# Differentiation of Family System Inventory (DoFSI)

**The Differentiation of Family System Inventory (DoFSI):**
**Description, Instructions, Purpose, and Use**

The DoFSI is meant to help families both prevent problems and solve them by making some basic statements about what effective families do to protect children, provide resources for growth and development, and maintain a secure environment for these tasks.

This inventory describes interactions on a scale from 1 (Absolutely not!) to 10 (Absolutely!), and also gives you space to explain your choices, because how you think is even more important than your scores. In fact, what comes to mind (questions, situations, etc.) when you answer the questions may be the most important part of the survey. HOW you experience the way your family interacts will help you imagine your family working more cooperatively.

Please use as much of the space after each section as you want to explain how you chose your answers. There is no expectation that families score high on each item…or even on the whole survey. No family or family member is perfect. Instead, the DoFSI is meant to be a tool to help you imagine healthy family relationships. It can also help you choose clear goals as you grow individually and as a family. And finally, it can offer you ways to increase satisfaction in your relationships. The survey is meant to highlight where your family has strengths and where it might struggle to work as a team.

A total score on the DoFSI suggests how well your family works cooperatively, while individual items may offer you and your family specific goals to shoot for. Also, comparing the answers from other family members can give your family a chance to talk about how you want to grow. It's important to remember, however, that the items of this tool are not ends in themselves. The goal isn't to get high scores on each of the items just for the sake of getting high scores. The DoFSI is not a measure of performance. It is a guide to help you move toward improved functioning in accomplishing the tasks of the human family for all its members.

The DoFSI refers to your "family system" which usually means the group of people who share blood and emotional ties. As you complete this survey, use your own definition of family (family of origin, nuclear family, or whatever group of individuals you think of when you consider the word "family"). *The survey is meant to be practical, relevant, and useful to you.*

To get the most out of this instrument, come back to it regularly to reflect on your progress…or lack thereof! Also, it will be most useful if you are using it to spark discussion with each other, particularly with a family systems coach who can help you make a research project out of your family life. The more family members who are interested in and able to complete the DoFSI separately, the more useful this tool can be. As you engage in conversation about it, identify goals for growth, and work toward achieving them, the more you will enjoy increased family satisfaction.

## The Differentiation of Family System Inventory

**This inventory offers you, your family, and your clinician an opportunity to identify the strengths and struggles of your family system so that you can thoughtfully consider and intentionally implement practical ways that you and your family can move toward more optimal family functioning.**

*Circle the number that corresponds to how you experience your family, according to the following scale:*

**Absolutely not!**                                                                 **Absolutely!**
**1        2        3        4        5        6        7        8        9        10**

## Goal Structure

←————————————————————————————————————————————→

**No Clear Goals**                                                          **Developed Goals**

**Goal Structure**

1.  In my experience of our family, I feel free to develop a distinct sense of self.

    **Absolutely not!**                                                             **Absolutely!**
    **1        2        3        4        5        6        7        8        9        10**

2.  In my experience in our family, I feel free to think about, develop, and live by principles that make sense to me.

    **Absolutely not!**                                                             **Absolutely!**

    **1        2        3        4        5        6        7        8        9        10**

3.  In my experience in our family, I am free to pursue goals that fit who I am.

    **Absolutely not!**                                                             **Absolutely!**
    **1        2        3        4        5        6        7        8        9        10**

4.  In my experience of our family, we operate like a cooperative team, each making contributions based on our true capacities, to the group efforts of effective family functioning.

    **Absolutely not!**                                                             **Absolutely!**
    **1        2        3        4        5        6        7        8        9        10**

5. What came to mind (questions, scenarios, definition of family, etc.) when you answered the questions in this section on Goal Structure?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

**Systems Thinking**



**Conventional Thinking**                                                                **Systems Thinking**

**Systems Thinking**

6. When our family encounters a challenge, we ask, "How can we solve this together?" rather than, "Who made this happen?"

   **Absolutely not!**                                                          **Absolutely!**
   **1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10**

7. When one family member says there's a problem, there IS a problem, and we may all be contributing to it. We all contribute to both problems and solutions.

   **Absolutely not!**                                                          **Absolutely!**
   **1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10**

8. In my experience in our family, when our family encounters a challenge, we each do our part to resolve it.

   **Absolutely not!**                                                          **Absolutely!**
   **1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10**

9. When children in this family show difficulty adjusting to life, we think of this as a symptom of how our whole family is functioning and get very curious about that.

   **Absolutely not!**                                                          **Absolutely!**
   **1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10**

10. In our family, there's no pressure on the child/ren to conform to expectations based on perceived needs or capacities, rather than real ones.

    **Absolutely not!**                                                          **Absolutely!**
    **1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10**

11. In our family, our members are free of roles, such as hero, victim, villain, scapegoat, or troublemaker.

**Absolutely not!**                                                                    **Absolutely!**
    1        2        3        4        5        6        7        8        9        10

12. In our family, there's no pressure to be someone we're not.

**Absolutely not!**                                                                    **Absolutely!**
    1        2        3        4        5        6        7        8        9        10

13. What came to mind (questions, scenarios, definition of family, etc.) when you answered the questions in this section on Systems Thinking?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
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**Tension Management**

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**Tension Unmanaged**                                          **Tension Recognized and Managed**

**Tension Management**

14. Our family is free from stress-related physical health issues.

**Absolutely not!**                                                                    **Absolutely!**
    1        2        3        4        5        6        7        8        9        10

15. Our family is free from stress-related emotional health issues.

**Absolutely not!**                                                                    **Absolutely!**
    1        2        3        4        5        6        7        8        9        10

16. Our family is free from addictions.

**Absolutely not!**                                                                    **Absolutely!**
    1        2        3        4        5        6        7        8        9        10

17. Our family is free from social problems.

**Absolutely not!**                                                                    **Absolutely!**
    **1        2        3        4        5        6        7        8        9        10**

18. In our family, we encourage each person to thoughtfully use a balance of feelings and facts to make decisions.

**Absolutely not!**                                                                    **Absolutely!**
    **1        2        3        4        5        6        7        8        9        10**

19. When our family encounters a challenge, we take responsibility for our own emotions, rather than try to change how each other feels about it.

**Absolutely not!**                                                                    **Absolutely!**
    **1        2        3        4        5        6        7        8        9        10**

20. When our family encounters a challenge, the parents (or other family leaders) provide clear leadership and security to the dependents in the family.

**Absolutely not!**                                                                    **Absolutely!**
    **1        2        3        4        5        6        7        8        9        10**

21. Our family members encourage one another to think for themselves, even when they disagree with each other.

**Absolutely not!**                                                                    **Absolutely!**
    **1        2        3        4        5        6        7        8        9        10**

22. When one family member has a disagreement with another family member, we can be confident that they'll work the problem out with respect for each other.

**Absolutely not!**                                                                    **Absolutely!**
    **1        2        3        4        5        6        7        8        9        10**

23. When our family encounters a challenge, we're able to manage our emotions so that they don't prevent us from making headway toward solutions.

**Absolutely not!**                                                                    **Absolutely!**
    **1        2        3        4        5        6        7        8        9        10**

24. When tensions run high between family leaders, they are careful to stay focused on their part of the issue and work to improve that, rather than turn those issues into perceived problems in the child/ren.

**Absolutely not!**                                                                    **Absolutely!**
    **1        2        3        4        5        6        7        8        9        10**

25. When tensions run high between family leaders, they're careful not to seek comfort or escape in the child/ren.

    **Absolutely not!**                                              **Absolutely!**
    **1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10**

26. Parents are careful to manage their stress responsibly, even if their own parents did not always do so.

    **Absolutely not!**                                              **Absolutely!**
    **1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10**

27. If during tension we need to get some space to clear our heads, we then come back together to engage the challenge when we're calmer.

    **Absolutely not!**                                              **Absolutely!**
    **1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10**

28. What came to mind (questions, scenarios, definition of family, etc.) when you answered the questions in this section on Tension Management?

    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____

## Resourcefulness

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**Functionally Helpless**                                              **Resourceful**

**Resourcefulness**

29. When our family needs help with a challenge, we're able to determine whether we need to seek resources from within our (extended) family and friends systems or from outside resources (e.g., counseling, social services, law enforcement, etc.).

    **Absolutely not!**                                              **Absolutely!**
    **1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10**

30. When the parents or other family leaders need help figuring something out, they seek unbiased help, rather than look for other family members or outside parties to take sides.
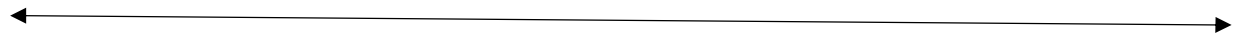
**Absolutely not!**                                                                **Absolutely!**
**1          2          3          4          5          6          7          8          9          10**

31. When our family encounters a challenge, we are confident in our ability to find solutions cooperatively.

**Absolutely not!**                                                                **Absolutely!**
**1          2          3          4          5          6          7          8          9          10**

32. When our family encounters a challenge, we offer our differing opinions, and then each do our part to resolve it.

**Absolutely not!**                                                                **Absolutely!**
**1          2          3          4          5          6          7          8          9          10**

33. When tensions from the world outside our family impact our family, we remain true to our respective principles while applying them flexibly.

**Absolutely not!**                                                                **Absolutely!**
**1          2          3          4          5          6          7          8          9          10**

34. What came to mind (questions, scenarios, definition of family, etc.) when you answered the questions in this section on Resourcefulness?

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_____
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**Connectedness and Integration**

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**Cutoff**                                          **Broad Connection and Emotionally Open Relationships**

**Connectedness & Integration**

35. In our family, we aim to maintain meaningful person-to-person relationships with family members across the generations.

**Absolutely not!**                                                                **Absolutely!**
**1          2          3          4          5          6          7          8          9          10**

36. Our family finds opportunities in problems to work together to find solutions.

**Absolutely not!**                                              **Absolutely!**
   **1        2        3        4        5        6        7        8        9       10**

37. Even when we disagree with one another, we maintain meaningful connections with each other.

**Absolutely not!**                                              **Absolutely!**
   **1        2        3        4        5        6        7        8        9       10**

38. In our family, we aim for all members to be able to honestly say, "This is a pretty good family to be in."

**Absolutely not!**                                              **Absolutely!**
   **1        2        3        4        5        6        7        8        9       10**

39. What came to mind (questions, scenarios, definition of family, etc.) when you answered the questions in this section on Connectedness & Integration?

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**For additional reflection**

40. What family-unit-altering events have occurred in the life cycle of your family (however you define family)? Do you notice any patterns in how your family adapts to major and minor challenges? What can you learn from what you notice?

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_____
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**Notes**

*For the theory behind this inventory, see:*

- Bowen, M. (1978). *Family therapy in clinical practice*. Jason Aronson, Inc.

*For the origin of the five dimensions of this inventory, see:*

- Papero, D. (2018). Developing a systems model for family assessment. *Family Systems: A Journal of Natural Systems Thinking in Psychiatry & the Sciences, 13*(2), 129–144.
                                                                        Or
- Papero, D. (2020). Developing a systems model for family assessment. In M. Keller & R. Noone (Eds.), *Handbook of Bowen family systems theory and research methods: A systems model for family research* (pp. 36-46). Tayler and Francis.

*For the development and content validation of this inventory, see:*

- Wilt, M. J. (2022). *Participant evaluation of the differentiation of family system inventory (DoFSI): A multi-purpose family unit assessment/intervention/treatment tool* (Publication No. 29395659) [Doctoral dissertation, Northcentral University.] ProQuest Dissertations Publishing. https://www.proquest.com/docview/2729492541

*For a publication summarizing the development and content validation of this inventory, see:*
- Wilt, M. J. (2023). Differentiation of Family System Inventory (DoFSI): Development and content validation of a new qualitative family intervention and evaluation tool. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Family Therapy*, 00, 1-22. Available from: https://doi.org/10.1002/anzf.1532