

Dysfunctional Family Gatherings

Today's podcast is about dysfunctional family gatherings.

During the holiday season, many families get together. They share a good meal & enjoy each other's company. There is no pressure about these gatherings & everyone genuinely looks forward to them.

Then there are the dysfunctional family gatherings. They are something very different.

On first glance, dysfunctional family gatherings may look the same as their functional counterparts. Family members get together & share a big meal. But, that is often where the similarities end.

With dysfunctional families, the stress is terrible. There is usually intense pressure to show up at the get together no matter what. Sick? Who cares? You aren't so sick you can't attend! Car trouble? So what? Figure out how to get there! You would prefer to spend the day at home or with some friends? Clearly something is very wrong with you! No one is as worthy of your time as the dysfunctional family, & the holiday dictator will be highly offended if you even consider spending time with anyone else. You need to attend this gathering & act like you are happy when you're there, even if you are miserable. Your misery means nothing, after all. This gathering is all about appearances, not about having a good time.

There's also the dysfunctional clique action. Some people are going to shun other people or at the very least talk badly about them. Maybe the other people didn't bring a large enough casserole. Maybe their gifts didn't cost as much as the shunning people think they should have cost. Maybe the other people weren't wearing the appropriate holiday attire. In any case, something will be found to criticize even when there isn't anything to criticize.

The truth is that very few people genuinely enjoy this get together. They may dread it but feel no other option is available but to attend & pretend to have a wonderful time.

So why participate in this gathering at all? Wouldn't it just make more sense to do whatever you enjoy on the holidays & forego the dysfunctional family nightmare hoopla? It would, but few will do that. There are several reasons why.

One reason is no one wants to anger the holiday dictator. Doing so can result in guilt trips, anger, &/or shaming. No one wants this. Many people think it is simply easier to sacrifice a holiday than to deal with the guilt, anger or shaming.

Another reason is that by participating in these get togethers, it gives the delusion that this family actually is a big, happy, functional family. They can pretend that

everyone gets along & is a “normal” family because after all, they got together for this holiday gathering. That is a perfectly normal thing to do, so it must prove they are all normal.

When you are aren't someone who is capable of blindly going along with people's delusions & denial, these gatherings can be described as nothing less than excruciating. The fakeness of it all is exhausting & repulsive to those who believe in facing the truth.

When you are faced with these dysfunctional family gatherings, you can cope. You have choices.

You can choose not to attend. This decision is a tough one, because those who are in favor of this get together will judge & criticize you harshly for not attending. Even so, it may be worth it.

You can attend, but with strict boundaries in place. You can avoid the critics as much as possible. You also can set a specific time to give to this gathering then leave at the allotted time.

If you attend & the critics start their nastiness, you also can simply say, “Well, isn't that nice” & walk away. In the southern part of the United States, that comment is known to be a polite way of saying, “I really don't care.” I have said it many times then walked away. It feels good! It also tells the critics their opinion means nothing to you & in a polite way.

Believe it or not, you do have options during the holiday season. Exercise them! It is your right!

Thank you for listening to my podcast!