

King (or Queen) Baby

I Won't Grow UP!

We know this one by many names. In Chemical Dependency Treatment circles, this identity is called the mascot or the clown. *The Big Book*, known well by recovering addicts and alcoholics around the world, even has a chapter entitled "King Baby." Dan Kiley, author of *The Peter Pan Syndrome* (Dodd Mead, 1983) was the first to call this role Peter Pan. Of course, he applied it only to men who refused to grow up, but the syndrome is not actually gender specific. Or you might say "the Party Dude or Party Dudette", emphasizing the idea of the need for party. Here, I call it Big Baby. The fact is that by whatever name this rose is still a role. It is not the Authentic Self. Like the other identities we've named and will yet name, this one is based on a coping mechanism. The Big Baby copes with life, by copping out of life. This is the role that compels us to laugh when we need to cry, and dictates that we make others laugh as a way of distracting them and ourselves from the emotional work at hand. The Big Baby knows how to party. And the party is always on. If it takes more drugs and alcohol to keep the party going, then bring it, for the party must go on! He's the first one to crack a joke at the wake. She's the one who has her friends rolling in the aisle at the wedding she'll later leave at the altar. And the beat goes on.

Big Babies require that you be there for them at all times when they need you, but they want you to go away when responsibility comes into the picture in any way. They are quite often very bad with money. And not so good with work ethic either. They tend to insist that you drop everything and come running whenever anything that requires their adult attention comes up. They need for you to attend to this thing to which they refuse to attend. And if you don't, they may break all the way down and throw a two-year-old temper tantrum. Big Babies have a hard time with commitment. They want someone else in the room to depend on, but they don't want anyone depending on them-for anything. Even if they make all the right charming gestures, and say all the right words, when it comes down to it, Big Babies cannot be counted on to be there, financially, emotionally, or otherwise. They tend to be attracted to parental figures, not necessarily older, but definitely more responsible, who tend likewise to be overly responsible and are attracted to the clownish rascal, Big Baby. The overly responsible party (ORP) is attracted to the lightness and the fun, because God knows they need some fun in their lives. And the Big Baby is attracted to the responsible party because he needs someone to lean on.

But eventually, ORP is going to start asking for things: commitment, responsibility, assurances, being there-and the Big Baby is going to become very manipulative. Oh, Big Baby wants ORP to stay. So he will say all the right things and dance all the right dance steps to get what he wants. But keeping promises is a little too much like work. Caught in a broken promise the Baby will become the truculent child, begging ORP to stay, making more promises, and even becoming quite demanding, sometimes even abusive. The point of all of this is to get ORP to stay without requiring that Big Baby grow up. This push-pull could go on for years, until ORP finally gets so exhausted that he or she will come into therapy to figure out what to do. Generally, by that time ORP is not only physically, mentally and emotionally spent, but feels totally responsible for the well-being of Big Baby, at which point the caretaking Scapegoat or Superhero role can often be revealed.

Big Babies marry to get a caregiver; they work only if they have to in order to eat or keep the party going; and they give only when giving gets them something. Responsible adult loving is not a developed capacity. Of course, ORP doesn't know this and, seeing the deeper soul hidden under

there, keeps hoping to bring out the potential--the Authentic Self. Stuck in the bargaining stage of grief or of acceptance, ORP tries mightily to get Big Baby to grow up--to no avail.

But the truth is that the Big Baby has a hard time moving out of this role, because there are just too many perks for staying in it. She is taken care of completely. She can party whenever she wants, can quit a job when she feels like it, and can play with the kids beautifully--seeming for all the world to be a very good parent--until it comes to real parenting. When the children really need her--she's out of here. The kids fall in love with this elusive butterfly and get their hearts broken again and again. But Big Baby doesn't know, because she's not paying attention long enough to find out--the party is over here, it's time to move on to the next party. And the kids were always just another party.

Many people live as King Baby or Queen Baby. Many of these people never have an addiction problem. However, they do have a mind-set problem which turns into a personality problem. This personality problem causes bad chaos in families and in the work place. In the work place, a co-worker has to put up the slack that is created by King Baby. This person walks around in complete denial that he is a King Baby. He is unable to see the difference in his behavior and the behavior of others around him. And really, he does not care. He enjoys the position of being a child and resents authority.