

Life Script

A life script¹ is an unconscious life plan we develop in childhood which drives our behaviours and determines our life patterns. From our early experiences and the messages we received from our parents and caregivers, we formed our ideas about ourself, others and the world (our core beliefs) and developed rules for living. A life script functions like an invisible internal rule book or a pre-written screenplay for your life, drafted in early childhood and unconsciously played out into adulthood. The parental messages we received in childhood came in the form of injunctions, counterinjunctions (drivers), permissions and programs.

Injunctions

Injunctions are unspoken (nonverbal) emotional messages sent from parent to child.² For example, a parent may frown at a child who is behaving in a manner they find disagreeable. Conveying messages like: **Don't be important. Don't succeed. Don't feel. Don't belong.** Injunctions strongly shape the life script.

Counter-Injunctions (Drivers)

Counter-injunctions or drivers are verbal rules and expectations sent from parent to child.³ Some examples include: **Be perfect. Be strong. Try hard. Please me. Hurry up.**

These create pressure patterns in adulthood. Pressure patterns are predictable stress behaviours that occur when a person operates under a driver. Some examples include:

Be Perfect (I must not make mistakes) creates a pressure pattern of overthinking, fear of criticism, excessive checking, tension in the body (tight jaw, stiff posture) and delayed decision-making.

Be Strong (I must not show feelings) creates a pressure pattern of emotional suppression, detached communication, minimal facial expression, over-responsibility and difficulty asking for help.

Try Hard (Effort matters more than success) creates a pressure pattern of starting many tasks and finishing few, overcomplicating simple things, sighing, straining tone and talking about effort rather than results.

Please Others (I must make everyone happy) creates a pressure pattern of difficulty saying no, over-apologising, smiling even when upset, anxiety about others' approval and neglect of own needs.

Hurry Up (There's not enough time) creates a pressure pattern of impatience, rapid speech, interrupting others, restlessness and anxiety about delays.

Permissions

Permissions are messages that counteract injunctions. They give psychological freedom, encourage healthy autonomy, support growth and self-acceptance. They are sent by a supportive parent to their child or sent by a supportive therapist to their client.⁴

Some examples include: **It's OK to succeed. It's OK to feel. It's OK to think. It's OK to be close. It's OK to be playful. You matter.**

Permissions are positive messages that counteract negative injunctions and allow a person to live more freely and autonomously.

¹ Life script is a concept used in Transactional Analysis.

² The message is being sent from the parent's Child ego state and received in the child's Child ego state.

³ The message is being sent from the parent's Parent ego state and received in the child's Parent ego state.

⁴ They are sent from the parent's or therapist's Nurturing Parent ego state to the person's Child ego state.

Programs

Program Messages are practical instructions sent from parent to child.⁵

Some examples include: **Study engineering. Save money. Respect elders.**

These influence career and practical life choices.

Types of life scripts

Winner Script

Person achieves goals

Feels OK about self and others

Makes autonomous decisions

Non-Winner Script

Average or stuck life pattern

Avoids risk

Lives below potential

Loser Script

Repeated failure or self-sabotage

Confirms negative beliefs

May engage in destructive patterns

Redecision

Life scripts can change. Scripts are decisions and decisions can be re-decided. Through therapy, awareness, and Adult ego-state functioning, people can rewrite their script. The goal is autonomy, which includes: Awareness, Spontaneity and Intimacy.

Ancestral Scripts

Family generational scripts are unconscious life plans and behavioural patterns passed down through generations influencing how individuals think, feel, and behave, similarly to their ancestors. These scripts were often constructed during periods of hardship and adversity in previous generations to help ancestors survive, but hinder modern personal growth and happiness. Change is possible by identifying harmful or limiting ancestral scripts and consciously deciding to alter them.

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⁵ The message is being sent from the parent's Adult ego state and received in the child's Adult ego state.