



## Levels of Character Structure

In each of the four domains of **character structure**, a person grows sequentially through four levels along a continuum toward fully possessing that specific character structure. Each level builds on the previous one and contributes to a strong, mature identity (“sense of self”). As you counsel, lead or coach, it is vitally important to assess the level the person has obtained. This helps you to match their developmental pace and not be too far behind or ahead. These levels are a road map on how to restart and build into a person that particular character structure domain. See **Levels of Character Structure – 1 Sheet** for a summary.

One very important thing to remember is that, even though there are four domains of character structures that people need to grow in (*Attachment, Separation, Integration, Adulthood*), and the four quadrants of relational nutrients that help them grow (*Be Present, Go Deeper, Provide Reality, Call to Action*), these don’t correspond by number. That is, *Be Present* doesn’t just apply to Attachment, *Go Deeper* doesn’t just apply to Separation, *Provide Reality* doesn’t just apply to Integration and *Call to Action* doesn’t just apply to Adulthood. *Every relational nutrient can be helpful for the growth of every character structure.* For example, an individual working on Attachment deficits might need not only Attunement (Q1) of how frightening it is to need others, but also Affirmation (Q2) of their efforts to reach out and be vulnerable. They might also need Insight (Q3) on past significant relational patterns that they internalized, as to how impactful these were in why they struggle with Attachment. And they might also need Challenge (Q4) in suggesting that they are ready for taking a relational risk. So, the competent counselor, coach or leader is always scanning the **22 Nutrient in 4 Quadrants** to see which might apply to any of the 4 domains of character structures.

**Attachment:** *The person engages mutually in need-based relationships and can regulate emotions.*

Deficit: Does not desire relationships, enjoys being isolated and independent because of early insecure attachments experiences. Focuses more on tasks and activities than vulnerable relating. Is overwhelmed by feelings, neediness, and closeness. May feel that one’s love is destructive and “bad” or he/she is not desirable. Difficulty trusting others and relies on rationality and will power. Often feel emptiness and existential aloneness. Some deeply aware of emotions and internal life but fearful being too close and engulfed.

*Level One:* **Aware and can identify emotions and needs** (first positive, then negative). Moves from intellectualizing and superficial conversations to deeper conversations with emotions. Or as share feelings and needs, doesn’t feel as engulfed and takes steps toward intimacy.

*Level Two:* **Expresses emotions and needs** (first positive, then negative) to another person. Begins to develop more relationships. Takes initiative to express and get needs met. Asks for help and more comfortable being dependent and emotionally vulnerable. Recognizes the lack of secure attachment during his/her early environment and other defenses and interpersonal coping style that compensates for this deficit.

*Level Three:* **Desires need-based friendships** and pursues them. When stressed turns to relationships instead of isolating. Now can feel loneliness and hurt from relationships. Recognizes defenses and interpersonal coping style that compensates for this deficit. Begins to have secure attachment experiences that are internalized. New relationships not feel engulfed and less fearful of intimacy. Intensifies practice of new ways of being and living by putting themselves in mismatching experiences.

*Level Four:* **Attunes, contains, and identifies** with the feelings and needs of others which creates mutuality in the friendship. Finds ways to encourage others. Can contain negative feelings of others while regulating own. Able to talk about how it feels in the moment and how he/she is experiencing the other person. Takes in feedback from others on an emotional level. Celebrates the results of their new ways of being and living.

**Separation:** *The person has the ability to be different from others, maintain boundaries, and take initiative.*

Deficit: Does not want to be different from others. Strong need to be close to someone and be liked. Hates conflict or disappointing others. Anger very difficult emotion to have or express. Not comfortable being alone. Passively engages the world and wants to be taken care of by others. Feels helpless and often takes a victim stance. Has not established a unique identity.

*Level One:* **Knows what likes and dislikes** about activities, objects (e.g. colors, food, entertainment), values, passion, strengths, purpose in life, and relationships. Talks about a genuine interest, personal goal, or desired career.

*Level Two:* **Celebrates differences, develops individuated strivings, owns opinions and expresses them.** Expresses in relationships what like and dislike. Begins to enjoy ways different than others. Starts to share controversial opinions and give feedback that is not always affirmative. Begins to know and pursue intrinsically gratifying activities. Takes on new responsibilities. Begins to take risks. Recognizes current dependency, especially on rejecting relationships and other defenses and interpersonal coping style that compensates for this deficit.

*Level Three:* **Can say “no” to others and feel anger toward significant others.** Begins to be more aware of their negative emotions towards other people. Tolerates disappointing people or being disliked as they begin to say “no” or when they initiate what they want. Takes beginning steps to separate from the early rejecting





relationships. Tolerates aloneness more. Takes initiative to impact situations and people in directions that might be different than the group norm. Becoming more independent and less need to be taken care of. Feels a greater internal sense of strength and confidence. Intensifies practice of new ways of being and living by putting themselves in mismatching experiences.

*Level Four:* **Has the ability to express and contain anger from another person.** Resolves conflicts instead of avoiding them. Not as overwhelmed when rejected. Develops additional relationships instead of just one or two. Begins to confront toxic relationships and step out of them. Not scared of another person's disappointment or anger directed at them. Celebrates the results of their new ways of being and living.

**Integration:** *The person has the ability to experience loss, failure, weakness, mediocrity, limits, negative impulses, sin and yet maintain a loved sense of self. Recognizes negative realities in relationships and situations. Shame and guilt are not internalized or overwhelming.*

Deficit: Weakness, loss and sadness, mediocrity, limits, mistakes, failures, negative impulses (e.g. anger, jealousy, sexuality), and sin trigger shame and guilt. Internalized the rejecting aspects of significant relationships ("internal judge") and experiences self as "bad" or "unlovable." When overwhelmed these negative aspects are "split off" and only the positive aspects recognized. Often create a false self that focuses on being right, performing well, and striving for perfection. Highly critical of others, organize and vigilant to avoid the negative. Performance, results and achievements more important than relationships. If not defended then feels not good enough and all bad.

*Level One:* **Increased awareness of negative realities in self, others, and situations** are not defended against as much. Understands the past internalization of rejecting relationships from their early environment and the implicit core emotional learnings.

*Level Two:* **More sadness and grieving experienced.** The new experiences of sadness and grieving negative realities are more prevalent. Small steps to take this to relationship. The anger turned inward starts to go towards the rejecting relationships during his/her early environment. Recognizes other defenses and interpersonal coping style that compensates for this deficit.

*Level Three:* **Finds healthy relationships to experiences closeness in the midst of negative realities.** Feels loving connection to the "bad parts" Starts to experience good, loving parts when negative parts exist self instead of being all bad. Moving away from black and white thinking. Begins to grieve and let go of what didn't get in past relationships. Intensifies practice of new ways of being and living by putting themselves in mismatching experiences.

*Level Four:* **Shifts from the "good self" to the "loved self."** Relationships become more important than work and performance. Contains and holds losses and negative realities for others. Greater capacity to forgive others or self. Accepts limits. Less perfectionistic, vigilant and critical of others. Takes more risks to accomplish a larger life purpose. Celebrates the results of their new ways of being and living.

**Adulthood:** *The person has the ability for mutual authority, a work ethic, vocational competence, healthy sexuality, purpose, & expressing a strong "voice."*

Deficit: Feels one down (submissive), one up (better than) or defiant (rebellious) towards authority. Unclear, anxious and/or has under-developed skills (expertise) and a career path that is void of meaning, failing or erratic. Seeks approval from authority or critical, controlling, micromanaging of others, or dismissive. Decisions are either too difficult to make on own, too rigid or ignored. Has guilt and shame about sex or uses sex to avoid pain. Has an internal sense of emptiness, unfulfillment or restlessness because does not know their passions and purpose. Understands some of the implicit core emotional learnings.

*Level One:* **Differentiates from authority** or aware how feel superior than others or aware of defiance towards authority. Begins to recognize different preferences and opinions than authority, or how they over-identify with authority and like. power and control or resists authority. Explores areas of expertise, spiritual gifts, skills, possible career path. More awareness of sexual feelings or the negative consequences of acting out. Explores passions and purpose.

*Level Two:* **Expresses preferences and opinions directly to authority** or less controlling (micromanaging) or less defiant. Aware of frustration and anger towards authority or what drives control and rebelliousness. Developing career skills. Desires a romantic relationship that is mutual and not compensatory. Getting involved in activities that gives transcendent purpose. Sexuality is attached to love and not split off from relationship. Recognizes defenses and interpersonal coping style that compensates for this deficit.

*Level Three:* **Begins to make decisions that comes from oneself** without a constant need for external permission or they need to be the best and always right (rigid) or not as reactive. Finding a career that meets their passions, skill set and giving them purpose. In a relationship practicing mutuality and intimacy. Intensifies practice of new ways of being and living by putting themselves in mismatching experiences.

*Level Four:* **Feels mutual with authority and possesses an integrated, strong voice.** Can confront authority or be open to different ideas or be submissive. Uses voice more in leading or collaborates more. His or her presence more powerful resulting in a stronger voice. Finds a vocational role in an organization using one's skills, passion, and voice to accomplish a larger purpose. Connects one's sexuality to relationship and a moral system and is able to commit to a long term marriage relationship or comfortable remaining single. Celebrates the results of their new ways of being and living.