



Contributed by Tracey Coulon, LICSW

The mother-daughter relationship is often complex because there are expectations to be the perfect mother or the good little girl. If you are a mom or daughter and your relationship is not perfect, it does not mean there isn't love, compassion or caring involved. It may mean that what you share isn't enough to meet your needs or perhaps that you are not understanding of one another. There is no such thing as the perfect mother-daughter relationship, but like any relationship, it takes work and communication by both parties to improve. The reality is that people make mistakes and bad decisions or choices that affect not only ourselves but others around us, and that affect may be felt for years to come.

Sometimes, what affects our bond as mother-daughter is not related to our choices. Rather, our relationship is negatively impacted due to mental or physical health issues, addiction or death.

It is amazing how one can carry with them experiences from the past. It's that little voice in our head that can guide us into the right or wrong direction. Our interpretations of our experiences can be so different from one person to another. For example, if five people were to witness an accident there could be five different versions of what happened based on our how we perceive it. Our past experiences, perceptions of experiences, achievements, challenges and role models all play a factor in who we are today. For many, the past can shape the future and mirror that of what one experienced growing up. For others, the past is a catalyst for change to ensure a different or better future.

Just because Mom does what Grandma did doesn't make it right. Mom does what she learned without questioning why or looking at other ways of doing something. How often do we find ourselves

following the same pattern. You might say, "Well they did it to me and I turned out fine!" Or the opposite, "I will never say or do that to my kids," and in a moment of anger out come those words or actions you vowed never to say or do! How does that happen?

For most daughters, mothers are the primary role model for how to be a woman, mother and friend. What happens to the relationship when there has been abuse or neglect involved, or any kind of trauma? Most people have traumas of one kind or another in their life, whether it's a severe trauma such as sexual assault, fire, neglect, abuse, something that would affect anyone. Others experience a less severe trauma that can be anything having a significant impact on you. For example, if kids made fun of you when you were young because you had freckles, that might be something

that you don't like about yourself even as an adult. One way that original experience effects you is that it becomes a "lens" or view you look through as you experience and interpret situations. You may see freckles as a bad quality, however freckles don't make you a better or worse person – they are just freckles.

The younger a person is and the more chronic the trauma is, the more severe an impact it can have, even shaping personalities. Experiences, big or small (and how we interpret them) can affect our self esteem, our relationships with partners, children and the choices we make. Perceptions of how things were handled in traumatic circumstances and during the aftermath may also shape whether or not we felt protected, believed, loved, etc.

All of this may play a role in the mother-daughter relationship and whether it is strong or strained. It can be awkward to discuss the relationship itself if there is work to be done to improve. Barriers to communication such as defensiveness or shame often get in the way. Resolution doesn't need to occur nor do both people need to agree. Sometimes just discussing what you need in a nonjudgmental environment can help to give you the perspective needed to enhance the relationship. Obviously, we can't change the past but it might be a matter of thinking about your perceptions differently. Often times we hold onto our pain. Ever wonder why suddenly you feel like a kid when you are with your mom even though your 40? Sometimes we rationalize the way things were with our brain, but our hearts still hold the pain. All of this plays a role in the mother-daughter relationship.

If you're interested in learning more about the mother-daughter relationship, join us for an 8 week session, Tuesdays, March 24 to May 12, 5:30 to 6:30 p.m. at Elliot Behavioral Health Services, 445 Cypress St. Suite 8. For more information or to register call 663-8617.

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