

How to Drive Someone Crazy or Seven Deadly Sins Against Children and Other People

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More and more, we hear that emotional illness does not really exist **except** in people who have incurred brain damage, brain birth defects or through the unwise use of drugs, alcohol, or amphetamines.

The term "mental illness," as it is commonly used in newspapers is, for the most part, referring to learned behavior, a way of responding when under stress in which the person reverts to an earlier or more immature way of dealing with problems. These immature survival techniques may have worked well for us as children. But, as adults, they are set-ups for failure. For example, for a child or teen, running away from home is not a problem. It is the child's solution to an unacceptable situation.

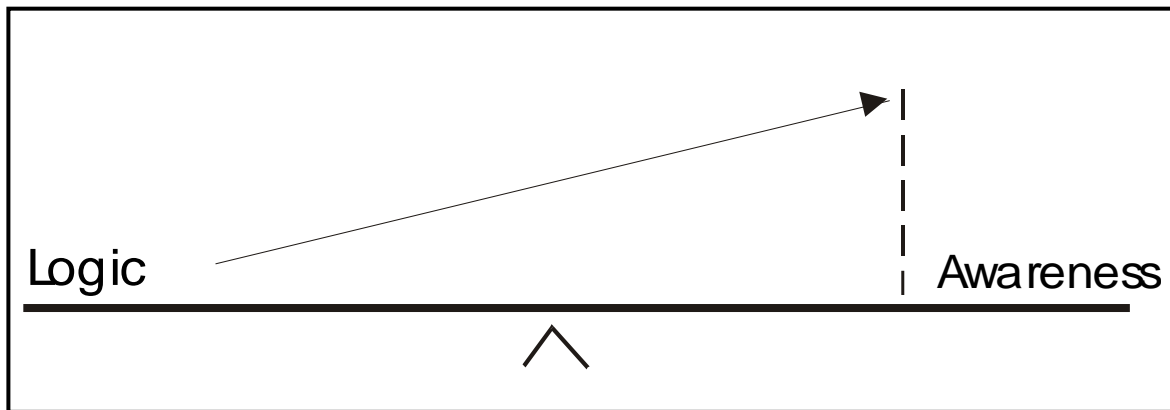
As an adult, running away as a solution to work or marriage problems is usually not a good idea. As a child, being the peace maker in the home becomes a problem when, as an adult, he has to make everybody get along, an impossible task. The child who allows himself to be molested without telling anybody can be his solution to not being rejected and a way of getting attention, etc. As an adult, that same "solution" may lead to sexual, emotional and physical abuse. The dysfunctional family is a learned set of behaviors that often seem crazy to those who are close to them and love them.

When it comes to these dysfunctional, learned behaviors, there are more accurate terms used today such as "mental disorders", "anxiety disorders", "depressive disorders" etc. Disorder implies the need to make it right by putting things back in order. Disorder is a much better concept than "illness" or "crazy" when working with people's lives.

There is no such thing as a completely crazy person. On the other hand, there is no such thing as a completely sane person. Even the craziest person in the locked ward of the hospital has some degree of sanity by which he holds himself together; while the sanest person among us has periods, under stress, where he feels and may even behave crazily. In a sense then, we are all on a continuum between crazy and sane, never reaching the absolute extremity at either end. The extremes can be thought of as disordered behaviors.

Pathological, as well as so called neurotic behaviors are included on this continuum. Also included are simple misperceptions of reality, all the way to severe psychotic distortions. Whether you are talking about your negative self-concept (low self-image) or some form of mental disorder, it's only a matter of degrees. The extent to which a person experiences emotional problems depends largely upon the frequency with which he has received and accepted crazy-making (disordering) messages given to him as he was growing up.

People are born with two parts: a logical, rational, thinking part and a feeling part made up of physical and emotional feelings. You make logical decisions based upon the feelings of which you are aware. If, after years of repression, denial and negative programming, you come to the point where you are no longer able to be aware of more than one feeling at a time, then you will respond to only that feeling. If that feeling is hate or anger, then the person may end up killing themselves or someone else. As a person's behavior becomes increasingly illogical and irrational (disorganized) the person is labeled by friends as crazy. "Why would she kill herself and her children? That is crazy."



For better or worse, most programming is from parents and others close to us, from our schools and from our social surroundings. The results can be positive or negative, constructive or destructive. Your upbringing influences where you find yourselves on the mental health/mental disorder continuum.

There are seven negative ways of responding to children and young adults that can confuse and distort their reality so as to disorder their thinking and lives in ways that will ensure that they will need therapy and possibly hospitalization at some point in their lives. I call them The Seven Deadly Sins.

There are seven negative ways of responding to children and young adults that can so confuse and distort their reality so as to disorder their thinking and lives...

The **first of these Seven Deadly Sins** is to put the child into a double-bind. There are two kinds of double-binds: double-bind messages and double-bind situations.

The double-bind message is when you are presented with two opposite choices, usually both of them unacceptable or threatening. For example: the parent who smiles while he tells his child how angry he is. Which do you respond to, the smile or the words of anger? Or, the mother who spansks the child and says with an angry tone of voice, "Mother loves you." Which do you respond to, the spanking and angry

voice or the words? A common children's lullaby is a good example of the double-bind messages we give our children without even knowing it:

"Rock-a-bye Baby in the treetop,
When the wind blows, the cradle will rock,
When the bough breaks, the cradle will fall,
And **down will come Baby**, cradle and all."

Other examples of double-bind messages are: "Go on out and have a good time. My bad heart is giving me a lot of trouble right now, but I'll be fine." Our clichéd words of advice and wisdom contain double-bind messages: "Laugh and the world laughs with you; cry and you cry alone." "If you can't do a job right, don't do it at all." We give double-bind messages with statements such as, "That's a dumb way to feel." "You shouldn't feel that way." Still others are, "Big boys don't cry." "Nice girls don't get angry."

The double-bind situation is one in which a person is put into a position where any choice made will be unacceptable. Children caught in the middle of divorcing parents, who are competing for their loyalty and affection, are really given a crazy-maker. The child is expected to view the ex-spouse with the same anger and rejection that the hostile parent has. The message the child gets is "If you loved me, you would not love your mother." Whether he chooses his own feelings or whether he chooses the feelings expected of him, he is the loser. So, we give him another one "Stop crying or I'll give you something to cry about!"

An example of an adult double-bind situation: A woman's new husband and her son were constantly fighting. The only choice that seemed available to her was to kick out her son or to kick out her new husband. Both were unacceptable. The woman experienced a period of time when she was "crazy" and had to be placed in the hospital.

Double-binds make a person confused as to what he is feeling. When he/she becomes unable to identify what he/she is feeling, it is impossible to make wise choices based upon those feelings. Then what happens is there are fewer and fewer identifiable feelings from which to choose. The strongest feeling dominates. This is what happens when someone becomes self-destructive or goes "postal," or goes "crazy." The person sees no alternative. The more confused your feelings become; the more confused your behaviors become.

The **second Deadly Sin** is one in which we tell a person that what they feel is **not** what they feel. A child knows only that there is something inside of him, some kind of feeling prodding him for attention. In the same way as we teach a child the names of objects in his world such as a chair, table or desk, he must be taught appropriate names for what he feels. However, instead we come up with messages such as, "Jump up, that didn't hurt," or "You're not mad at Mother, you love Mother," and "You don't hate your brother, you love him." Talk about a crazy maker, "love feels like hate!" A variation of this is simply telling someone, "Oh, you shouldn't feel that way." The inference is that what you are feeling is bad or wrong and you are not OK for feeling that way.

Another way you can teach people to deny what they feel is by teaching them that anger is a sin, that sexual feelings are evil, etc.; thereby turning everyday life experiences into double-bind situations. The concept that anger is a sin or bad gets people to lie to themselves and to others about what they are feeling, "**I'M NOT ANGRY; I'M JUST UPSET!**" If that is upset, I'm not looking forward to your anger.

If the message the child gets is, “Don’t touch yourself down there (that’s dirty)” or “Sex is dirty, save it for the one you love,” what conclusion is the child to make? Everyone, at sometime in their lives, will experience anger or sexual feelings. These feelings of anger and sexual arousal are a naturally occurring part of you. While you have no choice over what you feel, it is what you do with your feelings that is either good or bad. Feelings just ARE!

The **third Deadly Sin** is the use of put-downs. There are many ways to put people down. You can call them names: “You’re dumb!” “You’re stupid!” “You’re a little witch!” “You’re a bad boy!” “You’re mean.” “You’re selfish.” Said often enough and with emotion, the person begins to accept the label as a fact, “That is who I am.” If a person sees themselves as dumb or stupid, what will they do? What will a mean or selfish person do?

There are more subtle ways of putting people down that are equally or more destructive. Some of the most emotionally violent programs on TV use put-down humor: Groucho Marx in his later programs, Don Rickles, or Howard Stern. Sarcasm, a form of put-down, is commonly misused as humor. “That’s real smart! You wanna try for two?” All humans have some doubts as to their abilities, talents and looks and when you are made the victim of put-downs, especially from significant people in your life, your self-concept can be greatly shaken and you will feel powerless and a little bit crazy. “For a fat girl, you don’t sweat much.” “He’s just kidding, right?”

When someone comes up to talk to you and you turn away or ignore the person completely, you give him or her a very strong message of how low their importance is to you. Giving someone the “cold shoulder” or the “silent treatment” is a sure way of telling them that they don’t exist.

Another type of put-down is when you discount the person's feelings: “You think that was bad! Why, when I was your age, I had to walk through the snow barefooted!” “It’s just puppy love. You’ll get over it. It’s no big deal.” “That wasn’t a hard spanking; why, when I was your age, I used to get it with a razor strap.” “You think you’ve got it bad! Wait ‘til you grow up. Then you’ll know what real trouble is all about.” All of these messages are ways of telling the other person that their feelings are insignificant when compared to yours. “If I tell you how I feel and you reject them; that is all I have.” (John Powell)

Once you have a person trapped in a double-bind situation and have confused them about what they feel, you can assure their perpetual neurotic or crazy behavior by convincing and then reinforcing in the person's mind, that they are powerless to change anything in their lives.

The **fourth of the Seven Deadly Sins** is that other people are always more important than you are. A few years ago in the emergency room of a local hospital, a young boy with a broken leg was crying softly to himself. His father approached him and said, “Now, now, you mustn’t cry. You’re upsetting your mother.” In other words, everyone else’s feelings are more important than yours are. How many of you have heard, “You’ll do it because I told you to do it!” Here again, no explanation, and the reinforcement that parents are more important. “As long as you have your feet under my table, you are going to do what I tell you.” The child is being treated as a second-class citizen with no power to control or to change anything in his life. The problem is that you just may convince the child that they are not important and they should do whatever someone tells them to do, which could lead to molest and rape. Then, as adults, it will be OK to treat them as if they were nothing and to use them. Would you ever treat a guest in your home or your mate that way? Then, how is it OK to treat a child that way?

The **fifth of my Seven Deadly Sins** reinforces powerlessness. You may do this quite often in a very subtle way by rescuing a person and making all his decisions for him. When you rescue a child who is capable of doing it himself, it teaches him that there are no consequences to behavior and that he is powerless to control or shape anything in his environment. These children tend to exhibit school and social phobias. They may then grow up to believe that the world is a dangerous place and that they are not able to protect themselves in this dangerous world.

A few years ago, I had a young mother in my office with a little girl of about 3 years old. The mother brought her in because the little girl was afraid of just about everything in her world, including new toys and her own shadow! Children are not born feeling powerless and afraid. This type of fear is learned from their parents. As I observed them, a new, smaller child of less than a year old crawled up to this three year old girl, who immediately began screaming, "Baby is going to get me! Baby is going to get me!" The mother walked over, picked up the little girl and said, "Now, now, don't get excited, don't cry. The baby isn't going to hurt you. The baby loves you." Then, the mother took her little girl a short distance away from the baby and placed her back on the floor. The little baby again crawled towards the little girl and again, the girl screamed, "The baby is going to get me" and again the mother picked her up with reassuring words and moved her to the far corner of the room. And, the baby started crawling towards the three year old. Finally, the mother allowed her little girl to remain on her lap.

My grandpa used to say, "What you do speaks so loud I can't hear what you say." From the little girl's perspective, "Mother came over to pick me up and rescue me from the baby each time I screamed. If I need to be rescued, the baby must not be safe to be around and the baby is going to hurt me."

Without knowing it, parents often reinforce the child's feelings of powerlessness. Who picks up after the child that is able to pick up after himself? Who picks out what clothes the child will wear today? Who forces the child to eat when he is not hungry? Who yells at the child and calls him clumsy when he spills the milk instead of simply saying, "Looks like you will need to clean that up."

By making all the decisions for our children, by constantly rescuing them, and labeling them with lazy, stupid, or selfish, children learn to believe that they are too dumb, too weak, and too powerless to learn to take care of themselves and that they will never be able to make even the simplest decisions. They become afraid of change, afraid of growth, and afraid of life.

The **sixth and most destructive of the Deadly Sins** is the double-bind of conditional love. The use of conditional love can guarantee the most obedient children because they are afraid of losing your love. "If I lose your love, then I am nothing and I will die." The conditional love message is, "If you don't mind me, I won't love you." This message is acted out when the parent withdraws from or withholds the expression of love from the child until obedience is obtained. This can be done by a word or just a look. As the child approaches the parent, the parent ignores or rejects him as a way of punishing him for disobedience.

Children, who are the victims of this punishment, become very afraid that their parents might leave them. They fear being left alone, even for short periods, and will go to extreme lengths to "guarantee" that they will not be rejected. "If I do everything perfectly, if I don't rock the boat then my parents will love me and not leave me." These children become extremely well mannered and reserved, but with very few friends. They are content to play by themselves for unusually long periods of time. Research indicates that these children tend to run a very high risk of suicidal and/or homicidal behaviors in high school and

college years, but they are extremely well mannered!

The **Seventh Sin against children** is a guarantee that they will develop mental illness. Once we have confused the child and convinced him that he is unimportant and powerless, the next goal is to ensure that he will be too afraid to check with others to find out if the world is different from what he has been taught. He is afraid to check out his perceptions of himself and of those around him.

In the Seventh Sin, children are taught very directly that the world is a dangerous, unsafe, threatening place to be and that the people in the world are unsafe and dangerous and that you must protect yourself from everything and everybody. "People will use you; they will take advantage of you and then leave you alone and isolated." "Women are all gold diggers who are out to use you." "Everybody lies. There are no honest people." "Men only want one thing." "You have to be strong, take care of yourself. No one gives a damn about anybody but themselves." This Seventh Sin establishes, in the mind of the child, that the only safe response is withdrawal from all people, from the world, from society. With this belief, there will be no change in their perception of their surroundings because there is no new information coming in to question or raise doubts about all the previous crazy- makers.

All of us, from time to time, have received or been given some of these "crazy makers". The degree to which we effect, or are affected by, others with crazy-making messages depends upon the frequency and length of time the crazy-making messages have been given. In many ways, these Seven Deadly Sins are like accumulated poisons. Their effect can range from a low self-image to bizarre and crazy behaviors that would require institutionalization.

Ask yourself, "Is what I'm doing getting me what I want in the long run?" "Is this what I want my children to be?" "Is this how I want to control my relationships?"

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