

Dysfunctional Ways Narcissists Cope—Retroactive Justification

While narcissists have no conscience to speak of, I believe they still know right from wrong. If they didn't, they wouldn't work so hard to keep what they do a secret. Knowing right from wrong also means they know abusing their children is wrong. Unlike normal people though, rather than admit that what they've done was wrong, they may try to justify it, even years after the events happened.

A couple of years ago, my overtly narcissistic mother & I had a very strange conversation. She asked if my ex husband ever hit me. Since at that time we'd been divorced for just under 19 years, it seemed odd she'd ask anything like that. I was also surprised because yes he did, she saw me shortly after it happened & she just ignored the fact I was bruised & swollen. Anyway, I said he did once when we had a huge argument at the time of our separation. She then asked if his mother or father were abusive. I said no. She went on to say no one should be abused, & if she would've known he hit me, she could've called a lawyer immediately. It was all very hurtful that she forgot about the event & strange that she brought it up & acted like it bothered her.

I wondered what on earth that conversation was about, so I prayed some time after hanging up the phone. God showed me what my mother's motivations were.

If she could prove my ex was a terrible person like she always said he was, then she'd feel justified in her abusing me in an attempt to keep us apart back when we first met just before I turned 17. It could prove to her that she really was saving me from myself, as she claimed she was trying to do at that time.

Also, at the time of this conversation, my mother had been giving me the silent treatment, as she often did. By her saying what she did, she believed it showed me that she was on my side, that she cared about me. That was supposed to make me resume our relationship without being upset about the silent treatment.

This retroactive justification for abuse is something many narcissists do. By justifying what awful things they have done, they hope to take away your anger. After all, how can you be angry about the horrible things they've done if there was a very good reason for it? And, if you aren't angry, not only will you stay in that relationship with the narcissist, but you'll tolerate their abuse because you think they always have a good reason for doing it.

Having reasons for their abusive ways also helps narcissists to cope with what they have done. I don't believe they feel guilt or remorse, since that requires empathy that they don't have. But, they may feel embarrassed about their actions or afraid people will think badly of them because of some things that they have done. Having a reason for their behavior validates their behavior, at least in their minds. Sure, they may have acted badly, but it was for a good reason, so it's OK! The ends justifies the means, at least in the mind of the narcissist.

If you have a narcissist in your life or have had one in your life that did their best to justify abusing you, you need to remember that this retroactive justification is merely one more dysfunctional coping skills narcissists use. The more you know about & understand why narcissists behave as they do, the less harm they can cause you. When you realize their abuse is about their dysfunction & nothing to do with you, it hurts you a great deal less. You don't take things as personally when you have a healthy understanding of the depths of the narcissist's dysfunction. I know when I realized why my mother brought up that topic the day she did, I felt a lot better. At first, I thought it was just to hurt me, which hurt even more than the topic of the conversation. After realizing it was just one more dysfunctional way of hers, it hurt much less.