Twitter Thread by The Tapped Therapist



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Emotional incest is not sexual unlike the name can suggest. It's also called covert incest. It is when an adult's (parent/guardian) relationship with their child is too adult-like. The child is burdened with adult emotional responsibility. It is considered abused.

People often wonder what's SO wrong with it, and often debate if it is *really* abuse. It is considered so because it forces children to put their parent's needs first and abandon their own emotional needs and it forces them to be adults and abandon regular growth/development.

Parents that depend on children in this way are often lonely. Either from social withdrawal, singleness or a tumultuous relationship(s). Their social/support system is not great and so they lean on in-house support from their child/children.

Emotional incest can be tricky to recognise because children sometimes like it, it can make them feel very special, powerful, helpful and grown-up for their age. It can also appear really loving from the outside looking in.

Forms that emotional incest take place:

Asking children to mediate in their parent's relationship is one way in which it takes place. Children should not have to offer emotional support for romantic and social woes and be in positions of responsibility in regards to adult interactions.

Another form is when children are responsible for the validation of their parent. The child is expected to constantly praise the parent's parenting, beauty or personality etc. The child is a massive part of the parent's reassurance/validation system

When a child is put in the position of a therapist, this is also emotional incest. A child should not be responsible for managing the thoughts, emotions or the crises of their parents. A child should be shielded from such and not given the detailed intricacies.

And lastly, a child should also not fulfil the role of being an adult's literal best friend where they have social and emotional duty and need to be exceptionally dependable to an adult.

The result of emotional incest often means neglect takes place. The child isn't treated like a child because boundaries are crossed. The appropriate structure, routine and discipline isn't put in place because the child is assumed to be adult-like. They can struggle to adjust.

People that grew up like this can grow up with anxiety and hypersensitivity to other people's emotional needs, they may often not be able to identify their own emotional needs. It is said that such people frequently become therapists...

Another effect is that people like this can subsequently enter a series of co-dependent relationships where they are mostly doing labour for a dependent partner and toxic cycles occur.

Emotional incest often leads to a lack of boundaries, people that experienced this often struggle to recognise when to place boundaries or how to accept boundaries in social/romantic situations.

Parents with multiple children often do this with 1 child and that can create favouritism and resentment from the other children. The "favoured" child can also eventually resent their siblings for not having enough duty to the parent too.

Another effect is that children do not confide in their parent. Children can hide information that would "upset" their parent, similarly to how adults should shield children from distress. So when a child encounters a troubling matter/abuse, they keep it to themself.