

Life... Still mad at Dad

Situation:

Where do I begin? I am 33-years old. After my parents divorced when I was in my teens, my two brothers and I stayed with my Dad. All went pretty well for a while, my Mother moved far enough away to reclaim her life, yet close enough to stay in close touch with all of us children. At the time I wasn't sure, now I know she did her best.

During the time that my Mom and I were re-building our relationship, she told me about when she and Dad first split up and how she went to counseling, Dad joined her one time. The psychologist told them both to avoid saying hateful things about each other to us kids because it would affect us emotionally, not only then but in the future. I do remember Mom's discussions about Dad being more or less neutral.

It's the memories of my Father's that haunt and hurt me. He was always putting my Mother down, as if he wanted us to hate her as much as he did. It wasn't constant, but it was continuous. She wasn't around to hear the verbal abuse, but I was. What irks me is that he knew, he knew it wasn't healthy for us kids, and he did it anyway! One of my most vivid memories is that every time she called to talk to me, he would hold the phone receiver out to me and not speak a word. He wouldn't even acknowledge she was on the other end.

He couldn't forgive Mom, or take even take a tiny bit of responsibility for their breakup, and now I find myself acting just like he did – I can't seem to forgive him. My anger is keeping me depressed and affecting not only my relationships, but my work life too. Any hints as to what can help me?

Answer:

Good for you for taking responsibility for what's going on in your mind! It's a positive sign of emotional maturity.

As a general rule (but not in every case) Mom's are usually more "in-tune" with psychological needs. It sounds like your Mom took the professional's words to heart.

As for your Dad – you've heard the expression, "anger blocks insight?" Unfortunately it doesn't end there. That same anger can also impede a person's listening abilities. A person who lives with anger and hate clogging up his mind, isn't open and receptive. And under the circumstances, there's a very real possibility that your Dad didn't hear the psychologist's warning, so he couldn't act on the advice. He was physically present, but in a very real sense his ears were sealed to what was being said.

You mentioned that he only attended one counseling session. That pretty much indicates that he wasn't thrilled about going. You mentioned that he had his mind made



up that he was “right” and your Mom was “wrong.” That too is a sign that he was less than open-minded.

You’re a smart lady for recognizing what’s contributing to your depressed mood. Part of what holds us anchored to the past is wanting to know the “why” behind what took place. And it’s common to get caught up in the “why” and think an explanation would be our cure. Know that even if you had the opportunity to ask him “why” you might not get a clear-cut explanation.

We’ve all heard that our parents “did the best they could under the circumstances” – for some people, that’s enough to help them release their pent-up feelings, for others it’s not. Here’s a statement that came to me when I was working through some of my ancient parental issues: “My parents had their own brand of love.”

Their own brand of love – they did what they did from their perspective of responsibility and love. Does that mean that I think what they provided for me was enough to really nurture me? No, not from my perspective. Does it mean that I’ve stopped wishing my upbringing would have been different? Wishing? Yes, I’ve stopped wishing. Using the phrase “their own brand of love” helped me accept the way things were. “Wishing” means I’d like to go back and change the past. Realistically that’s impossible. All the wishing in the world won’t put us into rewind to relive our former lives in a different/better way. “Their own brand of love” has brought me understanding and acceptance. Minus the right, the wrong, the good, the bad – I’ve accepted the circumstances – just as they were.

Whichever statement you choose to use in excusing/forgiving your Dad, know that in order to be effective and healing for you, it’s going to take saying it more than one time. Whenever the angry/insecure thoughts start to surface, you will have to replace them – one at a time – over and over again.

Keep at it, and I assure you that one day you’ll say it and believe it, and that will be a glorious and freeing time for you. With practice you will be able to acknowledge and affirm that: Of course my Dad loved me, with his “own brand of love.”

You’ll finally be at peace about it.

