

WHAT

IS

NORMAL

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# What Is Normal?

## Objective:

Since the beginning of time, human beings of all ages and backgrounds have grappled with what it means to be "normal". *Do I look normal? Is it normal to feel this way or think these thoughts? Do other people, couples or families act like this? Is it normal the way I eat my food, deal with money, spend my time or discipline my children?* While there are no easy, concrete answers to these types of questions, they provide opportunities to discuss and explore topics of uniqueness, personal preferences and choices, self-judgment, cultural norms, standards of beauty and how we treat others.

*Note: This card is designed to promote general discussion of normalcy and is not intended for use with individuals who exhibit dangerous or extremely disturbed thinking and behaviors. Such circumstances may require immediate attention and the appropriate professional actions.*

## Approach:

Show the front of the card. Initiate a conversation about the concept of normalcy; use examples from history, current events or celebrities in the news. *Can the person identify situations in their life where they were unclear - or criticized - regarding what was considered normal?* Encourage them to think about the behavior, appearance and choices of other people in their lives (*family, friends, co-workers*). *What do they personally consider normal?*

Discuss the legitimacy of personal preference, individuality and the desire to feel important or special, while acknowledging the harm that can result from dangerous or excessive behaviors. Address the wide spectrum of normalcy, while weaving in ideas of balance and well being, experimental stages that many of us go through, peer group persuasion, parental expectations, societal standards, the influence of media, etc.

## Outcomes:

*What Is Normal?* encourages the exploration of this expansive, often perplexing issue. It facilitates the expression of personal opinions and ideas in a safe forum where our views are acknowledged, respected and sometimes challenged. When we have the freedom to explore our fears and concerns about fitting in, we can become more comfortable accepting who we are. We learn to value our personal choices - as well as the choices of others. We can begin to address why some of our behaviors might be considered unhealthy or dangerous and why those around us may be legitimately concerned. With questions about normalcy explored, we can become more open to hearing and considering the advice of loving family members, friends and caring professional sources.