

Characteristics of Dysfunctional and Functional Couples

1. **Dysfunctional:** Being together and unhappy is safer than being alone.
Functional: Being alone is comfortable, but working together can bring us greater joy and happiness. We are together because we want to be.
2. **Dysfunctional:** It is safer to be with other people than it is to be alone and intimate with our partner.
Functional: Being alone and intimate with our partners is becoming safe because we are learning to be open and honest.
3. **Dysfunctional:** If we really let our partner know what we have done or what we are feeling and thinking (who we are), we will be abandoned.
Functional: When we let our partners know what we have done or what we have been thinking (who we are), surprisingly, it is generally met with acceptance and actually increases our intimacy.
4. **Dysfunctional:** It is easier to hide or medicate our feelings through compulsive behaviors than it is to express them.
Functional: We are learning to express our feelings, no longer needing to hide or medicate them.
5. **Dysfunctional:** Being enmeshed and totally dependent on each other is perceived as being in love.
Functional: Being interdependent adds strength to our coupleship.
6. **Dysfunctional:** We find it difficult to ask for what we need, both individually and as couples.
Functional: We are learning that it is acceptable to ask for what we need, both individually and as couples.
7. **Dysfunctional:** Being sexual is equal to being intimate.
Functional: Being lovingly sexual can enhance our coupleship, but there are many additional ways of being intimate.
8. **Dysfunctional:** We either avoid our problems or feel we are individually responsible for solving the problems we have as couples.
Functional: We are learning to face our own problems but not feel individually responsible for solving all the problems we have as couples. It is normal for problems to exist that are not immediately resolvable.
9. **Dysfunctional:** We believe that we must agree on everything.
Functional: We are learning that isn't necessary to agree on everything to be happy.
10. **Dysfunctional:** We believe that we must enjoy the same things and have the same interests.
Functional: We are learning that we can have many different interests and still enjoy being together.
11. **Dysfunctional:** We believe that to be good couples we must be socially acceptable.
Functional: We believe that to be good couples we must be true to ourselves, to our coupleship, and to our principles.

12. **Dysfunctional:** We have forgotten how to play together.
Functional: We are discovering lightheartedness and the joy of playfulness.
13. **Dysfunctional:** It is safer to get upset about little issues than to express our true feelings about larger ones.
Functional: We are learning to appropriately express our true feelings about issues both large and small.
14. **Dysfunctional:** It is easier to blame our partner than it is to accept our individual responsibilities.
Functional: We are learning to accept our individual responsibilities rather than focusing on our partner's.
15. **Dysfunctional:** We deal with conflict by getting totally out of control or by not arguing at all.
Functional: We are learning to deal with conflict appropriately and to fight fairly.
16. **Dysfunctional:** We experience ourselves as inadequate parents
Functional: We are coming to accept our limitations as parents.
17. **Dysfunctional:** We are ashamed of ourselves as couples
Functional: We are proud of the progress we are making as couples.
18. **Dysfunctional:** We repeat patterns of dysfunction from our families of origin.
Functional: We are recognizing the patterns of dysfunction from our families of origin--and breaking them.

Recovering Couples Anonymous: A Twelve-Step Program for Couples (4th edition 2011, at p. 7).

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