

Are You Sure You Want to Dance with that Narcissist at Court?

Sorting out the care of children between even reasonable separated parents can be challenging enough. However, when one has a personality disorder, particularly of a narcissistic type, coming to agreeable terms may seem impossible.

The narcissist sees him or herself as particularly hard done by. They interpret literally every action of their former partner as aggression towards themselves. For instance: Arrive 5 minutes early to pick up the child and they complain you are undermining their time with the child; Arrive on time and they complain you are rigid; Arrive 5 minutes late are you are blamed as neglectful.

There is no winning for losing with the narcissist. They take their own feelings as facts and can distort facts to fit their reality. They believe totally in their point of view with every fiber of their being. Thus while others will say they are lying, this only makes them angrier because of absolute belief in their own point of view. This actually makes them better at presenting their distorted and even reconstructed points of view than others are at telling the truth because they will defend themselves to the end. They can actually cause others to question their own judgment, whereas they will be unwavering. This can be remarkably crazy-making if you are on the receiving end of their behavior.

When the narcissist feels thwarted by the actions of the other, they not only feel hard done by, they are furious. In their rage, they seek such total retribution that annihilation seems to be their end game. It is not enough to win, you must be destroyed in the process of their winning.

Some narcissists are highly intelligent and while you may think their intelligence may make them more open to self-reflection and discussion, it does not. Their intelligence only makes them more insidiously dangerous. Their intelligence allows them to plot more meticulously to present their distorted reality in such a way as to cause others to believe their point of view.

Sound out of whack? Disproportionate? You would be right and yet that is the thinking and behavior of the narcissist.

This is so distant from most people's imagination.

Talk of these situations and the common thinking is that these people should just grow up or alternately, you should find a way to reason with them.

If you haven't met or lived with such a person it is difficult to appreciate that just won't happen. The narcissist has a strong yet distorted worldview that is unchanging. Because they can only see the problem as originating with the other person, the narcissist has no motivation to change. Unless the narcissist has a bone to pick with you, you may not even realize they are a narcissist.

If you are going to court to resolve a parenting plan with such a person, prepare for a long, exhausting and expensive battle. Also be prepared to lose.

From the courts perspective, without hard tangible evidence that the barrage of the narcissist is contrived and not reflective of your situation, it is difficult to mount a good case. Indeed, the narcissist will throw so much manufactured information at the judge and yourself, that even if everything doesn't stick, some inevitably will. As the saying goes, when you get into the trough with the pigs, we can't ell the pigs apart.

Just going to court then, everyone will have mud on themselves and that is just the starting point. As the case unfolds, there is likely to be so many loops and turns that the court process may become tangled and take years to resolve, yet resolve in ways unimaginable and at tremendous financial, social, emotional and even psychiatric costs.

Sadly, court may not resolve things with this kind of narcissist. Court often runs the risk of escalating and perpetuating the conflict and fallout. And let's say that after years of court, you have your day and you win, then ask yourself, "What is the likelihood of the narcissist actually following through meaningfully with a Court Order?" The narcissist will still feel hard done by and that the Court got it wrong. That outcome may predictably lead to yet new rounds of court. It doesn't necessarily end with one judge's pronouncement. An unsatisfied narcissist is a restless narcissist.

Bearing in mind there will be much at stake with court and the process will be long, costly and emotionally burdensome for everyone (including the children who live the fallout of all this tension and as pawns in the dispute) a negotiated settlement can offer a quicker

resolution, thus deflecting from the escalating fight. In negotiating your agreement you expedite the outcome. Because even the narcissist has signed on, while they will still find fault in everything you do, they are still more likely to follow their agreement because they feel they had input and control in developing it.

As distasteful and even as scary as it may seem, lawyer-assisted negotiation, mediation or Collaborative Law may offer somewhat of a solution. Bear in mind, none of these strategies has anything to do with winning. They only have to do with finding a solution you can nearly or even barely live with. As harsh or counter-intuitive or distasteful as that sounds you at least have some semblance of control in terms of the outcome:

1. Lawyer-assisted negotiations means your lawyers negotiate between themselves on your behalf, often through written communications. Ask your lawyer to share each and every communication before sending so you can appreciate and input into the negotiation. Very often narcissists find the most aggressive and unreasonable lawyers imaginable. If that is the case then lawyer-assisted negotiation may prove fruitless in the end. However, if the lawyer on the other side has any shred of reasonableness, there just may be an opportunity to resolve things.
2. Collaborative Law is a process that occurs outside the threat of court. You get together in 4-way meetings – both lawyers and both parents in the same room. Altogether you seek to find a resolution to your issues. Where necessary, other professionals can be brought in to help consult and facilitate problem solving.
3. Mediation requires both persons to meet with a single and neutral facilitator to aid in the discussions and help find joint points of interest around which to facilitate an agreement. Depending on the disposition of the mediation, lawyers may be asked to attend. Thus there is also lawyer-assisted mediation and the role of the lawyer in this approach is not to negotiate on your behalf, but to be witness to and help hold their respective client to the process. With lawyer-assisted negotiation, it makes it difficult for either party to provide a false impression of what transpired when their lawyer was there to see it firsthand.

To repeat, none of those approaches has anything to do with winning. They are all about recognizing you will have a dissatisfying outcome no matter what, yet seeking

to have the least dissatisfying outcome. These are tough situations to swallow.

When stuck between a rock and a hard place, choose neither, find a way to extricate yourself as unscathed as possible knowing perfectly well this has nothing to do with justice, fairness or what is ultimately right. As troubling as this may be, particularly with your kids in mind, it still may be the better decision in the long run, knowing there isn't that one decision that will totally fix everything.

Given how disastrous these situations can be, you may also want to consider either supportive counseling or a [separation coach](#) for support along the way. While support doesn't necessarily change your situation, it offers help to cope. It can also offer strategies to better manage the narcissist so as to mitigate some of the fallout. It's about surviving or getting through and not necessarily about getting over.

Are you Sure You Want to Dance with that Narcissist at Court? At least think twice.

As for those who don't get your situation, let them read this blog.

I am Gary Direnfeld and I am a [social worker](#). Check out all my [services](#) and then call me if you need help with a personal issue, mental health concern, child behavior or relationship, divorce or separation issue or even help growing your practice. I am available in person and by Skype.

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