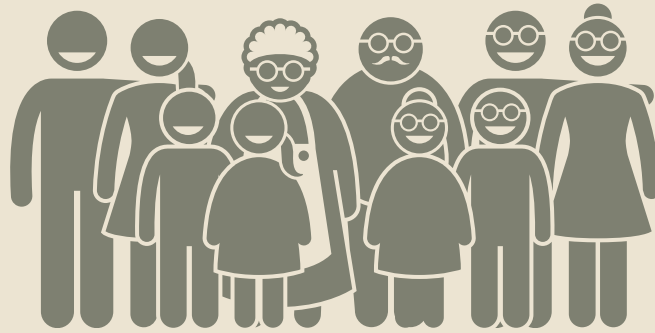




emileekrupa

# FAMILY TIES OR TOO TIED TOGETHER? UNDERSTANDING ENMESHMENT



## What Is Enmeshment?

Have you ever felt like your family is super close, almost to the point where it's hard to tell where your feelings end and theirs begin? This happens in families where everyone is deeply involved in each other's lives—sharing every emotion, making decisions together on things that should be personal, and leaning on each other for everything. It can feel like there's no room to be yourself or express what you really want.

This kind of super closeness was first talked about in the mid-20th century by Salvador Minuchin, a guy who studied families like they were his own. He noticed that sometimes, families get this way because they're trying to protect each other or make up for something that's missing—like going through a tough time or dealing with something really stressful together.

In these families, you might find that there are unspoken rules everyone just follows without question. It might feel like stepping out of line or having different opinions is off-limits. Growing up in this setting can make it tricky for you to figure out who you are on your own. You might struggle with making your own choices or feel unsure about how to set boundaries without causing a stir.

If this sounds familiar, you're not alone. It's important to recognize that while family support is wonderful, having space to grow into your own person is just as vital.

# WHY DOES IT FLY UNDER THE RADAR AND WHY DOES IT HAPPEN?



Ever wonder why the super closeness in some families just seems normal? It's often because we grow up thinking that's just how families are. Sometimes, questioning it feels like rocking the boat too much or it just doesn't seem worth the hassle. But if we don't take a step back to see what's really going on, we might end up accidentally passing these patterns on to the next generation without even realizing it.

Family enmeshment can stem from a variety of sources, deeply influenced by the specific dynamics and histories of each family. Here are some common root causes of family enmeshment:

1. Trauma and Stress: Families often become enmeshed as a response to trauma or ongoing stress. This could be related to illness, addiction, financial problems, or a history of abuse within the family. The family members may pull closely together in an attempt to cope with the stress or trauma, leading to overly intertwined relationships.
2. Cultural/Religious Factors: Some cultural backgrounds or religions emphasize loyalty over individuality. In these cases, the line between close family ties and enmeshment may be particularly thin, with generational patterns reinforcing these dynamics.
3. Parenting Styles: Overprotective or overly involved parenting can also lead to enmeshment. Parents who struggle with their own boundaries may rely on their children for emotional support or involve themselves excessively in their children's lives, blurring the lines between parent and child roles.
4. Lack of Boundaries: Families that lack clear boundaries between members are more prone to enmeshment. This might be due to unclear communication about personal needs and space or from a family history where boundaries were not respected or valued.

While enmeshment can in the short term provide a sense of security and closeness, it often limits personal growth and individual autonomy. Over time, this can lead to difficulties in external relationships and personal decision-making, as individuals may not develop a strong sense of self-independent from their family.



# SIGNS THAT YOU MAY COME FROM AN ENMESHED FAMILY

*If you check 5 boxes or more, enmeshment is a topic worth exploring further for yourself and potentially with a therapist.*

**Y   N**

- |                          |                          |  |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I hate confrontation.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | My family members drop in unannounced or call several times per day  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | There's pressure to remain physically close to home and engage in family activities over pursuing my individual interests. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I struggle with boundaries.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | My family expects me to ask for their help and input when it comes to decision-making.                                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I tend to seek my family's approval before making decisions.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | There are unwritten rules that I go along with in my family because "that's just the way it is."                           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I find it difficult to identify my own wants and needs.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I feel a responsibility to play the role of rescuer or caretaker in my family.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I can't stand it when a family member is upset with me.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I don't always trust myself to make responsible decisions.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | There are consequences to not falling in line with what is expected of me within the family.                               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | My parent relies on me for emotional support.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I feel stressed keeping things from my family, big or small.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I feel guilty if I spend too much time away from family  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I can't stand it when a family member is upset with me.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | If I don't agree with my parent(s), they may view it as a betrayal.  |



# 10 TIPS FOR MANAGING ENMESHED RELATIONSHIPS



1. **Open Communication:** Start with open and honest communication about the extent of the enmeshment and its impact on your relationship. Discuss feelings, concerns, and any discomfort regarding family interactions.
2. **Set Boundaries:** It's crucial to set clear boundaries with the enmeshed family members. This could involve deciding how often you visit, how much information you share about your personal lives, and how you will handle requests for time or involvement.
3. **Educate Yourself:** Understanding the dynamics of enmeshed families can help you recognize when unhealthy patterns begin to surface. Education can come through books, workshops, or therapy focused on family systems.
4. **Counseling:** Engaging in individual therapy can provide tools to manage the influence of an enmeshed family. Therapy can offer a safe space to explore feelings and develop strategies to strengthen your relationship in the face of these challenges.
5. **Strengthen Your Relationships:** Make a conscious effort to strengthen your own relationships outside of the family context. Prioritize quality time, shared interests, and mutual goals that reinforce your connections with others.
6. **Supportive Network:** Build a supportive network of friends or other family members who understand your situation and can offer outside perspectives and support when family dynamics become overwhelming.
7. **Practice Assertiveness:** Practice assertiveness when communicating your needs and boundaries to family members. It's important to be clear and firm without being aggressive.
8. **Flexibility:** While boundaries are essential, also maintain some level of flexibility. Family dynamics can be complex and fluid, so be prepared to reassess and adjust your boundaries and strategies as needed.
9. **Normalize Independence:** Find pursuits that foster individual growth and independence, whether they are hobbies, career aspirations, or personal goals. This helps to counterbalance the effects of enmeshment.
10. **Create New Traditions:** Establish your own family traditions and rituals that can help define your unique identity and family, separate from those of the extended family.



# BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS



1. "Boundaries: When to Say Yes, How to Say No to Take Control of Your Life" by Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend.
2. "Silently Seduced: When Parents Make Their Children Partners" by Kenneth M. Adams
3. "When He's Married to Mom: How to Help Mother-Enmeshed Men Open Their Hearts to True Love and Commitment" by Kenneth M. Adams and Alexander P. Morgan
4. "The Audacity To Be You" - by Brad Reedy
5. "Codependent No More: How to Stop Controlling Others and Start Caring for Yourself" by Melody Beattie