

Reactive Abuse: When Your Normal Reactions Are Used Against You

Today's podcast is called "Reactive Abuse: When Your Normal Reactions Are Used Against You."

Reactive abuse is one of the most misunderstood & most devastating forms of emotional manipulation. At its core, it is a strategy abusers use to shift blame, distort reality, & maintain control over their victims. While many people associate reactive abuse only with a person being provoked into an emotional outburst, the truth goes far deeper than that.

Yes, one form of reactive abuse involves the abuser goading you, provoking you repeatedly with cruel words, silent treatment, or subtle digs, until you finally react in frustration, anger, or tears. Then, the abuser weaponizes your emotional reaction, calling you "crazy," "overreactive," or "mentally unstable." They point to your justified reaction as evidence that *you* are the problem, not them. This is a classic tactic designed to erase their accountability & even make you question your own sanity.

But reactive abuse does not stop there. It also shows up in more covert & sinister ways.

In many abusive dynamics, simply having a normal emotional response to hurtful or traumatic events is seen as a problem. You may cry, withdraw, express sadness, or ask for space after something deeply upsetting happens, & instead of compassion, you are met with cold indifference or accusations such as, "Why are you making a big deal out of nothing?", "You're too sensitive." or, "You're always trying to start drama."

This is not just invalidation - it is gaslighting. The abuser is denying the legitimacy of your emotions & pressuring you to suppress your humanity. You are expected to stay calm & composed, no matter how hurtful or destabilizing their behavior is. & if you do not? You are blamed for the fallout. Your reaction is deemed the problem rather than whatever triggered your reaction.

Another form of reactive abuse is when an abuser demands that you behave as though nothing upsetting ever happened. Maybe there was a betrayal, a cruel outburst, or emotional harm – & instead of apologizing or addressing it, the abuser expects you to "just move on" or "get over it" immediately. If you are not cheerful or compliant, you become the problem.

This expectation is not only unfair – it is deeply damaging. It trains you to suppress your emotions, silence your voice, & carry the weight of pain without acknowledgment or healing. Over time, it conditions you to disconnect from the truth, to distrust your own emotional responses, & to believe that your pain is an inconvenience or a sign of weakness.

Reactive abuse is a powerful form of gaslighting. Its goal is to destabilize the victim's sense of self & keep them locked in a cycle of self blame, confusion, & silence. By flipping the script & making the victim seem like the abuser, this tactic allows the true abuser to evade responsibility & maintain dominance. Or, if the one who has harmed the victim is someone else outside of the abusive relationship, it also trains the victim to tolerate abuse from

anyone, which also benefits an abuser who then may continue abusing their victim without consequences.

Victims of reactive abuse often begin to wonder if they are truly overreacting, if whatever happened is really their fault or even if they are the problem. These doubts are part of the manipulation. The abuser wants you to internalize their narrative so deeply that you stop fighting back, stop expressing emotion, & stop seeking truth.

The first step toward healing from reactive abuse is recognizing it for what it is. Your anger, sadness, confusion, & fear are not signs that something is wrong with you – they are signs that something wrong is happening to you. Emotional responses are part of what it means to be human, & when those responses are used against you, it is not because you are broken! It is because someone is trying to break you.

Begin by giving yourself permission to feel. Name what is happening. Write it down. Speak it out loud. Reclaim your right to respond to pain. If you are struggling with this, ask God to speak the truth of your situation to you.

You are not crazy, unstable, or dramatic – you are someone who has been mistreated, & your reaction is valid.

Thank you for listening to my podcast!