

Dangerous Assumptions: Faulty Assumptions Cause Anxiety, Promote Immaturity, and Damage Healthy Relationships.

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Healthy individuals are slow to make assumptions. They check the facts, ask questions, and explore other perspectives before moving forward in their thinking or behavior. By contrast, those who live in dysfunctional mental health routinely make faulty and even dangerous assumptions. Consider a few examples:

- Many teens believe, "that would never happen to me" and then, based upon that faulty assumption, drive fast, abuse drugs and alcohol, or engage in risky sexual behaviors.
- A partner routinely "mind-reads" their spouse, creating false assumptions which lead to withdrawal. Over time, the marital relationship begins to crumble.
- A boy's parents believe there is a "right way" to do something, insisting that coloring within the lines of life is better than straying outside them. Based upon that assumption, the child's creativity is squashed while his fear of failure skyrockets. This often leads to child anxiety and a strained parent/child relationship.

With faulty assumptions causing so many problems, why do people make them? Why are they not more careful to check their assumptions ? Three thoughts:

1.) Assumptions are often made to reduce fears, paradoxically causing even more disequilibrium within a individual when the assumptions fail. Human beings hate vulnerability and strive to create a personal world free from mystery, risk of failure, and exposure to humiliation. Citizens of the United States are particularly disillusioned by the belief they can control their environments and determine their destinies. Twenty-percent of adult Americans are disordered with anxiety whereas ninety-four percent of adult Mexicans have NEVER experienced a depressive or anxious episode. What's the difference? The illusion of control and the accompanying assumptions. Two hurricanes strike Mexico in one year, injuring thousands and leaving many homeless. The citizens pick up the pieces and rebuild with little drama. They make no assumptions regarding their control over the environment or their government's ability to respond to devastating disasters. Katrina hits New Orleans, millions of dollars and countless hours are spent to determine who's to blame for not being more prepared. The assumption is that the consequences of a category 5 Hurricane can be predicted and properly managed. The assumptions lead to anger and anxiety when they are not fulfilled.

2.) Assumptions are often made to answer the question "why?" Human brains are pattern oriented in thought and behavior. The saying, "I'm a creature of habit" has scientific validity. When an experience is outside a person's pattern of understanding, an alarm goes off inside the brain which causes anxious feelings. When Keith girlfriend unexpectedly broke-up with him, he was shocked and bewildered, wondering WHY it happened. To calm his anxious feelings regarding his part in the break-up, he creates assumptions, assumptions that help him make sense of it and place him in a more favorable light. "She must not be ready for a mature relationship," he tells himself. The fear that it could be something more significant within him that needs changing is too threatening to consider, so he places the blame on her to help him cope with his anxious feelings.

3.) Assumptions are made when communication breaks down. A couple, or a parent and child, may be trapped in the vortex of anger, disappointment, and shame. Communication may be fragile or even at a complete standstill. Because communication is fractured, assumptions fill the void of understanding. When feelings between individuals are negative, so will be the assumptions. There's no alternative. Fearful emotions produce faulty, negative assumptions which then are projected onto the other as if they have been proven in a court of law. When dialog resumes, the conversation centers upon the faulty assumptions and not on the actual truth. The individuals find themselves saying things like, "I know you were thinking that, don't lie", countered with, "I never thought that", "that's not what I meant", "that's not what I believe." It becomes a duck-and-roll exercise to fend off the assumptions.

How many people have been wronged by faulty assumptions? How many relationships have fallen under the attack of such assaults? Faulty assumptions destroy friendships and families, convince people to make bad financial investments, and lead individuals to experience depression and anxiety. Impulsively reacting based upon faulty assumptions may ease short-term anxiety, but tends to create further damage and destruction which only heightens fear and worry all the more. How fear is managed is exceedingly important.

So, the next time you find yourself so sure about something, SLOW DOWN and determine if your surety is based upon an assumption or something more substantial and credible. Ask questions. Be humble and maintain an attitude of grace and patience. Explore different perspectives. Seek understanding more than being understood. Cultivating healthy communication allows us to reduce our faulty assumptions and live free of many fears and anxieties. Healthy individuals deal with reality rather than deny it or run from it. Keith may experience pain in dealing with the truth of the break-up, but he will mature through the process and become a better person. As the Bible says, "But let everyone be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger" (James 1:19); for "On the lips of the discerning, wisdom is found" (Proverbs 10:13). By doing this, being slow to form assumptions, you will save yourself and others from a world of pain.

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Turnaround: Turning Fear into Freedom, is a professionally developed, comprehension audio program for the treatment of child anxiety. It is highly entertaining for children, utilizing the talents of 14 child actors and 6 adult actors. It includes a 72-page workbook and has been shown to greatly reduce, if not eliminate, the symptoms associated with child anxiety. Many parents find it an excellent tool to facilitate dialog with their anxious child about his or her fears. Further information can be obtained by following the website link.

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