

Dysfunctional Ways Narcissists Cope—Reinventing The Past

Narcissists have absolutely no healthy coping skills. One of those dysfunctional coping skills is reinventing the past into something more palatable.

My overtly narcissistic mother was abused by her overtly narcissistic mother until the day her mother died. Honestly I feel sorry for my mother—my grandmother was a very cold, cruel woman. My mother took a lot of abuse from her in childhood as well as adulthood, yet to hear her talk, she had a loving mother.

My mother also went through a phase of at least about two years where she bragged to me constantly about how good she was to me, & what a loving, protective mother she's always been.

The more of my mother's stories she told, the more aggravated I got. My mother was lying, yet she seemed to believe most of her lies. Sometimes though, I noticed she seemed to be trying to convince herself that her lies were true. The expression on her face was like that of someone trying very hard to convince another person of what they're saying. It was strange to say the least, so I finally asked God what was happening. None of this made any sense. I saw my grandmother verbally abuse my mother my entire life—she was no loving mother to my mother! And, I was there in my childhood—my mother wasn't exactly mom of the year. It was making me very angry my mother was invalidating my pain that she caused me by abusing me yet again. I wanted to know what was happening. Why was my mother saying these ridiculous things?

God gave me my answer as soon as I asked for it. My mother couldn't cope with the fact her mother hated her, so she reinvented the past into something she could cope with, something much nicer. If she could convince herself her mother loved her, then she wouldn't have to face the ugly truth.

It was a similar situation with her bragging about what a good mom she was to me. She didn't want to admit she had abused me.. not out of remorse or guilt, but because she didn't want to feel like she was a bad person. If she could convince herself she was a good mom, then she could ignore the fact she'd abused me. By telling her stories to me, she hoped to convince me that she was a good mom as well.

Basically, this was my mother's way to cope with incredibly difficult or painful events—tell herself they didn't happen, & tell herself they happened a much happier, better way.

Realizing this was a very good thing for me. It helped me to understand why she was saying what she did, & to take her ignoring my pain less personally. It wasn't personal at all—it was her way to cope with painful & traumatic events.

After this realization, I no longer felt anger at my mother when she bragged to me about her impressive mothering skills. This was so helpful for me! I hate the feeling of being angry, so I was glad not to feel it any longer. It was replaced by pity for her. I feel sorry for my mother—she isn't able to cope in a normal, healthy way. She employs very dysfunctional ways to cope instead, which means she'll never heal from her problems.

I also wondered the best way for me to deal with her when she shared her tall tales. Should I correct her? Should I play along with it? After praying about it, I felt neither was the right answer. Instead, I realized that as dysfunctional as it is, it's her right to have this sick coping skill. If that's how she wants to cope with pain, so be it. It's her choice & her right to do so. But, that doesn't mean I have to validate it. If she asked me if I remembered an event that she was lying about, I simply said no. Sometimes it was because I remembered the event happening another way than she was saying it did & sometimes because I didn't remember it at all. Either way, she wasn't gaining validation of her lies from me.

If this past reinvention thing is happening with the narcissist in your life, please keep in mind what I have said. It's not personal—it's just how they cope. They also have every right to cope in any way they see fit, even if it's the worst way possible. And, don't validate their lies. Just because they want to believe the lies doesn't mean it's right & you should go along with it. You don't have to reward or encourage that bad behavior.