

THE
DAVIS FOUNDATION

FOR PROVIDING
EMOTIONAL COMFORT

Letter of April 6, 2005

Dear Reader,

Of the many stresses in everyday life, some are very obvious: demands at work, disharmony within relationships, concern about finances, worries about the well-being of relatives and friends, time pressures, and fears about safety. As if all of this was not enough, we are bombarded daily with minor irritations. Some of these come from physical sources such as bad weather or excessive noise. But most often they arise from interactions with other people: a rude driver or salesperson, a co-worker who is overly talkative or who doesn't respect boundaries, an acquaintance who is competitive or who tries to belittle us, a friend who lets us down or tries to take advantage of us. All of these stresses, the large and the small, contribute to an ongoing level of tension that interferes with our peace and well-being.

Many discomforts end. The cold person who must walk faster to stay warm will eventually reach shelter. The boom box player will sooner or later move on. But there are many disequilibrations that become chronic. Children whose parents are neglectful, abusive, or unempathic will suffer from ongoing distress. There are no *true solutions* for these situations because relief is in the hands of the parents, who are unable to change. These children will use various *partial solutions* to lessen their distress: trying to be very good in order to please their parents, overeating to soothe themselves, turning to other adults for nurturance, becoming stoic, rebelling, or simply becoming depressed. Even children with dedicated, loving parents experience some degree of chronic discomfort because most parents have at least a few traits that affect their children negatively.

These partial solutions become habit patterns and are locked in. They are automatic responses to subsequent similar stimuli and to new stimuli that are associatively related to the original one. They may become generalized and form major character traits.

Both the unresolved disequilibrations that evoked the partial solutions, and the partial solutions themselves, cause an ongoing level of tension. Memories of parental faults may be remembered, but often they are unrecognized because they have become taken for granted. And the habit patterns that have developed in response, though uncomfortable themselves, may not be viewed as problematic because they have become second nature.

A child who has tried to get the nurturance she needed by pleasing her distracted parent will tend to become an adult who tries to please everyone. This becomes exhausting yet she cannot change because this habit pattern is locked in. The child who rebelled against parental expectations that were unrealistic may generalize this trait and find himself, as an adult, unable to progress at work because of his tendency to be insubordinate.



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The habit patterns that originate in early life also are applied to the minor irritations of the present. The woman who tries to please everyone will be unable to protect herself from abuses. She will have difficulty extricating herself from her overly talkative co-worker. She won't know how to handle the acquaintance who belittles her. She will be helpless to set limits on a friend who takes advantage of her. The rebellious man will respond to a rude salesperson by arguing back. He will react to competition by escalating it. He may even respond to intrusion into his personal space with fisticuffs. All of these responses to minor irritations will serve to intensify them rather than to extinguish them, and will, themselves, create new disequibrations.

There are situations in which minor irritations will cause major distress. An unbearably disequilibrating event will give rise to a false solution, one in which the mind creates a double pathway. In one branch, out of awareness, the unbearable situation continues to be registered but in the other branch an alternative, such as amnesia, is experienced. If the neglected girl's despair and the rebellious boy's rage were sufficiently intense, their minds would create false solutions. They would be unaware of the full extent of their pain, but, out of awareness, it would form a reservoir of feeling that would be evoked by subsequent stimuli. The woman will then feel despair if a friend abandons her. The man will become enraged if too much is expected of him. And they will not understand that they are over-reacting.

An Inner Guide will perceive the early origins of these problems, find true solutions for them, and work to end these maladaptive habit patterns. It will also provide the best responses to the minor irritations of life.

QUESTION:

Would the Inner Guide tell you something that you do not want to do, and should you do this thing since it may be a subconsciously better thing to do?

ANSWER:

Your Inner Guide wants you to be comfortable. She won't tell you to do things that you don't want to do. What will happen is that, by and by, you will find yourself not wanting to do certain things that aren't good for you. Instead you will actually want to do the things that are best for you. This will happen gradually, and you may become aware of these changes only in retrospect.

I welcome your questions and comments, and will publish as many of them as possible. I look forward to hearing from you, either by post or at info@davis-foundation.org. If you would like to be anonymous, just let me know.

Cordially,

Judith M. Davis