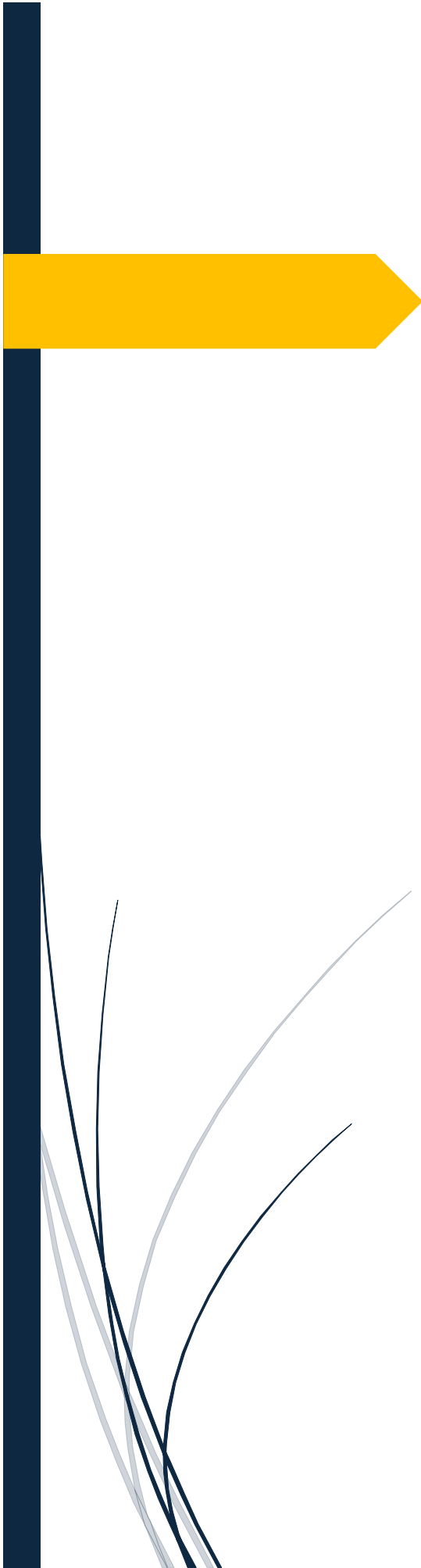




Family of Origin and the Systems that Shaped Us

Understanding What We Learned,
What We Carry, and What We
Want to Choose

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Before we intentionally decided who we wanted to be, we were already learning how the world worked.

We learned what was expected, rewarded, discouraged, safe, unsafe, normal, successful, respectful, selfish, responsible, loving, or acceptable.

Some of those lessons came from our **family of origin**.

Others came from **culture, religion or faith, gender expectations, socioeconomic circumstances, schools, sports, peers, workplaces, media, communities, and other institutions**.

These systems can give us valuable traditions, beliefs, skills, capabilities, relationships, and ways of understanding the world.

They can also give us rules and expectations that we continue to follow without realizing we have a choice. They can build the maps that implicitly and explicitly influence how we navigate life.

The goal isn't to blame or reject the systems that shaped us.

It is to become more intentional about: **What do I want to carry forward?**

We Learn Before We Choose

Much of what we learn about relationships happens through observation and experience.

We notice:

- Who makes decisions.
- How emotions are handled.
- What happens during conflict.
- Who takes care of whom.
- Whether adults apologize.
- How affection is expressed.
- What happens when someone fails.
- Whether asking for help is encouraged.
- How responsibilities are divided.
- How people talk about money.
- What topics aren't discussed.
- What makes someone successful.
- What creates belonging.

Over time: **EXPERIENCE → MESSAGE → BELIEF → EXPECTATION → BEHAVIOR**

Something that begins as: “This is how things were done around me.” can gradually become: “This is how things are supposed to be.”

Family of Origin

Our family of origin is often our earliest relationship system.

Families can teach us about:

Love | Safety | Trust | Emotions | Conflict | Responsibility | Independence | Dependence | Achievement | Failure | Affection | Boundaries | Privacy | Money | Work | Gender | Parenting | Power | Authority | Repair | Belonging

Some lessons are explicitly taught:

- “Family comes first.”
- “Always work hard.”
- “Tell the truth.”

Others may never be spoken:

- Don't upset Dad.
- Keep the peace.
- Don't ask for too much.
- Handle your problems yourself.
- Don't embarrass the family.
- Achievement gets attention.
- Don't show weakness.
- Take care of everyone else.

Unspoken rules can be particularly influential because we may follow them without recognizing them as rules.

Ask: **“What did everyone in my family seem to know without anyone having to say it?”**

The Roles We Learn

Families and other systems can also teach us who we are expected to be.

You may have learned to become:

- **The Responsible One**
- **The Achiever**
- **The Caretaker**
- **The Peacemaker**
- **The Funny One**
- **The Independent One**
- **The Strong One**
- **The Problem Solver**
- **The Rebel**
- **The Invisible One**
- **The Helper**
- **The One Who Doesn't Need Anything**

These roles aren't necessarily unhealthy. They can become genuine capabilities.

- The Responsible One may become dependable.
- The Peacemaker may become skilled at understanding different perspectives.
- The Achiever may develop persistence.
- The Caretaker may develop empathy.

The question is whether the role remains flexible.

“Is this something I am capable of doing or something I believe I always have to be?”

The Other Systems That Shape Us

Family is only one influence.

Culture & Community

Culture can influence how we understand family loyalty, independence, interdependence, emotion, achievement, privacy, marriage, parenting, work, money, mental health, community, and belonging.

Religion, Faith & Spirituality

Faith and religious communities can provide meaning, values, identity, tradition, belonging, purpose, hope, and support. They may also shape beliefs about marriage, gender, sexuality, parenting, authority, forgiveness, sacrifice, duty, suffering, and right and wrong.

Gender Expectations

Families, cultures, peers, media, religion, schools, sports, and workplaces may communicate expectations about how different genders should behave, express emotion, provide, care for others, lead, parent, communicate, or experience relationships.

Money & Socioeconomic Environment

Growing up with abundance, stability, scarcity, or financial uncertainty can shape beliefs about security, spending, saving, work, rest, risk, education, career, generosity, debt, and success.

Schools, Sports & Work

Achievement systems can teach discipline, resilience, teamwork, leadership, accountability, and persistence.

They can also reinforce messages such as:

- Perform.
- Push through.
- Don't disappoint people.
- Don't make mistakes.
- Someone else is ready to take your place.

Sometimes: **“Perform well”** gradually becomes: **“My value depends on performing well.”**

RENT | LEASE | OWN

Not everything we learned from these systems is something we consciously believe.

One way to explore our relationship with inherited messages is:

RENT

Some rules or behaviors may have been useful because of the environment we were in.

“This is what I needed to do while I was there.”

Maybe you learned to stay quiet, keep the peace, perform, hide emotion, take care of others, or handle things yourself.

You followed the rules of the environment without necessarily choosing them.

LEASE

Some messages continue long after we leave the original environment.

- I need to keep everyone happy.
- I should be able to handle this myself.
- Being productive makes me valuable.
- Conflict should be avoided.
- I shouldn't disappoint people.

We may continue to **renew the lease** because the belief is familiar not because we've intentionally decided it still fits.

Ask: **“Am I continuing to live by this because I choose it—or because I haven't reconsidered the terms?”**

OWN

Some beliefs, values, traditions, and practices have been examined and intentionally chosen.

- Family is important to me.
- My faith is important to me.
- I value hard work.
- Education matters to me.
- I want to care for other people.
- Financial responsibility is important to me.

Ownership doesn't mean the belief originated with us.

It means: **“I've considered this, and I choose for this to be part of who I am.”**

Renegotiate the Terms

We don't have to completely accept or reject something we inherited.

Sometimes we can **renegotiate the terms**.

INHERITED: Family always comes first.

- **RENEGOTIATED:** Family is deeply important to me, and healthy family relationships also require boundaries.

INHERITED: Work hard.

- **RENEGOTIATED:** I value effort and achievement without making productivity the measure of my worth.

INHERITED: Be strong.

- **RENEGOTIATED:** I value resilience, and asking for help can also be a form of strength.

The goal isn't: **KEEP EVERYTHING | REJECT EVERYTHING**

There is another option: **EXAMINE → RENEGOTIATE → CHOOSE**

DO Therapy: Map What Shaped You

Consider the major systems that influenced you.

What did I learn?

- **FAMILY**
- **CULTURE / COMMUNITY**
- **RELIGION / FAITH / SPIRITUALITY**
- **GENDER EXPECTATIONS**
- **MONEY / SOCIOECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT**
- **SCHOOL / SPORTS / WORK**
- **PEERS / MEDIA / OTHER SYSTEMS**

Now look across the systems.

- **What messages appeared repeatedly?**
- **What behaviors were rewarded?**
- **What was discouraged?**
- **What helped me belong?**
- **What role did I learn to play?**
- **What did I learn I was supposed to become?**

DO Therapy: What Am I Renting, Leasing, or Owning?

Choose an important belief, rule, expectation, or role.

- **What is the message?**
- **Where did I learn it?**

RENT

- Was this something I primarily followed because of the environment I was in?

LEASE

- Am I still organizing my life around it without intentionally deciding whether it fits?

OWN

- Have I examined it and intentionally decided it reflects who I want to be?

RENEGOTIATE

- Is there something valuable here that I want to practice differently?

Then ask: **“Do I want to keep renting, renew the lease, renegotiate the terms, take ownership or move on?”**

When Two Histories Become One Relationship

Partners don't only bring different personalities into relationships. They bring different **histories of learning**.

ME - “If something is wrong, talk about it immediately.”

- **YOU** - “If emotions are high, give people space.”

ME - “Family helps family.”

- **YOU** - “Adults should solve their own problems.”

ME - “Money should be saved.”

- **YOU** - “Money should also help us enjoy life.”

Neither person's normal is automatically **THE normal**.

Instead, we can ask: **“What did each of us learn, what does each of us actually own, and what do WE want to create together?”**

- **ME** - What have I inherited, leased, renegotiated, or chosen to own?
 - **YOU** - What have you inherited, leased, renegotiated, or chosen to own?
 - **US** - What values, beliefs, traditions, and practices do **we intentionally want our relationship or family to own?**
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From Inherited to Intentional

We don't choose everything that shapes us.

Our families, cultures, communities, faith traditions, gender expectations, socioeconomic environments, schools, teams, workplaces, and other institutions may have given us important strengths, values, traditions, capabilities, and ways of understanding the world.

They may also have handed us rules that deserve another look. Some things we were simply **renting**. Some things we've continued to **lease** because they're familiar. Some terms may need to be **renegotiated**. And some things we've examined and intentionally decided to **own**.

Growth doesn't require rejecting where we came from.

It means becoming more intentional about what we carry forward.

NOTICE → TRACE → QUESTION → RENEGOTIATE → CHOOSE → OWN

We don't choose everything we inherit. We can choose what we continue to carry.