

# 'Personality Imprints'

## Avoider

'Anger is more useful than despair' (61-65)

- "I'm just not a big feeler." (61)
  - o Avoiders tend to have a limited range of emotions because they've spent almost their entire lives suppressing them. "Most can no longer feel a desire for emotional connection and have no memory of longing to be close."

Some may think they're just naturally unemotional, but the authors point them to the example of infants- have you ever seen a baby who never expressed any feelings?

- "What's so great about comfort?" (61)

o Because avoiders have been trained never to ask for emotional support, they don't know how to ask for comfort. They have so much practice turtling inward when they're upset it usually takes a significant emotional blow before they feel uncomfortable.

- "I don't want to talk about it." (61-62)

o It's not even just that they don't want to talk about how they feel; they're completely unprepared to. They spent their formative years being encouraged to button their



Photo by Forest Runner (Flickr)

lip, so they have no experience articulating what's going on inside.

- "Just give me space." (62)

o One of the ways avoiders maintain emotional control is by keeping others at a distance. "If pushed to be vulnerable, they are likely to respond with frustration

and effectively push others away. Anger is the feeling most accessible to avoiders since it's not vulnerable, but rather powerful and tends to repel others."

- "I am a rock; I am an island." (62-63)

o Because avoiders have never

experienced emotional connection, they don't know what they're missing.

"Spouses of avoiders say they sometimes feel like they're purposefully being ignored." They're used to making decisions on their own and rarely consult their spouse for advice.

- "I get the job done." (63)

o They give by doing. They've learned excelling at something attracts praise, but neediness results in rejection.

- "At least I have the dog." (63)

o They often shower pets with the affection they can't give other people.

- "At least I have this one good feeling." (64)

o Many teens with avoider imprints turn to pornography, casual sex, or other reckless behaviors for emotional gratification.

- "I don't cry." (64-65)

o Because demonstrating "weak" emotions during childhood brought shame and rejection, it's difficult for adult avoiders to feel sadness. They may have tremendous difficulty processing grievous events such as the death of a child.

## Controller

'My way or the highway' (113-114)

- "It's either me or you." (113)
  - o Controllers cannot compromise because they've never seen it done. Someone either wins or loses, there is no middle ground. This is why they have to be in charge- it grows out of their personality. If they were more passive, their upbringing would have turned them into a victim, but because they're not, they're turned into an aggressor.

- "I don't want you out of my sight." (113)

o Because controllers never felt they were important to their parents, they expect rejection and abandonment. To prevent it, they keep their spouse from getting close to others and may interrogate them about daily activities.

- "Don't question me." (113)

o Controllers often use subterfuge to get what they want. Threats to this façade are met with an angry defense.

- "I didn't do anything wrong." (113-114)

o Controllers are convinced other people deserve what they get because they have trouble feeling remorse and repentance. This helps them justify their abusive behavior. They may apologize to their victim after an angry outburst in an attempt to draw them back in and regain control.



- "How could you be so stupid?" (114)
  - o Family members are often criticized and belittled. "Withdrawing, threats of abandonment, beatings, and withholding money all serve to keep others in line."

- "Anger keeps me safe." (114)
  - o Anger quiets the voice inside a controller's head that tells them they're inadequate. Their childhood did nothing to prepare them for dealing with adulthood, and their angry outbursts are reactions to insecurity.

- "I quit my job, my boss is a jerk." (114)

o They chafe under authority. "They impulsively quit jobs with no forethought to the consequences. Or their unexplained absences from work and irresponsible behavior result in job loss and financial instability."

## Victim

'Nothing's going on' (114-117)

- "It's not so bad." (114-115)
  - o People with victim imprints endure intolerable circumstances through mental contortions that render them tolerable. They deny how insufferable their homelife really is by tolerating, excusing, and rationalizing it. Their behavior is reminiscent of the toad that allows itself to be boiled alive because it doesn't notice how much hotter the pot becomes as the stove slowly heats.

To them, anything is better than being alone. And because their partner often blames the victim for the abuse, they believe, if only they could "get it right" it would go away.

- "It's hopeless." (115)

o "Even when resources such as money, shelter, or a caring person are available, victims often reject them, acting on feelings of worthlessness and hopelessness that are ingrained and pervasive."

- "Numb is better." (115)

o Because so many of the feelings they experience are painful, victims eventually learn to shut feelings off. The horrors of their life stop affecting them and they turn into automations just going through the motions of living.

- "I'll be good." (116)

o Victims give controllers whatever they want in

order to avoid their wrath. "When controllers make jealous inquiries as to their daily activities, victims will provide information, and when controllers make requests, victims will participate in dangerous, uncomfortable behaviors that often include sexual exploitation."

- "The secret is safe with me."/"I don't feel well." (116-117)

o Victims know they will be punished if they tell anyone about what goes on at home, so they don't. And because they and their abuser's playacting may convince those around them they're just as healthy and normal as anyone else, people sometimes don't believe the victim if they try tell someone what's actually going on at home.

o The burden of hiding this secret often manifests itself in physical ailments such as headaches, gastric problems, fatigue, weight problems, high blood pressure, etc.

## Vacillator

'I want you to want me' (91-98)

- "I'm trying to figure it out." (91)
  - o Because their interactions with their parents are so inconsistent, vacillator children become "confused and hyperattuned to signs of connection and abandonment." They learn to assess the emotional temperature of those around them and base their behavior on that. They put a lot of effort into reading other people, and then get frustrated when they can't get the attention they want.

- "I have a right to be angry." (93)

o Adults with a vacillator imprint tend to feel anxiety blanketed by anger. Their preoccupation with their own unpleasant feelings angers them. Quick to feel neglected or unwanted, vacillators experience a building tension as their fruitless waiting and desperate wanting bring them close to childhood pain." They tend to lash out at their partner as an attempt to draw them back in an attempt to soothe them.

- "It's love at first sight!" (94-95)

o Because they have worked since childhood to read others and transform themselves into whoever those people need them to be, vacillators tend to make instantaneous, magnetic connections with others. They launch into relationships with a powerful need for connection. They're wary of any hints of separation or distancing. Because everything feels so potent, they and their partner may often fail to notice any red flags.

- "I want out, then I want in it." (95-96)

o Vacillators feel nervous when their partners are gone because they fear abandonment. But they also feel nervous when they're with them because they don't trust the relationship will work out. This leads them to sabotage many of their relationships, because then, it ends on their terms.

- "Why don't you want me?" (96)

It's difficult for everyone to deal with the transformation their relationship undergoes after the honeymoon period fades. But vacillators have such grand expectations they're devastated by the let-down. This often triggers their anger and intensity and leads to them lashing out at their spouse.

- "You are the problem. If you would change, I'd be happy." (97)

o Because they're so attuned to reading others, vacillators rarely turn inward and examine their own brokenness. They desperately look to others to "provide relief from their anxiety about possible abandonment... Vacillators have difficulty seeing their part in destructive patterns and more readily focus on the ways others hurt them."

- "Make me feel special." (97-98)

o Everyone wants to make a home for themselves in the hearts of their loved ones, but vacillators need to have an exclusive position in that person's life. "They want to feel as though they have the greatest access to and privileges with the person, and they are deeply hurt if they see that time and attention directed elsewhere." They feel agitated and jealous if they don't get what they want and often end the relationship.

## Pleaser

'Everyone just walks all over me' (81-85)

- "I'm not worried; I'm just stressed." (81)
  - o You feel an ever-present undercurrent of what you think to be stress, but is most likely anxiety.

- "I just want to be with you."
  - o You avoid spending time away from your spouse or children.

- "I'm only trying to help" (82)
  - o You make yourself feel less anxious by assuaging the cares of others, and feel hurt when your spouse doesn't want your help.

- "How am I doing?"
  - o You're depend on others praising your performance.

- "Whatever you decide"
  - o Your insecurity keeps you from making decisions without help.

- "Don't get mad; I'm only trying to be nice" (83)

o You do "nice" things as a means of taking your partner's emotional temperature. "These pleasers may believe they just want more out of relationships than others. But in reality they're trying to soothe the anxious core within." (84)

- "If things stay the same, I know what to expect." (84)

o You take a cautious approach to life. Even if you aren't happy with the way things are, it's the devil you know. You may even turn down good things, such as a promotion, because you're afraid of the unknown challenges.

- "Everybody wants too much"
  - o Resentment builds because you've been ignoring and minimizing your frustrations. It doesn't help that you're reluctant to establish boundaries. You take on too much and get angry at people you couldn't tell "no."

- "What do I want?"
  - o You've spent so much time giving to others that it's made you a poor receiver. You're often too focused on the needs of others to know your own. You're also often unaware of how anxious and fearful you are.

- "Aren't you scared?" (85)
  - o You expect others to be react to things with fear (like you did growing up), so you overemphasize the need for caution. You "may inappropriately intervene to protect [your] children."



Photo by Michal Marcol (FreeDigitalPhotos)