

INDIVIDUATION PROCESS



What You Will Learn In This Chapter

- ☆ An explanation of the individuation process
- ☆ Insight into what your adolescent is experiencing during the individuation process
- ☆ Predictable areas of an adolescent's rebellion
- ☆ How to accept your adolescent's appearance
- ☆ Why the individuation process must happen in order for an individual to be a healthy adult

What Does Individuation Look Like?

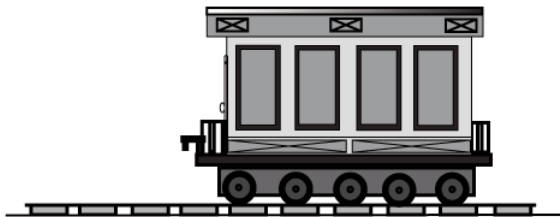
If puberty feels like having a tire blow out on the freeway, individuation seems like a train car unexpectedly uncoupling from its engine. The engine has always pulled and directed the individual car. The engine has supported it and brought it safely to its destination. The engine has been responsible for the train car's physical well-being. The engine has controlled where the train car goes, how it gets there, and what other cars are around it.

Think of parents as the engine. We are at the controls from the moment our child is born. We have guided our sons and daughters throughout their childhood to be the best they can be. We have taught them about life. We have shared our wisdom with them at each junction or train stop as they have grown. We have been their role model, primary teacher, their emotional coach, their

cheerleader, and their spiritual director. We have set limits and given consequences when they were needed to help our children grow.

Even though we have often grown tired and weary after ten years of being the full time “engine,” we realize that our job is expected to go on until our children are at least eighteen. So for most parents it comes as a real shock when our adolescents decide on their own that they are ready to uncouple from their engine and venture out on their own at eleven, twelve, or thirteen years of age. We, as parents, realize they are definitely not ready to be on their own so young and most parents resist their children’s attempts to “uncouple.” As a result of this resistance, the battles often begin.

There is a much simpler way to help our children during this time of their lives. It begins by acknowledging that our children are no longer children, but that they have grown into adolescents (eleven to nineteen years old). Next, we must be willing to understand the individuation process and accept it as an inevitable stage of life and not take it personally. Our adolescents need to go through it if they are going to grow into healthy adults. Picture your young adolescent as an uncoupled train car just sitting all alone on the train track in the middle of nowhere. He is not derailed. He hasn’t crashed. He is just sitting there. He doesn’t have the power on his own to go off onto another track. He is just sitting there declaring his independence with no plan and no way of moving forward on his own. Young adolescents from eleven to fifteen spend a lot of time trying to sound older and act older. The reality is that until they have a driver’s license and/or work permit, they are pretty much still dependent on their parents to move forward or to get anywhere for that matter. They are still very dependent on their parents to get most of their needs met.



PICTURE YOUR ADOLESCENT AS AN UNCOUPLED TRAIN CAR JUST SITTING ON THE TRACKS DECLARING HIS INDEPENDENCE WITH NO REAL POWER TO MOVE ANYWHERE ON HIS OWN.

After sixteen, adolescents move into a very different stage of their lives. (But that’s a different book!) That stage is where they can uncouple from their engine and find the power to move out on their own. Sixteen-year-olds and older are in a very different place emotionally and psychologically than eleven- through

fifteen-year-olds. When parents continue to work to increase their young adolescent's emotional intelligence throughout these challenging years, the remainder of adolescence moves along much smoother also.

What Is Individuation?

Individuation is the necessary process all individuals go through in order to become healthy adults. It is the time when individuals challenge their family's values, morals, authority, rules, religion, and just about anything else which is important to their parents. It is the time in a young person's life when they test their parent's beliefs, ethics, morals, and values. In fact, adolescents test their parents over and over again. One of the reasons for this is that adolescents want to know if their parent really believes what they are continually telling, lecturing, or preaching to them, or if it is just lip service.

★* EQ WISDOM *★

**INDIVIDUATION IS A NECESSARY PROCESS FOR AN
INDIVIDUAL TO GO THROUGH IN ORDER TO
BECOME A HEALTHY ADULT.
BE PATIENT AND DO NOT TAKE IT PERSONALLY!**

It is a difficult time for a parent. Young adolescents aren't easy on their parents. But our adolescents need us to be there as parents during these years. In fact, they need us to be stronger than ever during this testing. You might even say by eleven or twelve years old, and definitely by thirteen, a young adolescent is relentless in his testing. You, the parent, are under a microscope. The positive reality of the individuation process is that usually at the end of the turmoil created during this time, the young adult who emerges more often than not chooses to take on many of their family values which they have been resisting. The wonderful truth of this is that when the young adult begins to incorporate these values and morals into his own life, it is because he chooses to do so. It is not because his parents have told him to. In other words, the values and morals become his own. The young adult no longer sees his choices as a result of his parent's insistence, but a free choice he has made because he wants to live his life that way. The final process happens very gradually and although parents would enjoy celebrating it, they often don't recognize it for years to come.

Depending on the possible damage done to the parent-child relationship during this potentially tumultuous time, some parents never have the