



Client Handout

How we Hide from Pain

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The human mind is wired up to avoid discomfort. For this reason, there are very common and predictable coping mechanisms that persist in the lives of trauma survivors. When these coping mechanisms show up, you can be sure that there is untended pain being masked.

Denial - Rejecting reality. In serious cases, denial can mean denying what happened. More often, it can look like accepting what happened but denying its impact. Sounds like:

- *We just need to leave the past in the past.*
- *No use crying over spilled milk.*
- *You don't change anything by complaining.*
- *Crying doesn't change anything.*
- *It never happened!*
- *I left it at the foot of the cross.*
- *All things have been made new.*
- *I don't need to talk about it.*
- *It doesn't really affect me.*

Minimization - Downplaying reality. Sounds like:

- *It wasn't that bad.*
- *I'm just overreacting.*
- *Making a mountain from a molehill.*
- *Things could have been a lot worse.*
- *At least they didn't (do this much more serious thing).*
- *I've heard worse.*
- *I just need to be stronger.*
- *My family said it wasn't that bad.*

Rationalization - Downplaying reality through reasonable justifications. Sounds like::

- *They were under a lot of pressure.*
- *I was probably just an overly sensitive child.*
- *I was rebellious or disobeyed them.*
- *They didn't mean to hurt me.*
- *They didn't realize what they were doing.*
- *They didn't know any better.*
- *They were abused themselves.*
- *Everybody grew up in a dysfunctional family.*
- *It was all my fault.*

Dissociation - Distancing or disconnecting from reality. Sound like:

- *What abuse?*
- *I just don't remember much about growing up.*
- *I know what happened. I just don't feel anything about it.*
- *I remember school, but not much about home.*
- *I know it's there, but I can't seem to touch it.*
- *I feel crazy. I act crazy, but I have no idea why.*