

You Might Be a Porcupine if ...

I'm not sure exactly when the moment occurred, but recently I've discovered that I'm an animal ... a porcupine, to be more precise. Let me explain.

For many years, I've been speaking at events around the country. One of the topics I speak on is how to love your family well. I share how it's easy to love people who are sweet, kind and lovable. But then ask, "So how do you love people when they're unlovable? How do you love the prickly porcupines in your life who hiss at you, irritate you, wound you, or cause you pain?"

I then go on to share about the nature of the porcupine. And the most recognizable feature of this rodent is that it intrigues us all with its quills, which can number as many as 30,000. The quills are stiff hairs with barbed tips on the ends. The porcupine has quills on all parts of its body, with the exception of its stomach. The longest quills are on its rear end. When irritated or threatened, the porcupine stamps its feet, growls, hisses, and places his snout between his forelegs and spins around, presenting its rear to the other animal. If the porcupine hits the animal with its quills, the quills become embedded and can cause enormous pain.

The Porcupine Me

For some years now, my wife, Susan, has joked about my sometimes "porcupine-ish" tendencies. I'd even laugh about it with her every once in a while. But I didn't think too much about it until recently. Last summer, our team gathered to brainstorm some new topics for my blog. I thought it would be great not only to speak at events about this topic but also to write about it and share it with my blog audience. As we gathered around the table, I held up a picture of a porcupine. I then said, "What's the first thing you think about when you

see this?" One of our team members, Daniel, blurted out, "You!" Everyone chuckled. I even got a kick out of it too.

I then fired Daniel (just kidding). Our team knows I always want them to be honest with me. His comment made me realize that I'm not talking about something I don't know anything about. I can speak from personal experience as a porcupine and also as a person who has dealt with many porcupines in his life.

Born or Bred a Porcupine?

So, was I born a porcupine, or did I become a porcupine? Is it a genetic predisposition, or have external things influenced me? In other words, is it nature or nurture? I believe the answer is "yes." It's both. I was born a selfish creature that wants what he wants when he wants it. I was also raised in a world that has influenced me as well.

You Might Be a Porcupine If ...

Comedian Jeff Foxworthy has a well-known gig where he gives a lot of funny examples of how "You might be a redneck if ..." Well, check out these porcupine characteristics and evaluate whether you think you have any porcupine-ish tendencies.

- Porcupines have sharp quills on its back, sides, and tail, but its belly is tender and vulnerable. So, if you are often prickly, even though you have a lovable, tender side, you might be a porcupine.
- Porcupines are very vocal animals, with a variety of calls including moans, grunts, coughs, wails, whines, shrieks and tooth clicking. If you make a lot of unnecessary grunting, or do a lot of whining or complaining, you might be a porcupine.
- Porcupines are often solitary animals. If you find yourself wanting to be alone a lot, and being with other people too much makes you grumpy, you might be a porcupine.

- When irritated or threatened, a porcupine will turn its back, raise its quills and lash out at a predator with its rump. If you easily get defensive, show your backside, and angrily lash out at others, you might be a porcupine.
- A porcupine's quills have sharp tips and barbs that cause serious pain and make them difficult to remove. If you say or do things to others that deeply wound them and cause long-term pain, you might be a porcupine.
- Porcupines mate in late summer and early fall. this one doesn't exactly fit.

The First Step to Recovery

So, how did you do? Are you, or is someone you love, a porcupine like me sometimes? They say the first step to correcting a problem is admitting you have one, so join me now in saying:

"My name is _____, and I'm a porcupine."

Feel better? Me too!

Now that I've admitted to being a porcupine, I need to share with you that, sometimes, especially in my younger years, I have gotten irritated or lashed out when things haven't gone my way, when my expectations have not been met, when I've felt disrespected, or when I've been lied to. They're called trigger points. Trigger points are things that make our quills stand on end and evoke our "fight or flight" response.

So, in an upcoming blog, I'll further address those porcupine trigger points and how to deal with them.

Are you sometimes a porcupine? If so, what porcupine traits have you exhibited? Please share in the comments below.

Mark Merrill is the president of Family First. For the original article, visit .