

# The Eight Concepts of Bowen Theory

## 1. Differentiation of Self (Scale of Differentiation)

- Usually represented as a spectrum that includes the concepts of
  - i. Closeness (intense relationships with others and their actions are dependent on what others think) and
  - ii. Separateness (be in emotional contact with others yet still independent emotionally)
- A well differentiated person has a greater capacity to define themselves while staying connected with others in the system.
- Refers to the ability to think as an individual while staying meaningfully connected to others.
- It describes the varying capacity each person has to balance their emotions and their intellect, and to balance their need to be attached with their need to be a separate self.

## 2. Triangles

- A three-point configuration that can include three persons (or groups) or may include two persons (group) and an issue. This is a natural way that we handle anxiety.
  - i. When anxiety increases between two persons, they turn to a third person to relieve the anxiety.

## 3. Nuclear Family Emotional Process

- This involves taking a look at the emotional process patterns in the nuclear family.
- Typical patterns include:
  - i. Emotional distancing
  - ii. Marital conflict – intense energy invested in the “other” spouse
  - iii. Dysfunctional behavior (illness) in a spouse – over-functioning/under-functioning reciprocity
  - iv. Projection of problems onto a child (focused child/triangling)

## 4. Family Projection Process

- This refers to a particular emotional process in the family.
- The parents project their undifferentiation or conflict onto a child who then becomes the identified patient

## 5. Multigenerational Transmission Process

- This concept is related to the family projection process but it takes a multigenerational look at projection.

## 6. Sibling Position

- Taking a look at the roles inherent in a child’s position as youngest, oldest, middle etc. based on Walter Toman’s sibling position profiles.

## 7. Emotional Cutoff

- Refers to a child or adult’s emotional cutoff (more extreme than distancing) from their family of origin
- Typical reactions
  - i. Running away
  - ii. Cutting off all contact
  - iii. Denying the importance of the family of origin

## 8. Societal Emotional Process (Societal Regression)

- Society is more or less anxious at different times in history
- Emotional problems in society are similar to the emotional problems in the family
- High anxiety often seen in reactivity, a herding mentality, blaming and a desire for quick-fix solutions are signs of societal regression.