

# A Developmental Script Questionnaire

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## **ABSTRACT**

**Script development is broken down into chronological stages and ego states. The Developmental Script Questionnaire is presented. It allows people to take responsibility for their personal history while providing ready access to repressed information.**

Scripts interfere with the normal course of development because script behavior follows the patterns of myths, legends and fairy tales instead of the natural stages of development. When we follow a script we fail to develop sophistication in dealing with the issues and needs of our stages in life. Without thinking about it further, we recreate an ongoing drama in the present stage which is based on unhappy conclusions from a past stage.

Answer the following questions according to what comes to your mind without rumination. Your first answer will be the most productive.

## **STAGE ONE**

### **Task: Being Nurtured Ego State: Natural Child**

Imagine you are just born. List the people who are interested in your birth. What are their reactions?

Imagine you are four months old. You cannot walk or talk, you can only cry. You are hungry and cry to be picked up and fed. What is your mother's reaction? What is your father's reaction?

What significant events, if any, happened in the first six months of your life?

What conclusions do you reach about who you are and what life is like?

## **STAGE TWO**

### **Task: Exploring the World Ego State: Little Professor**

Imagine you are a toddler, just old enough to crawl, but not old enough to control your behavior. Your job developmentally is to learn about the world, your environment and your senses. You need to taste everything, put the world in your mouth, and touch all that you see. You are busy doing what toddlers do. What is your mother's reaction? Your father's reaction?

What significant events happened when you were between six months and eighteen months old?

What conclusions do you reach about doing things and getting support for doing?

### **STAGE THREE**

#### **Task: Separating Into Independence Ego State: Adult**

Imagine you are a two year old. You are beginning to separate from your infant dependency. You need to say "no," to test the limits, to be contrary and learn to think for yourself. What is your father's reaction when he wants you to do something and you assert, "No." Your mother's reaction?

What significant events happened when you were between eighteen months to three years of age?

What conclusions do you reach about whether it's OK to be separate and to think?

### **STAGE FOUR**

#### **Task: Creating an Identity Ego State: SuperNatural Child**

Imagine you are between three and six years old. Like children this age, you want to find out "what happens if..." (if I pretend I didn't hear somebody tell me to stop doing something ... if I steal even though I've been told I may get in trouble. . . "). You also want to know "why" (Why is the sky blue, why does it get dark outside, why are there boys and girls?). You love to test your power. You do something your parents told you not to ... you go into the street, take the cookies out of the cookie jar, and dump the plants out of their pots to make a magic forest with them. What is your mother's reaction? What is your father's reaction? What significant events happened during this age?

What conclusions do you reach about your power?

### **STAGE FIVE**

#### **Task: Developing Personal Skills Ego State: Parent**

Imagine you are between six and twelve years old, and life was just as it was during your childhood. You are developing your own skills. You want to do things your own way. You want to argue and hassle. You are asked to do something, and you argue about it. What is your father's reaction? What is your mother's reaction? What significant events happened when you were between six and twelve years old?

What conclusions do you reach about doing things your own way and having your own values?

### **STAGE SIX**

#### **Task: Integrating, Becoming Sexual and Leaving the Nest Ego States: Integrating All of Above**

Imagine you are an adolescent, new to the world of sexual urges and longings. You're old enough to be fairly independent, but you're not all grown up. You still need support and protection. You feel hungry for loving, affection, and contact with your parents. What is your mother's reaction? Your father's?

What significant events happened when you were an adolescent?

What are your conclusions about becoming sexual and growing up?

Imagine you are between sixteen and eighteen. You are breaking away from your

parents, wanting to finish the emotional bonds through which you've been relating to them as parents instead of people. You have your own world view and it doesn't agree with that of your parents. You insist on making a decision about your life based on your own values. What is your mother's reaction? Your father's?

What conclusions do you reach about separating and finishing growing up?

What is your favorite story or fairy tale?

### **A Case Example**

Dave D's answers to the Developmental Script Questionnaire illustrate information which may be gleaned from using this technique:

PL: "Imagine you are just born. What are your parent's reactions?"

DD: "They're both very proud, very happy. My father's happy I'm a boy."

PL: "Now imagine you're four months old. You are hungry. You're crying and kicking. You want to be picked up, held and fed. What happens?"

DD: "My father tells my mother to come over. It's not in his head at all that he could take care of me. My mother looks at the clock to decide if it's been four hours. If it has been she'll feed me. If it hasn't, she'll walk around the block until the four hours are up, leaving me there. She can't stand to hear me cry."

PL: "So here you are an infant. All you can do is cry. What is your reaction?"

DD: "That's the hard part. I learn that if you struggle you might not get results right away. But then you struggle even harder. And if that doesn't work, you keep trying until something works. It's a long time in between, but if you cry long enough, you might get fed. But in any case, it's better not to feel." (Anything — - hunger, pain, etc.)

PL: "So your father gets mad and You're crawling around on the floor, wanting to be picked up sometimes, getting into the cupboards, and you knock over a lamp or something. What happens?"

DD: "Oh, my father would get mad. He wasn't working much in those years, they were the bad years. He'd get himself someplace else. (I assume he means his father would leave the house.) My mother would put me in a place where I couldn't knock anything over. Maybe out on the porch by myself."

PL: "So your father gets made and leaves, and your mother sticks you out on the porch, what do you make of that?"

DD: "Well, if you want to do things, there's distance. (I assume he means that if he wants to do something he can't get support and care of be physically close to anyone.) It's kind of a rip off to have to do it all alone. But it doesn't count if someone helps you or you get support."

PL: "OK, now imagine you're a two year old. You're real interested in having your own opinion. You love to say, "NO" and "I won't." What happens?"

DD: "No" was not allowed. It is very negative for me to say no. In fact I have the inability to say no. I will finesse all kinds of ways, but never say flat out no. Wishy washy is safe. "No" feels dangerous and scary. There'd be Pa's big verbal explosion. Nobody would hit me though."

PL: "Well, I'm glad about that! Now, imagine you're about four. You're interested

in the difference between boys and girls, and you are figuring out which one you are. Imagine you're in the bathroom with a little girl and you want to see how she's different from you."

DD: Oh, I think the sky would fall. Both my parents were incredibly Victorian, both very straight laced. I would not have gotten in the bathroom with the neighbor girl."

PL: "OK, suppose you're finding out "what happens if. . ." Suppose you take candy from a store. What happens?"

DD: (he grinned) "There would be some kind of severe punishment. I'd get restricted to the house, maybe for a couple of days. I got up to six or seven days on occasion! "

PL: "And if you told your dad one thing and your mom another?"

DD: "They would talk it out, You wouldn't con them. They had some things mixed up but they weren't dumb. I got a lot of mixed signals, and that's tough to figure out. I think you get into a lot of insecurity because you don't know who you are or what you should be doing, (Here his switching into "I" and "you" points out parts of him: a grown-up self and a younger self who needs direction from parents.) I really didn't do well in that developmental area, and part of what I'm trying to put into place is really, "Who am I?" If you were born a herdsman in the 17th century you knew who you were and what was expected of you. But when you're upwardly mobile you have to psyche that out. There was part of my parents that was threatened if I grew. (I believe he means, "If I finish my developmental tasks.") One way, they wanted me to be powerful, and in another they were threatened if I was. There's some of that still in my head. No matter what I do, it's not enough to satisfy that feeling of being threatened. (Here he may be saying he made his parents threatened feelings his own.) I decided that whatever life was going to be, you had to struggle, had to figure it out and be tenacious as hell to do it."

PL: "Now imagine you're between six and twelve years old. You're learning the skills of life. You're needing to learn HOW TO... You want to argue and hassle to create your own values. What happens?"

DD: "Well, my father's gone a lot. He's not around to learn from. I have to learn it for myself, and everything will be a challenge. But that's OK, gets the old blood up. Focuses your attention. A lot of what I got about being a man I got from the movies. There was some kind of modeling that fear was not OK and not allowed. You work hard, you achieve and you don't be afraid. One of the poems I read when I was a boy scout (boy scouts get into camping, etc.) was something like this, "Do you feel the force of the wind, the splash of the rain? Go face them, fight them, be savage again! Go hungry like the wolf, go wade like the crane! The palms of your hands will thicken, the back of your neck will pain, but you'll walk like a man." I was a boy scout forever. I really wanted to be a man, and that was some macho stuff! The trouble is, you end up with no confidence in your value system."

PL: "And when you're 13 to 18, becoming actively sexual?"

DD: "By then my parents left me pretty much alone. I had developed enough independence. I'd already decided to go it alone. So they don't really have to respond to my sexual development. One time I got in an argument with my mother about what time I should come in. She said if I wasn't home by whatever time, she'd lock the door. I said OK. I'll just go sleep in the hall of an apartment building. That was threatening enough to her, so she left the door open. In a lot of ways I didn't have much structure. So it's hard to finish growing up. About finishing, I get about 90% done. I'm the best 90 percenter there ever was. In some ways, that's good, but then I'm still left with some feelings because I didn't finish, so I have guilt."

**These answers show David's script protocol.** Later, as a young man, Dave found a statement by Teddy Roosevelt that expressed the adaptation of his script in adulthood. In answer to "What is your favorite story or fairy tale," he replied, "It's not the critic who counts, not the man who points out how the strong man

stumbled, or where the doer of deeds could have done better, the credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marked by the dust and sweat and blood. Who strives valiantly? Who errs, comes up short again and again, who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions, and spends himself in worthy cause, what the best knows in the end is the triumph of high achievement. If he fails, at least he fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither defeat nor victory."

This developmental method differs from the first way we worked with scripts. Eric Berne said, "We can say we have identified a script when an individual's behavior in the most important aspects of life is directed by an ongoing program developed in early childhood under parental influence."

Traditionally, Transactional Analysts have identified scripts by asking questions such as:

What is your favorite fairy tale?

What is your favorite movie?

What is your favorite song?

How will you die?

Write your own epitaph.

What were your parents' favorite sayings about life?

What did you want to be when you grew up?

What was your childhood nickname?

Describe the bad feeling you've had most often in life.

Answers to questions on this script checklist identify adaptations people impose on their natural process of development, a useful starting point in the therapeutic process. Adding a developmental framework completes the context in which the script was developed and serves as a map for developmental tasks to finish within each stage. For example, David D. is working on the foundation for his script in Stage One. He has decided to get the nurturing and support he needs instead of not feeling. In the service of his grownup independence and autonomy, Dave is finishing the developmental tasks he left incomplete due to his script decision in infancy: learning unconditional love, physical contact, attachment, bonding and trust. When he is finished in Stage One, his answers to the development script questionnaire can guide his work in other stages.

The Developmental Script Questionnaire allows people to take responsibility for their personal history while providing ready access to repressed information. Having become aware of possibly threatening material in an unthreatening process, both clients and therapists are relieved of the burden of defining programs so they can get on with making changes.

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