

Dysfunctional Families And The Holidays

Today's podcast is about dysfunctional families & the holidays.

Since the holiday season is officially upon us, I thought it would be a good time to talk about dysfunctional families & the holidays.

The holiday season is supposed to be a joyful time of year, & spent with those you love the most. Instead, for people with dysfunctional families & in-laws, it is the most dreaded time of year.

These families make unreasonable demands, have their own traditions that allow no room for change & have no tolerance for anyone who doesn't go along with their traditions & demands. They turn a joyful time of year into one full of stress, anxiety, hurt feelings, & anger for anyone who doesn't go along with their "one big happy family" charade.

Clearly this is very common with narcissists, but those who are simply dysfunctional can behave in the same way. Their motivations are different than their narcissistic counterparts. It is usually done to make them feel as if their family isn't dysfunctional. After all, they always get together at the holidays, so they must be a close, happy family, right?

Whichever is your situation, you are in a frustrating, difficult & exasperating position. I understand it all too well since I have been there more years than I care to remember with both dysfunctional people & narcissists. I've learned some things that I think can help those of you who are currently in this situation.

Remember, as an adult, you aren't obligated to do what your family or in-laws tell you to do. Just because they think you need to obey their wishes & celebrate their way doesn't mean that you need to do as they say. Not doing as they want will upset them, & they will hurt you. Think about this... is it worth wasting your time being miserable to appease them to avoid them basically pouting like a spoiled child? Hopefully you feel you can handle their temper tantrum & spend the holidays as you want. If you do, chances are you are going to feel guilty & hurt when they are mad at you, since that is normal. When that happens, just remind yourself that you are a grown adult, & no one has the right to dictate how you spend your holidays.

If you opt not to spend your holidays with these people, then be sure to do something you enjoy doing. Spend the day with friends instead of family. Go on a trip. Start your own traditions that don't involve them.

If you don't feel you can avoid doing what your dysfunctional family & in-laws want you to do though, hope is not lost! Rather than do everything they want, set some boundaries. If they want you to spend all of Christmas day with them, say you only

have a couple of hours to spend with them. Or, offer to spend Christmas Eve or the day after Christmas with them.

I know setting boundaries with narcissists & very dysfunctional people can be hard, but you can do it! If the suggestions I just made feel like too much, start small. If this person wants you to be at their house at 11, say you will be there at noon. If they want you to bring three dishes for dinner, offer to bring two instead. Moves like this are small, but significant. They help you take back some of your power. Often, those small steps lead the way to setting bigger boundaries with confidence.

I also learned that after years of ridiculous holiday expectations of demanding dysfunctional people, I absolutely detest holidays no matter what I try to do to enjoy them. The narcissists & dysfunctional people in my life ruined almost all of the holidays in my adult life. Even though they are all gone from my life now, I still hate holidays. I've spoken with other people who have been in similar situations who feel the same as me, so I am left to assume this is normal. If this happens to you, don't beat yourself up over it. You can't help how you feel. Dysfunctional people made you feel this way, & there is nothing wrong with you for that. Many people can't understand feeling this way & can be quite hurtful with their judgments. Don't pay any attention to what they say. Their opinion isn't important. Your feelings aren't damaging their life in any way so you just be yourself & don't worry about them!

Thank you for listening to my podcast!