

# Scapegoat Identification Protocol

## Assessment Framework

### Overview

The scapegoat role is assigned to one family member who becomes the repository for family dysfunction. Identifying this dynamic is essential for understanding client presentations and guiding effective work.

### Primary Indicators

- Client reports being blamed for family problems disproportionately
- History of being the "problem child" despite objectively normal behavior
- Sibling(s) treated markedly differently (golden child dynamic)
- Client questions own reality frequently ("Am I crazy?")
- Family narratives about client don't match observable behavior
- Client has been cut off or threatened with cutoff for setting boundaries

### Interview Questions

- "When there was conflict in your family, who usually got blamed?"
- "How were you described to others outside the family?"
- "Were you and your siblings treated similarly or differently?"
- "What happened when you tried to set boundaries?"
- "Do family members have a different version of events than you remember?"

### Observational Markers

- Excessive self-blame or apologizing
- Difficulty identifying own needs or preferences
- Hypervigilance to others' emotional states
- Chronic self-doubt despite competence
- Relief when validated about family experiences

### Differential Considerations

Distinguish scapegoating from legitimate accountability. Key differentiators: scapegoating is disproportionate, consistent regardless of actual behavior, and serves family system needs rather than addressing real issues.

### Working with Scapegoated Clients

- Validate their reality without requiring "proof"
- Help them see the pattern is about the system, not their worth

- Support boundary-setting even if family reacts negatively
- Address internalized shame from years of scapegoating