

Covert Narcissism



SIGNS OF A COVERT NARCISSIST, WAYS TO PROTECT
YOURSELF FROM THEIR MANIPULATION AND HOW
TO DEAL WITH THEIR NARCISSISM

By Louisa Cox

Covert Narcissism: Signs of a Covert Narcissist, Ways to Protect Yourself from Their Manipulation and How to Deal With Their Narcissism

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Covert Narcissism: Signs of a Covert Narcissist, Ways to Protect Yourself from Their Manipulation and How to Deal With Their Narcissism

By Louisa Cox

FOR A DECADE OF MY life, I was trapped in toxic, manipulative and confidence-crushing relationships. I use the word ‘trapped’ to describe this time, as I’d been conditioned to think that I was unlovable, stupid and not worthy of anything good. In fact, because my abusers made me feel so devalued, I’d often feel *thankful* towards them for being with me. They made me feel as if they were lowering their high standards to be with me, and this created a cycle of me constantly chasing love. This was, as you may know, utterly pointless.

You can’t make a narcissist love you.

When I met my most recent ex, he came across as quiet, introverted and hardworking. He had a dry, witty sense of humor that was reserved for only a few people close to him. Everyone else saw him as professional and polite, albeit slightly quiet. His seemingly calm personality and quiet, inappropriate humor drew me towards him, along with the intelligence he exuberated. Of course, at this time I didn’t see him for what he truly was: a covert narcissist. And how could I? In the beginning he was charming, affectionate, full of adoration for me and seemed like the perfect partner.

The person I’d been in a relationship before this couldn’t have been more different; he was sadistic, blatantly cruel and would humiliate me with his antisocial, aggressive behavior. Meeting this new, quiet and introverted person seemed like a breath of fresh air at the time. I couldn’t believe my luck. He managed to sweep me off my feet in no time at all.

However ideal and picture-perfect this seemed at the time, this is also how a covert narcissist initiates their relationships. It's usually very intense in the beginning, very quick and somewhat of a whirlwind. That's not to say that all romances that develop quickly are with narcissists, but it should serve as something of a red flag. For someone like me who likes to give the benefit of the doubt, and as someone who used to give my trust quite freely, I was a sitting duck for my ex-partner. I was completely drawn in by his facade.

Eventually, the mask does slip, and the covert narcissist reveals their true self. By this point you're so emotionally invested and enamored by this person, not to mention confused by their hurtful behavior, the relationship becomes an amalgamation of upset, uncertainty and constant pacification of the abuser.

The fairy tale happy-ever-after love story you were promised turns into something more sinister and covertly toxic than you could ever imagine possible. Soon, the lines between reality and fabrication become blurred, your sense of self becomes distorted, and you become a shell of your former self. You become engulfed in the narcissists black hole of cloak and dagger abuse.

In this book I'd like to help you understand what a covert narcissist is, how they exert their abuse, the effects this has on you and ways you can manage this. I'd also like to guide you on setting boundaries with the covert narcissist and utilizing techniques to make sure the interactions you have aren't one sided or simply controlled by the narc. The final chapter of this book also includes advice on leaving a narcissist. Even if this isn't something you're looking to do, or if you can't comprehend that idea at the moment, I would still recommend reading it over. It could serve as some handy information for the future.

The main thing I want you to get out of this book is some inspiration. Even if that inspiration is simply not accepting certain behaviors from the narcissist or having more tools in your arsenal to communicate more effectively, I hope this book gives you some good takeaways to utilize.

What is a Covert Narcissist? The Six Giveaway Signs of a Covert Narcissist

Narcissistic behavior is usually associated with over the top, attention-seeking and manipulative traits. For most people, if they were to tell you what a narcissist was, they'd say they were a egotistical yet charming person who think the world revolves around them. Whilst this isn't incorrect, it's a very black and white view of a narcissist and the behaviors they display. There's more than one type of narcissist, and despite the word being very commonly used these days, not all narcissists conform to one specific behavioral pattern. Narcissism is a very complex form of abuse that doesn't have a 'one size fits all' set of characteristics.

Covert narcissists are a type of narcissist who don't fit the stereotypical, over-the-top, *'look at me, the world revolves around me'* personality that is usually attached to a narcissist. In some ways, covert narcissism can be more difficult to spot due to the introverted character of the narcissist. Whilst it's just as dangerous as its extroverted counterpart, the introverted, covert narcissist is a more hidden form of the abuse and therefore it can be trickier to pinpoint.

The main thing a covert narcissist has in common with an extroverted one is that they both use superiority (however subtle or blatant) to cover up their internal vulnerability. This, in turn, is also used to make their victim feel insecure or off balance about themselves or the situation. Whilst some narcissists may outright say, 'I'm better than you, so play by my rules', a covert narcissist will instead strongly hint at it - they won't be direct about it, but you'll still feel the same degradation as if they'd said it directly.

As I've mentioned, there is no 'cut and paste' set of traits for a narcissist, but I've outlined the seven behaviors a covert narcissist can exhibit in this chapter. Whilst they may not display all seven, a covert narcissist will exhibit some of the following throughout the course of their relationship with you. You may find that the covert narcissist in your life displays

several of these traits, or you may find that they only show these behaviors from time to time. Regardless, the ways of behaving outlined here should act as a warning, at the very least, and offer you the ability to spot when you're the victim of a narcissist.

Smugness

'None are so empty as those who are full of themselves'

Being quietly observant, judgmental and showing gestures of superiority are characteristics you'll find in a covert narcissist. They tend to do this with an air of smugness, which can leave you feeling belittled, confused and often like you're simply not good enough.

The quieter, stealthy superiority complex shows itself via aloof, detached behavior that just exudes negativity your way. Their nonverbal cues, such as sighs, eye rolls and a bored look on their face when talking to you will betray their half-hearted attempt to assure you that they're interested in what you have to say. This reassurance often feels like it's designed to make you feel even more confused because their actions are completely contradicting what they're telling you.

When you're talking or taking 'center stage' in a social setting, or even if it's just you and them, they will offer this distant and uninterested behavior. However, when they're speaking, you may find that as well as the conversation focusing on them and their views, they'll also attempt to belittle you and your opinion. Their critical, judgmental comments are, of course, very hurtful and humiliating.

My narcissistic ex would always switch off from me when I was speaking, often being easily distracted as well as acting blatantly uninterested in what I had to say. Any observation he would make during the conversation would be to used to judge me. When he did listen, however half-heartedly, he would only do so to be critical and judgmental of what I had to say.

This smug superiority serves as a front to mask the vulnerability the narcissist feels. This smugness can feel impenetrable, so it can be a good idea to remind yourself that their self-satisfying, superior front isn't anything to do with you.

Whilst it's directed towards you, the core reason of this toxic treatment of you is down to their own insecurity and fear of being exposed as vulnerable. I'm not asking you to remind yourself of this so you can offer pity to the narcissist, but rather to help you understand that this hurtful behavior doesn't stem from anything you've said or done. The problem is theirs, not yours.

HIGHLY SENSITIVE

'Some people can't endure criticism without resentment'

Communicating with a covert narcissist is like walking on eggshells. You're worried about saying the wrong thing that may upset, offend or annoy.

Covert narcissists tend to handle criticism, or perceived criticism, very poorly. They deem negative feedback or constructive criticism a personal attack towards them. Their reaction to this isn't always graceful nor is it from a place of wanting to take that constructive criticism and use it to improve. Instead, they react in one of two ways: they either get highly defensive, and use the smug superiority described above to dismiss any unwanted feedback, or they will sulkily withdraw from the situation.

My experience with a covert narcissist ensured that I didn't speak up when he was doing something upsetting, or if he was behaving in a hurtful way towards me. I was afraid of injuring his fragile ego and didn't want to face the dire consequences of upsetting him. I would even have to watch what I said in everyday conversation, as seemingly unimportant things I would say would end up bothering him.

For example, one time I mentioned how I'd like to visit an Italian restaurant that I'd been to before and added that the food there is better and much more authentic than the last Italian we'd tried. Of course, I regretted mentioning this immediately; my ex assumed I'd been there with another ex-partner, and as such went in a silent mood. His aloofness and disconnection from me was hurtful, and I didn't understand what I'd said so wrong until he asked if I had 'any other suggestions of places we can go that remind me of my ex' a few days later. As you can imagine, I was taken

aback by his comments, and hurt by the aloofness he'd treated me to for several days.

Typically, a covert narcissist won't tell you outright what is bothering them but will instead let their cold behavior towards you let you know something is up.

Passive Aggressiveness

'If you're sure of yourself, you don't need to be petty or hurtful'

Passive aggressiveness in a covert narcissist can be seen via the narcissist becoming angry, hostile, and they'll often offer a fake helpfulness with no intention of ever helping you. These passive aggressive behaviors are expressed in covert ways, which are used to give the narcissist an underhanded advantage over the situation. If a covert narcissist feels threatened, they'll use passive aggressive behavior to ensure they are in control of the situation. These passive aggressive tactics are a stealthy way to exact punishment on those who dare to hurt their fragile ego.

With a covert narcissist, this passive aggression will offer a thinly disguised sense of superiority, entitlement, and is an inadvertent way to showcase their conceited view of the world. A covert narcissist is inclined to become hostile if they don't get their own way. Even if their requests or demands are unreasonable, they'll devise stealthy yet destructive ways to make you miserable for hurting their delicate sense of entitlement.

I'll offer some examples of passive aggressiveness below:

Verbal hostility: For a covert narcissist, putting other people down makes them feel self-assured and superior. Making you feel inadequate and insecure about yourself helps the narcissist relieve their own insecurities and deficiencies. This helps them seek and obtain a false sense of importance, and their critical and hostile way of speaking to you will fuel their narcissistic fire.

You may be aware of the phrase 'misery loves company', and this couldn't be truer for a covert narcissist. They will, either consciously or unconsciously, spread their misery and unhappiness to those closest to them.

My ex-partner would use his verbal hostility to put me down at any given chance. When I cooked his tea, the chicken would be too dry, and he'd mock my cooking skills. If I got a promotion at work, he would ask why I hadn't achieved this sooner and berate me for not getting a big enough pay rise. If I had an idea or a plan to take up a new hobby or learn something new, he would criticize this; he would make me feel doubtful that I would have the capabilities to learn this new skill or hobby.

In a nutshell this passive aggressive verbal hostility from the narcissist is their habitual criticism of your ideas, experiences and feelings.

Hostile humor: Very thinly veiled hostile banter or joking is often followed by the phrase 'I was just kidding' or 'can't you take a joke?' Sarcastic, hostile humor offered from a covert narcissist is their way of expressing their internal anger, rejection and/or disapproval towards you.

However, with a covert narcissist, nothing is ever upfront. Instead of outright telling you that they're feeling negatively towards you, they'll use humor as a seemingly playful way to make you feel less credible, doubtful and stupid.

The hidden intentions behind the humor are quite sinister. The narcissist uses humor as one of their many weapons to berate you covertly. When this is done in public or in front of an audience, especially when those around you laugh at the narcissist's comments, you will undoubtedly feel discredited, rejected and downright silly.

Blaming: A covert narcissist will blame others for their own failures, irresponsibility and negligence. If the narcissist fails to (or is unwilling to) follow reasonable requests, show professional conduct or even abide by social norms, this is never their fault; someone else will always get the blame.

Blaming is a form of gaslighting*, for which narcissists are renowned for. The intention behind the blameful behavior is to avoid any responsibility by manipulating the facts of the situation. A covert narcissist will distort your perception of a situation or conversation, therefore making it easier to place blame elsewhere. Often the covert narcissist will misdirect the blame onto

you, thus taking the focus off the real issue at hand: their own failures and bad behavior.

As someone who spent almost a decade in narcissistic, abusive relationships, I felt the heavy burden of blame on my shoulders quite frequently. For example, if my ex went out drinking and didn't return until the next day, this would be my fault for stressing him out to the point he didn't want to come home. If my ex didn't successfully get the job he applied for, this would be my fault for not supporting him enough and helping him succeed. If he was late for work, this would be my fault for not waking him up earlier. I could go on and on, but I suspect you get the point. It's very likely, since you're reading this book, that you're also susceptible to having blame heaped on you from the narcissist in your life.

Covert Sabotage: Covert sabotage is the narcissist's way of sneakily administering their punishment on you in a very disguised way.

Examples of this could be the narcissist deliberately disclosing hurtful and harmful information, or deliberately obstructing any positive endeavors or communications. Other examples could be the narcissist deliberately undermining any agreements you've made with them. The narcissist could also purposely overspend your agreed budget, this causing you financial difficulty - but of course, you'd be the person who was handed the blame for this.

These examples are a way of summarizing the covert narcissists intentions: to punish you.

The above descriptions of passive aggressive behavior are all ways for the narcissist to manipulate and assert control over your relationship. Passive aggression can be seen in various way, not all of them so obvious. Because of this, it's important to always try to be aware of any falsehoods your partner is trying to convince you of, and to ensure that blameful behavior from the covert narcissist is met with assertive awareness of the true facts of the situation.

**GASLIGHTING DEFINITION: to manipulate someone by psychological means into doubting their own sanity.*

LACK OF EMPATHY

“One doesn’t have to operate with great malice to do great harm. The absence of empathy and understanding are sufficient”

A distinct lack of empathy is a trait the covert narcissist shares with an extroverted narcissist. Both types of narcissist are so self-absorbed and self-serving that they are dismissive of other people's feelings. Often, their apparent dismissiveness of your thoughts and feelings is in fact their complete obliviousness to your feelings.

Frustratingly, even when you tell the narcissist that their behavior or attitude is upsetting you, or that it’ll result in dire consequences, their response will often be reverted to be about them. Your needs, wants, thoughts and feelings aren’t the narcissist’s main priority.

For example, I recall being so poorly with food poisoning that I was unable to attend a pre-booked meal with my ex. At the time, I was bedridden and the thought of any food passing my lips made me want to vomit. Instead of being concerned about my well-being, my ex was more concerned about losing the deposit he had placed down in order to secure our reservation. As I was lying in bed, visibly very sick, my ex stood above me asking me ‘I take it you're not bothered about the £50 I've lost with the deposit?’, and getting flustered that he had to call the restaurant to cancel.

Even in my hazy state, I was most apologetic to my ex and offered to reimburse him the £50 he lost, to which he accepted.

‘I’m Special’ Complex

“Self-importance is humanity's greatest enemy”

A covert narcissist, although introverted, can still have a ‘special person’ complex. They may heavily hint towards being misunderstood, almost like they're so evolved nobody can understand their genius or uniqueness. This

‘special person’ complex can be something the covert narcissist uses as a ‘woe is me’ story: they may claim they feel isolated and misunderstood because they're so one-of-a-kind that nobody can possibly understand them.

‘I'm so head of my time’, was something my ex-partner used to say frequently. It was one of his covert narcissistic statements that would showcase his quiet superiority and uniqueness. His covert belief that he was an undiscovered genius was the superficial way of reassuring himself of his own importance.

Of course, this complex is just another way for the narcissist to bury his vulnerable and fearful true self.

Impersonal Relationships

“Narcissists see others as impersonal objects to be manipulated for their own gain”

Covert narcissists are deeply insecure about their inability to connect with people in a meaningful way. Some of the behaviors and characteristics of a narcissist are put in place to act as a defense mechanism to keep people away or at a distance. The reason that they want to do this is to avoid being exposed for their interpersonal inadequacies and hide their incapability to forge deep relationships with others.

It can be found that some covert narcissists, due to their often-introverted nature, will focus on work or hobbies that require less human interaction, for example video games, books and films. Their jobs can often also reflect their lack of interpersonal skills, although this isn't always the case.

Whilst a covert narcissist can have friends, it's often seen that this type of narcissist doesn't form deep friendships, and they find it easier to cut people out of their life without any real regard. A covert narcissist will often have friends that they only connect with on a surface level, and anything more than that would put the narcissistic in danger of being ‘exposed’.

Self-Absorbed

“If you live your life as if everything is about you, you'll be left with just that: just you”

Self-centeredness and self-absorption are very common characteristics of a covert narcissist. These introverted narcissists are very poor listeners, and as such form quick opinions on people and situations.

Quiet people are widely assumed to be good listeners, although for a covert narcissist this isn't the case; the opposite is true. Because of their self-absorption, they often find things that aren't about them (or things that will directly affect them) uninteresting and unworthy of their attention.

It's ironic to think that such self-absorbed people, like the covert narcissist, also lack the self-awareness that the rest of us possess. Whilst we are fortunate to be able to have the ability to reflect on our actions and behavior, the narcissist is unable (or unwilling a lot of cases), to fully recognize just how self-absorbed they are.

Most of us are able to recognize the nuances of situations and understand that not everything can always go our way. However, covert narcissists generally only focus on their wants and, selfishly, what they deem to be agreeable. Anything else is uninteresting to them or a waste of time.



HOPEFULLY THE ABOVE explanations have helped you understand what a covert narcissist is, and now you have some idea of the behaviors and characteristics that outline this type of narcissist. Whilst this is helpful in understanding this type of abuse, actually pinpointing when you're the victim of a narcissist can be quite hard to do, especially without any guidance.

It's important to remember that the covert narcissist is possibly the hardest type of abuse to spot. Generally, they look for highly empathetic people, who will listen to their sob stories and give the narcissist the benefit of the doubt. Once the victim then begins to feel a sense of responsibility for their narcissistic partner, that's when the abuser knows that they have them reeled in and then amps up their abuse in the relationship.

The victim is then trapped in this abusive cycle. Over time, the covert narcissist will make the victim question their perception of reality, doubt themselves and make them accept blame readily. Because of this, the

narcissist has ensured that they won't be held accountable for their behavior by the victim.

As with all narcissists, covert narcissists do have a predictable pattern of behavior when it comes to romantic partners. In the beginning, they may appear to idealize their partner. This acts as bait for the victim. Once the victim is hooked in, the narcissist will then devalue their partner, and (as you sadly may be all too aware), this then causes the victim to chase the love and adoration they received from their abuser previously.

The victim is unaware that this devaluation from the abuser is done with sinister and purposeful intent. After this, the narcissist will then discard their partner.

The covert narcissist may appear as a calm, quiet and polite person to most people. However, when you're in a relationship with one, they're often cold, distant abusive and demeaning. Jekyll and Hyde can be a good way of describing their personality and treatment of you.

Often, a covert narcissist is seemingly quiet and can usually be described as being meek and inoffensive by most people, but behind closed doors it can be a very different story. They thrive of their partners failures and upset. It's not an uncommon game for a covert narcissist to set you up for failure or upset. The crazy-making thing about this is that the narcissist will then punish you for the aforementioned failure. Introverted narcissists are also renowned for making empty promises, without ever having any intention of delivering. They will then get a twisted kick out of your reaction when they fail to deliver, often making themselves look like the victim, and making you look unreasonable and selfish with unbearable expectations.

A hurtful and frustrating aspect to this behavior of making promises without delivering is when the narcissist will deny ever making that promise in the first place. This gaslighting behavior can often make you think you're losing your mind, and make you question your perception of reality. This is known as 'percepticide*'.

**PERCEPTICIDE DEFINITION: a type of emotional abuse within a relationship, when one partner is so controlling over the other, that the victim loses their grasp on the truth and their sense of self.*

THE BEST WAY TO DESCRIBE a covert narcissists internal feelings would be 'conflicted'. Whilst the narcissist wants to be worshipped and adored, and they do think quite a lot about themselves, they are also incredibly insecure about themselves. This internal conflict creates the unbalanced, manipulative and willful confidence-sucker that is the covert narcissist.

For a long time, I asked myself why I ever got involved with someone who had all of these traits. For an even longer time, those around me would ask me why I was still with this person, and what I was thinking of by not simply walking away. Of course, you and I both know that it's much more complicated than that. Covert narcissists are very skilled at drawing us in with their sob stories. They're highly practiced and adept at finding the right victim, and these victims are often people who offer lot of empathy and kindness.

I'm a highly empathetic person, and if you're someone who is or has been in a narcissistic relationship, I'm going to go out on a limb and guess that you are too. This is because the narcissist will see our compassionate, forgiving and empathetic nature as a weakness, and use it to their wicked advantage.

A covert narcissist essentially worms their way into your heart. they do this with tales of misfortune and woe. For example, they'll say their ex mistreated them, previous relationships weren't kind to them or that their friends backstabbed them. The narcissist may also offer a story of an abusive childhood which still causes them a great deal of pain. Spinning tales such as this will certainly trigger us highly empathetic people to feel sorry for the narcissist, and we eventually develop a sense of responsibility for them. As well as feeling sorry for them, due to our 'benefit of the doubt' nature, we also feel tied to their unfulfilled potential.

In my case, my narcissistic ex manipulated my empathy in ways that were hard to ignore. He would often threaten suicide, or some form of self-

destructive behavior, that would make it impossible for me to simply walk away. This meant I was conditioned into a sense of fear, as well as an accountability for the wellbeing of my partner. This heavy burden was offset with the assurance that he'd 'never felt this way about anybody before'. Now I know this was just another statement, not from the heart, but rather a manipulative statement that ensured I was responsible for taking care of him. Yet another form of manipulation that also ensured I became isolated from family and friends.

Frustratingly, covert narcissists like to ensure that their emotions and feelings are paramount, but their victim's feelings and needs up for dispute. Even if you've been through some difficult times and had some horrible things happen to you in your life, nothing that you've been through will even *compete* with what the covert narcissist has been through; the death of one of their family members who always have hit them harder than the death of one of your family members. Their experience of an illness will always be more painful and traumatic than yours.

Anything that looks to threaten a covert narcissists superiority is seen as a direct attack towards them. This leads them to having a very high contempt for other people, and it's also what ensures their constant need to be superior to everyone else. For example, my ex couldn't contain his jealousy about anyone who was above him in any way, particularly financially. Those who had better careers, cars, houses, watches or holidays were dismissed as being 'privileged', 'from a rich family' or simply 'undeserving'.

This jealous insecurity also means the covert narcissist will tell lies about their past. From the beautiful girlfriends that they dumped, the job opportunities they chose to turn down, the exotic places that they've been on holiday and the sports they used to be professional at before an injury retired them - the narcissist uses these fibs to ensure that nobody overshadows them.

I understand it's easier to spot a covert narcissist with the ability of hindsight, however hopefully the above traits and characteristics of this type of narcissist will help you identify if you're in a relationship with one.

When you're in a relationship with somebody like this, it can be hard to admit to yourself that you are in fact the victim.

The word 'victim' was something I struggled with for quite some time, as it had implications of me being weak and vulnerable. However, it takes great strength to come to terms with the fact that this is what the covert narcissist turned you into, and the word doesn't define you as a person but rather shows the impact and ramifications a relationship with a narcissist can have.

With the acceptance that you are in an abusive relationship comes an undeniable power: this power should be used to arm yourself with the mental tools to deal with a narcissist, heal the relationship you have with yourself, and in a lot of cases move on from the toxic relationship.

Can a Covert Narcissist Love?

When I first came to terms with being in a narcissistic relationship, my first thoughts were scrambled, panicked and desperate ones that focused on the hope that a narcissist *can* in fact love. The thought that I'd been in a relationship with someone I adored, yet they would never be able to offer me the same in return, was heartbreaking. I scoured the internet looking for websites, blogs, books... anything that would offer me some comfort and let me know that narcissist can indeed love another person.

Of course, this is a very difficult question to answer, and various sources give varying answers. Some people believe that a narcissist can never truly love anyone but themselves. Others believe that with therapy and some self-development work, the narcissist can learn to fall in love, and that they are indeed capable of true love.

To answer this question, I initially only had my own experience with a covert narcissist to go off. If I were to answer this question based solely on my own experience, I would have to say that a covert narcissist isn't capable of genuine, selfless love. I would have stated that they seek out admiration, adoration and constant love, and they are incapable of offering the same back.

However, as I know narcissism isn't as black and white as that, I did some research on this, and I did find some people who were able to give me a more fully formed view of the answer to this complex question. I will offer their stories and experiences later on this chapter, but to begin with I will relay my own experiences that helped shape my opinion on this topic.

A narcissist can behave in ways that makes it seem like they love you. A narcissist can offer words and gestures of love, and I do think that narcissist can actually *think* its love. However, a better word for this would be entanglement. If you're in a relationship with a narcissist I don't believe you're unconditionally loved, but rather entangled in their facade of love.

In this unusual relationship, it can be hard to identify what's happening to you. I use the word entanglement purposefully, as the covert narcissist views you as an extension of themselves. You're snared by the narcissist and entangled in the complex relationship. Whilst most people enter a relationship and can retain their individuality, the covert narcissist is almost unaware that you exist as your own entity. A healthy relationship sees two separate individuals merge to connect, whilst still retaining their individuality. Opinions, beliefs, desires, needs and wants are all taken into consideration equally by both parties in a healthy relationship. That's what love is.

Unfortunately, this is a key ingredient missing from a relationship with a covert narcissist.

When I began searching for other people's views and experiences on this topic, I was lucky enough to meet a number of individuals online who had been through, or were going through, an abusive relationship. They were happy to hear my view on this question, and I was thankful to hear their differing opinion on this subject too. Whilst we may not agree on the answer to this question, we all agreed that it was a very complex question that had a number of variables that wouldn't allow for one clear-cut answer anyway.

I've changed the names of the people who were kind enough to offer their opinion on this question.

I met Caroline in a narcissism Facebook group. Caroline believes that a covert narcissist is very much capable of love. Here is her reply when I asked her this very complex question:

Of course, a covert narcissist can fall in love. People tend to make assumptions and form incorrect opinions about covert narcissists, just because they've never had the opportunity (or thought about trying) to see the world through their eyes. I'm in a relationship with a narcissist and I'm confident that I am loved. It's a different kind of love than you see in the movies, and it's a different kind of love that most people probably receive.

If you think a narcissist can't love then you're assuming that they can't give, which I can tell you isn't true.

*I believe narcissists are capable of loving you because they are capable of loving themselves, therefore they are **capable** of love. I do believe they fall in love when they believe they have found a 'catch': someone who is deserving enough to be in a relationship with them. They do have very big egos, so they want someone valuable enough to compliment that.*

I understand it's probably more difficult for me to keep my partner interested; I do need to ensure that I maintain my levels of self-care, social status and job in order for him to remain satisfied, but this doesn't mean he loves me any less, or doesn't love me at all. It's simply another kind of love. Because I'm aware of his narcissism, I am in a less vulnerable position, and there are things I can do in order to ensure my needs are also getting that my needs are also getting met.

Whilst Caroline and I agree to disagree on her thoughts about a narcissist being able to love, she did make a point that resonated with me: that they can love themselves, so why not anyone else? Whilst their self-love is born from insecurity and a fear of being unmasked as a fraud, it's still a form of love, albeit an unhealthy one.

When researching this question, I was adamant I wanted to get as many viewpoints on it as I could, to help me form as best an answer as I could. I sought out the help from forums, Facebook groups, and even connected to people via their websites. Many were happy to discuss this topic with me, including, to my surprise, a self-confessed covert narcissist. Mark reached out via Facebook once he heard I was seeking some stories, opinions and ideas about this subject, and was happy to offer his own take on this.

Here's his reply to the question:

I absolutely think that narcissists can fall in love. I fell in love with the mother of my children over a decade ago.

It just so happens that I also fell in love weird about half a dozen other women during the course of our twelve-year relationship. My philandering behavior, of course, hurt many people, not least my ex. However, that aside, I can attest to the fact that a narcissist can fall in love. A bit too readily in my case, but still.

For those who are willing to judge me for my discretions and blame my narcissism for my behavior, I'd like to point out that me and the mother of my children are now great friends. And I can honestly say that I still love her, although it's a different kind of love these days. I also still love a couple of my exes. It's not a love that grows more every day, but rather a retrospective love of the people I was with at the time. It doesn't bother me that these women have moved on with their lives. I can honestly say each and every relationship I had, although I didn't always treat them the way I should have, was meaningful to me.

Mark, now in his 40's with two teenage children, seems like he has a grasp on his narcissistic behavior, and understands and accepts the pain he's caused. However, his reply wasn't enough to convince me that a covert narcissist can fall in love.

There were more people who shared my opinion that a narcissist can't genuinely love their spouse (at least until all narcissistic behavior has been addressed and relinquished, with the help of therapy), than those who thought that they *are* capable of love.

Kerry, who got in touch via social media, had some strong opinions when it came to a narcissist ability to love. She was in an abusive, narcissistic relationship for six years, and after going no-contact* last year, she's rebuilding her confidence and self-esteem. Here's what she thinks:

No, a narcissist cannot love at all in the way true love should be. True love is not devaluing, abusive, objectifying, manipulative, selfish or full of passive aggressiveness. It's not dehumanizing, with the intent to hurt or harm your partner. A narcissist can only offer shallow and cruel love that is conditional - so if you don't meet those conditions, it's gone. I can't believe this is even a question.

A narcissist, despite any fake affection and empty words, is incapable of the genuine bond that's required when falling in love. A narcissist and love are miles apart from each other, and I am finding it difficult to comprehend why they are being used in the same sentence.

**NO CONTACT DEFINITION: This means exactly what it says. Cutting off all communication with your abusive ex. It can be likened to getting rid of an addiction to a drug. No contact means no text messaging, no calls, no going over, no emails, or doing anything else that means getting in touch with them or responding to their pleas or attempts at contact.*

I ALSO SPOKE TO EVE, who was firmly of the opinion that narcissist will never have the capabilities to love completely. She is now in a healthy long term relationship and has a young child, but still has issues with the way her narcissistic ex treated her, and as such has some trust issues that she's working on. Here's her take on this question:

*Absolutely not. A narcissist can love someone **somewhat**, but that soon disappears once the novelty wears off. Instead of breaking it off with their suffering partner, they choose to be unfaithful. They won't leave their victim until they find someone more suitable or 'better' who will believe their lies and manipulation.*

Covert narcissists, from what I've found, tend to have quite short relationships but a long list of infidelities.

I also received a message from Paula, who has had a tough time with her narcissistic boyfriend, and she's hoping therapy and her support will help him find the ability to genuinely offer love:

I'll give a little backstory to my situation: I have known my narcissistic boyfriend for 16 years. We've been on and off again throughout this time, starting out as friends initially, then moving onto a 'no strings' type of relationship. Soon after that he introduced me to drugs. This ensured that I lost everything: friends, family and my job, all in the space of ten months.

Whilst I was at rock bottom, my narcissistic boyfriend left me out of the blue. I had no choice but to pick up the pieces, as hard as it was to do, and I tried to rebuild my life without him. I did manage to somehow claw my way back up and kick the habits he introduced me to, but his sudden leaving did leave me quite emotionally scarred.

About a year and a half later, he suddenly reappeared into my life and I couldn't help but get close to him once again. Of course, there was a very little trust on my part, but I couldn't help myself getting involved again. He had girls left, right and center, and although it was breaking me knowing this, I couldn't bear to be without him again. The straw that broke the camel's back was when my father passed away three years ago. I couldn't deal with that as well as my boyfriend's horrible treatment of me. I completely broke down.

I collapsed emotionally, physically and mentally. It was only when my boyfriend seen me in my pitiful, low ebb, that he could recognize exactly how his behavior had affected me. His words were 'am I that horrible of a person?'

The darkest time of my life also turned into the most life-changing time of my life. My boyfriend finally seen how his narcissistic behavior had affected me and it sparked change in him. Although, of course, is still displays narcissistic tendencies, just the fact that he is now aware how this affects me is a step in the right direction.

He agreed to go to therapy with me, where he was also diagnosed with partial narcissism, and our therapy sessions really do seem to be having a positive impact on my boyfriend. I'll admit there is no cure for narcissism, and it is a daily struggle, but these therapy sessions and my boyfriend's acknowledgement of his illness have gone a long way in showing me that a narcissist can love. So yes, I do think they can love.

As you can see, different people have different answers depending on their experiences. However, when I did ask this question initially, the answer was a resounding 'no'. I wanted to dig a little deeper and find out the reason why most of us believe a narcissist can't love. Whilst studying the answer to this question, I found some research papers dedicated to this topic. I'll condense the findings of these papers below:

The findings agreed that narcissists show passion in the very early of beginning stages of dating. However, this passion is always directed towards their own expectations and fantasies in regard to the relationship. The love, therefore, is not of another person, but directed towards the narcissist themselves.

A relationship with a narcissist provides them with the positive attention, sexual satisfaction and the boost to their self-esteem and ego that they need. In short, a narcissist views and treats a relationship as transactional.

The findings also noted that narcissist loses interest in their partner as the expectation of intimacy increases from their spouse. Whilst in a healthy relationship, an increased expectation of intimacy is the norm as the relationship progresses, this is something that causes the narcissist to become uninterested. Many narcissists have issues when sustaining a relationship more than six months to a couple of years. Their priority isn't intimacy, but rather power, and a need to disguise any vulnerability on their part. This ties in with their need to be superior to others, including the person they're in a relationship with.

In order for a narcissist to get their needs met, they like to keep their options open, which can see them dating multiple people at once or cheating on their current spouse. Quite often, this can lead to a very sudden and unexpected break up, which leaves the victim of the narcissist bewildered by their sudden change of feelings. A narcissist can quite easily profess their love one day and exit from the relationship the next. Of course, the victim then feels highly betrayed, confused, discarded and crushed by their narcissistic partners behavior.

Narcissists can be quite pragmatic in their approach to relationships. They see relationships as a way of achieving goals. Whilst they may also develop some positive feelings for their spouse, this is more on a friendship or shared interests' basis. As the relationship goes on, the narcissist doesn't have the need or motivation to maintain their facade, and they utilize their defenses in order to prevent their partner getting any closer. This will see the narcissist displaying angry, critical and cold behavior, especially if their partner challenges them or makes any requests for them to change their behavior.

After a narcissist has devalued their partner, this triggers the need for them to go and look elsewhere in order for them to prop up the egotistical needs. They need some more narcissistic supply* and will now look elsewhere to get it.

**NARCISSISTIC SUPPLY DEFINITION: Narcissistic supply is a way to describe a type of admiration, [interpersonal support](#) or sustenance drawn by an individual from their environment and essential to their [self-esteem](#).*

LOVE REQUIRES COMPASSION, acceptance, respect, attention and support, and a genuine caring for the person we are with. It also requires us to really want to understand our spouse, and this is something that narcissists aren't really motivated to do. People who are in love with a narcissist are starved of many of the basic expressions of love.

In the aforementioned research paper, it ended with a statement that suggested the question '*can a narcissist love*' is a wrong question to be asking. The paper suggested that instead of asking yourself this question, which is detrimental to the narcissist, ask yourself whether you feel cared for, valued and respected, and evaluate how your needs are being met. In a nutshell, this paper suggested that you look at how the relationship is affecting *you and your esteem* and focus on this problem instead.

This question is open ended, and it's something that we all offer a varied or different answer for, based on our own experience. There is one thing I did agree with, however, and it was the summary of the research paper: to focus on yourself and your needs, as this is something that is well within your control.

Confusing Conversations with a Covert Narcissist

WE BOTH KNOW THAT BEING in a relationship with a covert narcissist means that we encounter quite a lot of manipulative communication from them. It can be quite difficult to communicate with a covert narcissist, because much of the time we find ourselves trying to figure out how to effectively converse with them, as well as trying to decipher their true intentions, which can differ from what they actually telling us.

You're probably all too aware of the painstaking lengths we have to go to to try and get our partner to understand where we're coming from. Often, it's just so difficult to get them to understand that what they're saying, or sometimes what they're not saying, can be extremely hurtful. Conversations with a covert narcissist can often seem quite one-sided, and this lack of balance in the relationship can be frustrating to say the least.

In this chapter I'm going to give you some (probably very familiar) covert narcissist 'speak', and help you understand what their true intentions are behind this narcissistic way of communicating. The narcissistic 'speak' I'm going to discuss is designed to strip you of your sanity, confuse you and get you to question your own recollection of events. A lot of the communication I'm going to outline below can happen when you dare to confront the narcissist about their behavior; the examples in this chapter is the covert narcissists way of gaslighting, although it's worth remembering that the narcissist can utilize this form of manipulation at any given time.

Repetition: Conversations with a covert narcissist are often very repetitive, and rarely do they end in any kind of solution or resolve.

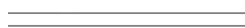
When a covert narcissist is confronted about their behavior, it's often found that they will become defensive, utilizing this repetitive communication in order to bring up other unrelated topics. This is intended to eventually

exhaust you into dropping the conversation altogether. This defense mechanism of repetition is also put in place to make you question yourself for even bringing up the topic; the narcissist will make you feel like you are being difficult and have a hard time of letting things drop.

This circular type of conversation can also be seen when the covert narcissist instigates a conversation. These conversations will often be about the same topic, often address in something you may have done to upset them, even if it was years ago. As with a lot of covert narcissistic behavior, it's one rule for the narcissist and a completely different rule for you.

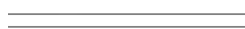
Patronization: A covert narcissist frequently uses a patronizing and condescending tone to evoke a intense reaction from you. Whilst you become flustered and upset, oftentimes the covert narcissist will remain calm, collected and entirely cool. Of course, this lack of emotional response from the narcissist will also frustrate and enrage you, as it's designed to do. The lack of emotional response from them will leave you feeling like you're being irrational, and you will feel insulted by their lack of feelings in this situation.

This patronizing tone used by the covert narcissist can be used to discard you, your emotions and your thoughts. This patronizing, crazy-making* tone that you're on the receiving end of can often serve as a good place for the narcissist to start their smear campaign** against you.



***CRAZY-MAKING DEFINITION:** Being purposefully contradictory, manipulative, untruthful and blameful enough to make someone doubt their own sanity.

****SMEAR CAMPAIGN DEFINITION:** A smear campaign, also sometimes referred to as a 'smear tactic' or just a 'smear', is an effort or a plan to damage or call into question someone's reputation. The individual carrying out the smear campaign does this by touting negative stories, ideas and theories about their victim to others.



A SMEAR CAMPAIGN, DESIGNED and put into action by the narcissist, often entails the narcissist informing various other people outside of the relationship about your crazy behavior, and uncontrollable temper. The narcissist can often make you believe that this is the case too, as their patronizing and condescending tone will often evoke a highly emotional response, thus proving their accusations are 'true'.

Projection: If there's one thing that a narcissist is highly adept at, it's projection. They will often accuse you of doing things that they themselves are doing. This usually happens during a confrontation, and to deflect the narcissist will usually project their behavior onto you.

What makes it all the more frustrating is the fact that being on the receiving end of this, we know that we aren't guilty of the behavior we are being accused of. This crazy-making tactic from the narcissist is filled with hypocrisy that the narc seems oblivious to. This frustrating irony will invariably cause the victim to respond with the emotional, agitated reaction that the narcissist seeks (which is again, some good cannon fodder for the narc to use against you).

Mask switching: A covert narcissist, like most narcissists, have a number of masks that they utilize depending on any given situation. If the narc feels that they are losing power or control, they may feel the need to switch masks in order to regain the upper hand in the situation.

As the victim, you may see various masks, such as the good guy (the one who will make promises of a brighter future, and express their love for you), the bad guy (the one who dishes out blame towards you and devalues you) and a childlike mask. The childlike mask will see the narc act like they didn't know what they were doing, like they didn't fully understand the consequences of their actions, and their facial expression will also attempt to recreate that of a childlike one.

If a narcissist feels like they have lost control, they will scramble through their collection of masks and wear the one that fits best in accordance to that particular situation. This frantic attempt of clawing back control can often leave you feeling scared, and like you really don't know the person in front of you at all. The sad truth is, really, you don't know who the real person is behind the masks.

How could you? Which one is real? Are any of them real?

Playing the victim: The covert narcissist is an eternal victim. Their behavior, their lies and their cheating ways, when confronted about, tend to always be a result of something traumatic that has happened in their life.

For example, a struggle with addiction, an abusive childhood, a psychotic ex, pressures at work and parental stresses are all common themes that is narc uses to garner sympathy.

As I've mentioned previously, the covert narcissist will seek out a highly empathetic partner, and as such will use this to their advantage. The victim will undoubtedly feel bad for the narcissist, even when they've done something horribly wrong or unforgivable, because they feel compassion towards them due to their traumatic experiences. This is ideal for the narcissist, especially when the victim feels that they are 'getting somewhere' with the narc, and that the conversations they've had in regard to the narcissist's past is therapeutic for the abuser.

Needless to say, this false sense of bonding with the narcissist is just that: fabricated. No matter how intense a conversation with a covert narc is, including talking about previous trauma and abuse, and no matter how honest the abuser appears, this is just another form of manipulation.

Due to the victim usually having a very empathetic nature, they will often think that a narcissist opening up to them is the relationship getting real and moving on to a deeper level. This 'victimization' way to manipulate is ironic, as in reality it's those around the narcissist that are the victims.

Needing basic things explaining to them: Being in a relationship with a covert narcissist means that you may find yourself quite frequently explaining basic human behaviors and emotions.

For example, with my narcissistic ex, I was surprised to find myself having to explain what it meant to be nice to someone. When he was getting to very close with a colleague, and I found out about this, I had to explain what flirting was and how hurtful this was for another person. I also had to explain what constitutes as 'cheating'. However, ironically, six months prior to this, my ex stopped speaking to me for 4 days after he accused me of

flirting with one of his friends. At the time, it didn't occur to me that *of course he knows how hurtful flirting is*, because he'd accused me of the same thing six months prior - I simply sat him down and explained to him the definition and consequences of flirting.

Often the covert narc expects you to just explain this behavior to them and that'll prevent it from happening again. As you're probably aware, this behavior doesn't just simply stop because you've explained it to them. You very likely have continued to see the same behavior and issues over and over, regardless of how many times you've explained how this makes you feel.

Yet another ironic factor to this is that the repetition of having to explain yourself gets you frustrated and emotional. This then evokes flustered and hot-headed reactions, which offers the covert narcissist some more ammunition for a smear campaign.

Full of excuses: Because a covert narcissist is never accountable for their behavior, they use excuses as a way to explain their actions. These excuses themselves are enough to drive you insane, but the fact that their words rarely match their behaviors is enough to enrage you.

What can also antagonize you is that the narc will often give you different versions of an excuse, or a few different accounts of what happened. This can go until you either accept one of the versions, or you become so emotionally exhausted that you stop digging.

My narcissistic ex would often stay out until the early hours, not returning home until 5 a.m. after a drinking binge. During these times, I would never know where he was, who he was with or what he was doing. He would rarely reply to my texts or calls, and any communication I got from him would be full of excuses. If he didn't reply to me all night he would tell me his phone battery had died, even though I knew full well it hadn't because when I was calling the phone was ringing. When I asked him where he was, he would tell me he was at his friend Jake's house, although I knew that was a lie because Jake work nights and he was at work that evening. When confronted with this undeniable fact, my ex would then make an excuse about being so drunk he can't remember where we went after that. When I

would then probe why he drank so much he couldn't remember, he would tell me he was so stressed out he was drinking to deal with the pressure.

As you can see, this conversation with my ex turned from something he had done to upset me, to something I should be feeling pity towards him for. When his excuses, to which there were many, weren't duping me, he would resort to victimization tactics.

My ex was also a serial philanderer. When he would get caught cheating, the situation would often go like this:

I would find out about his infidelity, and he would immediately deny this. However, when more evidence would then surface, he would admit to the bare minimum by confessing that it happened - but only once. His cheating would then be blamed on me, as he would accuse me of not giving him as much attention as he needed and not being at home as much as I should.

More information about his indiscretion would come out and I would find out about it. He would then usually blame the other woman, saying he was very drunk and that she came onto him. Yet more incriminating information would surface, and his excuses would keep shifting and changing.

Conversations going nowhere: These are the most draining types of interactions with a covert narc. After this type of interaction, you often question to yourself '*what was the point in that conversation?*', and you'll realize you've just spent the last few hours in a senseless conversation that achieved nothing.

These draining conversations will also often mean that you spend the next few hours, or even days, going over what was said, in a futile attempt to untangle some meaning from it. These conversations are usually cluttered with unrelated points and topics, meaning it's hard to articulate what exactly the narc was trying to achieve from the interaction.

In a nutshell, it's very common to have lengthy conversations with a covert narc without it going anywhere at all.

Denial of bad behavior: With nothing ever being their fault, the narcissist will deny their poor behavior and instead focus on yours.

If their behavior is in question, they will try to make this invalid by bringing up your behavior or any issues they have with you. These issues that the covert narc has don't even need to be real problems, and they are often something that the narcissist has imagined or made up to use against you.

For example, you may have made a request to your partner that you'd like to stop them contacting their ex fiancé. This may then evoke a response that denies any wrongdoing on their part, whilst then blaming you for doing something similar or worse. When confronted about cutting ties with their ex, the narcissist may respond with something along the lines of 'you still talk to your ex-husband, so what's the problem?'

Even if you then reassure your partner that you have to speak to your ex-husband because you co parent your children with him, and it's only on that basis, you may be met with an accusatory response from the narcissist. It could go along the lines of 'how can I trust you? How can I be so sure? For all I know you're cheating on me with him.'



THE EXAMPLES OUTLINED above may be something that's very familiar to you, and I hope it went somehow in helping you decipher the narcissists true intentions from the conversation. I understand just how frustrating and angering it can be to deal with a covert narcissist, but there are ways that you can take back control of the conversation and stop the narcissist dead in his tracks.

This can take some work on your part by actually setting these boundaries in place and refusing to let the narc control the conversation. I'll cover that shortly, but now I'll move on to the next chapter, which details the side effects of being with a covert narcissist.

The Effects Covert Narcissism Has on You

NARCISSISTIC ABUSE is just that: abuse. When we endure any form of abuse, we are undeniably left with negative emotional effects, although often we don't recognize that these negative thoughts and behaviors are a direct result of the abuse we went through.

In this chapter, I'll go through some of the commonly associated effects narcissism has on its victims. You may not find that you have been left with all of these effects, but as someone who has endured the toxicity and abuse of a narcissist, I'm sure you're resonate with a lot of these after-effects of abuse.

The first effect I will mention is the feeling of **doubt**. The victim of a narcissist, whether they are still in a narcissistic relationship or have escaped it, will be left feeling copious amounts of self-doubt.

You may find that you constantly seek clarification or assurance that you haven't made a mistake, and that, a lot of the time, you're uncertain of yourself. This is a very common effect of narcissistic abuse, because the abuser conditions their victim to carry the burden of blame and are always quick to point fingers at them, thus causing the effect of self-doubt.

Even after I'd escaped my narcissistic relationships, I still found that I was full of self-doubt. I was uncertain of myself and my ability to make the right choices. I always felt guilt and blame for things that were very often not my fault or out of my control, and there is no mistake that my doubtful feelings towards myself really held me back from finding any enjoyment in life. I would seek validation from others that I was doing the right thing, or that my choices were the right ones to make. I came across to other people as being as very uncertain of myself, and this really hindered my progress at work and when I was trying to forge relationships with new people. It made me appear needy and unstable.

This negative after-effect of the abuse was born from the fact that, during the relationship, I had to accept responsibility for the things I didn't say or do. It was almost a borrowed humiliation from the narcissist that I still carried with me after the relationship ended.

Another aftereffect you may be left with is **dissociation**. Victims tend to detach or disassociate from their surroundings, emotions and even their own body. This is a coping mechanism to help survive the overwhelming, hurtful and confusing emotional abuse that they endure.

I've done quite a bit of research on disassociation, and I found this was something I did quite well to help myself cope with my abuser. Disassociation plays a pivotal part in traumatic situations. Because my situation was so emotionally overwhelming, my brain automatically numbed my emotions to help me endure the toxic circumstances. Emotional repression almost becomes a way of life in order to escape from the horrific reality. I do admire the brain's way of utilizing coping strategies and how it can alter your reality to block out pain, although dissociation, of course, isn't ideal.

Another effect of being in a narcissistic relationship is **you put your own needs, wants and desires on the back burner**. Whilst you're in a relationship with a narcissist, it can often feel like you're simply there just to fulfill their needs and help them with their own agenda. If you think back to when you first met your narcissistic partner, it may seem like they doted on you and the world revolved around you. Of course, reality soon hits, and you realize that you will never truly satisfy them no matter how hard you try.

In the meantime, you've had to forget about your own needs and wants for the most part, just to ensure you pacify the abuser. You may have stopped partaking in hobbies, you may have sacrificed some friendships, or you may have forgotten about your life goals in your mission to satisfy the narcissist.

One of the more unspoken effects of narcissistic abuse is the **detriment it has to your physical health**. Whilst narcissistic abuse is associated with the emotional and mental trauma you and endure, there's no denying the impact it can have on your physical health as well.

The chronic abuse I suffered at the hands of my ex-partner ensured I lost a significant amount of weight. I was so anxious, nervous and apprehensive that I simply didn't want to eat anymore. Any food that passed my lips made me gag, and the thought of eating made me retch. The anxiety that riddled me was there as soon as I woke up, until I went to sleep.

If I did manage to get to sleep, it would be a very broken sleep. I'd have horrible nightmares, drifting in and out of terrible dreams. I would usually wake up around 4 a.m. and be unable to get back to sleep. I would then be lying awake thinking about all of the narcissistic things my ex had done to me, trying to work out what was so wrong with me, and how I could make it right.

Another side effect of narcissism is a huge sense of **mistrust**. This usually comes after the relationship has ended, where you then see every person as a threat. Because of your experience with the narcissist, you begin to worry about the intention of other people, even ones you've known for quite some time.

Where a normal person would be naturally cautious, a victim of narcissistic abuse becomes hyper diligent when it comes to vetting people. Since you were duped before by somebody who appeared to have your best interests at heart, you now have a hard time trusting anyone. Sadly, all too often, you also begin to have a hard time trusting yourself. You were fooled before, what's to say won't be fooled again, even with your hypervigilant mistrust?

As well as the anxiety that comes with being in a narcissistic relationship, often depression and a sense of hopelessness accompanies this. Unbearable and inescapable circumstances envelop you, and you don't see a way out. This helplessness, which is learned from the way the narcissist treats you, makes day-to-day living a struggle. Unfortunately, this can see some abuse victims engage in self-harm as a coping mechanism.

Many narcissistic **abusers isolate their victim**. However, some victims will also isolate themselves, due to feeling embarrassed and ashamed about what they're going through. From experience, I understand the fear of victim blaming, and the black and white misconceptions of many people who don't understand abuse or its effects. I didn't want to put myself through the

trauma of being invalidated by those who had no idea of what I was going through, so I isolated myself.

I couldn't bear the idea of traumatizing myself by opening up to somebody about my toxic and abusive relationship, only for them to dismiss it as being my fault: *my fault for staying, my fault for entering a relationship with somebody like that, my fault for not making my partner happy enough to treat me with respect...* the list of responses I was fearful of receiving went on and on. This cultivated a need for me to self-isolate.

You may find that this sounds familiar to you; isolating yourself so nobody knows the true extent of what you're going through. The fear of judgement stopping you from reaching out for help. I understand the need to withdraw from others to avoid this, and self-isolation is another sad side effect of narcissistic abuse.

Victims of covert narcissism tend to adopt **self-destructive thoughts and behaviors**. You might find that you ruminate over the things your abuser has said or done, replaying their negative words to you over and over in your head. This then generates a pattern of negative self-talk, which can lead to self-destructive or self-sabotaging behavior. The covert narcissist programs a negative thought pattern into their victim, leading them down a path of unhealthy self-talk and self-perception.

Because of the covert put downs and hypercriticism they are exposed to, as well as the narcissist instilling a sense of shame into them, the victim can have a tendency to punish themselves. They can do this by sabotaging their dreams, goals, aspirations or academic achievements. The reason for this is because the abuser has ensured the victim feels so worthless that they don't feel they deserve anything good.

This, in turn, can leave victims will be trepidant to do the things they love, for fear of achieving success with them. Covert narcissists are quite often envious of their victims, and anything that makes them feel inferior to their victim will result in them being jealous and bitter. This negative reaction from the abuser regarding their victims' talents, interests and hobbies conditions the victim to associate these things with resentful and cruel behaviour from the narcissist.

This begrudging conditioning makes the victim avoid any successes, hobbies or activities that makes them happy, for fear they'll be met with spiteful and callus reactions from their abuser. This can result in the victim becoming anxious, depressed and severely lacking in confidence. The victim may now try to be a wallflower, avoid any kind of spotlight and avoid chasing any successes for fear of reprisal.

As a side note here, I'd just like to say: if this sounds like something you're going through or have been through, just remember that the abuser it isn't resentful and critical of your gifts or successes because they think you're incompetent or inferior - it's because they feel threatened by them. Anything that threatens their control and ego, they'll try to destroy.

Another very sad, yet prevalent, effect of covert narcissism is where the victim protects their abuser. The victim may even try to deny the abusers behavior so much that they end up gaslighting themselves. This minimizing and rationalizing of the abusers behavior acts as a survival mechanism for the victim. In order to play down the emotional dissonance that appears when someone who's supposed to love you mistreats you, victims of covert narcissism can often convince themselves that the abuse 'isn't really that bad', or that they 'must have done something' to provoke their mistreatment.

I would like to stress the importance in reducing this mental dissonance. A good example of doing that is by reading this book right now; you're actively looking into their behavior and seeking to understand how to handle it. By doing this you're able to reconcile your reality against the falsities that your abuser is trying to portray. this can help you avoid self-gaslighting and keep your reality in check.

This need to implement survival tactics to avoid facing the harsh reality of abuse can often be overwhelming. This is especially the case in instances where the victim is trauma bonded* to their abuser. The victim will even try to portray a happy image to the outside world, and when confronted by others about their partners toxic behavior, they'll take sole the blame for the abuse.

***TRAUMA BOND DEFINITION:** A strong emotional attachment between an abused person and their abuser, formed as a result of the cycle of abuse. Although the victim may disclose the abuse to others, the trauma bond means that the victim may wish to receive comfort from the very person who abused them.

Setting Boundaries and Interacting with a Covert Narcissist

One of the key things you need to do to take back control from the narcissist is to set boundaries. Setting boundaries with a toxic person can help you ensure that you deflect any disrespectful communication and also help you avoid exploitative behavior from the narc.

Boundaries are essentially a measure of your self-esteem. They are a way of setting limits for the behaviors you're willing to accept. Once you successfully implement boundaries (which takes effort on your part to ensure you are consistent with your boundary setting), you're taking back control. You are determining whether or not someone else can make you feel put down or devalued, and you can use boundaries to stop the narc in their tracks from taking advantage of your kind heartedness.

At the moment, it's likely you have some weak boundaries in place. Weak boundaries open you up to being disrespected, emotionally damaged and mentally hurt, and a narcissist can spot weak boundaries a mile off, so it's probable that these frail boundaries are being used to the narcs advantage.

Replacing the boundaries you already have with stronger, more robust ones does take a little time and effort. When I first set about doing this, one of the hardest things I found to do was to be consistent with my boundary setting. It's all well and good to say 'no' to an unreasonable request one day, but the key to successful boundary setting is to ensure you say 'no' **every time** an unreasonable demand comes your way. I found this difficult because my narcissistic ex was very good at wearing me down emotionally, to the point where I would just give in. I can't stress how important it is to maintain consistency when you're doing this.

The first thing I would recommend doing is to take some time to reset your boundaries. Take some time aside to write down the specific words, phrases, actions (or lack of actions) and situations that make you feel hurt, unhappy and devalued. When you're writing these things down, it can also

be quite beneficial to consider what the narcissists motivation behind these words are actions are. This can go some way into helping motivate you to stick to the boundaries you're going to set in place.

This little exercise will also help you identify the weaknesses of your current boundaries.

The first boundary I would suggest think about is knowing where to draw the line. Which behaviors are you willing to accept, which ones aren't you? For example, my ex would referred to me with one particular derogatory term that I hated, and when I was thinking about what I wasn't going to tolerate any more, this particular word was the first thing on my (rather lengthy) list.

I understand it's one thing to say you're not going to accept a particular behavior anymore, but it's quite another to go ahead and prevent that from happening. Figuring out where you're going to draw the line is the easy part, the hard part is actually drawing the line.

To ensure I was refused to tolerate that hurtful, derogatory word, I had my own retort to that insult. It was straight to the point, it clearly stated my boundaries, and it prevented my narcissistic ex from having control over the conversation. It was as simple as this:

‘If you continue to call me that name, I will end this conversation until you can talk to me with respect’

I didn't gets sucked into his goading, I didn't report with any name-calling and I didn't feel the need to explain my reasoning. This strips the narcissist of any emotion to use against me, as well as the power they want to have over the conversation. I understand this can frustrate the narcissist, and there's a chance that they may continue name-calling, arguing or abusive behavior. In this instance, I would repeat what I'd said in the first place, this time putting into action what I'd warned my ex would happen:

‘As I said, if you continued to call me that name I would end the conversation, so that's what I'm doing.’

And this point I would either leave, hang up the phone, or I'd get myself to a place where my ex wasn't, depending on the situation. I wouldn't stand

around or linger for a response; I would ensure that I was carrying out my boundary setting no matter how difficult it felt. No matter the consequences he would threaten. No matter how much I wanted to cave in. *I had to be consistent.*

You must remind yourself that your boundaries are not up for discussion or debatable. Keep in mind why you are setting these boundaries in the first place: to make you feel less overwhelmed, calmer and more in control. You're doing this for your emotional health.

If, whilst you're setting boundaries, you feel the atmosphere has become too unhealthy or toxic, it's wise to have an exit plan up your sleeve. You have the right to leave at any time; you don't need permission. However, I understand this can be hard to initiate, especially if the narcissist is being abusive, but this should make it all the more necessary for you to leave.

Your exit plan can be as simple as saying you need to leave the room to make a call or you're late for something - it doesn't matter. If needs be, you might want to message a friend to ask them to call you, so you can remove yourself from the toxic situation. If this isn't possible, you can look at your phone and say, 'I need to answer this', which will also serve to take you away from the unpleasant situation.

You don't need to give any more detail than this; it doesn't matter who's calling you, what you're late for or where else you need to be. This is of no concern to the narcissist, so don't feel like you have to offer up any reasoning with the narc. Wherever you're going or whatever you're late for, the destination is self-care, and this is something the narcissist won't comprehend, so why try to reason with them?

A great tactic to utilize when setting boundaries is to use one of the narcissists greatest assets against them: conversation manipulation. It's not as complex as it sounds, nor is there any underlying malice as there is with a narcissist doing this. This is simply steering an uncomfortable or unpleasant conversation into a different direction. The direction you'll be steering this is the narcissists greatest topic: themselves.

For example, should you be asked a question that leaves you feeling uncomfortable, you're not required to stay on topic. Although you may feel

backed into a corner, you can be in control of how you retort to any narcissistic jibing. For instance, if the narcissist questions what you're doing with your money, you don't need to directly answer that question. Chances are it will only lead to you being made to feel inadequate or stupid by the narcissist. Instead, shift the conversation into another direction, preferably something that bumps up the narc's ego. Perhaps ask them what their secret tricks are for being so good with money or how they manage to save so much money whilst making it look easy.

I know from the outside looking in it seems like this 'conversation manipulation' only serves the narcissist, and fluffs their ego, but it's a technique to ensure the focus is taken off you and placed on to the narcissist.

To further add to this, it's important to note that you don't deserve to be interrogated. It's a sad truth that the less you share with a narcissist, the less information or 'ammunition' they have to use against you. When you're being criticized, or your actions are being questioned, don't feel the need to explain or justify yourself. Keep your replies short and to the point.

For example, if the narcissist is condemning you, for whatever reason, instead of getting flustered, agitated and wanting to retort with your justifications, understand that you're simply taking their bait. Instead, you could say something like, 'thank you for your opinion, I'll certainly keep that in mind'. If they are critiquing your choices or decisions, instead of trying to get them to understand your reasoning, simply say something like 'I'm quite confident about that idea'. You can still thank them for their concern and input, but this short and to the point reply strips the narcissist of any power over the conversation.

Remember that you don't deserve to be interrogated.

Another great way to set boundaries is to call out the narcissistic behavior that is being exhibited. It's not wise to outright name-call and accuse your abuser of being a narcissist or evil (even if this is the truth), as this will just cause an unpleasant atmosphere. On top of that, it will likely give the narcissist some ammunition to use against you; they may say you're mean, nasty, hurtful or a bully. This can then be used against you in a smear campaign, or to start an argument at a later date. Don't stoop to the

narcissists level. You can be matter of fact, straight to the point and honest without being aggressive or accusatory.

As you're probably all too aware narcissists do tend to push the limits of relationships. They like to test to see what they can get away with and go that one step further to make sure they feel one up on you or others around them. When you straight up call out the behavior of a narcissist, in a non-confrontational way, the aim is to defuse their limit pushing.

For example, if the narcissist says something negative about you or depreciates an idea you may have, instead of biting, you can say something like: *'that comment sounded like you were putting me down'*, or *'that comment was quite hurtful. Did you mean to put me down?'*

Tailor your reply to match the interaction. My ex-partner used to frequently interrupt me when I was talking. If I was talking about something that was happening at work, a new project I wanted to start or anything that may see me potentially improving my life, he would interrupt and talk about himself. One of the first boundaries I set was to call out this behavior.

I would say to him 'I see that every time I begin to talk about myself, you interrupt and revert the conversation back to you', and my straight-to-the point truthfulness would diffuse his attempts to draw the conversation back to him. My truthfulness would almost startle him, as if the thought I wouldn't pick up on the fact he was always reverting positive conversations about me back towards himself.

Don't feel the need to offer up anything else after you've called out their behavior or get into a lengthy conversation about it. Keep setting placeholders like this during negative interactions with the narc, and don't be drawn in if their response isn't as reasonable as you'd like. Setting boundaries takes time, as does reaping the rewards from them.

Attention is one of the narcissists biggest desires; even with a covert narcissist, who can appear meek and introverted, you ought to be under no illusion that the craving for attention is still there. Whatever they believe, say, or need is their main priority in that moment, and they do expect it to be your priority as well. This hunger for attention is ultimately draining,

and to stop yourself being sucked into their narcissistic, ego-inflating needs, make sure that you're checking in with yourself.

Mentally return your focus to yourself. What do you want? What do you need? How are you feeling? Take the time to ask yourself these important questions.

I understand this can be hard to do in the middle of an interaction with a narcissist, but you can still do this retrospectively after the event. This may be helpful in identifying your thoughts about the situation, and perhaps help you think about how you would like to handle the situation differently in the future. It's a great way to identify boundaries you wish to set as well.

By doing this on a regular basis, you're increasing your self-awareness, and allowing yourself to become more aware of how the narcissists behavior affects you. The more you do this, the more self-awareness you have, and over time this will lessen the power the narcissist has over you. With a more assured self-awareness, the narcissists agenda will no longer overwhelm you.

This is a good place to describe the term 'grey rock'. This term is a way to approach dissociation, temporarily, when you're in an emotionally vulnerable situation. It means dialing down how much you allow yourself to care about the narcissist. You temporarily make yourself as impenetrable as a rock, disassociating yourself emotionally, and protecting yourself from unsafe situations.

Essentially this technique is allowing you to take a step back, and not feel like you have to fend off any unwanted aggression or goading from the narcissist. You're not emotionally invested, and therefore their words can't penetrate you. Allow your replies and responses to be mundane and dull, almost making yourself part of the scenery.

This technique can help you remind yourself that you need to reserve some energy for yourself, and for people who genuinely care about you. By not fully engaging with the narcissist, you're reserving that precious energy for more meaningful things. Grey rock also stops you from showing as much vulnerability and offering up as much emotion, which are things a narcissist usually clings onto. The grey rock technique decreases the likelihood that

they will be able to do this, helping diminish the put downs and critiques that they would usually offer up in a situation.

Covert narcissists relish in getting a reaction out of other people. It's their perverse way of reassuring themselves that they are important, their presence matters, and they have the ability to 'get to' people. If you do bite or show emotion when they provoke you, although unintentionally, you're reinforcing then negative and unhealthy behavior. You're giving them the reaction they need.

I know as well as you do that narcissists are adept at getting a rise out of others, so I understand that sometimes you will react, despite you knowing that it's probably better not to. But, where possible, try to set that emotional reaction to one side until later, Manipulate the conversation to revert it back to them and excuse yourself when possible. Once you're out of that unpleasant and unhealthy environment, you can go ahead and process how you feel in a much safer way. This way, you won't offer up any emotional vulnerability to the narcissist. And that leaves you a winner in this fight for power that the narcissist is insistent on winning.

It's much easier to read about the idea of setting boundaries and to think about the boundaries you *want* to set than it is to actually put them into action. Setting boundaries isn't just a one-time thing: it's something that you have to consciously continue to put in place. In order to help you best implement these in a way that will ensure you don't slip or give in; self-compassion is a good thing to develop.

Compassion for ourselves is something that our narcissistic partners don't encourage. In fact, in most cases, it's something they strongly discourage, in their covert, patronizing way.

If you try to implement a boundary and it's not gone as successfully as you'd hoped, or if you've been too emotional or if you've allowed yourself to be manipulated yet again, give yourself some compassion. Understand that you are only human, ask yourself what you want to do differently next time and move on. Never beat yourself up about mistakes or mishaps; you and I both know that other people can be quick to put us down, so don't join them. We need to be our own champion and give ourselves a vote of confidence.

If you find that you're overwhelmed by the way the covert narcissist makes you feel, remember that you don't need to be that person who says yes to every demand or meets their every desire. You can choose who you want to be around them, you can choose whether or not you want to be their source of narcissistic supply.

If you're feeling short on self-compassion, ask yourself these questions:

Do I want to feel small belittled and overwhelmed, or strong confident and respected?

How do other people see me what do I stand for? Is that how I want to be perceived?

Your answers to these questions will help you decide the person you want to be and help guide you in that direction. The context that you find in the answers to those questions will also help embed the fact that you no longer want to be somebody's doormat or verbal punching bag. Visualizing the person you want to be will help you get there.

Whilst covert narcissists can be mean, spiteful, patronizing and can stealthily intimidate people, remember that they do feel inferior and empty on the inside. I'm not saying this to you feel pity for the narcissist, but rather so that you can see them in a more realistic light. If you think about it, it must be quite difficult to be constantly needing that narcissistic supply and craving validation from others all the time.

Underneath that bullying know-it-all exterior, there's a scared, needy person who utilizes toxic and abusive behavior to help them get through life. Covert narcissists are generally quite wounded over their limitations as a person, but this doesn't excuse their abusive or controlling behavior.

Keep in mind their limitations to help you not take their behavior personally. I'm not suggesting you offer them empathy because of this or use it as a way to explain their actions. Just remember that their insecurities and limitations don't justify their narcissistic behavior.

Before I draw this chapter to a close I do want to mention something else I'd like you to keep in mind: good, solid boundaries can also include consequences, and you need to follow through with these consequences. I

don't want you to be fearful of this, but rather use this knowledge to understand what you're prepared to do if your boundaries are violated.

As an example, if you're insulted by the narcissist when you are implementing a boundary, I'd like you to have a consequence of what will happen in your mind before the situation happens - you don't want to have to figure it out in the heat of the moment. I would suggest only communicating your desired consequence one time before carrying it out. No explanation is necessary. Once the consequence has been communicated, and this has been ignored and your boundary violated, you must take action - straight away, every single time. If you don't do this it's never going to be as effective as if you are consistent. Inconsistent boundary setting means you lose credibility and remain in the Cat and Mouse game of the narcissist.

It's also important to know that whenever you set healthy boundaries, the narcissist may up the ante on their threats, verbal attacks and gossip spreading. This is one of the sad risks of having a narcissist in your life; being with a narcissist does come at a price. You can attempt a healthy relationship with a narcissist, but you'll always be having to pick your battles and interact with your narcissist in a more mindful way than you would if you were in a non-toxic relationship.

Now that I've got you thinking about interacting with the narcissist, it may be something that you're looking to implement and try yourself, or it may be something that you're now questioning you even want to do. You may be thinking 'at what cost am I maintaining contact with this narcissist?'

In this next chapter I'm going to talk about considering a different path; a one that is admittedly quite difficult in the beginning, but ultimately turned one of the best choices I've ever made: leaving a narcissistic relationship.

Looking After You - Ways to Leave a Vulnerable Narcissist

I understand just how hard it is to leave someone you love. Although our narcissistic spouses undoubtedly torment us with their mental and emotional torture, there's no question as to whether or not we love them. We may feel silly for loving someone who treats us so badly, but it can't be denied that leaving them is a hard thing for us to do, largely because we feel so much for them.

You may not yet be ready to face the idea of leaving your partner. You maybe feel like you can't live with them, but you can't live without them either, and you're in a state of confusion about what you're going to do. Perhaps you've decided that you're going to leave your abuser, but you're just waiting for the right time. It could also be that you know for a fact you're ending this relationship, but you just don't know how or where to start.

I have fled two abusive relationships, and I can tell you from first-hand experience that it's not easy. Leaving my relationships, and enduring the emotionally draining months that followed, were some of the hardest times I've ever been through.

Cliché as it may sound, once you leave a toxic relationship, and you come out of the other side, you'll wonder how and why you ever endured the emotional trauma that your ex put you through.

This is probably the biggest piece of advice that you should take away from this chapter: you need to go no contact. This was one of the things that kept me in the cycle of abuse; I would leave the relationship, only to maintain contact, and eventually be persuaded to return to the relationship. For whatever reason, we always seem to believe that it will be better when we return, or the abuse will cease.

The best way to escape a narcissistic relationship is to go no contact. Block their number. Block their email address. Any social media you may have, make sure they're blocked on there too. I went as far as actually deleting my social media profiles for a while, just to avoid my ex keeping tabs on me via other people. If you leave a narcissist, their egos simply won't be able to deal with it; they will try to contact you. They need their narcissistic supply and that's *you*. With you gone their knee-jerk reaction is to get that back at all costs.

Of course, I understand if you have children with the narcissist, this isn't as simple as no contact. This wasn't something I ever had to deal with, but I have spoken to other victims of narcissism who had children with their abusive spouse. Some of them went to therapy with their ex in order to work out a parenting plan, but for those who were dealing with a more aggressive narcissist, it had to go down a legal route. Whilst I can't advise on the details of this, as this isn't something I had to go through, I would advise immediately work out a parenting plan, and if this is rebuffed by your ex, you can consider the alternate routes to go down.

When you leave I would advise you to *just go*. No long talk or lingering goodbyes - if you do this, you'll be convinced to stay, and then punished later for wanting to leave. If you feel like it's safer to do so, you may need to break up with your abuser via phone or even text. Be clear that you are done with the relationship, be straight to the point, and you may even want to wish them the best for the future if you feel it's appropriate. After that my best advice is to block their number. I would then delete this straight away, so if you ever get the urge to get back in touch, as that option is now stripped away from you. It's a form of tough self-love; it may hurt you at the time, but it's what's best for you in the long run.

Do not allow yourself to be hoovered back into the relationship. You know you'd only be told things that they know you want to hear; remember you need to end this cycle of toxicity. If you've left belongings or sentimental items at their place, if possible, cut your losses and forget about them. Whilst most things can be replaced, it's much harder to replace your sanity and emotional stability.

If your relationship was quite a lengthy one, it's likely you have friends in common. In fact, your entire friendship circle may be the same as your ex. I would consider blocking or detaching yourself from friend you have in common, especially ones who can go back to the narcissist and update your ex on your life. Some friends may even try to convince you to get back with your ex. Your mental and emotional health is dependent on your ability to remove yourself as much as possible from the narcissist. This may mean cutting certain people out of your life. Doing this also avoids you getting any updates on your ex which may trigger you wanting to regain contact.

Once you're out of the relationship, and spending more time alone, this can often cause you to look back on the relationship with rose tinted spectacles. Your reflection of the relationship may begin to just be on the good times, and you begin to forget, or bury, the reasons why you ended the relationship. during times like this when you're feeling especially weak, I would suggest writing down a list of reasons why you left. it's vital to remember the parts of your relationship that caused your self-esteem to plummet, your self-doubt to rise, your sanity to be questioned and your pain to be used as their narcissistic fuel.

Were you cut off from family and friends during the relationship? Were there things you were unable to do because of the relationship that you're now free to do? Was there a particular word or phrase that would be especially hurtful when you called it? Do you recall any specific passive aggressive behaviors that affected the way you reacted to things? Write it all down. The more you write down, the more you can think of, the more you remember and it almost snowballs into a list of reasons why you are better off out of the relationship. It can be quite cathartic and therapeutic to do this as well.

When I wrote my list of reasons why I left, I found a lot of the list was reminding myself that I have been lied to quite a lot throughout the relationship. This caused me a lot of pain because I knew I was being lied to deep down, but my narcissistic ex convinced me I was imagining things or remembering things incorrectly. I would look back on myself in the relationship and feel utterly stupid for allowing myself to be gaslighted and abused the way I was. I would beat myself up for accepting his feeble lies as the truth. Of course, this self-blaming behavior isn't helpful, but I just

want to let you know that it's definitely a natural feeling after the demise of the relationship. Allow yourself to feel the negativity for just a moment, and then move on.

It's also wise to assume that the narcissist will move on pretty quickly. Providing you stick to the no contact rule and avoid being sucked back in by the narcissist, the narcissist will need to find another source of supply. A lot of times, the narcissist even has a backup plan if anything were to ever happen in your relationship. Somebody may already be waiting in the wings. Whilst this is undeniably hurtful, and even though you're no longer with the narcissist, you still feel the same pain and betrayal. *How could they move on so quickly? How didn't I realize there was somebody already waiting take my place?*

Don't take this behavior personally. This is the only way the narcissist knows how to survive, and how to maintain that important narcissistic supply.

However, it can still come as quite a shock to find out that your narcissistic ex has swiftly moved on with someone else. In my case, it took my ex an entire nine hours to get somebody else back into the bed we shared. It took him two weeks to make that person his new girlfriend. I now understand that this person was already in the background of our relationship, and somebody he was already being intimate with behind my back. Whilst it wasn't a full-blown affair, they had been intermittently seeing each other for about six months before I left. As I came to find out, he would visit her whenever we had an argument, or he couldn't get his own way. When he would say he was 'staying at a friend's house to get some space', he was actually staying over at hers.

I didn't find out about this until a few months after the breakup. By this point, I'd come a long way in regaining some self-esteem, self-compassion and understanding that my toxic relationship wasn't my fault. However, to find out about this other woman and all of the sordid details still felt like a dagger in the gut. I'm sure it would have hurt me much more if I found out months prior, but the fact that it got to me really bothered me. I thought I was over him. In truth I was over *him*, but the effects of the abuse still lingered, and that's what was causing the pain. In long run, him moving on

quickly give me more closure. It assured me that I was disposable to him, and just another form of narcissistic supply. I was better than that, and I was worth more than he could ever offer me. Despite the initial pain, him moving on liberated me.

With all breakups, you do need to give yourself time to grieve. It's all the more difficult, I believe, to grieve an abusive ex. Not only are you mourning the demise of the relationship, you're grieving the person you *thought* your ex was. There may also be a sense of overwhelming shock, as the narcissist reveals even more evil and sadistic behaviors post break up.

Most narcissists will lovebomb* at the beginning of a relationship. You may feel swept off your feet and like the luckiest person in the world during the beginning stages of your relationship. The shock and sadness that comes with the realization that this isn't a true reflection of that person can be earth shattering.

**LOVEBOMB DEFINITION: Love bombing is an attempt to influence a person by demonstrations of attention and affection. It can often be used with negative intentions.*

BY THE TIME YOU'VE fallen for this charmer, you've already formed an emotional bond. When the relationship ends you are removing yourself from this person who there's a big part of your life. You need to grieve that.

I'm a big advocate for listening to your emotions, asking yourself how you're feeling, and making sure you have plentiful 'you' time. Allow yourself to feel the mirage of emotions that come with the break up. In the same breath, don't allow yourself to dwell. It's a fine line that you need to keep an eye on. If you feel like you're dwelling, it's important to find things to keep you occupied. Give yourself some distractions. Do the things that you were unable to do during the relationship. Learn new hobbies, get up and do some exercise, meet up with friends, find ways to make new

friends... whatever you do, make it something that will nourish you, even if you don't really feel like doing it.

You'll thank yourself later.

About the Publisher

Escape The Narcissist is about helping you find your self-worth, offering you some thought provoking ideas to change your life and aiding you in revitalizing your relationships.

With that in mind, Escape The Narcissist has one core relationship we want to focus on: the one you have with yourself.

Our website was born from a place of darkness. We've all, at some point in our lives, been on the receiving end of ill treatment from others. From being a victim of a narcissistic relationship to being mistreated by those who should protect us and not being shown the respect we deserve, these toxic relationships can affect us more than we realise.

Whilst the people behind the content of our site and books all have their own ideas and stories, they have one thing in common: they've all overcome toxicity in their lives and want to share their story.

The content of the stories, pieces of advice and actionable life changes within this site all aim to inspire, provoke a healthier way of thinking, and help to heal any negative effects you've been left with at the hands of other people.

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