

# LEVELS OF DIFFERENTIATION

Are you able to express your differences from others while still feeling caring and connected to them? Most people can do this easily when their stress level is low. To gain a better sense of how far you have come in expressing your individuality and differentiating from others, examine the way you operate during crises and conflict.<sup>1</sup>

**Directions:** Circle a number 1 through 5 to show how similar you are to statements that describe either the undifferentiated or differentiated person. Rate strictly because differentiation is difficult and few people master this task completely.

## Undifferentiated Person

### Indifference & Intolerance

- I have few preferences and like others to make decisions. 1 2 3 4 5
- My opinions, beliefs, and principles are almost identical to my family's, friends', or church's. 1 2 3 4 5
- I am easily swayed by others' viewpoints. 1 2 3 4 5
- I try to get others to see things my way or I try to defend myself. 1 2 3 4 5
- When my preferences differ from others, I either win or lose. 1 2 3 4 5
- I express my beliefs with the words "We think . . . , I agree with . . . ." 1 2 3 4 5
- I prefer to be with people whose views are similar to my own. 1 2 3 4 5

### Emotions Rule Intellect

- My reactions are usually caused by others. 1 2 3 4 5
- I am rarely emotional, OR I have "knee-jerk" reactions. 1 2 3 4 5
- When I am emotional, I seem to lose my powers of reason. 1 2 3 4 5
- My decisions are based on instinct and what "feels" right. 1 2 3 4 5
- I often don't know the reasons for my decisions. 1 2 3 4 5
- When others are in conflict, I am drawn to take sides. 1 2 3 4 5

### Other-Oriented Goals

- My long-term goals are more for my relationship than for me. 1 2 3 4 5
- It is hard for me to act without others' love and approval. 1 2 3 4 5
- I feel angry, hurt, or resentful when others don't approve of me. 1 2 3 4 5

## Differentiated Person

### Concern & Toleration

- I am aware of my preference, even if I choose to go along with others.
- I have questioned the beliefs of my family, friends, and religion before reaching my own conclusions.
- I consider others' ideas and choose whether or not to change my own.
- I can state my position without attacking others or defending myself.
- I can make compromises without fear of giving up parts of myself.
- I express my beliefs with the words "I think . . ."
- I enjoy points of view that differ from my own.

### Intellect Rules Emotions

- I can reason, reflect, and evaluate my reactions to people and events.
- I am able to experience passionate emotions without losing myself.
- My intellect and logic rule my emotions.
- I am able to think through my decisions.
- I am aware of the reasons for my decisions.
- During conflict, I see both sides of the issue.

### Self-Serving Goals

- I have long-term goals that affect only me.
- I can risk losing others' approval when something is important to me.
- I am temporarily sad or feel calm when others withhold approval.

<sup>1</sup> Murray Bowen's ideas on differentiation are summarized in *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice* (Jason Aronson, 1978).