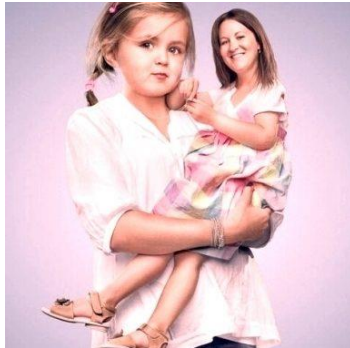


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Psychoeducation Series



PARENTIFICATION and ADULTIFICATION

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Board-Approved Supervisor
PTS Psychology Canberra

*Empowering People Through **Insightful Psychology Results***
ptspsychology.com

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What is Parentification?



A role reversal form of adultification where a child is burdened with being a confidant to regulate the emotional needs of an unstable parent. Typically the child is introduced to situations and information that adolescents and children are ill-equipped to process. The child may also be thrust into the role of caregiver to the parent and or siblings.

Parentification is the phenomenon where children take caregiving responsibilities and assume such a role for their parents, siblings or other family members, at the expense of their own developmental needs.



Parentification refers to the process through which children are assigned the role of an adult, taking on both emotional and functional responsibilities that typically are performed by the parent.

The parent, in turn, takes the dependent position of the child in the parent-child relationship.

Parentification occurs when children provide caregiving for family members that typically exceeds their capacity and developmental stage.

Parentification roles and responsibilities are often linked with deleterious outcomes, including robbing children of age-appropriate opportunities, activities, and support.

Research has demonstrated that parentification can potentially lead to insecure attachment.

Parentified children often do not gain the opportunity to understand who they truly are.

Some learn that they are not fully capable of managing the responsibilities forced upon them, and they may begin to feel that they will never be good enough.

These childhood feelings often lead to adult feelings of anger, anxiety, poor self-esteem, and feeling an overall sense of mistrust in peer and romantic relationships.

Parentified children also often continue the role of caretaker into adulthood. This includes over-functioning, perfectionism, and catering to the needs of others in their life, while often disregarding their own.

Since they experience this throughout most of their lives, parentified children may see these feelings as personality traits and since they were unable to form a sense of identify, they may feel as if it's "just who they are".

Healing from the negative impacts of parentification is possible!

Engelhardt, J.A. (2012). The developmental implications of parentification: Effects on childhood attachment. *Graduate Student Journal of Psychology*, 14, 45-52.

https://www.tc.columbia.edu/publications/gsjp/gsjp-volumes-archive/gsjp-volume-14-2012/25227_Engelhardt_Parentification.pdf

10 Toxic Ways How Parents Damage Their Children's Lives Without Realising It

Behaviour

Consequences on the child

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. Rely on their children as emotional support | ▪ Become caretakers and suppress their own needs – causing depression. |
| 2. Justify their bad behavior at the expense of their children | ▪ Internalise blame and feel depressed or anxious. |
| 3. Jokes about appearance | ▪ Low self-esteem and an inferiority complex. |
| 4. Being too critical | ▪ Can cause trauma and undermine self-worth. |
| 5. Make their children feel guilty regularly | ▪ Seek for an unhealthy amount of external approval as an adult. |
| 6. Lack of boundaries | ▪ Difficulties recognising boundaries in relationships as adults. |
| 7. Providing the silent treatment after a argument (passive aggression) | ▪ Copy this behavior as adults, and develop toxic relationships. |
| 8. Urge children to suppress their emotions (especially negative ones) | ▪ Become prone to depression and an inability to deal with negative situations. |
| 9. Being selfish and want to dominate in every situation | ▪ They prioritise their needs and feelings. |
| 10. Have unrealistically high expectations | ▪ Grow into people who believe they are always disappting their parents. Become perfectionist. |

parental alienation dynamics



ADULTIFICATION
Placing adult decisions
in the hands of children.

Adultification is a form of role corruption characterised by a parent's enlistment of a child in a peer- or partner-like role. As distinct from (but not mutually incompatible with) parentification, the adultified child becomes the parent's friend, confidante and ally.

Together, this enmeshed dyad functions in a more mutual and reciprocal manner than the parentified pair.





Negative Psychological Impacts of Parentification

Parentified children often suffer from:

- Shame.
- Depression.
- Social isolation.
- Excessive guilt.
- Suicidal thoughts.
- Unrelenting worry and anxiety.
- Other internalizing symptoms (e.g. psychosomatic problems).

Parentification during a youngster's formative years is **often the prologue to an adult life** characterised by interpersonal distrust, and inability to function independently, and perpetuating the cycle of a tendency to misuse parental authority.

Jurkovic, G. (1997). *Lost childhood: The plight of the parentified child*. Brunner/Mazel.

Jurkovic, G. J., Morrell, R., & Thirkield, A. (1999). Assessing childhood parentification: Guidelines for researchers and clinicians. In N.D. Chase (Ed.), *Burdened children*. Sage.

The Devastating Damage of Parentification Follows Into Adulthood

This is how the drama unfolds....

It doesn't matter how much children gives, it can never enough to their parents. So, sadly, they feel they have failed.

They feel they were never enough. They believe this because they never received the true love and attunement they truly deserved.

As the child becomes an adult she no longer can discern her true self. It was oppressed under the weight of parentification.

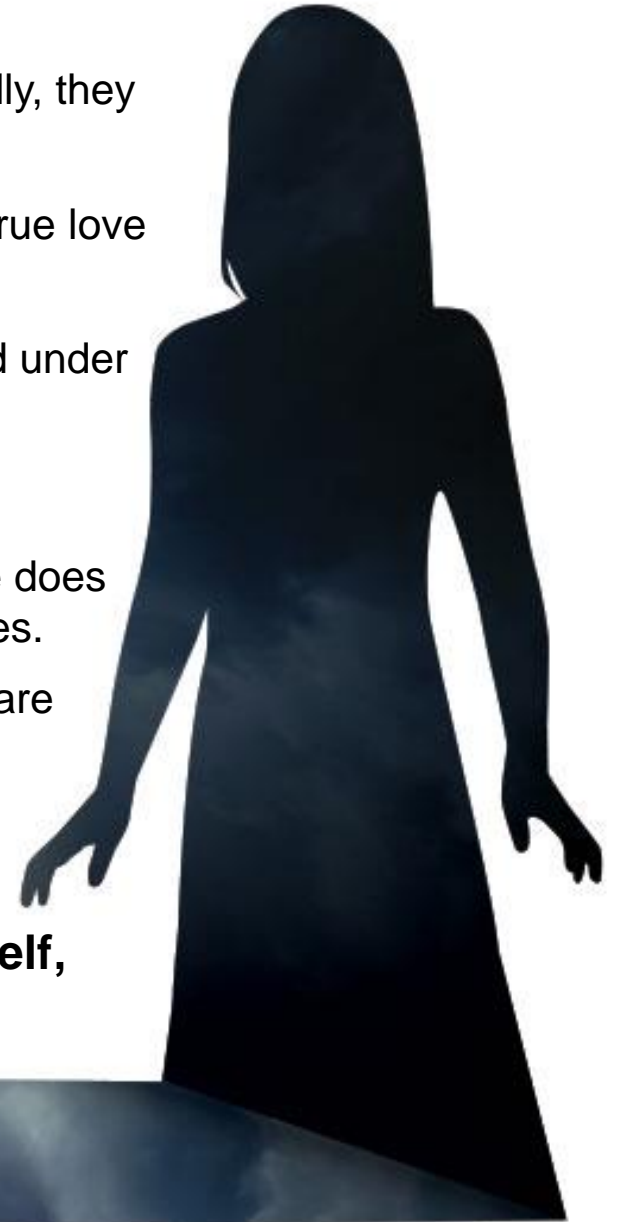
Her core identity has been suppressed by the demands of her needy parent(s).

She cannot pin-point her feelings or emotions. She cannot ask for what she needs. She does not know what her own needs are. She is incapable of saying no. She has no boundaries.

She spends her life tirelessly helping others, taking on the emotional load of those that are happy to take more than they will give.

She often ends up in emotionally neglectful or abusive relationships or marriage.

The child learns that she must grow up too fast, change her true self, shape-shift in order to be deserving of love and praise.



A young boy with short brown hair, wearing a dark blue sweater, is looking out of a window. The background is blurred, showing a person standing near the window. The overall tone is somber and reflective.

The Parentified Child

When a Child Has to Act Like an Adult

Some children don't get much of a
childhood.

When children have to act like adults –
taking responsibility for their siblings,
parents, and running a household– there
are lasting effects.

When Does Parentification Occur?

The effects on self-worth are far-reaching because the child unconsciously comes to discover that her/his natural way of being does not rouse the safety, validation and love that she/he needs.



Often it occurs as result of:

- Parents' separation/divorce.
- Death of a sibling or parent.
- Parental disability or chronic illness
- Family unpredictability and instability.
- Abusive relationship between parents.
- Parental alcoholism or drug addiction.
- Parents or siblings with a mental illness.
- Siblings with a disability or chronic disease.

Common Traits of Children of Alcoholics



Isolation



Approval-seeking



Low self-esteem



Fear of abandonment



Victim perspective



Fear of authority

Something to Be Aware of and Consider – Especially if you are an older sibling!



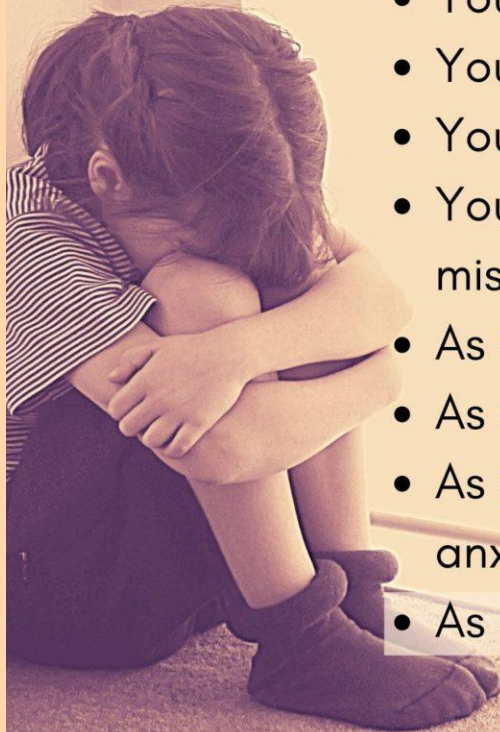
In some circumstances, such as caring for a sibling vs. caring for a parent, parentification may engender feelings of self-efficacy, competence, and other positive outcomes.



Borchet, J., Lewandowska-Walter, A., Połomski, P. et al. (2020). We are in this Together: Retrospective Parentification, Sibling Relationships, and Self-Esteem. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 29, 2982–2991. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-020-01723-3>

HOW TO RECOGNISE PARENTIFICATION

- You were pulled into adult arguments
- You were used by a parent as a substitute for their partner
- You grew up feeling responsible
- You grew up caring for younger siblings
- You don't remember having time to be a child
- You feel as though part of your childhood is missing
- As a child you felt the world on your shoulders
- As a child you felt socially isolated
- As a child you experienced depression, anxiety, over working, overwhelmed by life
- As a child you felt guilt and shame



TYPES OF PARENTIFICATION

Emotional Parentification

the child's emotional and psychological needs are not satisfied, poorly recognized, or ignored

- intervening in marital conflict or conflict between caregivers
- managing a caregiver's emotions or serving as their therapist/confidant
- becoming a surrogate spouse or significant other for a caregiver
- taking responsibility for a caregiver's feelings
- serving as a scapegoat to keep peace in the family

Logistical Parentification

the child attempts to meet the physical needs of the caregiver or family

- cooking, cleaning, grocery shopping, paying bills, giving out medication, getting siblings ready for school, etc.
- not the same as assigning chores
- activities are not age appropriate and the child may struggle to complete them
- doing these activities leaves the child with little or no time to engage in normal childhood play, school, sleep, etc.

IT IS NOT
A CHILD'S
JOB TO:

MEDIATE
THE
ARGUMENTS
OF ADULTS

MAKE SURE
THE RENT +
BILLS ARE
PAID

KEEP
THEMSELVES
SAFE FROM
ADULTS

ENSURE THE
CARE OF
PARENTS +
SIBLINGS

DO
THE
MAJORITY
OF THE
HOUSEWORK

BE AN
EMOTIONAL
SUPPORT
FOR THEIR
PARENT

EMOTIONALLY IMMATURE PARENTS

EMOTIONALLY IMMATURE

- Find boundaries selfish
- Have to be centre stage
- Difficulty with self-reflection
- Reactive and rigid
- Like co-dependent relationships
- Can't cope with differences of opinion
- Low stress tolerance
- Seek external validation – love addiction, owning things, business success etc

EMOTIONALLY MATURE

- Boundaries are healthy
- Can share the space
- Active self-reflection
- Respond rather than react
- Like interdependent relationships
- Find differences natural and interesting
- Self-regulated during stress
- Find internal validation



How **EMOTIONALLY IMMATURE PARENTS**

Have A Lasting Effect
In A Child's Adult Life

~~THE FOUR TYPES~~ OF EMOTIONALLY IMMATURE PARENTS



- Appears most normal
- Unhealthily concerned with child's success
- Know-it-alls
- Goals > feelings
- Proud of independence they possess because of *their* immature parents
- Can appear very emotionally insensitive



- Very obviously infantile
- Ticking time-bomb
- At worst, appear mentally ill and feelings can escalate quickly to violence
- In milder cases, severe mood swings
- Low tolerance for stress or emotional triggers
- See world in black and white



- Most likely a partner of a more aggressive personality type
- Only emotionally available to a degree
- Appear easy-going and playful
- Can show empathy for children conditionally
- Will turn a blind eye to harmful situations regarding their children



- Prefer being alone
- Children learn to avoid approaching them if possible
- "If pushed for a response, they may become angry or even abusive." (pg 78)
- Rule the home
- Least empathetic of all four types



10 Common Traits Of Toxic Parents

1. They make children feel they are never 'good enough'.
2. They pit their children against each other.
3. They assign roles to their children like 'scapegoat' & 'golden child'.
4. They act differently around people outside of the home.
5. They make their children 'parent' the parent.
6. They have no healthy emotional/physical boundaries.
7. They have no genuine interest in their children's needs or wellbeing.
8. Their children's accomplishments are used to impress others and stroke the parent's ego only.
9. They mock, belittle, get angry - when a child tries to stand up for themselves.
10. They create a toxic environment where the children walk on eggshells around the parent.

5 SIDE EFFECTS OF TOXIC PARENTING

YOU HAVE A
HIGHER RISK
OF
DEVELOPING
AN ANXIETY



YOU MAY SUFFER
FROM
POST-TRAUMATIC
STRESS DISORDER
(PTSD)

YOU MAY BE
HIGHLY
SELF-CRITICAL
AND BLAME
YOURSELF FOR
EVERYTHING.



*It's all
my
fault!*



YOU'RE MORE
LIKELY TO
EXPERIENCE
HEALTH
PROBLEMS.

YOU MAY DEVELOP
AN INSECURE
ATTACHMENT THAT
AFFECTS YOUR
RELATIONSHIPS.



PSYCH2GO

[HTTPS://PSYCH2GO.NET/6-SIDE-EFFECTS-OF-TOXIC-PARENTING/](https://psych2go.net/6-side-effects-of-toxic-parenting/)

7 “Innocent” Things Parents Say to Their Children That Can Emotionally Scar Them



1. Comparing your child to others



2. Denying your child's feelings



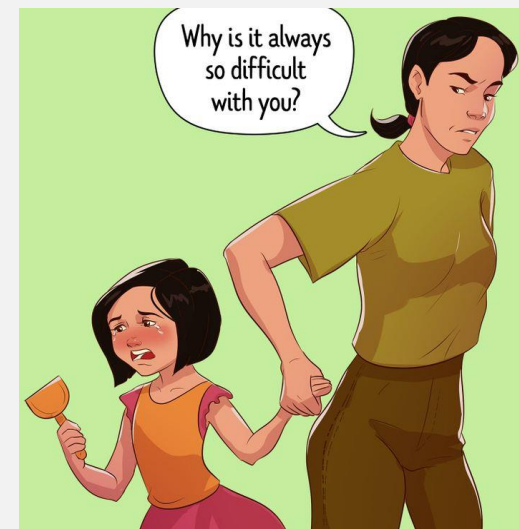
3. [Gaslighting](#) or lying to your kids



4. Loving them conditionally



5. Questioning their abilities



6. Labelling them with their mental abilities and/or physical features



7. Making them feel like they owe you something

**I threw you a birthday party,
bought you a new toy car and
still you want to go outside**





10 Years Later

VS.



AFTER BEING ABUSED

AFTER BEING RAISED BY LOVING PARENTS

PTSD

ANXIETY

SAD

DEPRESSED

CONFIDENT

FRIENDLY

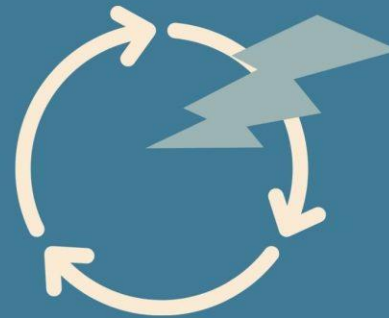
OUTGOING

HAPPY



BREAKING THE CYCLE OF PARENTIFICATION

- Learning that everyone's wellbeing is NOT your responsibility
- Resigning from being the family peacekeeper
- Reconnecting with your inner child
- Reconnecting with playfulness and fun
- Learning to accept support
- Boundaries with work
- Boundaries with others
- Increasing your self-care



Ensuring YOUR children have the space to be children - break the cycle.

Healing from parentification

In our need to heal and recover from recurrent depression and anxiety that was rooted in our childhood neglect.



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Resources – Videos



7 Signs Your Parents Are Emotionally Immature

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XFQmHM0ZNdM>

Parentification (7 Signs of Parentification, and its Long Term Impact)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NQjngYpM_Ag

What is PARENTIFICATION? What does PARENTIFICATION mean? PARENTIFICATION meaning & explanation

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2KMmD_jFpSU

Your Parents Are Emotionally Immature

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4uDLqL3zxr4>

Adult Children Of Emotionally Immature Parents Book Summary

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fbim235Ssf0>

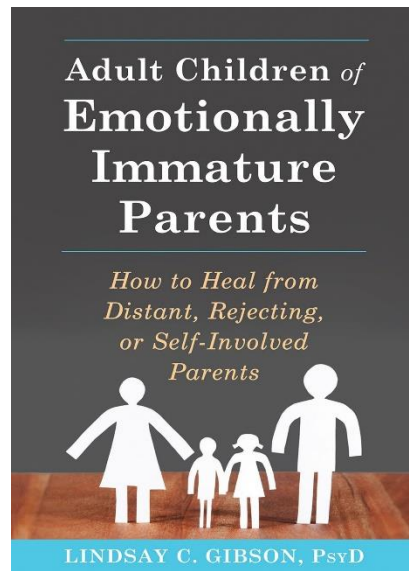
10 Signs You are Emotionally Immature | Is Emotional Immaturity a Mental Disorder?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gvZJXenaK5Y>

Podcast * * * * (Highly recommended)

043 What Is An Emotionally Immature Parent & How To Identify a Healthy Relationship with Lindsay...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vcF9KeJ6ifo>



Adult Children of Emotionally Immature Parents: How to Heal from Distant, Rejecting, or Self-Involved Parents Paperback – June 1, 2015

by Lindsay C. Gibson  (Author)

★★★★★ 5,212 ratings

#1 Best Seller in Parent & Adult Child Relationships

<https://www.amazon.com/Adult-Children-Emotionally-Immature-Parents/dp/1626251703>



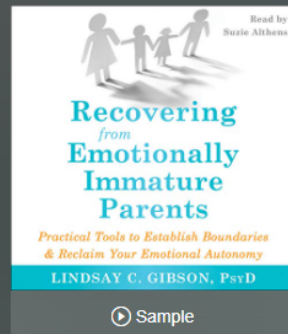
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Narrated by: Suzie Althens

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*Honor Your Emotions, Nurture
Your Self & Live with Confidence*

LINDSAY C. GIBSON, PsyD

Self-Care for Adult Children of Emotionally Immature Parents: Honor Your Emotions, Nurture Your Self, and Live with Confidence Paperback – September 1, 2021

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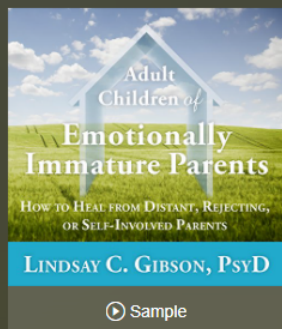
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Adult Children of Emotionally Immature Parents

How to Heal from Distant, Rejecting, or Self-
Involved Parents

By: Lindsay C. Gibson PsyD

Narrated by: Marguerite Gavin

Length: 6 hrs and 50 mins

Categories: Health & Wellness, Psychology & Mental Health

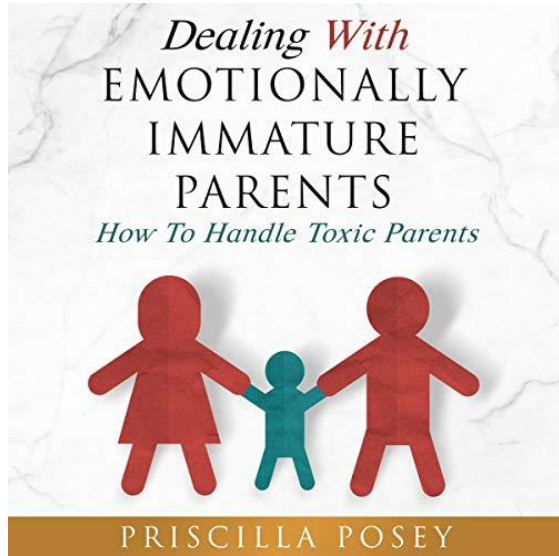
★★★★★ 4.8 (147 ratings)

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<https://www.audible.com.au/pd/Adult-Children-of-Emotionally-Immature-Parents-Audiobook/B01F2LA2V8>



Dealing with Emotionally Immature Parents: How to Handle Toxic Parents Audible Audiobook – Unabridged

Priscilla Posey (Author, Publisher), Robin Howatt Shrock (Narrator)

★★★★☆ 21 ratings

https://www.amazon.com/Dealing-Emotionally-Immature-Parents-Handle/dp/B07WV7MZN5/ref=sr_1_3?dchild=1&keywords=dealing+with+emotionally+immature+parents&qid=1618104568&s=books&sr=1-3

More Resources – Videos



What is Enmeshment and Are You Enmeshed?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z2QcH8Mb6HM>

Enmeshment--The Problem of Too Much Togetherness

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fRw0C35Ahao>

Mission Impossible: The Parentified Child

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jvxSddeM8Vw>

Building Up Your Ability to Go Without Love or Approval

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aCyHlgb-o2Y>

Getting Your Painful Childhood Out of You

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jkw9Uqz85_k

unhealed trauma can look like

low sense of
self worth

codependency
in
relationships

fear of
being
abandoned

putting your
needs aside for
other people

craving for
external
validation

an innate
feeling of
shame

not being able
to tolerate conflict

always fearing
what might
happen next

resisting
positive
change

tolerating
abusive behaviors
from others

difficulty standing
up for yourself and
asserting boundaries

being overtly
agreeable



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