

Chapter 1

Why the Need for No Contact?

The Need for No Contact

No doubt about it, some people in this world are lethal. They have no regard whatsoever for others. Their objective is to get what they want when they want it from whom they want it.

For those of us who have been in abusive relationships the recovery process is hard. It takes so much time to put the pieces of us back together because these pieces were slowly and deliberately taken from us over time. In order to heal, we've got to pick these pieces up and reconnect them to make ourselves whole.

In the early days of my healing I read at length about abuse. I learned that although there are different types of abusers they all lack empathy for others. I also found in my reading that personality disorders were often mentioned alongside discussions about abusers. When I came across Narcissistic Personality Disorder and the traits associated with it, I was amazed by how familiar it all sounded. Narcissists are usually drawn to people they believe are unique or have special qualities. This is important to them because they believe they are special and should only associate with people worthy of them. They also want to impress the outside world so want to make sure whoever they associate with helps them look good to others. They might be drawn to people with intelligence, money, fame, position, power, beauty or combinations of these and other qualities they deem desirable. They and other abusive individuals tend to pick partners who lack confidence, have low self-esteem, and have wavering boundaries or no boundaries at all. In the beginning their charm and wit are hard to resist and they pursue a new partner with a vengeance. However, over time they lose interest in the relationship. They often become distant and uncommunicative as well as mentally emotionally and/or physically abusive.

I was first introduced to the concept of no contact through my readings at an online discussion group: NarcissisticPersonalityGroup@groups.msn.com. At this group I learned that in order to leave an abusive rela-

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tionship you must eliminate all contact. However keeping the no contact rule is different when sharing co-parenting responsibilities or in an employment setting. In these cases the contact must be kept to a minimum as it relates to the children or to the workplace.

It isn't easy to leave a destructive relationship; especially if you aren't used to standing up for yourself. Your biggest ally in doing this will be your resolve to have the best life possible. Whenever you weaken, remember your happiness depends on taking care of yourself first. Also keep your thinking reality based. You are more vulnerable if you have a fantasy view toward life. It's to an abuser's advantage to find a partner who longs for a prince to sweep them off their feet. This is how they reel you in. Women planted firmly in reality aren't looking for a prince and won't buy into the fantasy. This doesn't mean that a woman should run from a man who treats her well but should be wary of a man who appears too good too soon. Chances are they're giving a great performance which won't be repeated once he's convinced he's won her over.

The Relationship Is Bad for You

Simply put, you've decided you don't want contact with this person because it is bad for you! Your self-esteem is on the line and to heal you've got to stay away. It may take awhile to decide you want to

end the relationship. It's a difficult decision with much to consider. When in a relationship with a narcissist, they want you to do what they want, when they want it. If it turns out you actually want to do what they want on a regular basis, it becomes too much like sharing, and they won't want it anymore. In other words, you won't reach a level of mutual sharing and understanding. You might wonder why things don't seem quite right. Maybe you get a sick feeling in the pit of your stomach then shrug it off, rationalizing you're too sensitive or didn't understand what was said or done. Men and women in these relationships often report that although they share some great times with their partner, they spend far more time feeling uneasy or downright miserable. Maybe you've hesitated bringing up your feelings, fearing that doing so, will anger your partner. Feeling hesitant and fearful of sharing emotion shouldn't be part of a healthy relationship.

Boundary Violators

Narcissists have no interest in boundaries, period. As was mentioned above, they are attracted to people who don't have firm boundaries. The abuser may be physically, mentally, and/or emotionally abusive. Their objective is to get their way, no matter what. In the beginning of these relationships life can look and seem good. These individuals can be quite charming and accommodating initially. Over

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time though, they may view the relationship as less exciting and you will never get them back to the full form they first presented. Chances are if you continue to stay in the relationship you'll get used to accepting poor behavior over and over again. If you accept poor behavior even one time and don't put an end to it you're leaving yourself wide open for more abuse. In my past, I wasn't consistently clear about my boundaries and consequently didn't always stand up for myself. Sometimes I wasn't even aware I was being violated until it was too late:

On my birthday, shortly after my divorce was final, three of my children who were spending the weekend with their dad, came over with him to bring me a bouquet of flowers and a birthday cake. I put the flowers in a vase and set them on the kitchen table. We all gathered around the table and I stretched toward the flowers to smell them and then looked up. My ex-husband told me to smell the flowers again. I said no; he said "come on smell them again," and pushed my head into the bouquet with his hand. When I lifted my head he looked at me and laughed out loud. I went into the bathroom, looked in the mirror, and saw residue from the flowers all over my face. I was being made a joke of on my birthday, in front of my children! I came out of the bathroom and told my ex-husband to leave.

In hindsight, I should have paid attention to my first thought and walked away. Instead, I allowed him to push my head into the bouquet. I didn't understand

and process in the moment that having my head pushed into the flowers was a violation. Hesitating and ignoring my own feelings made me vulnerable. When a person lacks confidence they can be directed to do things a person with clear boundaries wouldn't consider doing. Learn to stand up for yourself whether you're at home, at a family gathering, or in a business meeting.

Sometimes in a new relationship we make a decision to accept the unacceptable. We accommodate a new person in order to keep them in our lives. We don't want to pass judgment so ignore our boundaries. We forget to pay attention to our wants and needs concentrating only on pleasing the other person. Here is an example from my personal experience:

Three years after my divorce I began a new relationship with a man who told me from the beginning he didn't like being questioned and wasn't very "revealing" about daily happenings in his life. I took his upfront disclosure policy seriously and decided I would do my best to ignore anything I suspected to be a lie or half truth. Above all, I made it a point not to ask questions or limit the questions I did ask! I had been taught not to pry into other people's business and accept what they told me. I was the perfect partner for this no disclosure policy boyfriend! This mindset had undermined me throughout adulthood but proved especially detrimental in this particular rela-

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tionship. I made up my mind to rarely question anything he told me. It took a long time to see that by accepting the bits and pieces of his life he chose to give me and by not asking questions I really didn't have a relationship. I didn't know him and I was losing sight of myself. Eventually I realized a healthy relationship doesn't look like this. It took nearly losing all interest in my own life to take the necessary steps to get out. I had stopped valuing and believing in myself. My universe centered on this mans wants and needs. If he was okay then I was okay. He was the barometer for how things were going in my own life.

Pay attention to your own wants and needs. If you have the gut feeling things aren't right in your relationship, it's a good indicator you need to get to the bottom of whatever is making you feel uneasy. If you let things slide even once, it will become easier to continue to let things go rather than confronting the issues head on. It's impossible to have a good relationship without communication. If you're in a relationship where your questions are met with silence, are ignored, or you're redirected to another topic of conversation, don't ignore these behaviors.

Name-Calling

If you have come out of a destructive relationship, chances are, you have gotten used to being put down verbally. Name-calling is the use of any negative la-

bel to describe another person. Abusers probably think they have the right to put their partner down for a variety of reasons: they may be older, are the breadwinner, have more education, or feel they are superior in some other way. Narcissists have a strong sense of entitlement which blinds them to their abusive behavior. Most abusers also believe they can say things to other people that they themselves would never be able to tolerate. They lack the ability to acknowledge and accept their partner's feelings, perspectives, and opinions if they are different from their own. Verbal abuse creates pain and trauma. It can make you physically ill. Ongoing verbal abuse is stressful no matter how much you try to ignore it. On the other hand, non abusers will occasionally say something cruel because they are upset or frustrated, and when they think about how they came across, will apologize. The rare hurtful comment made when frustrated is different from the ongoing remarks made by an abusive individual.

In the early days of one relationship, I was often told I was wonderful, exciting, fun, etc. However, over time, the positive regards were expressed less and less. One evening we were on our way to dinner when he slipped something into my jacket pocket. I reached in my pocket and pulled out a magazine clipping. It was a poem about a woman who though not at all exciting was a comfort to be around. He told me the poem reminded him of me.

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At the time, I brushed the whole thing aside, even though reading the poem and hearing his reasoning for giving it to me gave me a sick feeling in the pit of my stomach. I should have paid attention to the way I felt. The sick feeling was my body's way of telling me that neither the poem nor comment was okay with me. Yet in the moment, I pretended everything was fine. I didn't want him to think I was bothered at all after reading it. By saying nothing I allowed him to get away with treating me poorly. I disregarded the pain I was feeling by denying it. After the relationship ended the poem became significant as clear use of devaluation.

How much self have you allowed another person to take from you? Do you know when enough is enough?

Remember, anyone who calls you names or in some other way attempts to devalue and make you feel inferior has no regard for you. It's about keeping you down. Don't get used to these comments. Remember to expect respect! Stay sharp and don't allow others to put you down because over time, it will wear you out.

Masters of Confusion

Narcissists tend to change on a daily basis. If there is one consistency in their personalities it's that they

are unpredictable and extremely changeable. What worked for them yesterday will most likely not work the next day. They often expect a partner to be able to read their moods and know instinctively what it is they need at any moment. Your wants and needs don't factor into the equation unless giving you what you need and want helps them portray a desirable image to the outside world. Their catch phrase might be "you make me feel...." The problem is you could make them feel alive and wonderful one day and like they're hooked to a ball and chain the next. You will most likely not be able to predict what each new day will bring. There were times in my past relationships when I considered myself to be in ongoing train wrecks. I knew a wreck was coming, however didn't know from which direction, or the force of impact upon crashing.

The confusion we feel with abusers is a deliberate control mechanism. If you listen to what they say and try to make sense out of it, you get caught up in the confusion. The trick is not to allow them to confuse you. The easiest way to do this is by not responding. Get out, stay away, don't contact.

With one ex-boyfriend, I could be in a great mood, thoroughly excited and anticipating our time together. One time in particular we were in the car. I was quiet, just enjoying the drive. He said, "Are you

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okay, is everything alright?" I assured him I was fine and then he added:

"I'm bored."

"Why?" I asked. "We have nothing to talk about anymore," he said.

This exchange was used to let me know it was my responsibility to keep the conversation going so he felt comfortable. It wasn't okay for me to be still, to be quiet, unless he wanted me to. I worried about whether my behavior was acceptable at any given moment in relationship to his moods. During this particular car ride I was anxious and unsure of his reaction to my continued silence so picked up on his cue to start talking. By doing this, I let him off the hook. I did what I was supposed to do which was to create conversation in order for him to feel less uncomfortable. I got nothing out of this exchange except an awareness that he was in control. I played the part I was supposed to play.

It isn't anyone's responsibility to keep another person entertained. We're capable of doing that for ourselves. However, some very charming and persuasive people are used to calling the shots and getting results. People with a strong sense of entitlement think nothing of expecting partners and others to follow their lead, agree with their views, and succumb to their wishes.

Signs of an Abusive Relationship

There will be other sections which show warning signs and red flags to be aware of when looking at a new relationship partner. Here you look at your current relationship and note whether or not any or all of the following apply:

- Is possessive or jealous toward you.
- Bossy or demanding in attempts to control you.
- May have a quick temper and/or is violent.
- Attempts to isolate you by cutting you off from friends, family, and other social contacts.
- Abuses alcohol and/or drugs.
- You feel pressure sexually and/or demands sexual activities you're not comfortable with.
- Tells you you're responsible when he mistreats you.
- History of bad relationships.
- Friends and family are concerned for your health and safety.
- You worry about your partner's reactions to what you say and do.
- Partner makes "jokes" that embarrass, humiliate, or shame you privately or around family and friends.
- Partner has angry outbursts when they feel hurt, shame, fear, or loss of control.
- Partner witnessed abusive parental relationship and/or was abused as a child.
- In order to cope with the pain of the relationship, you and/or your partner have developed or pro-

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gressed in alcohol or drug dependence.

- You repeatedly leave and return to relationship against the advice of your loved ones.
- You are not able to leave the relationship even though you know it is in your best interests to do so.

If you are thinking about leaving a destructive disturbing or otherwise unworkable relationship know you'll most likely always struggle with claiming a sense of self while with this person. It will zap you of your energy and for all your effort you'll still feel a sense of loss and emptiness. If your partner agrees to couples therapy and both of you are sincerely interested in making positive changes then go for it. Just be prepared that it might not work and in the end you'll need to get out so you can begin living a normal life.

Remember to expect respect. It takes practice, and trust in yourself, to know when something someone says to you, or wants you to do, isn't right. Stand up for yourself and realize you have great value. Don't let other people push you around, embarrass, or in some other way make you feel inferior. People who are cruel to you are not worth having in your life. Above all, don't be so dependent on another person, that the value you place on yourself is determined

by the attention they pay to you. You are a separate person!

You Have a High Probability of Going Back to an Abusive Relationship if You Maintain Contact

Yes you do but if you're still in the relationship there's no need to panic. Timing plays a critical role when you begin the process of leaving. You may have been in a relationship with this person for years and if so you'll need to detach. Detaching is important when you can't completely shut a person out of your life. If you have children with an abusive individual there will usually be some contact. There are also destructive relationships with people other than intimate partners. You might have a difficult relationship with a coworker, and in that case, it's often impossible to avoid contact altogether unless you quit your job. Whether you're in a co-parenting situation, or the relationship is with a coworker, maintain only minimal necessary contact.

If you've decided to leave a destructive relationship it may initially seem normal to continue contact with your former partner. However, it seems normal only because it is familiar. If you choose to stay in the relationship you can continue to work on yourself, though it may be difficult because your partner is still in the picture. It will be a delicate balance to give time and energy to you while continuing on in

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the relationship. Your concentration will be divided and it will be difficult to divert the time and energy you formally gave to your partner onto yourself.

In addition, it's likely you'll slip into previously set patterns you had with your partner and if you attempt to break these patterns will be met with resistance. Positive changes can happen but both you and your partner must be committed to the change. You are also likely to need guidance from a mental health specialist. It would be easier for you to clear your mind and space of this person before working on changing your own behavior patterns.

Breaking It Off

Breaking away from a destructive relationship is tough because even though it was dysfunctional it held value and a certain amount of enjoyment for you or you wouldn't have been in it at all. The objective of leaving is to bring peace and joy back into your life as well as to gain control of your world.

Destructive relationships are not joyful. There may be brief periods of happiness but overall there is a greater amount of dissatisfaction and misery. To settle for that type of relationship is crazy which is why you want out.

If you choose to move forward with no contact you

will need to make adjustments. It will be nearly impossible to stay away in the beginning but over time it will become easier as long as you maintain self-discipline.

Maintaining Boundaries with No Contact

Without clear boundaries none of us have a solid foundation to build on. We all know and understand this however putting it into practice is hard work.

Knowing who you are, accepting it, and growing with it, are the keys to developing a life you truly enjoy. If you are convinced that leaving the partnership is the best course of action to take, you will need to set your boundaries. This will be difficult. He may call you. He may come to see you. What do you do? You know the person and your situation. If you believe it's safe to do so, you could say the following: Please find someone else on whom to focus your attention as I have no interest in you at all. Saying this allows the other person to keep their dignity because if that is stripped away, it could mean misery and danger for you. To say anymore than the above just sucks you back in.

Once you have made it clear you're no longer interested don't take their calls and don't open the door to them. If the phone rings let the answering machine pick it up. If the calls continue save the mes-

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sages as you may need them for evidence. You may also want to consider getting another phone with an unlisted number and use that phone only with close friends and family.

When I left the last relationship I was committed to no contact but felt vulnerable and knew I would be tempted to pick up the phone if he called. I decided to unplug my landline using it only when necessary. I kept in touch with friends and family by using a cell phone with a number only they knew. I went to work every day and took care of my children. It was more important for me to self-protect than to worry about whether or not I was available to answer my phone.

Gaining Equilibrium with No Contact

Equilibrium is a state of balance. When we're in a state of balance we feel good about ourselves and the way we live our lives. If you are in an abusive relationship much of your energy is used to keep the relationship going. You are out of balance because too much of your energy is being poured into another person who isn't bringing positive energy back to you. It's possible to maintain the relationship and shift energy to you but it will take self-discipline and discernment to do so. The other issue is your partner's reaction to your newly found interest in taking care of yourself. How will they deal

with it? How will you deal with their reaction? Both partners in a relationship deserve to have a stable life with another person. It may be possible to improve the relationship for a short time but without ongoing counseling and commitment to change by both people, your energy will most likely be used to maintain status quo.

Contact Keeps You Vulnerable

Let's say that Sally left a relationship on Friday; three days later her ex-partner calls. Sally is sad and misses him so decides to pick up the phone when he calls. She had made it through three days without contact. After the call she set herself back three days. She's depressed and has him on her mind again. It really doesn't matter what was said during the conversation; she lost ground. She goes three more days and recovers from the first phone call, just begins to stabilize, and gets another call. She is now back where she was six days before when she got the first call.

When you pick up the phone, you're still involved and thinking about your ex-partner. You lose focus on what you're trying to accomplish which is to move forward. Instead the focus is switched back to them.

Contact Gives You an Excuse to Stay

It is familiar to stay inside the relationship. Life will not feel normal once you leave. You need to adapt to this change and remember that change never feels normal in the beginning.

In the early days after my divorce, my life didn't feel normal at all. I went through the motions. At the time, I worked as a substitute teacher. One day I remember standing in a classroom thinking, this isn't me, where did I go? I still did the same things every day but it felt like I was living someone else's life. It felt surreal. It took a long time before I was able to accept that, yes, this is my life.

It is also difficult to leave the other people behind who were part of your life as a result of the relationship you were in. These other people may include your partner's children, friends, relatives, and co-workers. You may also be leaving special pets behind. Sometimes it may be more difficult to lose contact with the other individuals than with the actual relationship partner. However, at this time, the most important people in your life are you and your own children, if you have children. Your ex-partner may even enlist the help of these other people to drag you back into the relationship. Be aware of this, and act accordingly. It is again in your best interest to limit or cut off contact with others who are directly involved with your ex-partner. You may

believe it is cruel to do this but when you stop and think about it, what will you gain by keeping in touch with them? Are you doing it because you genuinely want them in your life? Are you in touch with them in hopes you will learn more about what is happening with your ex? Who he is seeing, what he is doing? How will having this information benefit you in terms of your own healing? How will having this information help you move on? If you are committed to no contact, you need to break away from your ex-partner and the other people who are significant to them. If the relationship you're leaving is with an ex-spouse or partner and you have children together, it's not likely you'll cut off all contact. The objective will be to have limited contact with your ex. Contact with your ex-partner will be necessary regarding your children's health, safety, and scheduling concerns. It's unnecessary to continue regular contact with your ex, their friends, and other family members for any other reason.