

I DON'T CONSIDER MYSELF TO BE A VICTIM, SO HOW DO I ACCEPT THE REALITY OF MY ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIP?

Hi. This is Natalie Hoffman of Flyingfreenow.com, and you're listening to the Flying Free Podcast, a support resource for women of faith looking for hope and healing from hidden emotional and spiritual abuse.

NATALIE: Welcome to Episode 249 of the Flying Free Podcast. Today we have a question from a listener, so let's hear what she has to say.

LISTENER: Hi, Natalie. So here's my question: In order to move towards healing, I've had to stop living in denial and admit that what I experienced was abuse. I'm struggling with that realization because if it's true, it also means that I'm a victim. I don't want to live as a victim. So how do we accept the reality of the abuse and not continue to live as a victim? Thanks for your help.

NATALIE: Okay, I actually wrote an article about this a few years ago, so I'm going to draw from what I wrote in that article and then I'll share it with you all here on the podcast. So first of all, let's talk about what a victim is. According to dictionary.com, "A victim is a person who has been harmed, injured, or killed as a result of a crime, accident, or other event or action." So this just means that if you are a person who's been harmed by another person, such as in an emotionally, spiritually, financially, physically, whatever kind of abusive relationship it is, that means that you are a victim of that harm.

Now, do we like to be victims? No, nobody likes to be a victim for a lot of different reasons, but when we resist that reality, just as this listener pointed out, or we fight reality, we can end up with mental health problems, which is, ironically, just one more result of being a victim of abuse. So one of the ways that you can mitigate some of the results of being a victim is by simply accepting the fact, the reality, that someone or something has victimized you, and we call this radical acceptance of reality, which is absolutely a necessary first step if we want to heal and get beyond victimhood and back into our life.

People who insist that they are not victims and would never be victimized are people who may be unable to overcome the wounds of being a victim. It actually leaves them in more of a victimized place than someone who is willing to admit it and get help for it.

Now, I'll give you an example. I actually know someone personally who was gang raped in the neighborhood when this person was a young child. But this person to this day

insists that this experience did not impact them. And this person is like, "I will not be a victim." This person in their denial has, because of their mental health issues, as a result of this trauma, they have lost their marriage, they've lost their family, and they've lost their mental health simply by insisting on denying their reality and therefore getting the help that they need.

So this is serious. This is serious, and we'll talk about the shame in just a minute, but in my article, I write, "A victim is someone who has experienced a factual event that has harmed them in some way. A person whose house is destroyed by a tornado is a victim. A group of people who happen to be in a bank when it gets robbed, they're victims. A young man who's mugged in the park is a victim. A child who's beaten by her parents is a victim. An elderly woman left alone in her house with nobody to care for her is a victim. People are not victims because of who they are as a person or because of how they think. They are victims because something or someone outside of themselves has done something to them, or something happens to them that they have no control over.

It's not a victim's fault that they are a victim. Most people in the world, if you stop and think about it, are a victim in one way or another to something that has happened to them because it's just not possible to escape every form of harm when you live a life on planet Earth.

Now, there is a difference between being a victim and having a victim mentality. So what does it mean to have a victim mentality? Having a victim mentality is choosing to live with a way of thinking or believing that causes you to stay stuck. Now, this means it is possible to be both a true victim and to have a victim mentality or a victim complex. But please hear me: Not every victim has a victim mentality. I would argue that most of them don't."

So, in fact, I would argue, and I do in my article, that abusers have a victim mentality. And I'm going to read to you some of these characteristics and then see what you think.

So, "1. The belief that it's always someone else's fault when something goes wrong.

2. A refusal to take personal responsibility for their life.

3. Suspicion of others, even when there is no reason to be suspicious.

4. Believing they are special and deserve special treatment that others don't typically get.

5. Believing they are always right and everyone else is wrong and unfair.

6. A refusal to be self-aware and to learn and grow.

7. The expectation that others need to give to them, but they have nothing to offer

others.

8. Believing that life should be good and fair and right all the time.
9. Letting life happen to them instead of taking responsibility.
10. Believing that they got the worst life has to offer.

Someone with a victim mentality refuses to exercise their own personal power because that would require change, and change requires effort and pain. It's easier to say that it's someone else's fault and it's out of their control," okay?

Now, a lot of you guys have an abuser that you're living with — an emotional abuser, a spiritual abuser, an abuser of some kind — if you think about it, this list applies to them. They probably show up in these ways a lot. But I believe that most true victims of emotional abuse do not have a victim mentality. Instead, they usually show up more like this:

- "1. They have this belief that it's probably their fault when something goes wrong, meaning it's their own fault, right?
2. They have a propensity to take responsibility for themselves and everyone else.
3. They have a trusting and forgiving attitude towards others, almost too trusting and too forgiving.
4. They have a belief that they aren't worth much and they owe service to everyone else.
5. They have the belief that they need to learn how to be a better person, and so they just keep trying and trying and trying to be that better person.
6. They have a strong desire and motivation to read and learn and grow.
7. They have a belief that their life is all about dying to themselves and making sacrifices for others.
8. They believe that life is hard and will always be hard, but that's okay. They can do it. They'll do it.
9. They take responsibility to make life happy for everybody else.
10. They're very grateful for any scrap of kindness or goodness that is offered to them."

Now, these are not all healthy things either, right? I mean, there are opportunities to grow in these areas. But notice the difference, though, between the victim mentality person versus the person who's actually a genuine victim. Again, some of these things, they are areas to work on. Obviously, we don't want to walk around always believing that when something goes wrong, it's our fault.

If we believe that everything is our fault, what that actually means is there's probably some kind of childhood trauma or warped messages that got downloaded into our

brains at some point in our life. And the amazing thing is that now that we are adults, we can actually rewire some of those messages and change our lives. And this is really the main thing that we do inside of the Flying Free program. If this is work you want to do, I encourage you to learn more about this affordable support and education program by going to joinflyingfree.com.

Now, if you're a victim of emotional abuse, that means that you are living with an emotional abuser. You are living with lies, gaslighting, criticism, yelling, threats, spiritual control, financial control — I'm not saying you're living with all of these, but you're living with a variety of these things — limited resources, limited exposure to the outside world, dirty looks, the silent treatment, snarls, passive-aggressive manipulation, guilt-tripping, blame, and shame.

And when you're living with this kind of treatment, it makes it more challenging for you to do this kind of rewiring work that we do inside of Flying Free. It's kind of like hiring an electrician to come over and fix your electrical wiring, but every night when you go to bed, someone goes around and reconnects things in the wrong way again. This is a reality for many women. Now, it does not mean that the rewiring can't be done. It just means the process is going to take more intentionality and effort and time because you have someone living with you that's sabotaging the process each day.

Now, sometimes women tell me that they don't see themselves as a victim, just like this listener said. Maybe they don't want to be a victim because that sounds weak and shameful. But I would just like to challenge you to think about, is it really a shameful thing to be a victim? Is it an elderly woman's fault, and should she be ashamed of herself, if she gets mugged in the park? Is it a child's fault if he gets trafficked? Is it a man's fault if a drunk driver hits his bike and paralyzes him? Should these people feel shame for being victimized? Is it your fault that you unknowingly married an abusive partner and then tried to make the best of it? What if your daughter did? Would that be her fault?

You guys, bad things happen, sometimes because we were in the wrong place at the wrong time, sometimes because someone decided to be cruel, sometimes because nature took over and caused destruction, sometimes because we just made an innocent mistake. I agree that I would rather think of myself as this strong, empowered survivor than a victim. But that's just because of how we have framed what those things mean, how we have bought into this idea of what a victim is.

But think about this: You can't be a survivor if you haven't survived anything. So the first step to being a survivor is acknowledging that you were victimized in some way, and

there is no shame in that. It is part of the human experience for most people. And when we admit that, then we can heal from it and begin to make a life in spite of it. Always remember that pathology, mental health problems, are usually rooted in some kind of denial of reality.

So we don't want to deny what happened to us or to act like it was no big deal. But at the same time, admitting that you were a victim of something is not the same thing as giving up or being a doormat. We acknowledge that reality that we have been victimized, and then we dig in and we do the messy business of creating something life-giving out of that reality, in spite of that reality. That is what it means to survive. That is what it means to thrive.

So how can you go from being a victim to being a survivor? Here are the characteristics of someone who I would consider to be an emotional abuse survivor who is in the process of healing:

- “1. They believe that sometimes things go wrong in life, and that is part of the human experience.
2. They take responsibility for themselves without taking on the responsibility of others.
3. They trust those who have earned their trust over time, and also they have learned how to trust themselves.
4. They wisely steward their emotional space and they protect it from intruders or those who have demonstrated a lack of respect, love, and healthy boundaries.
5. They believe they are a worthy and valuable human being.
6. They continue to learn and grow and change as they accept — maybe not agree with — but accept the perspectives of other people.
7. They make their life about creating safe, healthy, life-giving spaces for themselves and for others.
8. They accept that everyone gets to make their own adult choices in life, and they take responsibility for their adult choices and nobody else's.
9. They take responsibility for their own well-being, inner peace, and joy without expecting anyone else to do this for them.
10. They empower themselves by managing their own brain space and the thoughts they allow to live there.”

Now, if you just heard that list and you think, “Oh my word, I have a long way to go,” don't freak out. Growing in these areas takes a lifetime, and our opportunity is to make just a little bit of progress each day. And it starts with your brain space. Your brain is going to want to shut down and give up. That's the easiest thing to do, and your brain, if left to itself, will always take the path of the least resistance. Our brains are adorable,

aren't they? But your brain doesn't get to control your life. You do. And the first step is introducing some brand new thoughts to your brain.

This is like taking a four-wheeler and driving over a wilderness area that has never been driven over before. You'll have to drive over the same area regularly and repetitively in order to create a new pathway. Likewise, when we are rewiring our brain, we are finding new thoughts and practicing them until they are part of our belief system. We are no longer giving our attention to the old neural pathways in our brain that are not serving us anymore, and we are giving our full attention to creating these new neural pathways until those new thoughts that we have intentionally chosen are integrated into our life and have changed and transformed us into the next version of ourselves.

And again, this is exactly the work that we do inside of Flying Free, and I would love to have you do this work with us. If you want to be a different person a year from now, you can. I'll help you. Go to joinflyingfree.com. Do it for yourself, but you know what? Do it for your kids, too, because when you change yourself, you change the world.

Hey, beautiful butterfly. Thank you so much for listening. If you liked this episode, be sure to subscribe, and then consider leaving a rating and review so others can find us. To connect with me and get a free chapter of my book, head over to flyingfreenow.com, and until next time, fly free.