



A List of Do's and Don'ts for Partners of Narcissists

Don't ask your partner to change or complain to him about how badly he treats you. The narcissist is probably not even listening to your complaint, but getting ready to go into attack mode. Save yourself the trouble of another battle.

Do concentrate on building your own self-respect and strengthening your own emotional immune system. Validate your perceptions of healthy versus unhealthy sharing.

Don't press a narcissist to share feelings. If you encourage or prod a narcissist to share feelings, it will not end well. Either you'll be in for an attack, or you'll be there for hours listening to a lecture.

Do manage your own anxiety. Usually we badger others because of our uneasiness. If you depend on a narcissist to soothe your anxiety, you're setting yourself up to be used and humiliated. Instead, tune in to your emotions. and when you feel desperate to connect, call a friend, take a walk, or listen to some music until the anxiety abates.

Don't try and please your partner so that he or she will notice and appreciate you. Trying to appease your partner only places you in a hideous double bind. A narcissist wants you to bend over backwards for him or her and yet will see you as pathetic and weak. There's no way to please a narcissist, so conserve your energy.

Do what pleases you! Ask yourself each day, "What do I need today?" "What will bring me the most serenity and well-being?"

Don't engage or retaliate with verbal abuse

Do decide to act on your own highest values, no matter what your spouse does. Don't be dragged down into the muck of your narcissistic partner.



Don't be seduced by the narcissist's promise for future change. Narcissists have no intention of fulfilling promises unless there's something in it for them. Typically, a partner of a narcissist is so hungry for love that he would rather believe anything than see the harsh reality of his situation.

Do bring forward your adult realism and take the narcissist's promises with a grain of salt. Remember how many times your heart leapt at assurances that things would change, just to be disappointed and heartbroken once again? In the case of a narcissistic partner, words are cheap and it's action that counts.

Don't allow yourself to be financially dependent upon a narcissist. It is dangerous and puts you and your children at risk.

Do strive to be financially independent of the narcissist. Begin to develop your own financial resources. The key word here is "begin." It doesn't have to happen immediately; the idea is to be thinking about how you can best be assured of some financial safety. At the very least, find out what assets you both have and how they are being used. You have every right to know this information. If you have to do this without the knowledge of your partner, then find an accountant who can assist you.

Don't allow your fantasies about your narcissistic partner to ruin your life. Fantasy helps us get through very difficult and painful situations, but it can also be dangerous. If you can't see your partner for who she is but what you want her to become, you will continue to set yourself up for profound disappointment, shame, and unending emotional and/or physical abuse.

Do remember that potential isn't enough to save a relationship. Can you envision yourself years from now, still turning somersaults and hoping for crumbs of attention and kindness? You cannot get affection, warmth, or understanding from *potential*. You can't get your emotional or physical needs met from the person he *might* become someday.



Don't medicate yourself with food, alcohol, drugs, or other compulsive behaviors in order to delay grieving. When you face the realities of your relationship, it may throw you into grief and despair. Rather than facing these emotions, many set out on a path of self-destruction.

Do allow yourself to grieve the death of your dreams. If you're someone who loved deeply, then your heart is shattered and will take some time to heal. By allowing yourself to grieve without medicating your emotions, you'll come face to face with the loss of your fantasies and dreams. The most profound loss is the dream of the partner with whom you could feel loved, cherished, and safe.

Don't beat yourself up for choosing a narcissistic partner. Did you wake up one morning and think to yourself,
Today I'm going to find some narcissist to love and be miserable. Haven't you been beaten up enough? By continuing to be harsh with yourself, you remain loyal to your narcissistic partner and the emotional battering that was given to you.

Do recognize that you're not insane; your situation is toxic. Perhaps it's time to differentiate your sick relationship from being a sick person. Chances are, you're having normal reactions to living in a dysfunctional situation. The most profound lessons we learn in our lives are through our relationships; this doesn't make us damaged. It makes us human.

Don't fall into the trap of denying your role in the relationship.

Do learn the powerful lessons that relationships teaches you.

Rokelle Lerner, *The Object of My Affection is in My Reflection: coping with Narcissists* (Deerfield Beach, Florida: Health Communications, Inc 2009) Permission to use material granted, September 20, 2010.