



# Developmental Religious Trauma: Harmful Childhood Messages Inventory

If you grew up in a high-control religious group, you may have internalized some harmful beliefs about yourself, your spirituality, and the world. Early childhood is when our cognitive, emotional, and social development occurs, and when trauma happens to us during these crucial developmental years, the damage is especially complex. This inventory is a list of harmful religious messages that can contribute to developmental religious trauma for children.

As you read this list, think about how your religious group's teachings impacted you in childhood and may still be affecting you now. Try to show compassion to the younger version of you who desperately needed safety and reassurance.

**Instructions: Check the statements that reflect things you believed or felt as a child.**

- I'm bad and I deserve for God and my parents to punish me.
- God and my parents discipline me to make me a better person.
- Being proud of myself is a sin.
- Feeling bad about myself means I'm being humble.
- God won't forgive me unless I stop doing bad things.
- Thinking something bad is just as bad as doing it.
- When something bad happens to me, it's because I deserve it.
- God knows all my thoughts and sees what I do in private.
- God will always punish me when I do bad things.
- Evil spirits will tempt, control, or hurt me if I'm not careful.
- People who don't believe in God will be punished or sent to hell forever.
- I should be ready and willing to die for my beliefs.
- God will heal people who are sick if they have enough faith.
- God will answer my prayers if I have enough faith.
- God will do miracles if I have enough faith.
- I should be able to hear God speaking to me and guiding me.
- I should be able to sense spiritual forces of good and evil.
- When I have a problem, I should be able to find the answer in scripture.
- Other people should be able to sense that I'm a true believer.
- I should always want to tell other people about my religious beliefs.
- It's dangerous for me to be friends with non-believers.
- I can't trust what non-believers say or do.
- I should only read/watch/listen to things that my religious group approves of.
- I have to make sure my body doesn't cause me to sin.

## EMPATHY PARADIGM



- I have to make sure my body doesn't cause other people to sin.
- Having sex before marriage or masturbating is a sin.
- Being gay or transgender is a sin.
- God wants me to get married and have kids when I grow up.
- I should only wear clothes that my religious group approves of.
- God will test my faith by asking me to do things I don't want to do.
- Being angry at God or people in my religious group is a sin.
- If I have questions about my beliefs, it means I'm not really saved.
- My family believes in the only true religion.
- I should never feel afraid or anxious if I have enough faith.
- I should always forgive people who hurt me, especially in my religious group.
- I should always show physical affection to people in my religious group.
- I should always obey my parents and other adults in my religious group.
- I should never question my parents or other adults in my religious group.
- I should never try to have privacy or secrets from my religious group.
- I should never complain or cause problems in my religious group.

### **Interpretation**

If you believed and internalized multiple of these messages as a child, those things likely had a deep impact on your sense of safety and autonomy. Even in adulthood, messages like these can continue to shape the way you see yourself, how you expect to be treated, and what kinds of things signal danger to you. Bringing this list with you to therapy is a great way to start unpacking these beliefs and healing the wound you experienced as a child.

*Need help finding a therapist who knows about religious trauma?*

*See our Religious Trauma Therapist Directory at [www.EmpathyParadigm.com/directory](http://www.EmpathyParadigm.com/directory).*