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**Coping with Your Abuser**

**By Sam Vaknin**

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How to cope with your abuser?

Sometimes it looks hopeless. Abusers are ruthless, immoral, sadistic, calculated, cunning, persuasive, deceitful – in short, they appear to be invincible. They easily sway the system in their favor.

Here is a list of escalating countermeasures. They represent the distilled experience of thousands of victims of abuse. They may help you cope with abuse and overcome it.

Not included are legal or medical steps. Consult an attorney, an accountant, a therapist, or a psychiatrist, where appropriate.

First, you must decide:

Do you want to stay with him – or terminate the relationship?

1. I want to Stay with Him

FIVE DON'T DO'S – How to Avoid the Wrath of the Narcissist

Never disagree with the narcissist or contradict him;

Never offer him any intimacy;

Look awed by whatever attribute matters to him (for instance: by his professional achievements or by his good looks, or by his success with women and so on);

Never remind him of life out there and if you do, connect it somehow to his sense of grandiosity;

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Do not make any comment, which might directly or indirectly impinge on his self-image, omnipotence, judgment, omniscience, skills, capabilities, professional record, or even omnipresence.

The TEN DO'S – How to Make your Narcissist Dependent on You If you INSIST on Staying with Him

Listen attentively to everything the narcissist says and agree with it all. Don't believe a word of it but let it slide as if everything is just fine, business as usual.

Personally offer something absolutely unique to the narcissist which they cannot obtain anywhere else. Also be prepared to line up future sources of primary Narcissistic Supply for your narcissist because you will not be IT for very long, if at all. If you take over the procuring function for the narcissist, they become that much more dependent on you.

Be endlessly patient and go way out of your way to be accommodating, thus keeping the narcissistic supply flowing liberally, and keeping the peace.

Be endlessly giving. This one may not be attractive to you, but it is a take it or leave it proposition.

Be absolutely emotionally and financially independent of the narcissist. Take what you need: the excitement and engulfment and refuse to get upset or hurt when the narcissist does or says something dumb, rude, or insensitive. Yelling back works really well but should be reserved for special occasions when you fear your narcissist may be on the verge of leaving you; the silent treatment is better as an ordinary response, but it must be carried out without any emotional content, more with the air of boredom and "I'll talk to you later, when I am good and ready, and when you are behaving in a more reasonable fashion". Treat your narcissist as you would a child.

If your narcissist is cerebral and not interested in having much sex – then give yourself ample permission to have "hidden" sex with other people. Your cerebral narcissist will not be indifferent to infidelity so discretion and secrecy is of paramount importance.

If your narcissist is somatic and you don't mind, join in on group sex encounters but make sure that you choose properly for your narcissist. If you do mind – leave him. Somatic narcissists are sex addicts and incurably unfaithful.

If you are a "fixer", then focus on fixing situations, preferably before they become "situations". Don't for one moment delude yourself that you can fix the narcissist – it simply will not happen.

If there is any fixing that can be done, it is to help your narcissist become aware of their condition, with no negative implications or accusations in the process at all. It is like living with a physically handicapped person and being able to discuss, calmly, unemotionally, what the limitations and benefits of the handicap are and how the two of you can work with these factors, rather than trying to change them.

Finally, and most important of all: Know Yourself.

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What are you getting from the relationship? Are you actually a masochist? A codependent? Why is this relationship attractive and interesting?

Define for yourself what good and beneficial things you believe you are receiving in this relationship.

Define the things that you find harmful to you. Develop strategies to minimize the harm to yourself. Don't expect that you will cognitively be able to reason with the narcissist to change who they are. You may have some limited success in getting your narcissist to tone down on the really harmful behaviors that affect you – but this can only be accomplished in a very trusting, frank and open relationship.

### (1a) Insist on Your Boundaries – Resist Abuse

Refuse to accept abusive behavior. Demand reasonably predictable and rational actions and reactions. Insist on respect for your boundaries, predilections, preferences, and priorities.

Demand a just and proportional treatment. Reject or ignore unjust and capricious behavior.

If you are up to the inevitable confrontation, react in kind. Let him taste some of his own medicine.

Never show your abuser that you are afraid of him. Do not negotiate with bullies. They are insatiable. Do not succumb to blackmail.

If things get rough– disengage, involve law enforcement officers, friends and colleagues, or threaten him (legally).

Do not keep your abuse a secret. Secrecy is the abuser's weapon.

Never give him a second chance. React with your full arsenal to the first transgression.

Be guarded. Don't be too forthcoming in a first or casual meeting. Gather intelligence.

Be yourself. Don't misrepresent your wishes, boundaries, preferences, priorities, and red lines.

Do not behave inconsistently. Do not go back on your word. Be firm and resolute.

Stay away from such quagmires. Scrutinize every offer and suggestion, no matter how innocuous.

Prepare backup plans. Keep others informed of your whereabouts and apprised of your situation.

Be vigilant and doubting. Do not be gullible and suggestible. Better safe than sorry.

Often the abuser's proxies are unaware of their role. Expose him. Inform them. Demonstrate to them how they are being abused, misused, and plain used by the abuser.

Trap your abuser. Treat him as he treats you. Involve others. Bring it into the open. Nothing like

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sunshine to disinfect abuse.

### (1b) Mirror His Behavior

Mirror the narcissist's actions and repeat his words.

If, for instance, he is having a rage attack - rage back. If he threatens - threaten back and credibly try to use the same language and content. If he leaves the house - leave it as well, disappear on him. If he is suspicious - act suspicious. Be critical, denigrating, humiliating, go down to his level.

### (1c) Frighten Him

Identify the vulnerabilities and susceptibilities of the narcissist and strike repeated, escalating blows at them.

If a narcissist has a secret or something he wishes to conceal - use your knowledge of it to threaten him. Drop cryptic hints that there are mysterious witnesses to the events and recently revealed evidence. Do it cleverly, noncommittally, gradually, in an escalating manner.

Let his imagination do the rest. You don't have to do much except utter a vague reference, make an ominous allusion, delineate a possible turn of events.

Needless to add that all these activities have to be pursued legally, preferably through the good services of law offices and in broad daylight. If done in the wrong way - they might constitute extortion or blackmail, harassment and a host of other criminal offences.

### (1d) Lure Him

Offer him continued Narcissistic Supply. You can make a narcissist do anything by offering, withholding, or threatening to withhold Narcissistic Supply (adulation, admiration, attention, sex, awe, subservience, etc.).

### (1e) Play on his Fear of Abandonment

If nothing else works, explicitly threaten to abandon him.

You can condition the threat ("If you don't do something or if you do it - I will desert you").

The narcissists perceives the following as threats of abandonment, even if they are not meant as such:

Confrontation, fundamental disagreement, and protracted criticism

When completely ignored

When you insist on respect for your boundaries, needs, emotions, choices, preferences

When you retaliate (for instance, shout back at him).

### II. I can't Take It Any Longer – I Have Decided to Leave Him

#### (IIa) Fight Him in Court

Here are a few of the things the narcissist finds devastating, especially in a court of law, for instance during a deposition:

Any statement or fact, which seems to contradict his inflated perception of his grandiose self. Any criticism, disagreement, exposure of fake achievements, belittling of "talents and skills" which the narcissist fantasizes that he possesses, any hint that he is subordinated, subjugated, controlled, owned or dependent upon a third party. Any description of the narcissist as average and common, indistinguishable from many others. Any hint that the narcissist is weak, needy, dependent, deficient, slow, not intelligent, naive, gullible, susceptible, not in the know, manipulated, a victim.

The narcissist is likely to react with rage to all these and, in an effort to re-establish his fantastic grandiosity, he is likely to expose facts and stratagems he had no conscious intention of exposing.

The narcissist reacts with narcissistic rage, hatred, aggression, or violence to an infringement of what he perceives to be his entitlement. Any insinuation, hint, intimation, or direct declaration that the narcissist is not special at all, that he is average, common, not even sufficiently idiosyncratic to warrant a fleeting interest will inflame the narcissist.

Tell the narcissist that he does not deserve the best treatment, that his needs are not everyone's priority, that he is boring, that his needs can be catered to by an average practitioner (medical doctor, accountant, lawyer, psychiatrist), that he and his motives are transparent and can be easily gauged, that he will do what he is told, that his temper tantrums will not be tolerated, that no special concessions will be made to accommodate his inflated sense of self, that he is subject to court procedures, etc. – and the narcissist will lose control.

Contradict, expose, humiliate, and berate the narcissist ("You are not as intelligent as you think you are", "Who is really behind all this? It takes sophistication which you don't seem to have", "So, you have no formal education", "you are (mistake his age, make him much older) ... sorry, you are ... old", "What did you do in your life? Did you study? Do you have a degree? Did you ever establish or run a business? Would you define yourself as a success?", "Would your children share your view that you are a good father?", "You were last seen with a Ms. ... who is (suppressed grin) a cleaning lady (in demeaning disbelief)").

Be equipped with absolutely unequivocal, first rate, thoroughly authenticated and vouched for information.

#### (IIb) If You Have Common Children

I described in "The Guilt of the Abused – Pathologizing the Victim" how the system is biased and titled

against the victim.

Regrettably, mental health professionals and practitioners – marital and couple therapists, counselors – are conditioned, by years of indoctrinating and dogmatic education, to respond favorably to specific verbal cues.

The paradigm is that abuse is rarely one sided – in other words, that it is invariably "triggered" either by the victim or by the mental health problems of the abuser. Another common lie is that all mental health problems can be successfully treated one way (talk therapy) or another (medication).

This shifts the responsibility from the offender to his prey. The abused must have done something to bring about their own maltreatment – or simply were emotionally "unavailable" to help the abuser with his problems. Healing is guaranteed if only the victim were willing to participate in a treatment plan and communicate with the abuser. So goes the orthodoxy.

Refusal to do so – in other words, refusal to risk further abuse – is harshly judged by the therapist. The victim is labeled uncooperative, resistant, or even abusive!

The key is, therefore, feigned acquiescence and collaboration with the therapist's scheme, acceptance of his/her interpretation of the events, and the use of key phrases such as: "I wish to communicate/work with (the abuser)", "trauma", "relationship", "healing process", "inner child", "the good of the children", "the importance of fathering", "significant other" and other psycho-babble. Learn the jargon, use it intelligently and you are bound to win the therapist's sympathy.

Above all – do not be assertive, or aggressive and do not overtly criticize the therapist or disagree with him/her.

I make the therapist sound like yet another potential abuser – because in many cases, he/she becomes

one as they inadvertently collude with the abuser, invalidate the abuse experiences, and pathologize the victim.

### (IIc) Refuse All Contact

Be sure to maintain as much contact with your abuser as the courts, counsellors, mediators, guardians, or law enforcement officials mandate.

Do NOT contravene the decisions of the system. Work from the inside to change judgments, evaluations, or rulings – but NEVER rebel against them or ignore them. You will only turn the system against you and your interests.

But with the exception of the minimum mandated by the courts – decline any and all gratuitous contact with the narcissist.

Do not respond to his pleading, romantic, nostalgic, flattering, or threatening e-mail messages.

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Return all gifts he sends you.

Refuse him entry to your premises. Do not even respond to the intercom.

Do not talk to him on the phone. Hang up the minute you hear his voice while making clear to him, in a single, polite but firm, sentence, that you are determined not to talk to him.

Do not answer his letters.

Do not visit him on special occasions, or in emergencies.

Do not respond to questions, requests, or pleas forwarded to you through third parties.

Disconnect from third parties whom you know are spying on you at his behest.

Do not discuss him with your children.

Do not gossip about him.

Do not ask him for anything, even if you are in dire need.

When you are forced to meet him, do not discuss your personal affairs – or his.

Relegate any inevitable contact with him – when and where possible – to professionals: your lawyer, or your accountant.

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United Press International (UPI) Senior Business Correspondent, and the editor of mental health and Central East Europe categories in *The Open Directory*, *Bellaonline*, and *Suite101*.

Until recently, he served as the Economic Advisor to the Government of Macedonia.

Visit Sam's Web site at

### **Alzheimer's Patients And Verbal Abuse: How To Deal With It**

**By William Hammond, J.D.**

Abuse of any kind is difficult to deal with. Types of verbal abuse can include the following: Does your loved one ignore your feelings? Is he disrespectful? Does he withhold approval, appreciation or affection? Does he walk away without answering you? Does he criticize you, call you names or yell at you? Does he humiliate you in public or in the privacy of your home? Does he tell you that you are too

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sensitive? Does he destroy furniture or punch holes in the walls?

These are some of the signs, but there are many more that may be observed. Abuse is difficult to deal with if the abuser has Alzheimer's disease since the abuser can't really control it.

If a person with Alzheimer's becomes verbally abusive, it may be because he is suffering from depression or aggressive behavior caused by the disease. In this case you might want to involve your doctor and let him know the situation. He may be able to prescribe an anti-depressive medication or simply change the current medication. You may want to take a break from your loved one, as sometimes caring all the time for the same person can be exhausting. Or you can try to place your loved one in an adult day care, or hire some professional help. Make sure that substitute caregivers are knowledgeable about Alzheimer's disease and know how to handle patients with dementia.

One way to deal with the situation before it becomes a big problem is to try humor. You cannot control how your loved one is acting but you can decrease the feelings of frustration by controlling how you respond. Try to validate your loved one's feelings; it will definitely help him. Many times, people with Alzheimer's are so frustrated that they act it out through verbal abuse and aggression. Put yourself in his place. It is very frustrating!

The most important thing you have to remember is not to talk "down" to your loved one because he is still a person with an entire life history of success and independence. If you see that what you are trying to do or say to him is not working, just let it go for a while, step out of the room and come back later. Let your loved one calm down and relax. You may want to try music. Studies have shown that Alzheimer's patients often find music relaxing.

Finally, if you still feel overwhelmed, join a support group that specifically deals with verbal abuse and learn how to cope with it. Many times other people in the group will have experienced the same ordeal with their loved ones. Group members may be able to counsel you on how they coped or dealt with this kind of behavior.

This group will also help you to deal with your emotions and frustrations. They will tell you how to control them, and once you are able to deal with your own feelings, then you will be more effective coping with your loved one's behavior.

William G. Hammond, JD is a nationally known elder law attorney and founder of The Alzheimer's Resource Center. He is a frequent guest on radio and television and has developed innovative solutions to guide families who have a loved one suffering from Alzheimer's. For more information you can visit his website at

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