

## DIVORCING A NARCISSIST 101

Below are the bullet point notes from our episode with a former public attorney turned divorce and domestic abuse attorney named Helen. We've been told by other lawyers that our interview was not only Law School 101 but Law School 201 when it comes to divorcing a narcissist.

Here is the outline from the show.

### 1. The Psychology and Behaviors Involved In Our Problems

#### a. I'm an attorney, not a psychologist or therapist.

- i. **Cannot diagnose.**
- ii. Just want to **understand and describe** challenging behaviors so that I can address it in Court.

#### b. All abuse is about power and control. Your abuser wants you to behave in a particular way.

- i. **Definition of Domestic Violence** - Domestic violence is a pattern of behavior **used to establish power and control** over another through **emotional attack, fear, and intimidation**. Domestic violence or battering, often, includes the threat or use of violence; this violence is a crime. Battering occurs when one person believes he/she is entitled to control another.

#### c. Many different patterns of abuse.

- i. **Physical abuse** – actual battery, use or threat of use of weapons, threats of death or great bodily harm. **MUST TREAT THIS EXTREMELY SERIOUSLY.**
- ii. **Financial abuse** – abuser withholds basic supports and/or doesn't want you to work or interferes with your work by calling, stalking, etc.
- iii. **Legal Threats** – if you leave I will take the children and the house, etc.
- iv. **Immigration abuse** – I will call ICE on you; taking your documents, etc.
- v. **Verbal abuse** – humiliating, belittling, we all know the words: how dumb can you be? Are you really that stupid? You look like a whore.

You're cheating on me. ETC..... We have all been there.

- vi. **WHAT IS THE SAME IN ALL ABUSE IS THE ABUSER'S NEED FOR POWER, FOR SELF-ESTEEM THROUGH BELITTling OTHERS.** Abusers do not value the health and well-being of their partners.
- vii. **Non abusing partners generally do value the health and well-being of the abuser however. Over themselves.** This imbalance is a huge part of the problem. I want to teach you today to factor in your own need for health and well-being.
- viii. **GOOD BOOKS:** Anything by Patricia Evans, but in particular The Verbally Abuse Relationship and Controlling People.

d. **But what about the psychology? I know my partner is a narcissist!**

- i. **There are lots of reasons abusers become abusers.** They may be modeling childhood patterns of abuse. They may have been allowed to tantrum as a child, especially if they had depressed or unavailable parents.
- ii. **They may have substance use disorders.** Substance use impairs judgment and influences
- iii. **They may be mood disordered themselves** – people who are depressed or bipolar are often chronically angry.
- iv. **They may have a legitimate personality disorder impacting their behavior.** The favorites are borderlines, narcissists and antisocials.
- v. **BUT IT DOESN'T MATTER. We can't diagnose them.** We don't have those credentials. It's useful to understand the patterns of behavior, but we are not clinicians who can diagnose. YOU CAN USE DIAGNOSES WITH YOUR THERAPIST TO UNDERSTAND BEHAVIORS, BUT COURTS DON'T WANT YOU TO DIAGNOSE ANYONE. YOU DON'T HAVE THOSE CREDENTIALS. SO WHAT YOU DO IS FACTUALLY DESCRIBE THE BEHAVIORS..... FACTS NOT OPINIONS ARE GENERALLY WHAT COURTS ARE LOOKING FOR.

## 2. Getting to Safety

- a. **GENERALLY SPEAKING, YOU MUST TAKE OFF YOUR SPOUSE HAT AND PUT ON YOUR BUSINESS HAT. GETTING OUT IS A BUSINESS. IT TAKES PLANNING.**
  - i. **Don't go back and forth.** Take your time if you are safe. Make your decision carefully. Take it to your team of trusted persons. Try not to rely on the internet, but rather smart, safe listeners who understand and value you.
  - ii. **Therapist.** You need help figuring out your goals and learning to prioritize your own well-being.
  - iii. **Realize that you are changing thought and behavior patterns and that it feels weird.** It may make your family uncomfortable. This may make you unsure or uncomfortable. Know ahead of time that there will be dark, lonely, difficult moments. But you'll make it. We know you will. Keep on keeping on. Shoulders up and eyes on the horizon.
- b. **If you fear for the physical safety of your children, YOU MUST start to move toward safety.** CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES CAN AND WILL TAKE YOUR CHILDREN AWAY IF YOU DO NOT PROTECT YOUR CHILDREN FROM AN ABUSER.
- c. **THIS IS PARTICULARLY TRUE IF YOUR PARTNER HAS ACCESS TO WEAPONS.** ACCESS TO WEAPONS IS THE NUMBER ONE PREDICTOR OF LETHALITY. READ ABOUT DV LETHALITY ONLINE.
- d. **Find your local Domestic Violence Response agency.** In most communities there is more than one. They are federally funded by the Violence Against Women Act. They will help you get to safety. They will do safety planning with you. They will hide you if they have to. They have a little money to stabilize you and your family. They have supports for employment, substance use problems. They will help you get settled – this is NOT EASY. But it works effectively for many women. There is a specific category of financing for agencies to help immigrants who are threatened with immigration abuse.
- e. **SAFETY FROM LESS PHYSICALLY THREATENING ABUSE**
  - i. **PLAN.**
  - ii. **EARN AS MUCH MONEY AS YOU CAN BEFORE YOU LEAVE.**

- iii. **What do you need to plan for? Where you will live. How you will pay your rent. Where you will work?**
- f. **If there are kids, keep a journal of who does what for the children.** Who takes the children to the doctor? Who registers them for school? Who takes them to school? Use a calendar and make a note every day of who does what, even if it seems routine and boring. **CALENDARS OR NOTES KEPT AT THE TIME THE EVENTS ARE HAPPENING ARE GENERALLY ADMISSIBLE IN COURT AND CAN BE VERY USEFUL.**
- g. **Consider moving to highly regulated communications if communications are at all abusive.** Reduce everything to writing.

### 3. The Legal System

a. **The Legal System operates by the use of documents.** You will have to write your story in declarations or petitions. You can start ahead of time by writing your story – why you need protection – with dates and facts ahead of time. This will help you when you file in court.

b. **Protection Orders** – use an advocate to help you write a petition for a domestic violence protection order. Go online or call the court.

- i. **USE FACTS AND DATES.** “On November 15, he woke up hostile and demanded that I give him all the cash in my wallet because he was out of cigarettes. When I protested that I needed the money for groceries, he raised a fist at me, but did not hit me. I felt fear that I would be hit.” You can go back in time for all or many alleged incidents of abuse.
- ii. **In Court physical acts of violence speak more loudly than words – but threats of physical acts are also taken extremely seriously.** Go ahead and put verbal abuse in there too, but know that the Court will not take this quite so seriously, even though you do.
- iii. **If your abuser has criminal history make certain the court is aware of it.**
- iv. **If your abuser has access to weapons make sure the court is aware of it.**
- v. **If you have a witness, have them write a statement too.**

- vi. **Generally takes more than one hearing** – a temporary order that will last until the next hearing and then a final hearing.
- c. **Divorce and custody.** Become educated. Look at the website for your court system and see if there are links to places that provide assistance. Many communities have drop in clinic type hours where you can get help. Go as often as you need to.
  - i. **Divorces usually take a few hearings.** At first there is often a hearing on “temporary orders” – and then a final trial or hearing on custody, division of property, etc. Try to “win” the temporary custody hearings. Everything else can wait if necessary.
  - ii. **No advantage, generally speaking, to file first.** It’s just fine if the abuser files for divorce first.
- d. **If you can hire an attorney, interview them and ask informed questions.** Ask about their experience with high conflict cases, because you think yours will be high conflict. See if the attorney has any recommended reading, because this will help you understand what their level of understanding and expertise is.
- e. **Courts make custody decisions based on who is really doing the parenting and safety for everyone involved.** This is where your calendar or journal comes in. BUT COURTS ALWAYS TRY TO KEEP TWO PARENTS IN THE CHILDREN’S LIVES. YOU ARE HIGHLY LIKELY TO END UP WITH SOME FLAVOR OF JOINT CUSTODY. REALIZE THIS AND TRY TO MAKE THE MOST OF IT. Make certain you tell the Court if this will be unsafe – as much as possible using FACTS rather than opinions or worries.
- f. **The rest of the decisions are really all financial.** Remember that. Everything else is just money and you can and will survive. If you have to utilize shelters for a while, you WILL survive it. Do your research first and PLAN.
- g. **Everyone has a relatives.** Sometimes relatives will help you – you need to ask them.
- h. **Every state has various forms of public assistance.** FIND ALL THE SOCIAL WORKERS YOU CAN. THEY ALWAYS KNOW MAGIC PROGRAMS, POTS OF MONEY, ETC. If you need beds for kids, those can be found. Call your local crisis line for where to start. Many communities also have a social services website such as 211.org

- i. **NARCS IN COURT – Read anything by Bill Eddy.** He is an attorney and a licensed clinical social worker. He invented the term high conflict divorce and developed skills to address it.
  - i. **The Narc will lie and complain and ask for continuances.** Your response should be detailed, factual and as unemotional as you possibly can. Tell the Court what your worries are, then give concrete examples of why you have that concern.
  - ii. **Your communications will all end up in Court.** Keep them BIFF. Bill Eddy's system. BRIEF, INFORMATIVE, FRIENDLY AND FIRM. Read about High Conflict People in Court by Bill Eddy.
  - iii. **Consider a regulated communications app** - such as talking parents.