



Why do I feel like the child in the room?

Understanding our ‘unfinished business’ when it comes to family.

With the Christmas decorations neatly packed away for another year, we are left to nurse our emotional hangovers, pondering the complexities of our extended family and the unfinished business that often re-surfaces over the holiday period. Have you ever wondered why our emotional age drops when in the presence of the people we grew up with? Family gatherings, especially Christmas, can be pressure cookers with adults playing out their roles as children in relation to each other and their parents. We slot quickly and easily back into our positions as “the baby of the family” or “the responsible one” despite perhaps having changed considerably outside the family. So why do our feelings, behaviours, insecurities and resentments from decades ago continue into our adult life when it comes to family? And why is Christmas so emotionally draining for many, with past hurts and “unfinished business” often re-surfacing?

As adults, we actually have very limited emotional autonomy. Every member of our family, both past and present, has impacted on the other family members in one way or another. You may have been told “*always be nice and put others first*” whilst for others it was “*get in first and fight for what you want*”. Where did these messages originate? And why are they so different between families? Regardless of the underlying message, as children, we learnt these messages and responded accordingly, developing into adults without necessarily questioning the values and beliefs that underpin our views of the world. That is of course until we began to interact with people, particularly partners and in-laws whose value systems differ from our own, or worse still, we began to recognise that our ‘set in stone’ beliefs and automatic responses were sabotaging our happiness and relationships.

The good news is, families are open, living systems that evolve over time, bringing new types of relationships, energy and challenges. This means that there are endless possibilities for change and growth. Through counselling, self-reflection and the exploration of our extended family system it is possible for individuals to continue to belong to the family they grew up in, to be part of it both physically and emotionally yet

maintain psychological separateness and the ability to function independently with confidence, even if your attitudes and opinions differ.

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