

Life Traps and Basic Psychological Needs

*"A life trap is a pattern that starts in childhood and reverberates throughout life. It began with something that was DONE to us by our families or other children. We were abandoned, criticized, overprotected, abused, excluded or deprived - we were damaged in some way. Eventually the life trap becomes part of us. **Long after we leave the home we grew up in, we continue to create situations** in which we are mistreated, ignored, put down, or controlled and in which we fail to reach our most desired goals."*

Jeffery Young Pd.D.

The following list suggests what conditions are necessary for us to thrive as children and develop into independent, responsible adults. After each basic necessity (in bold) is a list of possible results if that basic need is not met. When those needs are not met, we experience a shortfall or **Missing Developmental Experience (MDE)**. The impact on our thinking and behavior is predictable and impedes happiness, growth and effective interaction. The resulting problems are called "Life traps" and are specific ways of coping with the problem in the basic need area. The coping/defense mechanism doesn't resolve the problem, but instead continues to perpetuate the pain and confusion from childhood.

(For those of you who have worked with me on basic psychological needs before, I have included the wording that Harper and Hoopes (BYU) have used to describe the six categories in their similar research.) Course content comes from Jeffery Young, Jim Harper, Meg Hoopes, David Burns, Albert Ellis, Nathaniel Brandon and others.

Basic Psychological Needs/Resulting Traps	Harper and Hoopes
A. Need for Basic Safety Traps: 1) Abandonment 2) Mistrust & Abuse	(appropriate dependency)
B. Need for Connection to Others Traps: 3) Emotional Deprivation 4) Social Exclusion	(intimacy)
C. Need for Autonomy Traps: 5) Dependence 6) Vulnerability	(choices)
D. Need for Self Esteem Traps: 7) Defectiveness 8) Failure	(uniqueness)
E. Need for Self - Expression Traps: 9) Subjugation 10) Unrelenting Standards	(production)
F. Need for Realistic Limits Trap: 11) Entitlement	(sense and order)

There are three central features to life traps that allow us to recognize them.

1. They are **lifelong patterns or themes**
2. They are **self destructive**
3. They **struggle for survival**

"The end result is that, as an adult, we manage to recreate the conditions of our childhood that were most harmful to us."

Jeffery E. Young

Overview of the 11 Life traps

Traps related to SAFETY needs

Abandonment

This life trap is the feeling that those that are closest to you will leave and that you will end up alone forever. When you feel this belief, you may cling too much and push people away. You may get agitated about normal separations and view them as threatening to you.

Mistrust and Abuse

This occurs when you EXPECT people to hurt you in some way. You believe that they will lie, manipulate, physically hurt you, cheat, betray, etc. . . You are typically suspicious of others intentions, especially when they treat you well. Most likely you will avoid relationships entirely or you may form very superficial relationships. One of the most painful and toxic responses is to form relationships with people who will hurt you and treat you poorly. You may then feel angry and vengeful toward them, but also retain of sense of evidence for your belief.

Traps related to AUTONOMY needs

Dependence

You may feel unable to handle daily life competently without considerable help from others. When you were a child you were made to feel incompetent and that your independence was not important. You most probably seek out strong figures to become dependent on and then have them rule your life. You typically hold back and don't assert yourself. Your true possibilities are not realized when you are in this trap.

Vulnerability

You live in constant fear that disaster will strike. It may be Y2K, medical, criminal, financial or natural problems. You don't feel safe in the world. If you experience this life trap you were made to feel that the world is not a safe place, and that dangerous things happen all the time. You were most likely overprotected by parents who worried too much about your safety. You are governed by excessive and unrealistic fears.

Traps related to EMOTIONAL CONNECTION needs

Emotional Deprivation

This is the belief that your need for love will never be met adequately by other people. You feel that no one truly cares for you or understands how you feel. You are probably attracted to cold and unforgiving people, or you may be cold and unforgiving yourself. Your relationships are typically unsatisfying and you probably feel cheated. Typically you alternate between feeling angry about it or feeling hurt and alone. Ironically your anger drives people away, even further, so it insures your continues deprivation. These people usually don't know what love is.

Social Exclusion

This has to do with feeling isolated from the rest of the world. You may feel different from others, specifically you most likely felt socially undesirable, and as an adult you may feel that you are ugly, sexually undesirable, boring, fat, etc. . . You reenact your childhood rejection - you both feel and act inferior in social situations. You avoid socializing in groups and tend to immerse yourself in work, family or solitary hobbies/activities.

Traps related to Self - Esteem needs

Defectiveness

You feel inwardly flawed and defective. You feel that no one can really love you because of how flawed you are. As a child you were not respected for who you were in your family, instead you were criticized for your flaws. You blamed yourself that you were so flawed. You find it difficult to believe that people close to you value you, so you expect rejection.

Failure

This is the belief that you are inadequate in areas of achievement. This category is related to ego or performance. There is usually consistent comparison to others and the result is that you will find ways to feel inferior. You may have been called stupid, lazy, or compared to a successful sibling. As an adult you exaggerate the degree of your failure in order to stay in the failure mode.

Traps related to Self - Expression needs

Subjugation

You sacrifice your own needs and desires for the sake of pleasing others. You allow others to control you. . . you do this out of guilt or fear. As a child you were subjugated by someone close to you, usually a parent. As an adult, you repeatedly enter relationships with dominant, controlling people and then subjugate yourself to them. Or you may enter relationships with needy people who are too damaged to give back to you in return.

Unrelenting Standards

In this life trap you strive relentlessly to meet extremely high standards for yourself. You place excessive emphasis on money, status, order, power, recognition AT THE EXPENSE OF HAPPINESS, HEALTH, PLEASURE and SATISFYING RELATIONSHIPS. You probably apply your rigid standards to others and are very judgmental. This may occur all within your head without telling others, but they usually feel it in some ways. . . they may feel that they can't help you, that they aren't good enough, that you don't need them, etc. . . As a child you were taught that anything other than the best was failure and you learned that nothing you did was quite good enough.

Trap related to Realistic Limits needs

Entitlement

People with this life trap feel special and they insist that they be able to do, or say, or have whatever they want immediately. They disregard what others consider reasonable, what is actually feasible, the time or patience usually required and the cost to others. They have difficulty with self discipline. Most of these people were spoiled as children. They were not required to show self control or accept restrictions. They get very angry when they don't get what they want.