

Conditions of Worth

Conditions of worth are internal rules learned in childhood that tell us we are only lovable or valuable if we meet certain external standards. For example: you need to be smart, you need to please others, you must not make mistakes, you must be strong, don't talk back, don't have feelings, don't be weak, don't be happy. Standards are set by parents, caregivers, authority figures, institutions or society. They create a gap between our real self and ideal self. This causes insecurity and leads to unhappiness and self-criticism when we fail to meet standards. Conditions of worth stem from conditional positive regard, conditional love and conditional acceptance. We experience approval when conditions are met and disapproval when we fail. We learn our value is dependent on the approval and judgment of others. In contrast, when we experience unconditional positive regard, unconditional love and unconditional acceptance we learn to value ourselves for who we are. Unconditional love and acceptance foster self-acceptance and self-confidence.

Internalisation

As children we learn from parents and caregivers what behaviours earn praise or approval and what brings criticism or disapproval. These external expectations become internalised rules, shaping our sense of self-worth. Some examples of internalised rules could be: I must be popular, I must be successful, I must never show weakness or I must be quiet.

Incongruence

In order to gain the necessary approval and external validation, a person suppresses or denies their true feelings and desires, distorting their own experience to fit the conditions. External expectations are introjected as internalised rules and create a conflict between your actual self (who you are) and your ideal self (who you think you should be). This creates a state of incongruence, a mismatch between one's true self and their ideal self, resulting in mental health struggles such as anxiety, depression and low self-esteem.

Perfectionism and Anxiety

Perfectionism is a constant pressure to be perfect or successful to earn love, often leading to a fear of failure or criticism.

Loss of Direction

A person may pursue careers, relationships or lifestyles that satisfy external pressures but aren't personally satisfying, leading to a life that feels unfulfilled or inauthentic.

Restricted Growth

Personal growth is hindered when the focus is on pleasing others or achieving external validation rather than authentic self-actualisation. An individual's innate drive to reach their full potential is stunted because they are living to satisfy the expectations of others rather than their own authentic desires. The individual stops trusting their own inner, organismic valuing process and instead relies on external validation to determine their worth. Our organismic valuing process is our inner compass: our instincts, feelings and intuition that guides us by what we personally value, what is meaningful for us and by what is growth-enhancing, leading to personal growth and realising our potential.

The Solution

The solution is self-validation: recognising, accepting, and affirming your own thoughts, emotions, sensations, intuitions and experiences, without judgment. It involves acknowledging

that your feelings and perceptions are legitimate, even if they are uncomfortable, and trusting your instincts to guide you. This cultivates emotional resilience, reduces self-criticism, and decreases reliance on external approval. Experiencing unconditional positive regard and acceptance fosters self-validation. Feeling valued for who you are, without judgment, allows you to develop a more congruent and authentic self, freeing you from conditional acceptance and enabling you to recognise and challenge the shoulds and oughts internalised from the past. Embracing your own unique qualities and trusting your own organismic valuing process, rather than others' opinions, leads to self-actualisation.

Parental Conditioning

Parental conditioning is transmitted unconsciously from one generation to the next. The conditions of worth we internalised from our parents as children will reflect the conditions of worth our parents internalised from their parents, caregivers, authority figures, institutions or society when they were children. Family culture is generational and each generation has absorbed the standards, rules and expectations from the previous generation and repeats this pattern of conditioning with their children. We can break the chain by identifying, questioning, and actively changing these deeply ingrained, often invisible patterns if they are not serving us. We can become our own person and live our lives in accordance with our own values.

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