – precious just for breathing – and grounded in your reality and confident about what your needs and wants are, you will probably tend toward being overly dependent or "anti-dependent" on others for your sense of self.

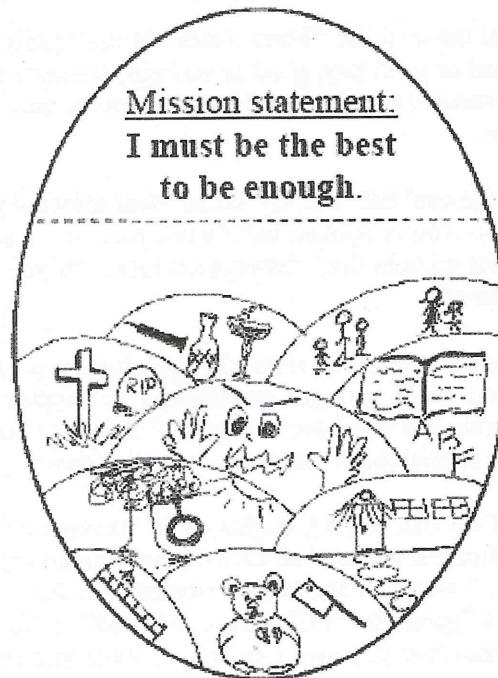
Once you're finished with this assignment your paper will look something like this:

The Family Rules

1. don't show feelings
2. work hard
3. be perfect or the best at anything
4. take care of everyone
5. always act properly

Brother(s) / Sister(s)

Scapegoat – younger bro
(3 years younger).
Pain in the butt – sis
(2 yrs older).



My Family Roles

1. Hero – Good Student
2. Sensitive
3. Emotional one
4. Oldest, first born
5. favorite

All Males/Men ...

only want sex
must be powerful
are competitive

All Females/Women ...

should be seen and not heard
are needy
are demanding

A GOOD (real) Man ...

makes a lot of money
must always be in control
doesn't get emotional
takes care of his woman

A GOOD (real) Woman ...

is always giving and nurturing
pleases her man
looks sexy
is sweet

Primary Male Caregiver

Demanding	Attention to detail
Aggressive	In Control
Anxious	Superficial
Absent (workaholic)	Hard worker
Needless	Super focused

Primary Female Caregiver

Passive	Helpful
Manipulative	Silent treatment
Depressed	Busy
Suffocating	Image conscious
Codependent	Intelligent

Most Prevalent Feelings Growing Up

Loneliness (pain), Fear

OR

Mission statement:
I must be the best to be enough.

The Family Rules

1. don't show feelings or vulnerability
2. work hard and earn lots of money
3. be perfect or the "best" at anything
4. take care of everyone's feelings, finances
5. always act properly (stoic, nice)

Brother(s) / Sister(s)

Younger brother – Scapegoat
 (3 years younger). Rebel.

Younger sister – Pain in the butt
 (2 yrs older). Baby of the family.

A GOOD (real) Man ...

makes a lot of money
 must always be in control
 doesn't get emotional
 takes care of his woman

My Family Roles

1. Hero – Good Student
2. Sensitive
3. Emotional one
4. Oldest, first born
5. Favorite

All Males/Men ...

only want sex
 must be powerful
 are competitive

All Females/Women ...

should be seen and not heard
 are needy
 are demanding

A GOOD (real) Woman ...

is always giving and nurturing
 pleases her man
 looks sexy
 is sweet

"Positive"



"Negative"

Primary Male Caregiver

Demanding
 Aggressive
 Anxious
 Absent (workaholic)
 Needless

Attention to detail
 In Control
 Superficial
 Hard worker
 Super focused

Primary Female Caregiver

Passive
 Manipulative
 Depressed
 Suffocating
 Codependent

Helpful
 Silent treatment
 Busy
 Image conscious
 Intelligent

Most Prevalent Feelings Growing Up

Loneliness (pain), Fear

13. Now that you've finished, what are you thinking **RIGHT NOW**?

14. What are you **FEELING** right now?

15. **Summarize in writing** your thoughts and feelings about this process experience. What did you learn about yourself as you developed a "picture and symbol" representation of your life?

- Have you realized any "insights" after completing this project? What questions might have been raised to consciousness?
- Are you aware of "why" you may be living the way you are?
- If you're having difficulty motivating yourself to self-care and self-nurture, what do you think might be preventing you from taking better care of yourself?
- If you had the power to clone yourself-meaning the same you with no programming-what mission would you give yourself? Write that mission down.

16. Answer the following questions:

- How did the original mission create repeated events throughout your life?
- What are you willing to do in order to change the mission?
- What steps would that take?
- Who can help with it?
- How will you start?