

GUIDELINES FOR FORMATORS: IDENTIFYING PSYCHOLOGICAL AND EMOTIONAL SIGNS IN FORMEES

As formators, it is essential to recognize psychological and emotional difficulties in formees to provide appropriate guidance and support. The following guidelines, based on Kernberg's Structural Diagnosis, outline key areas to observe in assessing emotional stability, relational patterns, and personality development, with practical examples from formation life.

Section	Topics/Subsections
Introduction	Purpose of Structural Diagnosis; Role of the Formator
1. Assessing Severity of Symptoms	Scope (Isolated/Widespread); Intensity (Mild/Severe); Duration (Persistent/Transient); Summary Questions
2. Identifying Types of Symptoms	A. Ego Weakness (Low Anxiety Tolerance; Impulsivity; Lack of Sublimation) B. Primitive Thinking (Unstructured Thought; Memorized Phrases; Emotional Outbursts) C. Primitive Defenses (Splitting; Idealization/Devaluation; Projective Identification; Denial and Omnipotence) D. Relationship Patterns (Quick Attachments; Abrupt Rejection; Unstable Sense of Self) E. Poor Internalization (Compliance Without Conviction; Inability to Experience Guilt) F. Thought, Affect, Will Disturbances (Cognitive Disruptions; Emotional Dysregulation; Lack of Motivation)
3. Responding as a Formator	Observation; Dialogue; Encouraging Growth; Professional Consultation; Balancing Discipline and Compassion
4. Red Flags	Persistent Isolation; Emotional Outbursts; Idealization/Devaluation; Inconsistent Self-Perception; Unstable Relationships; Avoidance of Responsibilities; Resistance to Correction; Over-Dependence; Extreme Reactions; Resistance to Prayer/Exercises; Frequent Goal Changes; Denial/Blaming
Conclusion	Supporting Growth and Maturity in Formation

1. Assessing the Severity of Symptoms

Why This Matters in Formation: As a formator, you're not expected to diagnose psychological conditions. But you are **responsible for noticing** when a formee's behaviour, mood, or thinking might be a sign of **deeper distress or dysfunction**.

To make good decisions about accompaniment or referral, it's important to **assess the severity** of what you observe—not just the incident itself, but its:

- Scope (Isolated or widespread?)
- Intensity (Mild or severe?)
- Duration (Short-term or long-lasting?)

This allows you to **respond appropriately**, balancing **patience** with **accountability** and **pastoral care** with **formation standards**.

a. Scope: Isolated or Widespread?

◆ **What it means:** Ask: *Is the difficulty affecting just one area of the formee's life, or is it showing up in multiple areas (prayer, studies, relationships, emotions, tasks)?*

✓ **Isolated Issue:**

- Limited to one context (e.g., struggles only in public speaking).
- Might be related to skill gap, temporary stress, or personality.

✓ **Widespread Issue:**

- Appears across different settings: avoids prayer, struggles in relationships, skips apostolic work.
- Suggests deeper psychological or emotional difficulty.

📌 **Formation Examples:**

- **Isolated:** A formee struggles with sharing in large group meetings but engages well in smaller groups and personal prayer.
👉 Likely a manageable personal growth area.
- **Widespread:** A formee avoids prayer, stays silent in group meetings, isolates during recreation, and resists feedback.
👉 Likely a sign of broader emotional or psychological concern.

💬 **Accompaniment Questions:**

- “Do you notice this difficulty only in one area or in several parts of your life?”
- “How do you feel in community prayer compared to personal prayer?”
- “Are there moments when you feel more at ease or more stressed during the day?”

b. Intensity: Mild or Severe?

◆ **What it means:** Ask: *How strong or disruptive is the symptom?*

✓ **Mild Intensity:**

- Infrequent or moderate emotional responses.
- Discomfort or struggle that can be discussed and redirected.
- Not disruptive to others or the environment.

✓ **Severe Intensity:**

- Strong, extreme, or disproportionate emotional reactions.
- May involve shouting, crying spells, self-isolation, or complete shutdown.
- Affects group dynamics or becomes a repeated source of tension.

📌 **Formation Examples:**

- **Mild:** A formee becomes quiet and withdrawn after receiving correction but later reflects and returns to activities.
👉 Indicates normal emotional processing and growth potential.
- **Severe:** A formee bursts into anger, refuses to speak to the formator for days, and stops participating in all community life.
👉 Sign of emotional dysregulation that needs deeper accompaniment and possibly psychological support.

💬 **Accompaniment Questions:**

- “How strongly did you feel that reaction?”
- “What helped you calm down or regain perspective?”
- “Do you feel your response matched the situation?”

c. Duration: Persistent or Transient?

◆ **What it means:**

Ask: *How long has this behaviour or symptom been happening?*

✓ **Transient:**

- Appears briefly, often connected to a specific event (e.g., homesickness, a disagreement).
- Resolves or improves with support, rest, or feedback.
- Normal part of adaptation or formation struggles.

✓ **Persistent:**

- Lasts for weeks or months without noticeable improvement.
- Resists encouragement, dialogue, or accompaniment efforts.
- May worsen over time or recur in cycles.

📌 **Formation Examples:**

- **Transient:** A postulant isolates for a few days after a painful phone call from home, but gradually re-engages with community life.
👉 Requires support, not alarm.
- **Persistent:** A novice has avoided group prayer, shared meals, and community events for over a month despite multiple conversations and encouragement.
👉 Likely points to underlying emotional or psychological distress (e.g., depression, anxiety, trauma response).

💬 **Accompaniment Questions:**

- “How long have you been feeling this way?”
- “Has anything helped you feel better or worse over time?”
- “Has this happened before, in other settings?”

Summary Questions for Discernment

- Is this formee’s struggle part of normal formation adjustment, or something deeper?
- Are symptoms isolated, or do they affect multiple aspects of life?
- Do they pass with time, or persist and resist support?
- Do they disrupt community, mission, or prayer life?
- What level of support is needed—formative, spiritual, professional?

2. Identifying Types of Symptoms

A. Signs of Ego Weakness

What it means: “Ego strength” refers to a person’s ability to manage emotions, cope with stress, control impulses, and handle reality in a balanced way.

A person with **ego weakness** struggles with these tasks. Their reactions to stress are often extreme, chaotic, or poorly managed.

In formation, these difficulties can *disrupt personal growth, prayer life, community relationships, and discernment.*

1. Low Anxiety Tolerance

- Struggles to handle stress or frustration calmly.
- Overwhelmed by minor difficulties.
- Emotional reactions are strong, inappropriate, or prolonged.

✓ **Typical Signs in Formation Life:**

- Easily bursts into tears or anger over small corrections.
- Deep discouragement after minor failures (e.g., being late for prayer once).
- Cannot tolerate waiting, uncertainty, or change in routine.
- Moves repeatedly from room to room or asks to change formation houses frequently, seeking relief from discomfort.

🌿 **Formation Examples:**

- ★ A novice shouts in a community meeting when gently corrected about chores.
- ★ A postulant weeps for hours after being told to redo a reflection assignment.

★ A seminarian constantly asks to be transferred to another formation house after disagreements.

★ **Why It Matters:**

- Formation includes inevitable stress: community life, spiritual direction, self-examination.
- Low anxiety tolerance makes it hard to benefit from these experiences.
- Can damage community bonds and hinder discernment.

💬 **Accompaniment Questions:**

- “What did you feel in that moment?”
- “How do you usually respond when something frustrates you?”
- “What helps you calm down after you’re upset?”

✅ **Practical Tips for Formators:**

- ✓ Stay calm when they’re emotional.
- ✓ Normalize feelings: “It’s okay to feel upset, but let’s find a way to express it safely.”
- ✓ Teach calming strategies: breathing exercises, prayerful reflection.
- ✓ Offer consistent routines, but also gently stretch tolerance for change.

2. Impulsivity

- Acting quickly without thinking.
- Difficulty controlling urges or delaying gratification.
- Uses impulsive behaviours to relieve stress or tension.

✅ **Typical Signs in Formation Life:**

- Talks excessively in meetings without reflection.
- Spends community funds or personal allowance carelessly.
- Overeats or binges on snacks, especially when stressed.
- Quickly volunteers for tasks but abandons them halfway.
- Jumps into new spiritual practices intensely, then drops them.

🌿 **Formation Examples:**

- ★ A formee who dominates group sharing with unfocused talk, ignoring others’ contributions.
- ★ Someone who orders books or devotional items impulsively with community money.
- ★ A novice who signs up eagerly for all ministries but quits when it gets hard.

★ **Why It Matters:**

- Impulsivity undermines self-discipline required for religious life.
- Can lead to conflict over shared resources or community rules.
- Makes it difficult to commit to prayer, ministry, or studies consistently.

💬 **Accompaniment Questions:**

- “What were you hoping for when you did that?”
- “How do you decide when to say yes or no?”
- “What might help you slow down before acting?”

✅ **Practical Tips for Formators:**

- ✓ Encourage awareness: “Notice the urge before acting.”
- ✓ Offer structured routines to build discipline.
- ✓ Model and teach discernment: “Pause, pray, decide.”
- ✓ Set clear, kind boundaries on community resources and tasks.

3. Lack of Sublimation

- Sublimation = channelling strong emotions, drives, or frustrations into positive, meaningful activities.
- Lack of sublimation means difficulty using creative, productive, or spiritual outlets for stress.

✓ Typical Signs in Formation Life:

- Avoids or resists meaningful work (e.g., chores, apostolates).
- Neglects or avoids personal prayer time.
- Becomes dependent on rigid schedules or rules to function at all.
- Cannot “transform” feelings of anger, envy, or lust into service, prayer, or creativity.

🌿 Formation Examples:

- ★ A novice who refuses all housework, claiming it’s beneath him.
- ★ A formee who skips personal prayer consistently, saying it’s “pointless.”
- ★ Someone who demands detailed daily schedules but falls apart if anything changes.

★ Why It Matters:

- Religious life is built on transforming the self for God’s mission.
- Lack of sublimation keeps emotions raw and unmanaged.
- Undermines spiritual growth, community life, and apostolic zeal.

💬 Accompaniment Questions:

- “How do you usually deal with anger or stress?”
- “What helps you feel grounded or at peace?”
- “How might you use this energy for something good?”

✓ Practical Tips for Formators:

- ✓ Gently suggest practical spiritual exercises: meditation, creative prayer, journaling.
- ✓ Invite participation in service tasks as a way to transform frustration into love.
- ✓ Encourage manageable, flexible schedules that require some adaptation.
- ✓ Offer supportive, consistent guidance without over-structuring.

🌟 Why Recognizing Ego Weakness Matters in Formation

✓ Formation is about shaping disciples who can:

- Live peacefully in community.
- Respond maturely to correction.
- Channel passions into mission.
- Persevere in prayer and service even under stress.

✓ Signs of ego weakness highlight where a formee needs special support and growth.

✓ Not a condemnation, but a *map* for accompaniment.

✓ 🌿 Formation Accompaniment Strategy

- ★ **Observe patterns over time:** Don’t react to one incident.
- ★ **Offer feedback with compassion:** “I noticed you seemed very upset after... can we talk about it?”
- ★ **Use structured reflection tools:** Journaling prompts, spiritual direction conversations.
- ★ **Normalize struggles:** “We all have to learn how to manage stress.”
- ★ **Set clear but kind expectations:** Boundaries and goals.
- ★ **Refer to professional help if needed** for severe, persistent issues.

B. Primitive Thinking Patterns

🌟 **What It Means:** “Primitive” here doesn’t mean “stupid” or “uneducated.” It refers to **immature** ways of thinking that avoid complexity, personal reflection, or integration. It is often **rigid, unstructured, shallow**, and highly **defensive**.

- Instead of deep, personal understanding, the person uses memorized answers or clichés.
- They resist exploring contradictions or nuances.
- When these defensive patterns are threatened, they may react emotionally or shut down.

✓ Why Does It Happen? (Psychological Background)

Primitive thinking patterns often develop as **protection**:

- Defends against anxiety and self-doubt.
- Avoids painful self-examination.
- Maintains certainty by repeating fixed formulas.
- Simplifies complex realities that feel overwhelming.

In other words: **“If I don’t think deeply, I won’t feel uncertain, wrong, or vulnerable.”**

✓ Key Features and Typical Signs in Formation Life

1. Unstructured Thought Processes

- ★ Thoughts are scattered, disorganized, or jumpy.
- ★ Arguments or reflections lack clear logic.
- ★ Difficulty connecting ideas coherently.
- ★ Trouble following formation conferences or spiritual readings in depth.

✓ *Formation Examples:*

- During spiritual sharing, a formee rambles, jumping from topic to topic with no clear point.
- When asked about a spiritual theme, gives a disjointed response with no real reflection.

2. Reliance on Memorized Phrases without Deep Reflection

- ★ Uses fixed, rehearsed answers to avoid thinking deeply.
- ★ Repeats spiritual slogans or theological formulas without personal meaning.
- ★ Quotes Scripture or Church documents by memory but cannot explain relevance to their own life.
- ★ Avoids or deflects when invited to personalize.

✓ *Formation Examples:*

- “God is love,” said in every sharing, but unable to describe how that shapes his behaviour.
- Recites rule perfectly but ignores its spirit in daily life.
- When asked, “What does this mean for you?” says, “It’s just what the Catechism says,” with no further thought.

3. Emotional Outbursts When Defensive Patterns are Challenged

- ★ Becomes angry or shut down when asked to think more deeply.
- ★ Reacts with frustration if invited to see contradictions in their statements.
- ★ Feels threatened by open-ended questions.

✓ *Formation Examples:*

- Shouts “You’re attacking my faith!” when asked, “What does that passage mean to you personally?”
- Refuses further conversation after being gently challenged about an inconsistency.
- Storms out of spiritual direction when invited to explore personal feelings.

✓ ☀ Why This Matters in Formation

Formation isn’t about memorizing doctrines alone—it’s about **integrating faith into one’s life**.

✓ Primitive thinking patterns *block integration*:

- Prevent self-knowledge.
- Undermine genuine prayer life.
- Impede discernment of vocation.

- Create superficial community sharing.
- ✅ A formee who can't move beyond memorized phrases:
 - Struggles to apply faith in real challenges.
 - May crumble under stress.
 - Risks becoming rigid, judgmental, or shallow in ministry.

- ✅ 🌟 **Deeper Root Causes (Psychological Insight)**
 - Fear of making mistakes or appearing ignorant.
 - Anxiety about vulnerability—reflecting means seeing one's own wounds.
 - Need for control through rigid formulas.
 - Past experiences where questions or exploration felt unsafe.

✅ 🛠️ **Practical Tips for Formators**

Observe Without Judging

- Don't label them "shallow."
- Recognize it as a *defense* they may need to feel safe.

Gently Invite Personalization

- "That's a beautiful teaching. How do you see it in your own life?"
- "How has this scripture challenged you personally?"

Model It Yourself

- Share your own real struggles with applying faith.
- Avoid teacherly monologues—foster dialogue.

Encourage Journaling

- Prompts like: "What did I hear? How did it touch me? What is God inviting me to do?"

Use Small Group Sharing

- Safe, intimate spaces help break rote answers.
- Ask open-ended questions.

Be Patient

- They may need time to feel safe enough to be real.
- Praise small steps toward deeper reflection.

✅ 💬 **Suggested Accompaniment Questions**

★ For Unstructured Thought:

- "Can you tell me that again in a simpler way?"
- "What's the main point you want to share?"

★ For Memorized Answers:

- "That's a great phrase. What does it mean for you personally?"
- "Can you give me an example from your life?"

★ For Emotional Resistance:

- "I see this question upsets you. Can we explore why?"
- "What's scary about reflecting more deeply?"

Conclusion for Formators: Primitive thinking patterns are **not a sign of lack of intelligence or bad faith.**

- ✓ They're *defenses* that help a formee avoid discomfort or confusion.
- ✓ Formation is about gently moving them toward **integration**: owning faith personally, applying it concretely, and thinking deeply.

Your role is to:

- ★ Recognize it kindly.

- ★ Invite personal reflection.
- ★ Model real, honest sharing.
- ★ Build trust so they feel safe going deeper.

C. Primitive Defense Mechanisms

✦ What It Means

- **Primitive defense mechanisms** are *unconscious strategies* that people use to protect themselves from anxiety, emotional pain, or feelings of inadequacy.
- They are called “**primitive**” because they are *early developmental* defenses. Instead of managing emotions in a mature, balanced way, they **distort reality** to avoid emotional discomfort.
- In formation, these defenses often surface under stress—community life, correction, spiritual challenges. They can **block growth**, strain relationships, and undermine discernment.

1. Splitting

- Seeing people or situations in black-and-white terms: *all-good* or *all-bad*, with no shades of grey.
- Lacks ability to hold mixed feelings about someone.

What it looks like in formation:

- A formee praises a peer or formator as “perfect” one day, but calls them “hypocrite” the next after a disagreement.
- Describes community life as “paradise” or “hell” with no nuance.
- Rapid shifts in alliances or friendships based on small conflicts.

Why it happens:

- To avoid feeling confused or anxious about complexity.
- Immature ego can’t handle ambivalence, so it divides the world into extremes.

Example Formation Dialogue: “*Father is amazing! He’s so holy and understands everything.*” (a week later) “He’s completely unfair and doesn’t get me at all!”

2. Idealization and Devaluation

- Extreme, unbalanced admiration (idealization) followed by sharp disappointment and criticism (devaluation).
- A cycle of raising people onto pedestals, then knocking them down.

What it looks like in formation:

- Over-the-top praise for the formator after getting positive feedback.
- Harsh personal attacks when corrected gently.
- Rapid changes of heart about vocation based on minor experiences.

Why it happens:

- Difficulty seeing people as complex or flawed yet valuable.
- Avoids accepting disappointment or limits in others.

Example Formation Scene: A formee insists: “*Sister is so inspiring, I’ll follow anything she says!*” Later: “*She’s so controlling, she doesn’t know anything about real mission!*”

3. Projective Identification

- Projective Identification is a psychological defense mechanism where a person unconsciously *projects* unwanted feelings or traits onto someone else **and then behaves in a way that pressures the other person to feel or act them out.**
- It is more complex than simple projection. In **projection**, you deny your own feelings and see them in others (“I’m not angry, *you* are!”).

- In **projective identification**, you not only see your unwanted feelings in the other person—you also provoke them to feel or behave in the way you fear or dislike, *almost making your projection come true*.

Why It Happens

- Protects the person's fragile self-image.
- Avoids owning difficult emotions like anger, envy, shame.
- Maintains a sense of control by making others "carry" unwanted feelings.
- Often happens under stress or when a person feels vulnerable.

Example 1: "The Unjust Formator"

- The formee struggles with authority, feels rebellious but won't admit it.
- He behaves in subtly disrespectful, challenging ways—sarcasm, non-compliance.
- The formator, after repeated provocations, reacts sharply.
- The formee then says: "You see? You're so harsh and controlling! This place is oppressive!"



Analysis:

- The formee cannot admit his own anger at authority.
- By provoking the formator, he *creates* the experience of harshness he fears or resents.
- Confirms his belief that authority is unfair, avoiding self-reflection.

Example 2: "Creating Rejection"

- A formee fears being unwanted or excluded.
- He acts cold, suspicious, uncooperative with peers.
- Community members withdraw, avoid including him.
- The formee complains: "No one here accepts me. I knew I didn't belong."



Analysis:

- He unconsciously engineers the rejection he fears.
- He can blame the community instead of exploring his own fears or social habits.

4. Denial and Omnipotence

- **Denial** means refusing to admit something unpleasant or difficult — like a personal fault, a weakness, or a painful truth.
- **Omnipotence** is when someone feels or acts like they are all-powerful, perfect, or always right, even when it's not true. It often shows up as a need to be in control or as an inflated self-image.
- These are **defense mechanisms**—ways people unconsciously protect themselves from feeling vulnerable, weak, or hurt.

Why it Happens in Formation

- In the formation process, candidates are being shaped spiritually, emotionally, and humanly. This involves facing one's limitations and growing in humility and self-awareness. But sometimes, to avoid the discomfort of facing the truth about themselves, some may fall into **denial or omnipotence**.

Example of Denial

- A candidate consistently comes late to community prayers. When the formator brings it up, he says, "It's not a problem. I work better when I follow my own rhythm."
- **Reality:** He may be struggling with discipline or resisting community life.
- **Denial:** He refuses to acknowledge that his behaviour affects the group and avoids facing his own inconsistency.

Example of Omnipotence

- A candidate is told by his formator that he needs to listen more in group sharing. He replies, "I already know what others are going to say. I don't need this part of formation. I'm ready for mission."
- **Reality:** He may be avoiding growth in empathy and humility.
- **Omnipotence:** He assumes he's above the process, not needing correction or growth.

How It Affects Formation

- Blocks **personal growth** and **self-awareness**.
- Hinders **community living**, as others feel disrespected or dismissed.
- Makes it hard for the person to receive **feedback** or **correction**.
- Creates **conflict** or **isolation** if not addressed gently but firmly.

How to Accompany Someone in This State

1. **Build trust:** Make the person feel safe to admit their struggles.
2. **Use gentle truth:** Reflect what you observe without judgment.
 - “I notice that when correction is given, you often dismiss it. Can we explore why that might be?”
3. **Encourage vulnerability:** Share your own experiences of growth through struggle.
4. **Reinforce the value of the process:** Emphasize that formation is not about perfection but honesty and openness to grow.

D. Relationship Patterns and Object Relations

☀ What it Means

✓ **Object relations** is a term from psychology that describes *how people understand and relate to others*.

✓ Healthy object relations = ability to form stable, realistic, emotionally meaningful relationships.

Someone with **immature or problematic object relations** may have trouble:

- ★ Seeing others realistically (not idealizing/demonizing)
- ★ Maintaining closeness after conflict
- ★ Holding onto their own identity in relationships

In formation, this shows up as *difficulty building the stable, respectful, fraternal bonds essential to religious life*.

Underlying Psychology

- Early relationships (especially childhood attachments) shape expectations about closeness, trust, conflict, and safety.
- If those early models were inconsistent, chaotic, or rejecting, a person may fear intimacy or lack skills to navigate it.
- Stressful, communal living in formation can **re-activate** these fears or patterns.

Key Features of Problematic Relationship Patterns

1. Quick, Intense Attachments

- Formees who quickly become “*best friends*” with someone after knowing them only days or weeks.
- Shares personal secrets very early.
- Relies excessively on one person for support.
- Feels safe only with that person.

Why?

- Desperate for security or affirmation.
- May idealize the other person, ignoring their flaws.

Formation Example: A novice spends every free moment with one companion, neglects community activities, describes them as “the only one who understands me.”

2. Abrupt Rejection After Conflict

- When any disagreement, disappointment, or perceived betrayal leads to **complete rupture**.
- Former “best friend” becomes “enemy.”
- Avoidance, gossip, silent treatment.

Why?

- Can’t tolerate complexity (good and bad in same person).
- Fears vulnerability, so cuts ties to protect self.

Formation Example: After a small argument over chores, two companions stop speaking for weeks, refuse to work together.

3. Unstable Sense of Self

- Formee changes personal goals, beliefs, or behaviours to fit whoever they are with.
- Has difficulty knowing or holding their own convictions.
- Needs others’ approval to feel okay.

Why?

- Identity is fragile, built on external validation.
- Afraid of rejection if they show authentic self.

Formation Example: Enthusiastic about missionary life with one peer, talks about leaving formation with another.

Additional Signs in Formation Life

- ✓ Frequent switching of close friendships.
- ✓ Intense jealousy if close friend befriends others.
- ✓ Difficulty setting or respecting personal boundaries.
- ✓ Over-involvement in others’ problems (“rescuing”).
- ✓ Feeling easily betrayed, slighted, or excluded.
- ✓ Struggles to apologize or repair after conflict.
- ✓ Fear of being alone or left out.
- ✓ Idealizing authority figures, then devaluing them after correction.

Why It Matters in Formation

- Community life requires stable, mature relationships.
- Religious vows (especially obedience and chastity) involve healthy emotional attachments.
- Conflict is inevitable; the ability to manage it gracefully is essential.
- Vocational discernment depends on knowing one’s *real self*, not just adapting to please others.
- Patterns of attachment are often deeply rooted but can grow with awareness and help.

✅ 🌟 Practical Tips for Formators

Observe Patterns Over Time

- Don’t react to one event. Look for cycles.

Gently Name Contradictions

- *“I notice you were very close to X before the conflict. Can you tell me about that change?”*

Promote Reflection on Self and Other

- Help formees see that others are complex, not all-good/all-bad.

Encourage Boundaries and Balance

- Emphasize community over cliques.
- Teach respectful space in relationships.

Normalize Conflict and Repair

- Model healthy disagreement and forgiveness.

Encourage Identity Formation

- “What do *you* think about this?”
- “What are *your* goals, regardless of others’ expectations?”

Use Peer Feedback

- Group reflections on relationship dynamics (with safe facilitation).

Referral for Deeper Work if Needed

- Psychological accompaniment for severe or persistent patterns.

Conclusion for Formators

Immature relationship patterns aren’t moral failures. They’re often unconscious strategies people use to protect themselves from:

- ✓ Fear of rejection
- ✓ Fear of losing identity
- ✓ Fear of conflict

Your role is to:

- Recognize these patterns with compassion
- Help formees become aware of them
- Teach healthier ways to relate
- Model patient, consistent, respectful community life

E. Poor Internalization & Weak Ideal Self

☀ What It Means

- **Internalization** is the process of making external values, rules, and ideals truly one’s *own*.
- A **strong ideal self** = having clear, consistent personal values and striving to live by them, even when no one is watching.
- **Poor internalization** means a formee hasn’t really *taken in* the values they claim to believe. They may *say* the right things, but they don’t *own* them.
- A **weak ideal self** = their personal vision of who they want to be is unclear, unstable, or easily influenced.

Why This Happens (Psychological Insight)

- Avoids conflict or rejection by pleasing others.
- May have grown up learning to *perform* for approval instead of developing a real personal conscience.
- Anxiety about making mistakes or being seen as “bad.”
- Weak sense of self, dependent on external validation.

Key Features and Typical Signs in Formation

1. Compliance Without Conviction

- Quickly agrees with whoever is in charge or whoever is present.
- Changes opinions depending on the audience.
- Says what they think the formator wants to hear.
- Lacks a stable, personal moral stance.
- Avoids expressing honest doubts or disagreements.

✓ Formation Example:

- In spiritual direction, says, “Yes, I completely agree,” even when unsure—just to avoid conflict.

- In group discussions, echoes whatever the majority says, even if it's contradictory from day to day.

✓ *Why?*

- Fear of rejection or criticism.
- Sees formation as a performance.
- Doesn't yet know or trust their own convictions.

2. Inability to Experience Guilt

- Refuses to take personal responsibility for mistakes.
- Blames circumstances, other people, or claims "I didn't know."
- Minimizes harm caused to others.
- Sees correction as unfair attack instead of invitation to grow.
- Resents or rejects feedback.

✓ *Formation Example:*

- A novice who breaks community rules but says, "Everyone does it," or "I didn't realize it was wrong."
- A seminarian who hurts a peer with words but refuses to apologize, claiming the other is too sensitive.
- A formee who fails at a task but says, "It wasn't my fault—I didn't have enough help."

✓ *Why?*

- Protects fragile self-esteem.
- Avoids painful self-examination.
- Has not developed mature moral conscience.

Why This Matters in Formation

Formation isn't about external compliance or pleasing superiors—it's about **becoming a mature, free disciple** with:

- A personal, interiorized commitment to Gospel values.
- Capacity to examine conscience honestly.
- Willingness to take responsibility, seek forgiveness, and grow.

Without internalization, a vocation is **fragile**:

- Obedience becomes mere people-pleasing.
- Chastity lacks integration.
- Ministry risks hypocrisy or superficiality.
- Community life becomes manipulative or dishonest.

Conclusion for Formators

- **Poor internalization isn't about being "bad" or "dishonest."**
- It signals a *developmental need* to move from **external compliance** to **internal conviction**.

Your role is to:

- ✓ Recognize it compassionately.
- ✓ Invite real reflection and ownership.
- ✓ Accompany the formee as they develop a stronger, clearer, Gospel-shaped ideal self.

F. Thought, Affect, and Will Disturbances

What It Means

- This category refers to **core aspects of human functioning** that shape how someone *thinks, feels, and chooses to act*.

When there are **disturbances** in these areas, a person struggles with:

- Thinking clearly and logically (Thought)
- Regulating emotions appropriately (Affect)
- Making decisions and committing to actions (Will)

In formation, these issues can seriously hinder personal growth, communal living, and vocational discernment.

Why This Happens (Psychological Insight)

- May reflect developmental gaps in emotional maturity.
- Can be stress responses to the demands of formation life.
- Sometimes signal deeper psychological issues requiring professional help.
- Formation often “stirs up” these areas as formees face self-knowledge, obedience, community life, and spiritual demands.

Key Features and Typical Signs in Formation Life

1. Cognitive Disruptions

- Confused or contradictory speech.
- Illogical arguments or sudden topic shifts.
- Difficulty organizing thoughts coherently.
- Struggles to understand abstract or complex ideas.
- Inconsistent or disconnected responses in conversations.

Formation Examples:

- A formee gives rambling answers during spiritual direction that don’t address the question.
- Shares in meetings with contradictory points (“I feel totally ready for vows but also think I’m not called at all”) without recognizing the conflict.
- Struggles to explain what they read or heard in conferences in their own words.

Why it matters:

- Makes real reflection and spiritual direction hard.
- Can hinder study and understanding of theology or spirituality.
- Blocks personal integration of learning.

2. Emotional Dysregulation

- Intense, unpredictable mood swings.
- Overreacts to small events (e.g., extreme anger over minor correction).
- Inappropriate emotional responses (e.g., laughing during serious discussions, crying without clear trigger).
- Disconnect from emotional reality (e.g., numbness, flat affect).

Formation Examples:

- A novice bursts out laughing during a solemn prayer.
- A postulant cries uncontrollably when asked to redo a task.
- A seminarian seems completely detached, responding blankly to emotional topics in community sharing.

Why it matters:

- Damages trust and safety in community life.
- Makes it difficult to handle correction, stress, or change.
- Impedes empathy and pastoral sensitivity.

3. Lack of Motivation

- Difficulty making even simple decisions.

- Avoids responsibilities or assigned tasks.
- Expresses grand goals but fails in small, daily commitments.
- Little sense of long-term vision or planning.
- May appear passive, resigned, or fatalistic.

✓ *Formation Examples:*

- A formee talks passionately about missionary work but refuses to help with local apostolate visits.
- Fails to show up for scheduled chores or classes without explanation.
- Says “I don’t know” repeatedly when asked about personal goals or vocation.
- Needs constant prompting to do even simple tasks.

✓ *Why it matters:*

- Religious life requires **commitment, responsibility, and perseverance**.
- Without motivation, a formee can’t sustain prayer life, ministry, or vows.
- Avoidance can cover deeper fears or conflicts about vocation.

Conclusion for Formators

Thought, Affect, and Will Disturbances aren’t about “bad behaviour” alone. They show **developmental or emotional areas needing growth**.

✓ Your role is to:

- ✓ Recognize the patterns kindly.
- ✓ Provide safe, structured guidance.
- ✓ Invite self-awareness and ownership.
- ✓ Accompany formees in building clarity, emotional balance, and commitment.

Formation isn’t about perfect people—it’s about people **growing in freedom and maturity to respond to God’s call**.

3. Responding as a Formator

- **Observe and Document:** Keep a record of behavioural patterns rather than isolated incidents.
- **Engage in Dialogue:** Gently bring up observations and allow formees to reflect on their behaviours.
- **Encourage Spiritual and Psychological Growth:** Provide opportunities for deeper self-awareness through prayer, reflection, and professional guidance if necessary.
- **Seek Professional Consultation:** When signs of severe personality struggles persist, consult with a psychologist for further evaluation and intervention.
- **Balance Discipline with Compassion:** Firmly guide formees in developing self-awareness while offering them a supportive and nurturing environment.

Example:

- If a formee repeatedly struggles with emotional outbursts, a formator may arrange a series of conversations, suggest practical spiritual exercises, and recommend professional counselling if necessary.
- By attentively observing these signs and fostering a culture of growth, formators can help formees cultivate emotional and psychological maturity necessary for their spiritual journey and vocational discernment.

Red Flags for Formators During Initial Formation

- Persistent isolation from community activities.
- Frequent emotional outbursts or extreme mood swings.
- Strong idealization of authority figures followed by sudden devaluation.

- Inconsistent or contradictory self-perception and beliefs.
- Difficulty forming and maintaining stable relationships.
- Avoidance of responsibilities, lack of motivation, or frequent excuses.
- Refusal to accept correction or guidance from formators and peers.
- Over-dependence on external validation, changing opinions based on the audience.
- Extreme reactions to minor frustrations or conflicts.
- Unwillingness to engage in personal prayer or formation exercises.
- Sudden and frequent changes in long-term goals or vocational discernment.
- Persistent denial of personal faults while blaming others.

Conclusion

This guide offers formators a practical framework for recognizing and responding to psychological and emotional patterns in initial formation. By observing behaviour with discernment, engaging in compassionate dialogue, and fostering personal growth, formators can accompany each formee toward greater maturity, integration, and vocational clarity.