

Divorcing or Breaking up with a Narcissist

This guide is to help you to understand how narcissists think and what makes them feel empowered. Once you have a clear understanding of where they are, then you can better position yourself to beat them at their own game. Beating them at their own game can be overcoming a tiny hump, i.e. getting them to agree to a scheduled pickup, to succeeding at getting a settlement that you feel you deserve, the idea is that you manage to accomplish what you set out to. By understanding more about narcissistic personality disorder, you can spot the narcissists in your life, protect yourself from their power plays, and establish healthier boundaries.

****Note:** This should not be used as replacement of any legal or therapeutic advice. Please consult with the necessary professionals to help you achieve your desired results. ******

Background on narcissists:

“Narcissistic personality disorder involves a pattern of self-centered, arrogant thinking and behavior, a lack of empathy and consideration for other people, and an excessive need for admiration. Others often describe people with NPD as cocky, manipulative, selfish, patronizing, and demanding. They are extremely resistant to changing their behavior, even when it’s causing them problems and have the tendency to turn the blame on to others. Further, they are extremely sensitive and react badly to even the slightest criticisms, disagreements, or perceived slights, which they view as personal attacks. For the people in the narcissist’s life, it’s often easier just to go along with their demands to avoid the coldness and rages.”

Things to remember about narcissists:

1. They are in it to win it.

We know that in divorce, there are no real winners. However, to the narcissist that's what they really focus on. They are most likely to play victim no matter how much reasoning anyone tries to use with them. They are very hard to successfully negotiate or mediate any divorce settlement because they are having no desire to meet anywhere near the middle. Their main concern is being right and so they will lie, cheat and manipulate just to prove that they are right, even when they are far from it.

2. They like to play games.

It has been proven that narcissists like maintaining power and having an edge by keeping others off-balance. And no one is immune, they will do this with you, both your lawyers, the judge and any other party to the divorce process or proceeding.

3. They lack empathy, and that's not going to change.

Because of impaired empathy, the narcissist is unable to care about how their antics are causing harm to you, the kids or anyone else involved. They only care about how they feel or what they want or being "right" and there are no number of tears, rationalizing, compromising that will make them consider anyone else's feelings

4. Starting a court battle equates to being in control and exerting their power.

Giving in is not something narcissists do. So, dragging you to court is part of the joy they get, they get to maintain control and flex their muscle by not letting go. Unless something is at stake that they deem important, time, money or inconvenience are not anything they consider as long as they get to dictate the terms of the divorce. As stated above, rationalizing with them is almost impossible so unnecessarily prolonging court involvement is very likely.

5. They need that symbol of their "win". They not only want to be right; they need some sort of validation of this. So, if they can point to something that symbolizes their win, they win. They take joy in their target relenting or giving up.

What You Need to Know to “beat” the Narcissist:

1. Do not go it alone, hire the “right” attorney.

It isn't wise to proceed through divorce against a narcissist pro se or unrepresented. Narcissists know your triggers, understand your weaknesses and prey on your “soft” side, bringing in a professional that is impartial and experience to deal with these types is strongly advised. If previous discussions about settlement went unsuccessful or you've had history of abuse, manipulation and/or control, then understand that your chances of succeeding are increased by hiring an experienced attorney. When choosing an attorney, be sure to screen them for their experience and ability to go up against narcissists. (See my **Questions to Ask when Interviewing Divorce Attorneys**) Especially if the narcissist is represented by an attorney, (there are many times they purposely will not hire an attorney since the attorney will advise them to do the “right” thing) you should hire one as well.

2. Document EVERYTHING, with pictures, documents, receipts, etc.

This may be overly cumbersome but so very helpful in the end. Especially in “he said, she said” situations, third party, objective proof speaks for itself. So, keep a detailed diary/journey of every misled appointment, every insult, every nonpayment, etc. Take pictures with time stamps, use apps to save text messages, have a witness for pickups & drop-offs, and so on.

3. Try, try and try harder to stay calm.

You will inevitably get the provoking emails, the antagonistic text messages, etc. but you must not respond with the same intensity. You **MUST** not indulge in any discussions, no matter the means, that will only perpetuate the discord the narcissist incites. Remember they are playing their game; you can choose to sit out of it at any point you choose. Trying to disprove how “right” they are is an exercise in futility, it absolutely serves you no purpose. You can experience your emotions, just don't express them openly to the narcissist. This will be most challenging when the narcissist use your children as bait or a pawn, which they will inevitably do, but remember your restraint will benefit your children in the long run.

4. Examine Your Role in the Ongoing Conflict without Taking Responsibility for their Actions.

It is much easier to achieve this if you are emotionally “healthy” to begin with, and no offense, but if you were then there would have been no relationship with the narcissist to begin with. The narcissist is adept at creating doubt, causing confusion and “gaslighting” where their target questions if their own behavior caused their circumstances. You can’t stop them from being who they are, but what you can do is change the way you respond to them. Try to make their behaviors about them, not you. Try to remember that almost every move they make is to further their own mission, which has nothing to do with you per se. Their true intentions will be revealed and called out for exactly what they are, selfish, manipulative and controlling.

5. Deal with Your Reality, not Theirs.

The world of the narcissist is made up of fantasy, nothing is real, all is an expression of their need to be someone they are not. It is imperative you see the narcissist for who he/she really is and not for whom you wish he/she was. No matter, how good the narcissist used to be, how you want the narcissist to be, the more you work at bringing goodness out, the more the narcissist will exploit your goodness.

Focus on your own self-worth so that you don’t look to the narcissist to value or validate who you are.

6. You MUST Set Firm Boundaries.

The narcissist believes their needs are more important than yours, they believe they are more intelligent than you and find it unacceptable that anyone would disagree with them. For this reason, they lack an understanding of boundaries and respecting the needs of others.

You can't teach or expect the narcissist to ever respect your boundaries. You can, however, refuse to allow the narcissist to cross your boundaries and cause you undue stress during the divorce process. This is done by you controlling what behaviors you will and will not allow and sticking to them no matter what. If you need to, practice expressing those boundaries, see how they show up when you visualize doing this. Don’t try to control the behaviors of the narcissist, or confront them or be assertive, none of these are equivalent to setting boundaries. Refusing to communicate in a contentious, disrespectful or condescending manner is recommended

instead. Maybe limiting communication to email or the agreed upon apps, is a perfect way to keep the boundaries in check.

7. Establish & Maintain an Understanding Support System.

During the breakup or divorce, we all go to family and friends for support and advice. Your situation is unique, though; friends and family will not understand and may even doubt your honesty when you relay what you are dealing with. It is almost guaranteed that you will lose family, friends etc. throughout the divorce process, but there are other ways to get support. Local groups, social media groups, etc. are great additions to the friends & family that choose to stick by your side during this emotionally draining time. Being able to be honest, to communicate, to be free of judgment and so on, is going to make this stressful event much more bearable.

8. Use psychology on them, Psych 101 is all it takes.

They want to blame EVERYTHING on you, they want you to be the fall guy. Well without disputing or overtly disagreeing with them, concede when it's necessary (without admitting anything that can be used against you). If he says "it's your fault I'm not paying you support because...", you can reply "well that was not my intention to..." but be sure to follow up with how you can rectify that if he pays. It might take practice, because we want to be right, we seldom want to be the fall guy in volatile situations.

