



# Mindful Representations

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## Training Handout: Surviving and Thriving Within Family of Origin

This work doesn't ask you to play family superhero or start handing out unsolicited therapy to relatives. It invites a steadier kind of change: one that starts with you, ripples through your family system, and, with time, frees up space for everyone to breathe.

We're drawing here on the work of Murray Bowen (psychiatrist, family systems pioneer) and Bert Hellinger (founder of Family Constellations). Bowen zooms in on the individual within the system, while Hellinger zooms out to the wider field. Put simply: Bowen gives you the workout routine, Hellinger shows you the map. Mindful Representations blends the best of both.

### Why It Matters

- Family issues don't arrive gift-wrapped from nowhere; they usually tumble down through the generations.
- By shifting your stance, you loosen old patterns.
- Bowen offers practical tools; Hellinger offers field awareness. Together, they make the work richer.
- Practicing the Bowen approach makes the Mindful Rep Practitioner more effective

### I. Right Motivation: 'Enlightened Self-Interest'

- You're not here to fix the family, redecorate Uncle Frank's inner world, or win sainthood.
- Focus on clarity in your own mind and feelings.
- Compassion for others grows stronger when it's rooted in compassion for yourself.
- Fix-it mode invites resistance.
- Analysing relatives drains energy.
- Self-focus builds resilience when others don't applaud your efforts.

### II. Become an Astute Observer

- Learn the facts: Who, what, when, where, how. (Leave the 'why' for philosophers or teenagers.)
- Notice the family process: traumas, myths, unspoken rules.
- Spot your role: Which stories you've swallowed, which rules you're still following, which deserve retirement.
- Fairness check: Are you fair to all family members, including yourself?



### III. Make a Plan, Implement Slowly

- One-to-one contact works better than groups, where old roles snap back like elastic waistbands.
- Start with peripheral members: they often hold fresh insights.
- Reconnect with cut-off members: their stories can unlock hidden chapters.
- Use letters, calls, or visits: one clear point per message works better than a parenting-grievances top-ten list.
- Plan around stamina: know your emotional limits before the twitch sets in.

### IV. Beginning of Change

- Take an 'I' Position: 'I feel overlooked' lands better than 'You never listen.'
- Manage reactivity: zoom in, zoom out.
- Humour can defuse tension better than a week of icebreakers.
- Stay out of triangles: go direct, refuse sides, dodge gossip.
- Use transitions (births, deaths, weddings, divorces) as windows for change.
- Differentiation in Three Steps: Make a move, expect pushback, stay steady.
- Bowen's 5 Rules: Avoid counterattack, stay non-defensive, maintain active relationships, find right distance, remember context.

### Closing

- Mindful Representations and Bowen's theory aren't rivals; they're companions.
- One shows the field, the other gives you the tools to navigate it.
- Together, they remind us that family change is possible: step back, plant new patterns, or simply stand steady.
- Small shifts open big spaces—for choice, connection, and the occasional miracle of a peaceful family lunch.

### Reflection Space

- What small shift could you try in your family this week?
- Which unhelpful 'heirloom' might you be ready to retire?
- Where could an 'I' statement bring more clarity and less drama?