
Overcoming Denial

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on Aug 17, 2019

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An alcoholic, bulimic teen or workaholic father may say, "I don't have a problem," yet the problem is so clear to the observer.

Or, the parent, not willing to recognize the potential of their son's risky behaviors, may remark: "There's a mistake, my son could never have been driving recklessly."

What is denial and how is a person to safeguard against it?

Denial is the refusal to acknowledge the existence or pain of unpleasant external realities or internal thoughts and feelings. As an individual faces a fact (truth) that is too hurtful to accept, he rejects it instead of accepting it. Usually the person will insist that the fact is not true despite what may be overwhelming evidence to the contrary. There is a conflict occurring in the ability of the person to learn from and cope with reality. The mind develops a defense mechanism to protect the individual. This mechanism is denial.

Simply, denial is rejecting the reality of the objectionable fact (truth) altogether.

Minimization is admitting the truth but denying its seriousness. This is a combination between denial and rationalization (excuse).

Projection is admitting the truth of both fact and seriousness but denying personal responsibility (blame).

Denial can have multiple parts, possessing one or many of these parts enables the behavior to continue. The individual can rationalize or justify an inconsistent belief that is

obvious to an outsider.

Dealing with personal denial issues is important in a person's maturity and growth process. A friend confronting irrational thinking usually brings denial of reality to their attention. Having an accountability partner that will confront the irrational reality they see in the individual is important in overcoming denial. There must be an acknowledgement of the true-reality and rejecting and reversing the distorted fact. A person's ability to blame, justify or minimize is an essential part of what enables the denial-behavior to continue despite evidence to an outsider the behavior appears overwhelmingly faulty. God, the author of truth, tells us that in a multitude of counselors there is safety (Proverbs 24:6).

Avoiding Denial

Accountable

Cultivate healthy relationship and rely on good people to help point out the faulty assumptions in your facts.

Teachable

Understanding and avoiding denial is also important in all areas of life. With illness the opportunity exists for the patient to deny the emergency, often with fatal consequences. For example, it is common for patients to delay mammograms or other tests because of a fear of cancer, even though this is clearly maladaptive. Just as medical staffs are responsible to train at-risk patients to avoid such behaviors, God tells us in the Scriptures "Hear instruction (training), and be wise, and do not refuse it. (Proverbs 8:33). Christians have the mandate from God to educate and train others how to avoid the pitfalls caused by denial-behaviors. Proverbs tell us "Poverty and shame shall be to him who refuses instruction, but he who listens to correction shall be honored (13:18)."

Responsible

People in leadership have a responsibility to themselves and to others, Jesus warns us In Matthew about acting as a hypocrite. He challenges us to first clear the "log" from our eye to see clearly, before we can help remove the "twig" from another's eye. (Matthew 7:5). This tells us that we can be blind to our own sins and shortcomings.

Solomon in Proverbs speaks to the failure of our own wisdom. A person must realize he cannot rely on his own ideas and action alone as being always correct. Proverbs states, "Listen to advice and accept discipline, and at the end you will be counted among the wise. (19:20). He also says "Listen and be wise, and set your heart on the right path

(23:19). These verses help us realize we cannot responsibly root out destructive behaviors such as denial alone.

Connection with trusted others for insight and accountability is an important key to resolving the denial issues. Every person should develop accountability relationships that provide loving and responsible feedback, instruction and insight into their every day life because denial is rather easy to observe in others but not as easy to see in us.