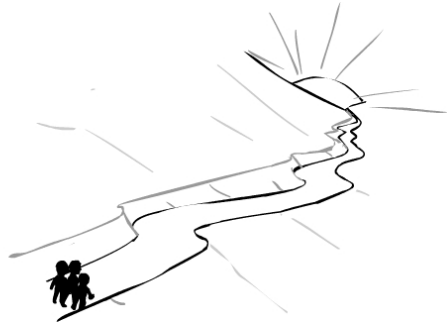


- Chapter One -



The TRANSITIONAL YEARS

You are finishing or have already finished high school and are ready for the rest of your life. Over the next few years, you will grow and change a lot, make relationships, and get going on a career. Welcome to the *Transitional* years! Most people find this to be a *great*, even *magical* time of life—full of growth, exploration, joy, and just plain fun. Enjoy these years and learn all you can about yourself and you will gain the skills and confidence to lead a successful and happy life. This Chapter will talk about three fundamental ideas—your *Prism*, *Style*, and *Identity*, including *Sexuality*.

YOUR PERSONAL PRISM

You look at the world and everything around you through your own *prism*—your unique perspective that comes partly from your genes and partly from past experiences and relationships with others. The more you understand about your prism, the more you can build the confidence you will need to manage relationships and solve problems. Let's look at how you can examine the *prism*.

Think about how your life experiences have determined who you are and how you see the world. Those experiences include messages you received from others—family, friends, school, community, and strangers. You absorbed these experiences and messages into your emotional makeup, often without question. Some messages may have been positive and boosted your self-esteem: "You are brilliant" (or talented). Others may have been not so flattering: "You are "stupid" (or lazy or selfish). What messages about yourself did you accept from others?

There were also ideas you developed about yourself—what kind of person you are and what expectations you have about yourself and the world. These, too, can be positive or negative, realistic or unrealistic, giving a light or dark cast to the prism. "I am the best" (or the worst). "I have to be perfect" (or "make A's, be cool, be thin, please my parents, get into college, get a relationship.") What ideas about yourself did you develop?

Genetics, past experiences, and our own ideas about ourselves blend together to make us optimistic or pessimistic when problems arise. If you are an optimist, you will think, "I won't let this get me down -- everything will turn out okay." If you are more of a pessimist, you will be more uncertain: "If I fail, I am worthless." "Nothing ever seems to turn out right for me." Which are you?

As you go along, get to know your *prism*. Examine your assumptions about the world and yourself, as these will color everything you do. Are your expectations of yourself and the world overly negative or positive? An overly negative view can defeat you and add more difficulty to a situation than it deserves! An overly positive view can lead to disappointments again and again. This is the time of life when you can "rebalance" your expectations of yourself and the world and reconstitute that *prism*!

Tools:

1. Make a list of terms that best describe first, how you feel about yourself, and second, how you feel about trying out new situations.

2. Now, try these experiments:

A. You are preparing something for school or work. As you do this, tell yourself that you will do the *best* you can, and no matter what the outcome, you will learn something useful. And guess what? Maybe your *best* is pretty darn good. A wise doctor realized as a young man: "I'm just as good as the next guy, and in some areas, maybe a little bit better!"

B. As you enter a new situation or meet new people, don't automatically assume the best or the worst about them. Try for a "neutral" stance and tell yourself you will make a judgment about it later. Then take some time to evaluate it, and don't make a snap decision.

STYLE

Just as the *prism* colors our attitude toward ourselves and the world, there is another factor that also determines how we interact with others. This is your *personality style*, and it is important to learn as much as you can about it. For example, if your style is "extroverted," you will enthusiastically enter new social situations, but if it is "introverted," you will tend to shy away from them. For example, you're invited to a party. The *extrovert* says, "I love going to parties and meeting new people!" Or you're about to meet your new roommates. The extrovert will say, "I can't wait to move into my new room and meet them!" The *introvert* says, "I don't care for parties; I hate having to make superficial conversation!" Introverts may prefer single rooms, but if they are going to have roommates, they are likely to say, "I hope they work out okay."

Although America tends toward extroversion, neither style is "better" than the other; they just are what they are. Both styles have strengths and weaknesses and create different expectations.

Extroverts tend to get into lots of situations, some good and others not so good, so they need to develop a bit of caution to avoid danger. The introvert, who is more reserved, reluctant, or apprehensive needs to step out and take a few chances! And guess what? You never know what will happen. The extrovert may not enjoy the new experience at all, while the introvert may be surprised and delighted to meet the love of his or her life! Or, if not a lifelong love, someone who can give friendship or companionship or open doors to new activities or the exploration of new ideas.

Tools:

1. To all you extroverts and introverts: Situations and people will rarely turn out to be as *good* or as *bad* as you think, so, as with the prism, try for a "neutral" stance and be open to being surprised. To you introverts: Believe it or not, the more you do the more fun you have, so take a chance and step out!

2. Not sure about your style? There is a psychological instrument that can tell you about it. It is called the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® (MBTI), and it was developed by Isabel Briggs Myers based on the work of the Swiss psychologist, Carl Jung. The MBTI® describes four axes, or pairs of contrasting personality types, of which extroverted/ introverted is just one. If you search "Myers-Briggs" on the Internet, you can learn more about this instrument. Here are the Four Axes:

Extroverted	Introverted
Sensing.....	. Intuitive
Thinking.....	Feeling
Judging.....	. Perceptive

3. Remember that everyone has some of each characteristic. No one is a "pure" example of any of these traits, but most people have preferences on each axis. Consider taking the MBTI® to learn more about your style. This will help you relate better to others by understanding yourself and them better. It can also help you to think about a career that is a good fit for your "type."

IDENTITY

It may not be easy to imagine now, but you will look back at these years as the time when you forged the major pieces of your *identity*—that core of your being that defines who you are. Some of these pieces include sexual role as male or female, sexual orientation, career path, ethics and values, and artistic, political, community, and social interests, to name a few. You already have some pieces in place from the past. Keep what is good and build on that foundation, but as you explore different aspects of life, things may shift as you enlarge your perspective. You will

confront a host of choices and make decisions about how you define yourself and conduct your life. Some of these will be easy, while others may be more challenging.

As you go along, you will also probably shed some misconceptions about yourself—ideas that needed updating, something like a software “upgrade.” Other people can teach us a lot about ourselves, helping smooth our rough edges and pushing us to change. These are adjustments we need to make in order to learn how to behave in a way that is assertive without being demanding, honest without being injurious, helpful without losing our own boundaries, inquisitive without being invasive, and cooperative without allowing ourselves to be exploited.