

Understanding Your Personality Lesson Handout

Introduction

- Today we will discuss what personality is and how it can affect you.
- We all have unique characteristics, with our own set of strengths and weaknesses.
- Some personality aspects can be troubling to you or your relationships, but there are ways to make improvements.

Goals and Objectives

To empower yourself to improve your behavior and relationships through self-awareness

- To describe a personality trait that you can relate to
- To discuss how your personality can affect your emotions or behavior
- To identify something you like about your personality
- Identify something (if anything) you would like to change
- To discuss how to change an old behavior pattern

What is a Personality?

- The quality or state of being a person
- The many characteristics or qualities of a person that “sets them apart” from other people, or a set of distinctive traits and characteristics

Modified from Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary (2010). Retrieved from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/personality>

Your personality is all the behaviors and emotions that make you, “you,”

Why are personalities important?

- **To provide comfort** - When people are satisfied with their personalities, they want to keep things the same.
- **To define you** - Other people can't change your personality because you control it - If you are bothered by habits or patterns that affect your relationships, you have the chance to change things for the better.
- **To appreciate each other** - When we value each other and our differences, we find that we can be more successful together than apart

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- In the movie, *The Wizard of Oz*, discuss the strengths and weaknesses in the personalities of the character, and how they got along. An image that says it is copyright-free is at <http://cdn8.openculture.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/wizard-of-oz-original1.jpg>



Optional Learning Activities

- Watch and listen to the New Adventures of Winnie the Pooh Theme song at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AHcOPcM0hJU> (1:00 minutes).
- Discuss their unique and valuable personalities and how they get along. See the Winnie the Pooh Personalities Handout.

Nine Personality Traits (By James J. Messina - See Self-Awareness Handouts and think about which of the traits below match you.)

- **Looking good** – Very careful about how they appear to others, but they feel bad inside
- **Acting out** – Seems like “troublemaker” but feels lonely and hurt
- **Pulling in** – Quiet and lonely
- **Entertaining** – Immature and insecure
- **Troubled person** – Unstable and restless
- **Enabling** – Protects others and feels self-pity or guilt
- **People pleasing** – Works hard to make others happy, but gets stressed out and loses own identity
- **Rescuing** – Helps troubled people instead of taking care of self
- **Non-feeling** – Calm, unemotional and uncomplaining

Most people relate to more than one of the traits. The personality traits “Looking Good” and “Pulling In” are explained below:

Looking Good Personality – From outside, a “Looking Good” person seems to be:

- A hero, high achiever, goal oriented, very responsible

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- Positive, helpful, a peace maker
- Tries to always look confident, and behave “appropriately”
- But on the inside, they may be:
- Fearful of confronting problems or people
- Troubled by feeling “not good enough”
- Lonely, fearful of showing affection, secretive
- Critical of self and others, with low self-worth or guilt

Negative Consequences of “Looking Good”

- Low self-esteem, fear of rejection
- Inability to relax or enjoy successes
- Fear of letting go or taking risks
- Guilt or anger about not doing enough
- Inability to face own problems
- High stress and pressure
- Trouble with showing affection
- Anger for giving in to others, not taking care of own needs
- Perfectionist or workaholic

Positive Potential of “Looking Good” - People can learn to:

- Focus on their own needs and accept help when offered
- Accept both their strengths and weaknesses
- Let go of guilt, and include fun and relaxation into schedule
- Set realistic goals for themselves and others
- Freely choose how to act or look (without feeling a need to be perfect)
- Realize they are worthy of unconditional love

“Pulling In” Personality - On the outside, the “Pulling In” person may seem to be:

- Quiet, easily forgotten by others
- Withdrawn, spends time alone, hard to know
- Escaping into books, TV, music, hobbies, or daydreaming
- Self-reliant, takes pride in possessions
- On the inside, the person may be:

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- Feeling ignored, rejected, unimportant
- Angry about problems that make them feel isolated
- Feeling comfortable alone, and stays “out of the way”
- Lonely, but holds back negative feelings

Negative Consequences of “Pulling In”

- Low self-esteem, isolation
- Escapes to fantasy world
- Prone to chemical dependency, overweight, and illnesses
- Fearful of getting help
- May ignore personal needs
- Puts too much value on their belongings
- Not wanting to take any risks
- May lack close friendships or relationships

Positive Potential of “Pulling In”

- Solves problems independently
- Development of personal coping strategies
- Support from others can be found when needed
- Trustworthy
- Successful in learning through reading and other useful activities
- They can be very good listeners
- Able to learn assertiveness skills and expressiveness

Optional Discussion

- *Why do many of these personality traits can have the same negative potential of low self-esteem and behavior problems?*
 - Self-esteem is at the foundation of our personalities. It is something that is changeable, and can be improved.
 - Troubled relationships can lead to frustration and behavior problems.
- *After exploring your personality, are you happy with it? Is there anything that bothers you about it?*
- *Would you like to keep things the same, or learn how to change it?*

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Positive changes we can make in our personalities may be small or larger ones.

Example 1: Personality Change

- When Kim was a teenager, she was so afraid to speak in front of people that she got sick when she had to do speeches. As she grew up, she sometimes thought about being a teacher, but told herself, “I could never do that.”
- Then she learned that her shyness is not really a bad thing, because a quiet person (introvert) often thinks more deeply than an outgoing person (extrovert). Kim found out that teachers should have a variety of personalities – Students may be more comfortable if a teacher has a personality similar to theirs, and may even learn better.
- Kim decided to give it a try, and slowly became more comfortable doing presentations. But her favorite work was still developing lessons and talking to students individually. Instead of telling herself she must change her personality to become a teacher, she focused on adding new skills.

Example 2: Personality Change

- A young businessman worked overtime every day, was very anxious, and had a quick temper. His doctor told him his blood pressure was too high and he must calm down for the sake of his health.
- He learned ways to “mellow out” with relaxation and coping techniques. He decided not to work as much. His family relationships improved, because he was able to manage his anger better. He was successful in changing some parts of his personality.

Changing Your Personality Patterns

- Personality traits and “self-scripts” are patterns of behavior, ways of thinking, feeling, reacting and responding.
- Without you realizing it, self-beliefs and internal messages (sometimes called “tapes”) can cause low self-esteem and create personality traits.
- Personality traits are not “right or wrong,” so there is no need to be defensive about them – Your personality is right for you if you are happy with it.
- However, sometimes personality disorders can happen when inflexible personalities get in the way of social functioning.

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What Is a Personality Disorder?

- An extreme set of character traits that goes beyond the range found in most people and persists over time.
- Deeply ingrained and inflexible thoughts and behaviors that impair functioning and distress other people.
- Personality disorders can run in families, but other complex factors may be poor nurturing as a child, or having severe life experiences.
- If emotional development suffers, personality disorders can result.

Optional: Discuss Personality Disorders Handout: Examples from PD's Diner.

Can You Change Your Personality?

You may have been in some relationships where people asked you to change, but it is not easy. There are parts of your personality that can be changed, but only if you want to change them.

- Your environment (situation and surroundings) can also affect personality, including your self-esteem.
- If patterns and habits develop at home, school, work, or in family relationships, you tend to continue them.

Below are 5 Steps toward changing old personality patterns and some examples:

Step One: Recognize the Problem

Are you trapped in an old pattern or "self-script?" (Self-scripts are what you tell yourself about yourself.)

What problems are you having?

I am trapped in the personality traits of 'Looking Good' and 'Pulling In' by not saying what I think and standing up for myself. Even when I am angry, I don't want to start an argument with my husband because I hate confrontation. He always wins anyway.

What behaviors are you using?

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I have been stuffing my feelings inside, and I'm unhappy about it. It seems like I am mad at him all of the time.

What new behavior would be more successful?

I want to speak up, but the arguments can last too long. I would like to be able to stop talking about it when we have both said what we think.

How do you feel about resolving the relationship problem?

I have not been assertive in the past, but I want to be more assertive. If I tell him what I think, he might not listen, but at least I could feel better about myself.

Step Two: Examine the Problem

When and how did you get this way?

I got this self-script from when I was young. I always tried to be good and was taught to always be nice, so I was passive, not assertive. I felt unappreciated, but kept trying.

What were the benefits of it?

I was shy. When I was passive, I didn't have to talk much. But if I had a different opinion than the others, it was useless to say it. The other people in my family were very strong in their opinions and would just keep arguing about it.

How comfortable are you with the self-scripts below?

It is a problem. I need to voice my opinion and stand up for myself.

What changes are needed to be healthier?

I need to be able to feel good about speaking up, even if I don't "win" the argument. I have to quit thinking of myself as "quiet and shy" and realize that expressing my ideas and opinions is important in a healthy relationship.

What is stopping you from changing it?

I might be rejected if I speak up for myself.

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Step Three: Find Solutions

What should be changed?

I will calmly say what I think or feel when I am upset - Not to win an argument, but to express it.

How do I overcome what is stopping me?

Even if my husband gets angry and says that I am wrong, I still don't have to change my opinion or feel rejected.

What new behavior pattern would help me change?

If we both say what we think, I can become more assertive.

Make a plan to change it.

I will take control, keeping the arguments short by saying we agree to disagree.

Action Plan Example for "Pulling In"

Every time I use this old personality self-script, I will make an attempt to resolve problems instead of denying them. I know that by confronting others, it is possible that someone will be mad at me. Even if it means being in an argument, I still need to speak up for myself.

I will know I have been successful by talking about what is bothering me instead of keeping it inside. I now realize that I am responsible for what I say and do, but I'm not responsible for how someone else reacts. Date and sign your action plan.

Action Plan Example for "Looking Good"

Every time I use this old personality self-script, I will stop feeling angry at others for making a mess after I clean up the house. I realize that I am putting too much time and energy into housework and not asking anyone else to help.

I will know I have been successful by not expecting my home to be perfectly clean. When my children help dust or do the dishes, I won't criticize or re-do them. Instead of doing housework all the time, we will do something fun together at least once a week. Date and sign your action plan.

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Step Four: Use Your Experience

Take time to think about your past life and what it is like to use your old personality self-scripts.

Think about how it would be if you continued to use the old personality patterns in the future.

Step Five Toward Change:

If you still have problems with old patterns of thinking, reacting or behavior, return to Step 1 and begin again.

Optional Handouts and Discussion

- Find the complete “Laying the Foundation” handout about your personality traits in the links below.
- Talk about your personality with a trusted friend, family member, or someone on your health care team. Ask how you appear to them. Compare their response to how you think you appear.
- Go to http://www.personalitypathways.com/type_inventory.html for a personality test and information about Myers Briggs personality types.

Conclusion

- Your personality traits can affect your self-esteem and emotional health.
- Try to be aware of both negatives and positives of your personality, but focus on your strengths.
- Many different personalities around us add interesting variety to our lives - We need to value the unique differences in ourselves and people around us.
- Understanding ourselves and others better can empower us to improve our relationships during recovery.

References

“Laying the Foundation” Handouts by James J. Messina & Constance M. Messina (2007):

Looking good <http://www.livestrong.com/article/14704-looking-good-personality/>

Acting out <http://www.livestrong.com/article/14715-acting-out-personality/>

Pulling in <http://jamesjmessina.com/lowselfesteemroles/pullingin.html>

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Entertaining <http://jamesjmessina.com/lowselfesteemroles/entertaining.html>

Troubled person <http://jamesjmessina.com/lowselfesteemroles/troubledperson.html>

Enabling <http://www.livestrong.com/article/14675-enabling-personality/>

People pleasing <http://www.livestrong.com/article/14669-people-pleasing-personality/>

Rescuing <http://jamesjmessina.com/lowselfesteemroles/rescuing.html>

Non-feeling <http://jamesjmessina.com/lowselfesteemroles/nonfeeling.html>

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