

Who Am I in Different Settings?

Read the article first. This worksheet accompanies *Who are you? How to stop conforming to expectations and to start presenting the self you would like to present* at ThoughtsFromATherapist.com, which explores how each setting draws out a different self and why a family system resists our change. Search “stop conforming to expectations” on the site to find it.

Most of us present differently in different settings, consciously and unconsciously. That is ordinary. A coherent identity forms through the ability to move across roles and contexts without losing continuity: consistent, and not fixed. This sheet looks at how each setting expects us to be, then at one way of showing up we would like to present less. A few words per space is enough.

PART ONE The settings	For each setting, how do I show up (what I say, feel, and do), and how am I encouraged or expected to be there? The expectation is often unspoken and rarely intentional.
PART TWO The counter questions	Statements that begin with “I am...” can harden into a fixed role. Two questions loosen them. <i>Am I always that way, no matter the situation?</i> <i>Can I imagine a situation in which I would not be that way?</i>
PART THREE One self to present less	Pick one way of showing up that leaves us or the people around us uncomfortable. Trace what calls it forward, what its purpose is, where it began, and what the system around us gets from it. <i>What would the self I would like to present instead look like?</i> <i>How could I help the people in that setting accept it?</i>
PART FOUR The system	Families are some of the most stable systems there are. Touch one figure on a mobile and all of them move, so when one person changes, the system pushes back toward the old role. Transparency helps: telling the system directly what we are changing and what would help.

A WORKED EXAMPLE: THE POLITICAL SELF AT FAMILY HOLIDAYS

THE SELF	Starting political arguments, turning light conversations into deep polarized debates.
WHERE IT SURFACED	Mostly at holidays with family, though it came up in many places.
WHAT CALLED IT FORWARD	Old feelings from school years of being out of place, different, and unaccepted.
ITS PURPOSE	To be right. To take power by out-arguing people. To manage guilt about unearned advantages.
WHAT THE SYSTEM DID	Became guarded and defensive, and debated preemptively so as not to lose.
WHY CHANGE	It felt isolating, defensive, and rigid, and it interrupted the joy in the family.
TRANSPARENCY	Telling the family about the plan to read less politics and avoid political talk, and asking them to let those conversations pass.
HOW IT WENT	Relatively easy, because the family also wanted that self to show up less. Change is harder when the system does not want it.

Having more than one self is ordinary human variation. It does not mean something is wrong with us.

How I show up across settings

For each setting, two columns: what I do, and what the setting expects of me.

SETTING	Parents, siblings, the holiday table.	
My family of origin	HOW I SHOW UP	WHAT THIS SETTING EXPECTS OF ME

SETTING	At home, in ordinary time and in conflict.	
My partner or closest person	HOW I SHOW UP	WHAT THIS SETTING EXPECTS OF ME

SETTING	Colleagues, clients, the people above and below me.	
Work	HOW I SHOW UP	WHAT THIS SETTING EXPECTS OF ME

SETTING	Old friends and new ones, one at a time and in a group.	
Friends	HOW I SHOW UP	WHAT THIS SETTING EXPECTS OF ME

SETTING	With someone I trust, and with someone I don't.	
Trusted or untrusted	HOW I SHOW UP	WHAT THIS SETTING EXPECTS OF ME

How conditions change who shows up

The same person under different conditions. Fill in both sides of each pair.

CONDITIONS

**Judged or
accepted**

When I feel judged or attacked, and when I feel accepted.

JUDGED OR ATTACKED

ACCEPTED

CONDITIONS

**Tired or
comfortable**

Cold, tired, hungry, or uncomfortable, and when the body is at ease.

DEPLETED

AT EASE

CONDITIONS

**Privileged or
marginalized**

When a setting gives me standing, and when it leaves me on the edge.

PRIVILEGED

MARGINALIZED

CONDITIONS

**Different or
shared beliefs**

Around people who see the world differently, and around people who share most of my beliefs.

DIFFERENT BELIEFS

SHARED BELIEFS

LOOKING ACROSS THE GRID

Am I always that way, no matter the situation? Can I imagine a situation in which I would not be?

WHERE I FEEL MOST LIKE MYSELF:

A SELF I WISH SHOWED UP MORE OFTEN:

A SELF I WOULD LIKE TO PRESENT LESS:

One self to present less

Change in one person asks the whole system to change, and systems resist. Insight first, then transparency.

TRACING IT

Answer with curiosity. This self has had a job.

WHAT FEELINGS, THOUGHTS, AND EXPECTATIONS CALL THIS SELF FORWARD?

ITS PURPOSE: WHAT IS IT TRYING TO DO FOR ME?

WHERE AND WITH WHOM DOES IT SHOW UP MOST? WHAT DO I DO THAT LETS IT TAKE OVER?

HOW DID IT COME TO BE? WHAT IS HISTORICALLY SIGNIFICANT ABOUT IT?

WHAT DOES THE SYSTEM GET FROM IT, AND WHAT WOULD HAVE TO CHANGE IF I CHANGED?

SAYING IT TO THE SYSTEM

Direct, without blame. Adjust the wording until it sounds like me.

I'VE USUALLY SHOWN UP AS... AND I CAN SEE YOU HAVE ALL COME TO EXPECT THAT FROM ME.

I THINK I CAME TO IT PARTLY BECAUSE...

I WANT TO CHANGE BECAUSE WHEN I SHOW UP THAT WAY I FEEL...

I'M AIMING TO BE MORE... IT WOULD HELP IF YOU...

Change is harder when someone else's sense of self depends on our old role. Social support matters, and we have some say over the settings we place ourselves in.