



INNER CHILD WORK

Understanding and overcoming negative injunctions

WHAT IS AN INJUNCTION?

In the context of Transactional Analysis (TA), an injunction is a negative command or message that a person internalises, usually during childhood. These messages often come from parents or authority figures and can deeply affect your behaviour, beliefs, and emotional health in adulthood.

The injunctions create confusion between your own beliefs and the adopted beliefs of others. Inner Child Work involves recognising the harmful injunctions and transforming them to promote healing and personal growth.

The 12 Injunctions and their impact on adulthood

1. DON'T BE (DON'T EXIST)

DESCRIPTION: The message that one's existence is unwanted or unnecessary. This often leads to feelings of invisibility and worthlessness.

CHILD'S FEELING: The child feels unwanted and that their presence is a burden.

IMPACT: Adults may feel like they don't deserve to occupy space, leading to issues like low self-esteem and self-destructive behaviours.

2. DON'T BE YOU

DESCRIPTION: A directive that one's true self is not accepted. This can cause confusion and a lack of self-identity.

CHILD'S FEELING: The child usually feels they must hide their true self to be loved or accepted.

IMPACT: Adults often struggle with identity issues, constantly trying to be someone they are not to gain approval or love.

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3. DON'T BE A CHILD

DESCRIPTION: The expectation to act more mature or responsible than appropriate for one's age. This denies the child the freedom to explore and enjoy their childhood.

CHILD'S FEELING: The child feels pressured to grow up too fast and miss out on the joys of childhood.

IMPACT: This can lead to taking on excessive responsibilities early in life, resulting in stress, anxiety, and difficulty relaxing or enjoying life.

4. DON'T GROW UP

DESCRIPTION: A desire from caregivers for the child to remain dependent and small. This stifles the child's natural development and autonomy.

CHILD'S FEELING: The child feels constrained and discouraged from pursuing independence.

IMPACT: Adults may resist taking on adult responsibilities, fear independence, or feel incapable of managing their own lives.

5. DON'T MAKE IT

DESCRIPTION: A desire from caregivers for the child to remain dependent and small. This stifles the child's natural development and autonomy.

CHILD'S FEELING: The child feels constrained and discouraged from pursuing independence.

IMPACT: Adults may resist taking on adult responsibilities, fear independence, or feel incapable of managing their own lives.

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6. DON'T BE IMPORTANT

DESCRIPTION: The idea that one's needs and desires are less important than others'. This invalidates the child's sense of self-worth.

CHILD'S FEELING: The child feels insignificant and that their needs do not matter.

IMPACT: Adults may struggle to assert themselves, prioritise others over themselves, and have difficulty asking for what they need.

7. DON'T BELONG

DESCRIPTION: The belief that one does not fit in or belong anywhere. This creates a pervasive sense of alienation.

CHILD'S FEELING: The child feels isolated and excluded, believing they do not fit in anywhere.

IMPACT: This can lead to feelings of isolation, difficulty forming relationships, and a pervasive sense of being an outsider.

8. DON'T BE CLOSE

DESCRIPTION: A warning against forming close, intimate relationships. This fosters fear of intimacy and connection

CHILD'S FEELING: The child feels scared to get close to others, fearing rejection or hurt.

IMPACT: Adults may have trust issues, fear vulnerability, and struggle with forming and maintaining intimate relationships.

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9. DON'T BE WELL

DESCRIPTION: The notion that being healthy or well is not acceptable. This promotes neglect of self-care and well-being. Sickness potentially brings secondary advantages when parents only pay attention to the child when the child is not well.

CHILD'S FEELING: The child feels guilty or undeserving of health and wellness. The child learns to get attention from others by being unwell or unstable.

IMPACT: This may manifest in psychosomatic illnesses, neglecting health, or feeling guilty for being well.

10. DON'T THINK

DESCRIPTION: Discouragement of independent thinking and questioning. This suppresses the child's intellectual growth and autonomy.

CHILD'S FEELING: The child feels that their thoughts and ideas are not valued or valid

IMPACT: Adults may doubt their judgment, defer to others for decisions, and struggle with critical thinking.

11. DON'T FEEL

DESCRIPTION: The message that emotions are wrong or dangerous. This leads to emotional repression and difficulty in expressing feelings.

CHILD'S FEELING: The child feels ashamed or afraid of their emotions, believing they are unacceptable.

IMPACT: This often leads to emotional repression, difficulty expressing feelings, and emotional numbness.

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12. DON'T DO ANYTHING

DESCRIPTION: A directive against taking initiative or making changes. This stifles the child's natural curiosity and initiative.

CHILD'S FEELING: The child feels powerless and afraid to take any action or make decisions.

IMPACT: Adults may experience inertia, fear taking risks, and have trouble initiating actions or making decisions.

Doing Inner Child Work

Inner Child Work helps to identify these injunctions, understand their origins, and start reparenting the inner child by transforming the negative messages and therefore changing the negative reality your inner child lives in.

Reflective Exercise

IDENTIFY YOUR INJUNCTIONS: Reflect on your childhood and identify any messages you received that might correspond to the above injunctions.

START CHANGING INNER DIALOGUE: Transform the negative commands into affirming messages that correspond to your inner child needs. For example, if you received the message "Don't be important," say to your inner child "Your needs and feelings are important to me."

PRACTICE SELF-COMPASSION: Treat your inner child with kindness and compassion, acknowledging the painful reality of negative injunctions and offering support and understanding.

Recognising and working through these injunctions is a crucial step in Inner Child Work. By addressing the internalised messages, you can release the hold they have on your life and move towards a healthier, more authentic self.

If you want to know more about Inner Child Work, don't hesitate to contact me anna@being-aware.co.uk