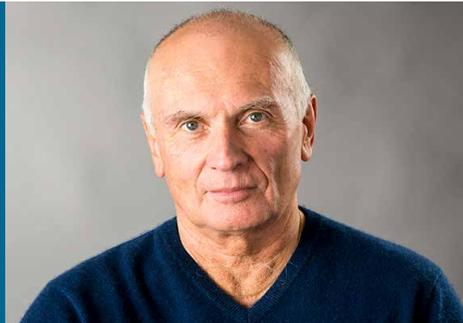


Being Family versus Playing Family

by Dr. Paul Dunion, Transformational Faculty Member

January 14, 2017



It's that time of the year when many of us will be Playing Family. The following characteristics reflect the difference between the two. However, many families are doing some of both. The key is to be mindful of how much Being Family vs. Playing Family is taking place, and deciding what you want and how to support what you want.

- **Known or Not Known.** It is natural to expect being known and understood when we are Being Family. We also anticipate knowing and understanding others. What we know includes current challenges, achievements, values, beliefs and hopes. When Playing Family, there is no expectation of mutual understanding. Conversations sound like reports of the 6:00 o'clock news highlighting current political and economic events.
- **Strengths and Buffoonery.** When Being Family, tales told by family members include accomplishments of others and accounts of strengths of character as well as foolish undertakings. Playing Family is characterized by recounting the buffoonery of others, walking a thin line between fun and mockery.
- **Clarity vs. Innuendo.** Being Family reflects a clarity spoken by members regarding what they want when they are together. Folks Playing

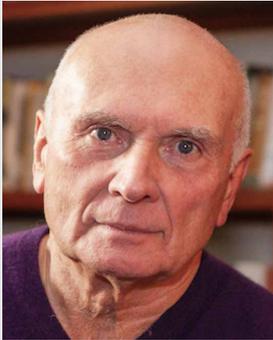
Family either speak through innuendo or deference to the wishes to others.

- Boundaries tend to be more fluid when we are Being Family. Family members welcome friends and relatives of other family members. When Playing Family, boundaries get more rigid with less flexibility to include non-family members.
- **Substance Abuse.** Substance abuse is more prevalent when Playing Family since members are attempting to cope with pretense, alienation, inclusion and anxiety.
- Encouragement, compliments and reassurance are woven into the conversation of folks Being Family. Conversations are typically more self-centered when Playing Family. The connective tissue is not there in order to support gestures of warmth and compassion.
- Being Family normally reflects a level of attention affording members the opportunity to feel heard and listened to. When Playing Family, members can be regularly interrupted or ignored.
- When Being Family, members anticipate the fun and joy that gathering brings. When Playing Family, folks feel the weight of an obligation to show-up and adhere to family protocol.

BEING FAMILY VERSUS PLAYING FAMILY

There are several choices we can make to gradually shift a family from Playing Family to Being Family: Is there a family member I can make a one-on-one connection with before the gathering? Is there a family member I can offer some uninterrupted attention during the gathering? Am I willing to tell a story of a family member's accomplishments

during the gathering? Am I willing to sit near someone who tends to feel marginalized? Am I willing to abstain from drug abuse or drinking alcohol to access? Is there someone I could thank during the gathering for the help or assistance they offered me during the year?



PAUL DUNION earned his Doctoral degree in Counseling and Consulting Psychology from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst and his M.A. in Philosophy from the University of Connecticut. He taught Philosophy for thirteen years at UConn and Three Rivers Community College.

Dr. Dunion has been in private practice for the past thirty-seven years. He is a wholistic psychological healer, employing an existential modality as well as a somatic approach to treating trauma. He is trained in EMDR and is a graduate of the Somatic Experiencing Institute.

From its early beginnings, Dr. Dunion represented the State of Connecticut at the national gatherings of the mytho-poetic men's movement, sponsored by Wingspan. As the founder of Boys to Men, Dr. Dunion created a mentoring community for teenage boys. He is also the co-founder of COMEGA (Connecticut Gathering of Men), having served over 6,000 men since 1992, which continues to offer biannual retreats. In 2013, Dr. Dunion established the Croton Mystery School and designed its curriculum with a focus on teaching students how to make peace with life's mystery and unpredictability. Dr. Dunion has offered over 200 workshops on topics related to Human Potential. Currently, he offers supervision for younger psychotherapists.

He has published five books: *Seekers – Finding Our Way Home*; *Path of the Novice Mystic – Maintaining a Beginner's Heart and Mind*; *Dare to Grow-Up – Become Who You Are Meant to Be*; *Shadow Marriage – A Descent into Intimacy*; and *Temptation in the House of the Lord*. Dr. Dunion's latest offering due to be released in 2020 is *Wisdom – Apprenticing to the Unknown and Befriending Fate*.



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