GUIDEBOOK FOR A PROFESIONAL OR PEER-FACILITATED SUPPORT GROUP FOR:

PARTNERS IN DESTRUCTIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH NARCISSISTS, SOCIOPATHS, & PSYCHOPATHS

By Mary Ann Glynn
DISCLAIMER

While the intellectual content of this booklet is the property of destructiverelationshipshelp.com, the content is not affiliated with the beliefs of any person, organization, or method. It is for informational purposes only as it relates to suggestive guidance in the initiation and facilitation of peer-facilitated support groups for partners in destructive relationships with those with low-conscience externalizing disorders (LCED’s), popularly known as narcissists, sociopaths and psychopaths. Anyone who chooses to use these guidelines to facilitate or attend a support group is doing so as an independent entity, with no affiliation or responsibility to its writer.

The writer of the suggestions for this support group is not responsible for how a facilitator or member acts in a group, how the group is facilitated, any breach of confidentiality by a member, or any harm that may come to a person as a result of their attending this support group. Anyone who makes use of these guidelines to facilitate a group does so of their own volition and at their own risk.

Peer-facilitated support groups are not meant to be therapeutic groups (e.i. those facilitated by a professional with a therapeutic purpose), nor are they meant to replace professional help or replace specific therapeutic modalities that individuals who attend the groups may need.

THE SUGGESTED GROUP QUESTIONS, SUGGESTED READING, & ARTICLES THAT FOLLOW THE GUIDELINES ARE OPTIONAL AND DESIGNED FOR INFORMATIONAL PURPOSES ONLY TO HELP SPARK GROUP DISCUSSION (IF DESIRED). THEY DO NOT NECESSARILY EXPRESS THE OPINION OF THE GROUP FACILITATOR OR MEMBERS. THE INFORMATION, ARTICLES, AND SUGGESTIONS CONTAINED HEREIN ARE THE INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY OF DESTRUCTIVERELATIONSHIPSHELP.COM AND MAY BE REPRINTED ONLY WITH THE EXPRESS PERMISSION OF SAID OWNER. THEY ARE A SMALL CONTRIBUTION TO THE VAST AMOUNT OF RESOURCES AND INFORMATION AVAILABLE ON THE SUBJECT THAT CAN BE USED AS PART OF POTENTIAL DISCUSSION SUBJECT MATTER IN THE GROUP, IF DESIRED. THEY ARE NOT MEANT TO BE PROFESSIONAL ADVICE.

10 SUGGESTED GUIDELINES FOR SUPPORT GROUP

DESTRUCTIVERELATIONSHIPSHELP.COM
MEETINGS OF PARTNERS IN RELATIONSHIPS
WITH NARCISSISTS, SOCIOPATHS, PSYCHOPATHS
(LOW-CONSCIENCE EXTERNALIZING DISORDERS-LCED’s)

To maintain an ongoing safe, fair, confidential environment it is suggested to pass around and read italicized statements aloud at the beginning of each group.

1. **Confidentiality** - Everything said within the confines of the group is confidential information. Participants respect each others’ privacy and create a safe environment to speak without anyone having to worry that their personal sharing or any personal information will leave the room.

2. **Anonymity** – Participants can choose to use only first names and share whatever personal information they feel comfortable sharing. It is never necessary to share any personal information or even a first name.

3. **Safety in Meeting Location** – All participants agree to keep the meeting location undisclosed to any and all non-participants (including friends and family) for the safety of all who attend.

4. **Safety in Meeting Environment** – Be aware that it has happened that a narcissist, sociopath, or psychopath has begun a group like this! If the group believes that a narc/socio/psychopath is facilitating the group (including a professional!), the group may choose to disband and regroup with another facilitator.

5. **Safety in Sharing** - When someone shares in the group, others respect what they say without judgment or criticism. If the person sharing would like feedback or advice, it should be given in a considerate, non-judgmental way. No one acts as a counselor in the group unless a professional is facilitating.

6. **Length of Group & Sharing Time** – A group may be an hour or longer, depending on consensus. Suggested personal sharing time limit is10 minutes (including time for group feedback) depending on the size of the group, allowing time for all who want to share. Feedback should be to the sharer’s issue and not veer into one’s own issues until it is their turn. [The facilitator may ask at the beginning for a showing of hands of who might like or need to share that night. The facilitator should remind participants after the allotted time that it’s time to move on to the next person. This will prevent anyone from dominating the sharing time.]

7. **Format** – The group is a “support group”, meaning it is for the purpose of allowing individual sharing to gain support, clarity, and validation in their struggle - not a therapy group. [However, with the group’s approval, the group at times can be structured to accommodate a guest speaker, topic questions, readings from a book or article,
exercises to assist in coping and grounding (e.g. guided meditation, tapping, breathing, mindfulness exercises, etc.)]

8. **Content** – *The group is not a framework for religious or political discussions (unless a particular group decides to form expressly within a religious or political context).* Sharing one’s spirituality as it relates to their coping and recovery is appropriate. *It does not matter where a person is in their journey, all sharing is welcome and valued.*

9. **Organization** – **A)** *Each group is an independent entity in and of itself. This group, or any group that may split off from it, is not affiliated or associated in any way with any person, website, other group, or organization.*  
**B)** *Groups are run by volunteer facilitators who may pass on or alternate facilitation with others at any time.* A facilitator is defined as someone who guides the group according to recommended group guidelines, with the goal of facilitating a safe and fair environment. A facilitator’s decision for time, place, length, frequency, format, and content of group should take everyone’s input and comfort into consideration. No one (or more) individual(s) is ever sole decision maker(s) or leader(s) for the group.  
**C)** *If the group feels a facilitator has been facilitating for a long a time, and someone else would like the role, they may discuss switching facilitators. This is to prevent against any one person having too much leverage or control. However, this is not essential.*

10. **Fees & Transparency** – *These groups are to be strictly nonprofit.* Donations may be taken to defray group expenses. A donation receptacle [envelope, basket, jar, box] may be passed around or stationed so participants can donate with discretion and according to their means, or it can be done through a Meetup group page. If someone cannot afford a donation none is required.  
- A **Treasurer** can be assigned to keep records of donations and expenses (e.g. a meeting room, supplies, Meetup.com or other website expenses, etc.) that should be reported to the group regularly (e.g. weekly, bimonthly, monthly) with a written accounting that can be passed around for participants to look over. The treasurer should discuss with the group what to do with any excess (e.g. a healing workshop/retreat, a charitable contribution to someone in the group need, the starting of another group, etc.).

**SUGGESTIONS FOR ESTABLISHING A SAFE GROUP SETTING**

**Meetup.com**  
- Anyone can start a group on Meetup.com. The group is automatically listed in the area of the many people who visit the site.  
- The facilitator and joining members of a Meetup group can remain as anonymous as they like. The Meetup page has visible only what the member chooses. It can simply be a first or user name. A member’s sign-up information is only known to the Meetup.com administration and kept private even from the facilitator. A member’s
email is not visible on the site. The facilitator and other members can message each other on the site without need for the members’ emails.

- Members are approved by the facilitator of the Meetup group. When a prospective member requests to join the group, the facilitator can first message them and ask them to tell a little about their experience in one of these relationships. The facilitator can then assess whether the prospect genuinely has or is experiencing a destructive relationship and weed out those who are not appropriate for the group. Some people seem to attempt to join any Meetup in their area or may be mistaken as to the nature of a particular group. Screening also helps prevent for narc/socio/psychopaths who might attempt to join the group. Another idea is for the facilitator to present requests to join to existing group members who can decide if they have any concerns about the prospect, or whether they would like to ask the prospect any further questions.

- The Meetup location can be group emailed privately to approved members only.

**A Professional as Facilitator**

- A professional such as therapist or counselor may decide to be a facilitator for a support group, but may incorporate therapeutic tools and interventions. In this case, there would not be the need to switch or alternate facilitators as needed.

- A person wanting to start a group, may invite a professional to be the facilitator. That professional, by their training, should understand the conditions of confidentiality, creating safety, and treating participants with the utmost regard for their well-being.

- It is strongly recommended that a professional facilitating the group stick to the recommended reading of the 10 Guidelines at the beginning of each group to maintain privacy, confidentiality, expectations, parameters, and safety in sharing.

**Advertising**

- Advertising the group is at the discretion of the facilitator. However, safety and privacy of the group members should always be the priority in considering getting the word out.

**Location**

- It is suggested that the location of the group be revealed only to approved members, and that they not reveal the location to anyone outside of the group.

- An area that is frequented by the public would increase safety.

**Materials**

- It is suggested that the keeper of the guidelines, whether facilitator or member, is not someone still living with their destructive partner, to protect the privacy of the group.

- It is suggested that the facilitator and members use careful discretion in keeping group website, communication, and other info private from others in their household.
**SUGGESTED QUESTIONS TO FACILITATE SHARING (OPTIONAL)**

**Experience of the Relationship**
What were early warning signs in your partner you tried to make sense of, and explain away?

What behaviors in your partner seemed odd or didn’t feel right but they explained away?

How did your partner show you that your needs or complaints were not acceptable?

How did you “adapt”, or tolerate, those behaviors, or perhaps take responsibility? What did you have to give up or suppress in yourself to do so?

How were you were physically, emotionally, or sexually abused and/or controlled, what was that like for you? What did you tell yourself about it, and how did you cope with it?

What was it like when you tried to communicate a hurt or concern to your partner? What were the manipulations you encountered when you did?

Did your partner begin to distance emotionally and/or lose interest in you sexually? How did you deal with it? What response did you get?

Did you participate in a sexual practice you didn’t feel comfortable with? What did you tell yourself to get through it or accept it?

Do you notice your “victim” self getting triggered by the nar/soc/psychopath? How did that part of you reaction (ex. withdraw, fight, hopelessness)?

What issues came up with children? (A destructive partner will sometimes ally one or all children against you; sometimes children are exposed to abuse or neglect.)

Partners get targeted who are loyal, trusting, committed, over responsible, nurturing, willing to think the best, have financial resources - good qualities to have in normal relationships. Other vulnerabilities include naivete, codependence, low self-esteem, previous trauma, fear of being alone or getting older. Did any of those traits draw you to or keep you in the relationship?

**Letting Go**
Where are you in the relationship (in, out, coming out), and how are you feeling?

In wanting or trying to leave, partners agonize over what went wrong, often blaming themselves for not seeing the signs or staying so long. The reality is that your partner deceived you from the beginning, and never having been with a deceitful person, you were naïve to it.

DESTRUCTIVERELATIONSHIPSHelp.COM
When your partner’s real person began to surface, you did what any loving partner would do. You looked to yourself to see what responsibility you had, you tried to adapt and accommodate. Unfortunately, none of these things work with a destructive partner. A relationship is a hard thing to walk out on, especially when children are involved. It’s a process that takes time to figure out as you build strength and clarity. It takes as long as it takes! How do you still blame yourself?

How can you forgive your naivety, vulnerability, or need that brought you into the relationship?

What are your safety concerns about leaving? What safety plan can you put in place?

What is hard right now about staying, or leaving? What are your fears?

More than the n/s/p/path, the loss of the dream of a happy lifelong marriage and family is a huge. Where in the grief process are you at with this (shock, anger, depression, bargaining, acceptance)? [Keep in mind these phases have no special order]

Looking back
What are you most angry about? What is your biggest regret?

Most experts recommend no contact whatsoever with your partner once you’re gone (except as necessary during divorce and in co-parenting). How is your “No Contact” rule going? What in you is responding to his/her contacts, lures (e.g. hope, fear, loneliness, fear of being alone)?

What symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress do you have? Nightmares, insomnia, hypervigilance, depression, anxiety and panic attacks, increased startle response, avoidance of thinking about things that may trigger memories, reliving memories (flashbacks), obsessive replaying of events and conversations in your head, irritability, negative self-esteem, guilt or shame, lack interest in activities and isolating, emotional numbness, spaciness, dissociation, hopelessness about the future, poor concentration, distractibility, distrust, physical exhaustion/breakdown

What can you do to help yourself and your children heal? (EMDR, hypnotherapy, yoga, somatic therapies, psychotherapy, body work, exercise, martial arts, dance, nature, etc.)

Books, websites, research and articles can provide topics for discussion. Here are a few:
-Lovefraud.com has a weekly newsletter, a blog, educational webinars for lay and professionals.
-Psychopathfree.com is an online forum for information and support.
-Destructiverelationshipshelp.com offers a live support group and individual therapy for those in the NJ area, plus an online support live chat and a blog for everyone.
-“Women Who Love Psychopaths” by Sandra L. Brown and Dr. Liane Leedom
“Without Conscience: The Disturbing World of the Psychopaths Among Us” by Robert D. Hare

“Just Like His Father” by Dr. Liane J. Leedom (an excellent parenting guide for parents of children who have a psychopathic parent who may have passed on vulnerable genes and biology)

“The Inner World of the Psychopath” by Steve Becker

“Puzzling People: The Labyrinth of the Psychopath” by Thomas Sheridan

“The Psychopath Inside” by James Fallon (latest genetic and neuroscience research)

“Healing Trauma” (book and CD – healing exercises) by Peter A. Levine

-Mind Warrior™ app to help with triggers of the relationship, PTSD, and non-contact. Contains activities and planning to aid focus to recondition reactions and mindfully heal (in App Store and Google Play. Use on own or with therapist. Has lifestyle planning and email sharing features.

EARLY WARNING SIGNS OF A DESTRUCTIVE RELATIONSHIP

1. Steps up the relationship very quickly – declaring love, wanting to move in, get engaged, get married relatively soon after meeting.
2. May be “between jobs”.
3. May need a place to stay and suggest moving in quicker than is appropriate.
4. Is extremely charming and romantic – sweeps you off your feet.
5. Has an uncanny and wonderful way of always saying the right words.
6. Seems too good to be true.
7. Has very strong rules or boundaries about some things that you feel compelled to bend to.
8. Tells you about his/her sad childhood, past relationships or marriage, possibly displaying emotion or no emotion, and looking sad, forlorn. Expresses gratitude for your love and not abandoning him/her like everyone else.
9. Only expresses anger, loss or self-pity (victimhood) as an emotion.
10. May seem wonderful, nurturing, and romantic, but does not seem able to talk through a conflict. S/he is likely instead to smooth it over by being romantic or just avoiding a conversation about it, or by anger, or by playing the victim.
11. You may get strange, illogical or defensive answers to straightforward questions. E.g. “What are you doing when you spend so much time with your friends?” “Why don’t you have a social life?” “Why did you get divorced?” “Why didn’t you get back to me?”
12. His/her perception is that bad things or problems come from outside of him/herself.
13. Sex is more intense than you’ve ever experienced.
14. Motivations are based on looking good, being the hero, having control.
15. Likes you for qualities that make him/her feel or look good (talent, intelligence, achievement, career, money, how you take care of him/her) – not necessarily for the qualities of your personality, e.g. integrity, honesty, insight, perception, strength,
positive attitude, outspokenness, playfulness, articulate, caring friend or parent or family member.

16. Plays the victim or has an extreme reaction if you ever complain about something in his/her behavior that bothers you or voice a need.

17. You find yourself increasingly accommodating his/her needs re: social life, sexual preferences, activities, way of resolving a problem, being right. Your needs begin to sublimate.

18. Might not leave the cell phone around (or leave it face down) or computer open, or the history is constantly deleted or blocked, or may have passwords and some excuse for needing them (the kids, the job, etc).

19. Blames the demise of previous relationship on partner or spouse.

20. Is disconnected from family, children, friends.

21. Shows aggressive actions towards others or you – even once!

22. May exhibit irritability at others performing a service (e.g. waitress).

23. Is possessive, shows escalating need to connect or know what you’re doing.

24. You may be impressed by how strong and confident s/he seems with opinions and boundaries.

MODUS OPERANDI

[I will use masculine pronouns for the destructive partner in this article the sake of simplicity]

There are a number of MO’s a narcissistic or socio/psychopathic partner employ in a destructive relationship, as a response to your needs, complaints, or issues in the relationship. One is that you are kept off balance. You may be feeling desperate and alone a lot in the relationship because your partner has become more distant, disengaged, angry, and rejecting (sexually and/or emotionally). Perhaps he has even become abusive. But, if you complain too much or bring up suspicious behavior, you may find he has turned back into the lovestruck partner who wooed you in the beginning, being attentive, engaged, “making love” to you, or giving you gifts. This makes you wonder if you were wrong about him distancing, or your suspicions. You begin to doubt your perception as any trusting partner would, and become confused. He is counting on your trusting nature to do just that.

Another MO of the destructive partner is to never take responsibility for a relationship issue. If there is a conflict, or you bring up a need or complaint, or question a suspicious behavior, he may use escalated anger to stop the conversation, or turn the problem around to something you have done wrong, or say you are being “needy, paranoid, crazy.” He may dismiss what you have to say as ridiculous, stonewall with silence, or walk away. He will never admit wrong or have remorse for a behavior that has caused you hurt. His blaming behavior may cause you to examine yourself, wonder what is wrong with you. This is because you are willing to take responsibility in the relationship, as a responsible partner would, and he is counting on this.
Another MO of the destructive partner is to act like a victim. He may complain you are being too demanding or harsh, and you may feel guilty, because he appears to be so wounded by what you just brought up. You might feel compassion for the “wounded boy” that you can sense in that moment, because you know he has come from an abusive or sad childhood. You never wanted to be another person who abandoned or hurt him. On the contrary, you wanted to be the one person who really loved him, hoping your love could help heal his wounds. In a healthy relationship, safety and compassion does reciprocally help heal childhood wounds. But, this can’t happen with a person who is not really present. He is actually emotionally disconnected from his childhood wounds, and has created a false self, or facade. He can’t reciprocate, and he is counting on your compassion to keep him as the victim and you as the guilty party.

Another MO of the destructive partner is to create (consciously or not) the illusion that he is experiencing the relationship in the same way that you are. During the beginning romantic phase of the relationship, during sex or fun times, being parents together, you felt emotional connection with your partner that has deepened over time. When there were no emotional demands, and nothing was threatening his false self and sense of control, he may have felt attachment or even brief spurts of empathy. Remember, narcissists and socio/psychopaths by definition lack true empathy. [They are, however, able to fake empathy and emotions!] The work of a committed relationship – the demand for emotional intimacy - would always be threatening to their false self and sense of control (and deep down they know they are incapable of it). Empathy and compassion is what causes you to act lovingly, to consider his needs and emotions before yours even when it’s hard, and to do everything in your power to make the connection right. This he cannot do. So, when you think he feels love like you do, what he actually feels is a sense of control or power, or attachment to domestic or financial security, looking good, or a cover. Unfortunately, this is not love. But, he is counting on you to think it is.

As the destructiveness of your relationship becomes apparent to you, it is hard to wrap your head around what has happened. You can’t fathom that your partner was not who you thought he was all this time. This person who supposedly has loved you has hurt you more than anyone else ever has. He has felt comfortable hurting or taking advantage of you, lying and deceiving you for perhaps many years – many years that now seem to have gone up in smoke. Many years that you believed you were investing your love in a life together. Perhaps his greatest deceit of all was to encourage you to believe that you were loved.

A person is not their potential, words, nor image. A person is what they do.

Love is not its potential, words, nor feelings. Love is action.
WAS I EVER LOVED?

One of the most confusing things people grapple with during and after a relationship with a nar/soc/psychopath is wondering if any of the “love” was real. It’s a total mind f---. You think of the beginning of the relationship in which your partner was the most romantic person you ever dated – how attentive he was. S/he may have even been thoughtful, empathetic if you confided in him about someone or a situation troubling you in your life. S/he may have remembered each occasion with wonderful gifts. You remember times being part of family and friends as a couple, even when things started to get bad. You may have felt secure and proud when he seemed to be an attentive father or generous neighbor. You think of the time last week when you both glowed and felt proud over an accomplishment of your child. You think of a time not long ago when you laughed together with friends over dinner, or, when you made up with electric sex. You have in your memory times when there seemed to be genuine caring, thoughtfulness.

Love is not chemistry. Love is not a feeling of attachment. Love is not romantic feelings. Love is not the high feelings you experience at the beginning of a relationship when it is new and super-affirming by the good feelings you get and the best selves you’re putting forward. Love is not a “feeling” at all, it is an action. *Love is the ability to first feel compassion/empathy for another, and then act to meet their need, even before your own.* Think of what you would feel for a crying child. You would feel their pain, and this would move you to try to comfort the child, even if you are weary and would rather be relaxing.

Since nar/soc/psychopaths lack empathy, and, therefore, the ability to love, what was going on? This statement isn’t entirely true as nar/soc/psychopaths may feel compassion or empathy for something which they see as an extension of themselves, e.g. a child, colleague, friend, pet, even spouses if s/he never challenges or needs anything from them. These things do not threaten the sense of control or the image they like to put forth in the world. But the minute you have a need or a conflict to resolve, which is what every normal healthy intimate relationship requires, what semblance of compassion they may have will go right out the window. Protection of the way they need to see themselves, or whatever they are hiding, is their priority. Everyone and everything else is sacrificed at the altar to their in-control, blameless awesomeness.

Often what happens is that at the beginning of the relationship when they appear to be more engaged and romantic than anyone else you’d ever been with, can be mistaken for love. Then you get addicted to the intense sexual fireworks, which will release large amounts of oxytocin, the hormone that causes attachment. So, you’ll become very attached early on, believing that they feel the same close connectedness as you. They may be very turned on and very sex-centric at first, and/or are deliberately being manipulative, knowing consciously or subconsciously that sex will attach you to them. Then, after that perception has been firmly imprinted with a particular idea about them – s/he’s a great, caring, sexy, smart catch - it has the power to put a veil over the red flags that follow after.
I think the biggest mistake that partners make is to think that nar/soc/psychopaths operate in the same way they do. Nar/soc/psychopaths look for partners who have a larger than average dose of the qualities that will make a good relationship work: compassion, trust, loyalty, and the ability to love – someone who will think the best of them, feel for them, and jump backwards through hoops of fire to tolerate their behavior in order to make the relationship work. What partners don’t get is the way nar/soc/psychopaths’ minds work. For nar/soc/psychopaths, sex does not have emotional connection like it does for you. They can’t feel your pain or your wounds like you do theirs. They can’t respond to your need if it doesn’t correspond with theirs. They trust no one. They aren’t honest with themselves and can’t be honest with you, period.

Ask yourself, how much has your nar/soc/psychopath been able to feel compassion/empathy for you or your needs, and respond? That tells you how much you have been loved. Realizing this is a bitter pill to swallow. Love isn’t something you show only when it’s easy, convenient or gets you something. If someone is truly loving you, there is no question in your mind about it.

**ARE THERE BAD PEOPLE? PSYCHOPATHY 101**

Our wiring makes it difficult to fathom or even believe that a person would not feel guilt after hurting someone, because if you have a conscience this would be impossible. Having no conscience would make it possible to behave badly towards others repeatedly, without a desire to stop. Having no conscience, or the lack of empathy, the ability to feel for another human being, is the primary defining feature of a nar/soc/psychopathic, psychopathic, or narcissistic personality. How does this happen? Are these people insane? Are they born this way? Are they formed through being treated badly themselves? It may be any combination of the three. However, the majority of people who are abused, abandoned, or neglected as children, or insane, or born with a brain malfunction, do not kill or even hurt others. Most would never think to hurt others because they wouldn’t want others to experience what they had. That is because they are capable of empathy, the ability to feel for others, which is the foundation of conscience. Whether a psychopathic individual deliberately shuts down empathy or conscience at some point early on, or whether they were born with compromised social functioning of their brain, or both, is not absolutely clear.

Lack of empathy is the primary characteristic of Narcissistic Personality Disorder as well as what is referred to as a “psychopath”. Clinically, a nar/soc/psychopath is defined as someone who engages in criminal behavior (which can range from petty theft to a Ponzi scheme, from domestic abuse to murder, and so on). It is possible for a nar/soc/psychopath to have a conscience and choose to ignore it. Those nar/soc/psychopaths have come be involved in criminal behavior for some reason, but are capable of feeling remorse for that behavior, either while engaged in it or somewhere along the way. If their consciences prick them enough at some point, they are the ones capable of change or redemption, because their consciences can tell the difference between good and bad. Other nar/soc/psychopaths – the ones most of you
have come across - may not have a conscience at all. Those nar/soc/psychopaths would be psychopathic.

Nar/soc/psychopaths (with some exceptions), psychopaths, and narcissists define people who are capable of “bad” behavior for which they feel no remorse. This is referred to as psychopathic behavior. These people never change. According to Mary Ellen O’Toole, former profiler in the FBI’s Behavioral Analysis Unit, the statistic for the ratio of psychopaths that are considered dangerous compared to psychopaths that are sitting next to us at the coffee shop or work or looking at us from across a dinner table are about 20 to 80!

If you are or have been on the receiving end of bad, i.e. manipulative, controlling, or abusive, behavior of a nar/soc/psychopath, psychopath, or narcissist, there is no doubt in your mind that you have experienced their destructiveness in varying degrees. Destructiveness, in my opinion, is the definition of “bad”. Any self-serving behavior exerted toward another person at the expense of that person is always destructive to that person.

In other words, if in order for me to feel good about myself I have to hurt, demean, dismiss, deceive, devalue, or diminish you in some way, I am being destructive to you in that moment. I have violated your personhood, suppressed it. In order for me to do this, I feel nothing for you, no empathy at all. In my perception you have no value as a separate human being, and your needs are invisible to me. You only have value if you are serving my purpose somehow. I have dehumanized you.

Of course, nar/soc/psychopaths never admit any of this to themselves. They always perceive themselves as the victim who you don’t understand and mistreat. Living with this day in and day out, your self will slowly begin to be compromised and lost. If it goes on long enough, you will break down emotionally and physically, even to the edge of survival. I know that sounds dramatic, but those of you who have lived through this know this to be true! You got out in the end because you knew in order for you to survive, you had to.

There are may be reasons in a person’s past that may have contributed to he or she acting in a destructive manner toward another, but there is no excuse for inflicting pain on another human being in the present. That involves a series of choices – bad ones.

ATTACHMENT VS. LOVE

When we thought our nar/soc/psychopath was in love with us, there was a feeling of connection but it was not based on love. Love is based on empathy. If we can feel compassion for another, we are moved to care for them, often even before ourselves. Love is not self-serving. The attachment that forms from love is through increased connection from loving actions, the safety that creates, and the security of commitment. Romantic love parallels the first attachment we ever felt, which was to our caregivers. Hopefully, they were attuned to us and nurtured us, and we experienced what it felt like to be fiercely, unconditionally loved. In psychology this is termed “healthy attachment”.

DESTRUCTIVERELATIONSHIPSHelp.COM
Feeling attached to someone is not always based in love. Sometimes we attach because of need. There is anxiety in it, because loss of the attachment will cause us to feel our need again. It may be the need to have someone reflecting to us that we are worthy because we have difficulty feeling that on our own. It may be the need to find our value in caring for someone else, because by ourselves we might not feel valuable. It may be the need to cover up feelings of loneliness, abandonment, inadequacy, insignificance. Attachment based on need can keep us in an unloving relationship a long time. If we grew up with caretakers who were not able to love and nurture as they should have, we may recognize “love” as something we feel when someone needs something from us, or something we feel when we’re mistreated or neglected. In psychology this is from either “ambivalent” or “disorganized” attachment. Then a love relationship becomes an ongoing attempt to get the love we never got.

Most of us are somewhere in the middle. We have the ability to love, but there is some need in it – some unhealthy attachment baggage which we bring into our relationships. If two such people form a relationship, if they are honest people who take their commitment seriously, they can communicate about those needs and issues, connect emotionally, and help each other heal from them. But, if a person has the misfortune of ending up with a nar/soc/psychopath, the “love” (romantic) period will only last as long as the nar/soc/psychopath feels good or feels control in it and with sex, or when s/he’s getting what s/he wants. After that you will continue what comes naturally, to love and nurture in a committed unconditional way, and s/he will not, cannot.

The nar/soc/psychopath can only attach from need. This can vary and include the need to not be alone, the need for nurturing, the need to control, the need for sexual control and/or lust, the need to feel important or admired or powerful, the need to look good to others, the need for financial support or housing, the need for cover of clandestine or duplicitious activities. At the beginning of the romance (unless the relationship is a total con!) s/he may feel “in love”. This may happen at other times in the relationship when you may share the joy of children, a purchase, a family event. But, love is not a fleeting feeling. Love is action based in trust, honesty, and commitment. That is what’s needed for the real work of a relationship: the resolution of conflict, the demand for emotional intimacy, the seeking to understand the other, the desire to put the other’s needs/feelings before theirs. Being honest with a nar/soc/psychopath is not even safe. Trust is nonexistent. The work of a relationship threatens their false facade and their need to feel in control. That’s when you will gradually see the real person come out – the one who couldn’t love you if their life depended on it.

What nar/soc/psychopaths do know of “love” is that attentive romantic overtures and sex (in which the attachment hormone oxytocin is released) can make you forget the hurt, distrust or anger you are feeling for them. This is a tried and true method in their world. It also confuses the hell out of you, and keeps you off balance – an added bonus manipulation for them. Though incapable of loving, they tend to gravitate toward committed caring types who are very capable of loving. They might enjoy the feeling of being loved and being cared for by someone who’s always there, even though they cannot reciprocate it. It is really lost on them. The compassionate nature of their partners can unfortunately contribute to making it hard to
easily give up on them, and hurt and “abandon” them. Nar/soc/psychopaths, on the other hand, have not a whit of trouble or conscience walking away from their partner if they feel like it, or having multiple partners for that matter.

Nar/soc/psychopaths may feel “love” as a feeling of romance/lust or a met need that feels good in the moment, as long as nothing is required of them. They may act “loving” if it serves their purpose. But, of course, none of those are love. The more you recognize this, the more detached, you will become from the nar/soc/psychopath. The more detached you become, the clearer you will see it. This realization is both a painful loss and the ticket to freedom.

THE SHAME AND BLAME GAME

All conscientious people, when there’s a problem in a relationship, take a look inside eventually to see where their fault or responsibility lies. In a good couple relationship, you might have a fight over something, but then at some point, you talk about it and get a different understanding of where your partner was coming from, which can change your perspective. You might realize you reacted because it pushed some sort of button in you, perhaps some experience from your past, or you misinterpreted something. In this interchange, both people in a mutually caring relationship should eventually take responsibility for their part of the conflict. Through resolving the conflict you should end up growing closer, and this ultimately can lead to healing whatever old wounds or misperceptions you are over-reacting from.

Of course, this never happens with nar/soc/psychopaths who are incapable of taking responsibility for their part in a conflict or understanding you if it differs from their perspective. So, we who are responsible, look to ourselves to figure out what’s not working. It’s what we’ve been taught. If you’re still involved with one, you might be wracking your brain to think of some way, some approach, to get through to him/her. You might be feeling so frustrated because you can never make your partner understand you or how their behavior affects you. And so you probably take the responsibility, because it really has come down to you. You’re backed into a corner. You have committed your love to this person, made a life, a family. Somewhere inside a voice, perhaps a panicky voice, says, “This is not going well!” You may ask yourself, How can I make this better? How can I be better? How can I get through to him?

Maybe you have already decided to leave or have left the nar/soc/psychopath. Even then, when it’s clear how this person you loved violated your trust, tricked and betrayed you, you somehow you keep bringing fault back to yourself. What was I doing there in the first place? How could I have been so weak? Why did I stay so long? How could I have not protected our children and just left? From beginning to end, we could be torturing ourselves with these questions, and be consumed with feelings of shame and guilt.

My question is, why do we find it so easy to blame ourselves? It may be partly a conflict between an empathetic nature and assigning blame. Blaming others goes against the grain. Our consciences have us take responsibility for our behavior and when things are going wrong.
Some of us were raised to take too much responsibility in our families, which just makes it familiar to do. And, if you had children with the nar/soc/psychopath, a parental guilt of a particularly hellish sort can make it nearly impossible to let go of the regret of not having protected them from the nar/soc/psychopath.

Let’s not forget that nar/soc/psychopaths, by their destructive victimizing behaviors toward us, are transferring their own shame (which they are not consciously aware of) onto us, and therefore blame onto us. Those manipulations, those confusing, what I call, “Jedi mind tricks”, the anger, the control, the dismissing, the shaming and blaming on a continual basis that make us feel stunned and confused, and feeling immobilized as to know what to do. Our selves are repressed and get lost. It’s a bit like being in a one-man cult. You’re initially love-bombed and subtly, methodically brain-washed and broken down over time. It literally is that insidious. The healthiest individual would not have defenses against that, once taken in. It’s like a trap that you find yourself in, that you didn’t see coming, but now you’re hanging upside down in a net and it’s going to take time to figure out how to break free.

What if we assigned blame where blame is due? What if we accepted our naivety that made us fall for someone who was devilishly artful at presenting him/herself as a wonderful person? What if we accepted our “vulnerability”? People in intimate relationships are supposed to be vulnerable! What if we accepted our own “weakness”? If we consider loneliness or the longing for a partner a weakness, then the whole world is weak. To be loyal and committed, to fight to make a relationship work is the only thing a loving partner would do. Love trusts, love is open and vulnerable, love never gives up. You did all that love should do, and can feel good about that. How dare your partner discard that love or use it to his own advantage! A normal caring person would have treasured that love.

What if we even accepted that some harm may have come to our children as a result of living with a nar/soc/psychopath, and that we can’t always protect our children from harm like we think we should? So many things are out of our control, and certainly the behavior of another person. But we can focus on the love we gave our child, and the good intention of trying to keep the family together while we still had hope.

What if we accepted that we made a choice we thought was fine at the time but turned out to be wrong? We are fallible humans who make mistakes, and hopefully grow from them. What we can and perhaps have done, which is very very good, is to recognize we don’t want to live this way anymore. If you’ve gotten out, it is very very good to have gathered the strength and resources to have done it. This obsession with blaming ourselves, going round with, “I should have done it sooner, I shouldn’t have been a fool, etc.”, is only an exercise in beating ourselves up. Let’s not carry on what the nar/soc/psychopath has been doing all this time! Let’s stop the beatings!

Maybe you did it at exactly the right time, the only time you could have, considering your circumstances and where you had to get to psychologically to recognize who you were with. Now you do know what a nar/soc/psychopath is, and now it is appropriate for holding
yourself responsible for not falling in with one again. And, now you can support others who have fallen prey to their carefully constructed webs.

WHAT NAR/SOC/PSYCHOPATHS TARGET IN US & WHY WE BITE

Before I go into explaining in more detail the exercises to help you gather strength and lose fear to leave the nar/soc/psychopath (from last article) it would be helpful to know how and why we end up reacting to the nar/soc/psychopath and getting attached and controlled in the first place. Predators are extremely astute at quickly assessing and targeting our vulnerabilities, whether consciously or subconsciously. It’s very empowering to start becoming aware of what those vulnerabilities are that hook us and keep us hooked. Self-awareness, or “mindfulness” is the most essential tool in going forward. It means to become conscious of our reactions instead of them being subconsciously driven, so that we can regain control and inner strength, become detached.

Perhaps the biggest question we ask ourselves after realizing we have been with a nar/soc/psychopath, is, “How did this happened to me?” We may have started out as strong and independent, feeling relatively good about ourselves, had success in our lives, even had successful relationships. But when we were swept off our feet by the attentive, often intelligent, charming, and confident/strong personality that was our nar/soc/psychopath, we thought we had finally found someone who seemed to focus on loving us and was adoringly committed. At the end of it all we feel foolish and shame for being taken in, for not seeing the signs.

When it happened to me I was an experienced therapist who had worked long and hard in therapy myself to heal childhood wounds. I had recovered as a teenager from addiction and worked in the rehab as a counselor for three years. I had grieved the death of my husband after a long and happy marriage, become a struggling single mother while obtaining a graduate degree so we could survive. I dealt with mental illness in family members. I had great friends and a loving family. I loved my work. I felt strong. I was good. So, after having been taken in by a nar/soc/psychopath, I felt particularly foolish and ashamed. How did a therapist get conned? I suppose some of that has to do with trusting that people who look you in the eye and tell you something are being truthful, plus believing in the inherent goodness of people – what I’ve now come to recognize as naivety. But, there were other things in me reacting and responding to the nar/soc/psychopath as well – some dormant for a long time – and these vary from person to person. What are those reactions and responses in us that the nar/soc/psychopath targets that we can identify and change?

1. **Target our loyalty, trusting nature, commitment.** They can see that we are naïve to their type. I believe the “love-bombing”, the attention, the being everything we want or need them to be, their perfect glib answers, initially throw us off guard. The only thing we know about this person is what they present to us and that is all good, and we believe them. They have made it through the first level – gaining our trust. We mistakenly perceive that they feel as connected to us as we do to them. We believe they are experiencing the growing
feelings for them in the same way, becoming more committed – especially as they voice that they are. They may be feeling something intense, (or not), but it is not emotional connection like we think it is. We explain away their questionable behavior in the only way we know how – we perceive their confidence not as arrogance, their glibness not as deception, their dominance not as being controlling – but as strengths. It is encouraging to them that we accept them, and remain loyal and committed.

2. **Target our caretaker, codependent tendencies.** We may have been very much in control in our lives, felt confident, were independent, even have overcome previous codependent tendencies, and built solid boundaries. But, when the nar/soc/psychopath we love starts outwardly exhibiting the need to be in control, our subconscious knows just what to do. This response is likely to come from a younger version of us, perhaps going all the way back to childhood. We may have had a controlling/abusive parent or older sibling, a non-present parent, or witnessed the parent abusing or neglecting the other parent or a sibling. Maybe someone outside our family abused us or we were bullied. Or, maybe we just got too much correcting and/or criticizing and not enough validation. As children we may have responded by trying to be “good”, trying harder, being the peacemaker. We were over-responsible, blaming and looking at ourselves to solve the problem/chaos, in hopes that it ultimately will get us what every child needs: nurturing, validation. Some of us may have fought for it. So, when our partner creates the same environment in the relationship (e.g. reacting in anger, dismissiveness, shutting down, dissociating/withdrawing whenever we express a need or are unsubmissive), we do what we know. We scramble to save the relationship by trying harder, looking for the answer in ourselves, or fighting, in the hope that our needs for nurturing and validation in the relationship will be met. But the socio’s message is always the same: “Either conform to what works for me or go away.” Over time we accommodate them more and more to save the relationship. We start to lose what boundaries we have and our very selves.

3. **Target the addict.** Some of us respond viscerally to the frequent over-the-top sex the socio is so good at, or to the feeling of “love” that comes at the beginning of a relationship. Of course, the socio knows how to pour it on in heady doses. If we have addictive tendencies we will be vulnerable to the “love drug” as a means to feel better. Through the socio’s continual demands for sex, the hormone oxytocin is being released in women, which creates a powerful feeling of attachment. The socio instinctively knows this! This process is genetically encoded for the survival of offspring. Sex also causes a powerful release of dopamine, which is the body’s natural opiate. It all just makes us feel happy and close to our partner, makes unpleasant feelings go away, inside us or in the relationship. We have to ask ourselves, what about that “high” works for us?

4. **Target our own fears about commitment.** This is something we may have to dig deep to see in ourselves. While we were consciously “ready” for love, and so happy to have found it in the nar/soc/psychopath, our subconscious beliefs about love were likely not so optimistic. For instance, deep down we might not believe we are lovable or worthy of happiness. Or, we may have experienced a trauma that changed our former faith in love, happiness, or our worthiness, such as divorce, death, multiple failed relationships, being alone, aging. These subconscious beliefs will make us afraid to fully commit because if we do, we will experience the very painful loss of love that we had experienced before. So, we end up
with someone who is not capable of committing, not even really present in the relationship. Then we subconsciously know the loss won’t feel as bad. In a strange way, we are protecting ourselves.

5. **Target our inner victim.** I remember thinking at times, “Why do I feel like I did when I was living with my abusive father?” (wounds I had healed long ago with my father). But then, there was that feeling of it being very familiar. My “victim consciousness” got triggered. When she did, she went off and isolated, curled into a ball of despair. (That is, until my “fighter” kicked in later on.) We all have a victim in us to some degree – whether we were victimized by abuse and/or neglect in our families, abuse outside the home, bullying or rejection, learning problems. As a child, we were powerless to protect ourselves or know how to feel good with ourselves. Our partner who abuses, threatens, dominates, etc. violates our personhood, and by definition, victimizes us. This triggers the inner victim, which may have been long dormant, but who will feel and react exactly the way it did before – feel powerless to influence/stop the perpetrator, question his/her own worth, feel shame – all crippling.

6. **Target our empathy.** (This is the biggest hook!) Subconsciously the socio can intuit our “childhood wound” as we can intuit theirs. They may tell us about how they were abused and/or neglected by their parents or others. Indeed, they may have horrific stories of how their parents or others victimized, humiliated, and abandoned them. When we hear this, our own childhood wound of abandonment, abuse, loneliness, or neglect, is triggered, and so we feel intense compassion and sorrow for the wounded boy/girl in them. Their wound is deep down in them, and it is unhealed because, while they may speak sadly about how they were unloved or victimized, they are not actually emotionally connected to it (they chose at some point to bury it under rage). But we very much are! This can make us determined to love and never leave that poor boy/girl who no one ever loved and who everyone else abandoned. Our sadness for that wounded boy/girl will also encourage us to overlook too much. We may not judge him/her by normal standards or expectations, and may excuse his/her behaviors based on what s/he’s been through. At this point, because we identify and connect to our partner’s wounded child, to leave him/her now, we would be putting ourselves in the place of the parents or abusers who wounded them (and us), so we be put in a terrible conflict between not abandoning them, and our own survival.

On another note, the socio will use his victim card in any conflict to make you feel bad if you express a need, or are angry or insubordinate.
INTENSITY, CHARM, AND SEX

Most partners described sex with their nar/soc/psychopath as having been more intense than they had ever experienced. It's one of the factors that confused them into thinking they were with the right person. Nar/soc/psychopaths have the ability to be dynamic, charismatic, attractive, sexy, even hypnotic when they are in predatory mode, in either an extroverted or a subtle way. What fuels this charismatic energy, this sexual electricity? I have come to the conclusion that it has to do with their underlying rage. How does rage translate into charm and sexual intensity, you ask?

Nar/soc/psychopaths build their false selves around control to defend against vulnerability and exposure. Maintaining this control would take a lot of energy which the underlying rage provides. It comes through as intensity, edginess, charisma. It can be magnetic. Down the line, all partners of nar/soc/psychopaths experience the rage that seems to simmer just under the surface, when they do something that offends the nar/soc/psychopath or threatens their cover - like a match to gasoline! If subterfuge and evasion don’t work, their defend/ﬁght mode is ever ready. Think of a soldier as the enemy approaches. He is ready to defend his life and survive at all costs. He is like a cornered wild cat poised to pounce in blink of an eye. Sound familiar?

At first the nar/soc/psychopath’s strong, take control persona may have seemed admirable – made their partner feel protected and taken care of, even safe. And, that is, yes, pretty darn sexy and, oh, so confusing later on when everything changes. Now imagine the rage that fuels the control, that edgy, even predatory, energy, and apply it to sex. A partner who is dominant and forward sexually can be pretty exciting. It can be flattering that your partner’s sexual passion for you appears to be insatiable. And, because the nar/soc/psychopath is narcissistic, they will usually make it their business to be very good lovers. They take pride in making sure you are very satisfied. Remember, they’re competing with any lover you may have had. That’s how they see it.

You’re likely to have a lot of sex with a nar/soc/psychopath, especially early on, which releases a tsunami of oxytocin, the attachment hormone. This could make you feel like you’re “in love” early on, too. Also confusing! Put all this together and you can have an explosion of sexual passion that may overwhelm your defenses and your reason. This could be deliberate on the part of the nar/soc/psychopath, especially in the pursuit phase, or when you become suspicious, or to lure you back when you try to walk away. And/or, it is just how they experience connection, while maintaining a feeling of power and control.

What partners don’t know at the beginning is that for nar/soc/psychopaths sex is sex. Since emotional connection is a foreign concept, sexual attraction is the only way they experience “love” – in actuality infatuation, obsession, lust. For them, sexual connection may be a substitute for the emotional connection that eludes them in relationships. Orgasm can serve the purpose of feeling good, “loved”, powerful, forgetting everything. For this reason,
many nar/soc/psychopaths are sex addicts. When sex is an end in itself obsession, lust, and the feeling of power can be powerfully addictive.

The lack of emotional connection is what makes it so easy for nar/soc/psychopaths (much to their partners’ shock) to move from their relationship quickly on to another sexual partner. It’s always a rude awakening when a partner of a nar/soc/psychopath realizes down the line or even at the end of the relationship, that the emotional connection they experienced during sex was not reciprocated. It’s hard to realize someone could even operate that way. But, that’s just one more unfathomable aspect of a nar/soc/psychopath’s character that makes connection to them unlike any other.

LEAVING THE NAR/SOC/PSYCHOPATH: LOSING FEAR AND GATHERING STRENGTH

[I will use masculine pronouns for the sake of simplicity]

You are feeling more desperate and miserable in this relationship with this person who you thought loved you. Over time you have experienced feeling less valuable as you find your needs no longer seem important to him. Your feelings are not important. In fact, when you try to emotionally connect or bring up a hurt, a need, or a concern about something he did, it only seems to threaten him and make them act like a cornered animal. And, in the end, he acts victimized and you feel like the bad guy. There are many things about you or what you say or do that he cannot tolerate. You find yourself accommodating his wishes more and more to stop his negative reactions. You keep trying to figure out ways to get through to him, make him happy, save the relationship. You no longer feel safe and cared about. You don’t feel good about yourself anymore. You may feel victimized often. You probably feel anxious a lot, and perhaps even think you are paranoid about things that don’t seem quite right.

Perhaps you have already found out he has conned, deceived, played, cheated you, or he has begun to abuse you. When you try to bring up the deception or the way he has hurt, dismissed, or abused you, he only gets enraged or turns it around on you or dismisses you again. Maybe you have walked away or threatened to walk away, after which he has turned into the lovestruck partner you had originally and wooed you back with sex and “love bombing”, convincing you to believe that you really are the love of his life and he needs you – only to go back to hurting and deceiving you in the same way once you’re securely tied to him again.

Maybe you’ve had enough and are ready to leave now. Or maybe you’re not to the point of being sure, but you are checking out the Lovefraud site for answers, wondering if you are with a nar/soc/psychopath. Whether you are near the point of being ready to leave or trying to get clarity about it, leaving is never easy to do. You have invested your heart and emotions, time and faith in this person. You’ve come to find your partner to be unpredictable, rageful, even abusive. He has no regard for boundaries and yours are violated on a regular basis, so you are not sure what they are capable of once you decide to go.
Your conscience may give you hesitation. In examining yourself you may be wondering where you haven’t been loving enough, good enough, desirable enough, etc. You may not be sure you have done everything in your power to make the relationship work. Breaking your loyalty, commitment, or vows probably goes against the grain of your convictions. And, then, looking beyond the relationship to life on your own, you have to deal with a tremendous loss – if not for the nar/soc/psychopathic person you have come to recognize, then for the dream you had for the relationship. You’d have to start over and be alone again, not knowing if you’ll ever find someone else. You may not have financial resources. You might even wonder if you can survive the climb to the other side.

Leaving takes losing your attachment to the nar/soc/psychopath so you are less affected by his manipulations and control. Leaving takes losing your fear of him, your fear of feeling loss and loneliness, and your fear of an unknown future. To reach that place of detachment and courage, you will need to get back in touch with your core self that got lost along the way. It’s a gradual process, but if you do some of the following exercises daily, it will help get you there. These activities are further outlined and can be right at your fingertips in Mind Warrior™ app. (Find in your Google Play or App Store)

Detachment Exercises:
With your arms, make an imaginary boundary around your person, as if you were creating an invisible shield. Make a conscious commitment to not let your self go beyond its boundary, not to let yourself “leak out” to accommodate your partner. Begin by just noticing when you do this. Notice what you feel in your body. Try to keep your self “contained” behind this barrier. Redo this exercise as often as you need to remind yourself.

Visualize an invisible shield between you and your partner that puts you in an observing stance. Step back and try to observe your interactions with him/her as if you were watching from the outside or from up above.

Centering:
Meditation/Prayer (guided or non-guided from Youtube.com, CD’s, or silently.)
Body Relaxation – Close your eyes, breathe deeply, and relax each part of your body.
Journaling your thoughts and feelings (you can always tear up or delete when you are done).
Visualize yourself acting in protective ways, with strength.
Positive Affirmations about yourself daily (breathe them in).
Breathe deeply. Locate fear in your body. Breathe in strength, breathe out fear.
Acknowledge the things you do that feel good or that you accomplish each day.
Appreciate something about yourself in the last 24 hours.

Be mindful:
Awareness breeds detachment breeds change. Begin to be inside your body as much as possible. Notice what sensations your body feels, where your emotions are located in your body.
**One Minute Daily Mindfulness Exercise:** Close your eyes. 1. Focus on the thoughts in your head. Just notice what they are, don’t judge them. Acknowledge them by saying something like, “That’s the way it is right now.” 2. Focus all your attention now on your breathing. Just the breathing in and breathing out, either naturally or deeply. Keep your attention there for a few moments. 3. Put your attention now on your body. Notice any sensations in your body. Notice what it feels like to be inside your body right now. Notice any emotions located in it. When you feel ready, open your eyes.

**Pay attention to Triggers:** (You may need the help of a therapist in gaining awareness of the following, but perhaps you can begin to notice on your own):

- Notice what negative emotional states and thoughts about yourself get triggered by your partner – try to recognize what is being triggered from your past. And notice what your reactions are – how you try to get nurtured or validated (and of course how useless it is!). Instead, practice ways of validating and nurturing yourself.

- Notice when in interactions with the nar/soc/psychopath you feel like a “victim” (we all have one in us), and what you do when you feel it. Recognize your abused, abandoned, hurt, lonely, or neglected inner child there. Soothe and comfort the child. Tell the child s/he is safe, loved, worthy.

**Release/Regulate Emotions (after you become mindful of them):**
Yoga
Exercise (walking, running, dancing, vigorous, martial arts)
Journal your thoughts and emotions
Scream or Punch pillows, a mattress, or punching bag
Tap parts of your body that have tension with your finger, or the vagus nerve (left side of neck) – this helps calm an emotional reaction
Tap alternately the palms of your hands with the opposite finger, or drum on something with the palms of your hands (as above)

**Get Support:** Start talking to family, friends, a religious cleric, a therapist, a counselor about what’s going on in your life in order to get clarity and strength.

**Self-Care:**
Nutrition
Exercise
Do something nice for your body
Pleasureable activities
DECEIT – THE MOST DESTRUCTIVE FORM OF ABUSE

I have noticed that those who get involved with a nar/socio/psychopath, whether it’s for 30 years or 3 months, the relationship has the same devastating effect. I’ve heard some describe even a brief encounter with one as the most destructive relationship they’d ever been in, even if they had previously been in a physically abusive relationship. What makes this true?

Any abusive relationship is destructive. In order to survive it, a person has to sublimate their needs and their identity, and a loss of self is experienced over time. Self-esteem is battered. Ongoing exposure to physical or verbal degradation - from controlling over-correction to condescending criticism to demeaning words or tirades, and frequent angry tones - from controlled disdain to simmering rage to outright screaming, over time have a gradual eroding deconstructive effect. The violation of boundaries and disregard of personhood translates into the gradual loss of value and power, and the ultimate dehumanization of the victim.

In a nutshell, if a person who is supposed to love you reflects back to you on a continual basis anger, disapproval, disregard or neglect, you start to feel not valued, unworthy of their love, like you are wrong, you don’t matter, you’re not enough. You feel ashamed of who you are – a very painful emotional place. You start to believe different things about yourself, even if you started out feeling positive and strong. It’s the nature and essence of abuse.

Recognizing abuse is a process because you are attached to the person, who you believe loves you. You do everything in your power to make it work, especially if you have children. For an indefinite period of time, you will be locked in denial by the cycle of abuse in which the abuser becomes “remorseful” and/or romantic after the abuse, which then ignites hope again. If the abuse is obvious, you’re likely to recognize it faster and your survival instinct may kick in faster. Also, other people may notice it and bring it to your attention.

Many partners of nar/socio/psychopaths do not experience much outright abuse. It is much more subtle – deceit, rejection, disapproval, and distancing coupled with the feedback that you’re imagining it, crazy or needy, or that’s you’re the one victimizing them. That has the effect of keeping you off-kilter, in constant self-doubt about your perception, even your sanity. It’s crazy-making. The feeling of unsafety created by their lack of honesty and being kept off guard takes away your sense of safety and security that relationships must have for love to be shared. When it’s not safe to even speak and be heard and or even feel certain, you start to erode, you have no power to be heard or valued. You are being abused – in fact, taken for your mind – but it is being handed out in an insidiously veiled way.

At the point when you realize the person you have been with for however long, has been tricking you, the trauma and humiliation of being deceived and used is a violation that in and of itself has a crushing power. Nar/socio/psychopaths take you at your most vulnerable – the giving of your heart – and they use it, make fun of it, scorn and degrade it. For me, the part that makes me most angry at him and myself, is that he had the ability to take my power away.
He had the ability to manipulate my perception and devalue the best things in my character to meet his need, and I let that happen. But, for today I choose to accept my naivete and vulnerability and desire to be loving, to forgive myself, and take my power back.

REMORSE REVISITED

Partners in our support group are often confused by the fact that after a verbal outburst, physical abuse, or once the ruse is up, nar/soc/psychopaths may seem remorseful. They might see the consequence of their actions, may even cry and be emotional, or apologetic. There might be efforts to change by more responsive or caring behaviors. If the relationship gets pushed to the breaking point, they may engage in therapy. Most partners' experience the nar/soc/psychopath in therapy as completely blaming everything on them and/or trying to control the therapy sessions. But, some had a different, more perplexing experience.

Their experience was that the nar/soc/psychopaths appeared to be quite motivated to improve the relationship and to made headway - expressing remorse, feelings, even empathy for their partner. Their behavior seemed to make a turnaround so that their partner believed that they had seen the light, and that the loving caring person they used to be returned. Their faith was restored in the potential for a loving relationship and intact family. It’s not impossible after all, right?

In the end, even when everything looked promising, partners reported one of these things happened: 1) As soon as therapy ended, the nar/soc/psychopath’s behavior reverted back. 2) When therapy started getting into deeper underlying issues for behavior, the nar/soc/psychopath disengaged. 3) In trying to empathize with the pain or hurt they caused their partners, nar/soc/psychopaths were able to speak words of empathy, but their partner didn’t feel they got or felt it. This is very tricky. Empathy by definition means that you can feel another’s pain as if it were your own. What the brain feels when you perceive someone else’s pain, or any other emotion for that matter, is the identical experience as if you yourself were going through it.

If, in a couples session, partner1 is openly sharing hurt, etc., and partner2 attempts to empathize, partner1 can always “feel” if partner2 gets, or feels, it too. If that happens, partner1 feels connected to partner2, and vice versa. What happened with nar/soc/psychopaths is, even if they express words of empathy for their partner’s feelings, their partner does not feel they are getting (feeling) it. The nar/soc/psychopath may even seem to be showing emotion, but it’s not their partner’s emotion – they’re more likely stuck in their own feelings of shame or victimhood. Pay attention to this if you go to therapy with a nar/soc/psychopath! When you don’t feel “heard”, like your partner can’t get to feeling your emotion, they are not empathizing with you.

So let’s get back to remorse. Remorse should affect behavior – not temporarily, but permanently. It’s about conscience, which is completely dependent on the ability to empathize.
There are times we are all capable of turning down our consciences when it serves us, like telling a lie, taking supplies home from work, being defensive about our behavior, being insensitive, losing our tempers, being petty. But, once someone tells us openly how our behavior affects them, our conscience should make us have a different response.

For example, if you blow off plans with a friend several times without thinking anything of it, and then the friend comes to you and expresses hurt, rejection, not feeling important to you, or whatever, you are likely to feel their pain (empathy) and feel bad/guilty. If that friend identifies a childhood trigger in there, e.g. being blown off made them feel like in middle school when the group made rejected them, then your empathy quotient jumps much higher! Are you likely to blow off this friend anymore? No! If you had no ability to feel your friend’s hurt, your response would likely be defensive and cold, because it would just be about your indignation for them perceiving you that way.

If someone is not capable of empathy, they are not capable of remorse, and therefore change. Period. The brief feelings of remorse or regret you witness in a nar/soc/psychopath is likely to be about screwing something up they wanted (shame) or losing someone or something they wanted (victimhood) - in other words, it’s for themselves. They may believe themselves that they are making great strides in honesty and change – but it never really gets past their narcissism to feeling your pain. It’s more like a brief soiree into the anxiety of having lost control or lost something, in which they scramble to regain control and/or it. Once they regain control or what they lost, they’re done changing. Being disconnected from your feelings, they have no reason to keep up the change, and default back to being the way they were.

WHY WE DON’T BELIEVE IN BADNESS

Throughout graduate school for social work when the professors were teaching us about how to establish a working therapeutic relationship with a client, they repeatedly drove into us to “have unconditional positive regard for the client”. Implied in that phrase is the stance that we cannot accurately help someone we have prejudged. We learned first and foremost to see the valuable human being behind the behavior, to have compassion, and understand the reasons that brought a person to their present circumstance, even if it is criminal behavior.

People in the helping profession are there in the first place because they are hopeful about making a difference through their work and tend to be optimistic about the processes that make that happen. Therapists believe that people can be honest with themselves and effect change in their lives. We see it happen before our eyes. We believe in the core goodness of human beings.

Even if you’re not in a helping profession, you were probably raised with values that directed you to treat other people well and see the good in them. We are taught early on to be “nice” to others. If our sibling or friend hurt us we were trained to make up with them. Most of us are taught that if a rift happens between us and someone else, we should take an honest
look at ourselves and take responsibility for our part, not blame the other person. Many of us are raised with ideals, religious or otherwise, of forgiveness and non-judgement, which foster the idea that others should be valued and regarded with compassion and understanding. We should overlook a person’s faults as much as possible. We are taught to “listen to our conscience” to know when we’re doing something wrong. And, if we find we are doing something wrong, then we should change it to the better or right thing. It is expected to think that all humans have this same social concept of a conscience.

As Americans we have all been influenced in our perceptions of criminals and bad behavior by movies and TV shows. Scripts are written to be layered, so they will usually show background psychology of why a person has gone wrong, always including some type of brutality or hardship from their past. If you have any heart at all, you have probably felt some compassion for this person. These portrayals encourage that same concept I ingested in graduate school that people are inherently good. People start out good, and if they do bad things, it is because circumstances have molded them. So, wouldn’t it follow that with the right help or rehabilitation they could resurrect that good person who got lost along the way?

We do tend to draw the line of redemption before the extreme savagery of, say, a serial killer, a “grudge collector” who opens fire at a crowd or schoolroom, or a terrorist – what the media may refer to as a “psychopath”. A show like “Criminal Minds” makes no bones in graphically portraying the savagery of the sadistic killer, making it hard to perceive that behavior as anything but evil. But, when the show traces his path from abused or neglected child to adult killer, in spite of ourselves, we can feel a twinge of pity for him. It is in the nature of people with consciences to feel empathy, if for no other reason that s/he is a human being like we are.

To make matters worse, we are raised on endless movies about the “bad boy”, or girl, turning around through the power of another’s love, romantic or otherwise. They inspire our faith in humanity. Some of these stories are even true. We cut our teeth on movies like “Beauty and the Beast” and “Aladdin” driving home the “diamond in the rough” theme, that encourage us in the belief that people are inherently good and are capable of change. They affirm our belief in love. And now we have “50 Shades of Gray”, which has got to be the ultimate challenge for the dangerous myth that love conquers all.

It’s easier for us to accept badness on a grand scale. There are a multitude of examples throughout recorded history of tyrants dehumanizing or annihilating people in their ruthless grasps for power, and on a lesser scale cults. We have no problem calling this “evil”. We may understand people like that as having gotten too much power that has clearly corrupted their conscience. But, a regular individual in society must have that core of human goodness that can be turned around. Aren’t they the same as we are? So, they can change, too, right?

We don’t even like to judge people as bad or “evil”. That feels a little evil itself, doesn’t it, because of how we are taught to not judge and give a person the benefit of the doubt? We don’t consider that everything in nature and psychology is on a spectrum, including the
gradations of human evil. We certainly do not recognize evil in that disarming and charming person right before our eyes. We don’t recognize danger behind those eyes of love. We don’t second guess love. That is why we are so completely surprised at the devastation reeked in our lives once those eyes beheld us.

Visit Mary Ann Glynn’s website for more information:

DESTRUCTIVERELATIONSHIPSHELP.COM