

A man is holding a young girl in his arms, both smiling and looking at each other. The background is a warm, orange-toned bokeh of trees, suggesting a sunset or autumn setting. The overall mood is intimate and affectionate.

DIVORCING AND COPARENTING WITH A COVERT NARCISSIST: KEEP YOUR KIDS HAPPY



THE MICKLIN LAW GROUP^{LLC}

EMPOWERING MEN IN DIVORCE & FAMILY LAW ISSUES

Thanks to pop culture, the term “narcissist” conjures up the mental image of a boisterous extrovert with a larger-than-life personality and a huge ego. This type of narcissist, often called an overt narcissist, is often easy to spot – and may be easier to avoid. Unfortunately, many men don’t realize there is another type of narcissist whose behaviors are just as harmful but who may be more difficult to spot: the covert narcissist. These individuals often end up in marriages where they cause constant conflict and frustration for their spouses. Since it’s not always easy to spot a covert narcissist, many husbands are married with children before they realize they need to get divorced.



COVERT NARCISSISTS AS SPOUSES

People with covert narcissism are just as likely to get married as the rest of us, which can pose problems during the marriage. Narcissistic personality traits may not be apparent early on, especially since a covert narcissist isn't usually as outspoken or performative. This means it's especially important to understand the traits to look out for to identify a narcissist.

Common traits of a covert narcissist include:

- **Gaslighting and creating confusion about the realities of her marriage**
- **Shaming others for their behavior to create guilt and remorse**
- **Subtly fishing for compliments or trying to make herself feel better by giving others backhanded compliments**
- **A victim mentality**
- **Disregard of others' needs (since they feel much more important than everyone else)**

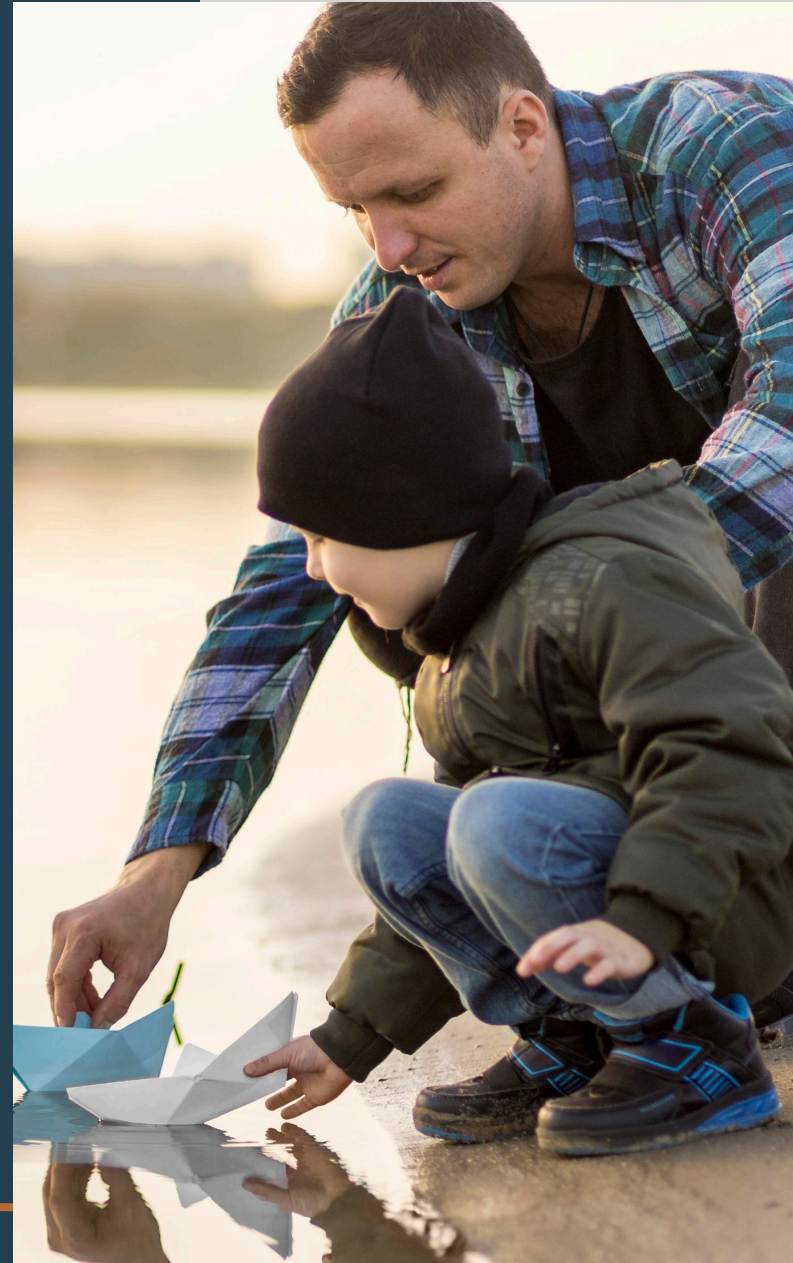
These traits aren't unique to covert narcissists. What is unique is the way they come across. Extroverted, gregarious, and straightforward narcissists may not have any shame about displaying these actions freely because they believe their charm allows them to easily manipulate others to "get them on their side." But covert narcissists are masters at hiding these tactics from bystanders and anyone not closely involved in the marriage. Fathers who are married to a covert narcissist often suffer without support because friends and family refuse to believe that the narcissist's demeanor is so drastically different in private.

PROTECTING YOUR KIDS DURING YOUR DIVORCE FROM A COVERT NARCISSIST

Unfortunately, divorcing a narcissist in New Jersey is rarely an easy process. Your covert narcissist spouse is more likely to go behind your back, manipulate those around you, and do absolutely anything to get their way in the divorce. Sadly, your narcissist spouse may try to make you look like an unfit parent or turn your children against you. In some cases, narcissist wives have even convinced their husband's own family that he's "the bad guy."

Divorce is scary enough as it is for children. They didn't ask their folks to split up. When they also are subjected to what psychologists call parental alienation, it becomes terrifying. Parental alienation is a common tactic used by narcissists. Parents who care more about themselves than everyone else have no problem using their children as pawns to ruin their ex's life. Kids who are subjected to parental alienation are made to feel guilty about loving their dad. It's heart wrenching to watch because it is so confusing for the child, and it takes a terrible toll on the father.

Here are some ways to spot signs that your former wife is trying to alienate your children and some strategies to stop it.



TELLTALE SIGNS YOUR EX IS TURNING YOUR CHILD AGAINST YOU

There are some ways to spot if the mother of your children is badmouthing you to them. The earliest warning sign is on social media. If her Facebook page is filled with derogatory comments about you to her family and friends, chances are pretty good she is making similar remarks to your children. Take screenshots and save them; if she blocks you, ask a friend to continue doing so.

As tempting as it may be to comment on your spouse's disparaging social media posts to salvage your

reputation, don't get into an online war of words with her. Judges do not take kindly to one spouse saying nasty things about the other online, so imagine how frustrated they are when both parents are engaging in this behavior! Resist the urge to stoop to your ex's level, and focus on collecting evidence of her wrongdoings. We can use it as evidence if needed when negotiating visitation, custody, and support issues with her attorney – and in court if it becomes necessary.





But even if she isn't posting anything on Facebook, there are other telltale signs that your spouse may be trying to alienate your children from you during the divorce. It is marked by a sudden change in the kid's attitude towards you:

- **You or friends overhear her speaking poorly of you**
- **She tries to limit the children's contact with you**
- **She tries to interfere with your communication with the kids**
- **She emotionally punishes the child when they say anything positive about you**
- **Worst of all: she tells your children that you do not love them**

We've yet to see studies into how many children are subjected to parental alienation by the mother, but reams of anecdotal evidence indicate that it happens to fathers who are the custodial or co-parent of a child even after the divorce is finalized. It is done to children as young as toddlers and preschoolers as well as to teens well into their high school years. If you're already experiencing issues during your divorce, it's fair to assume that your covert narcissist wife may attempt these parental alienation strategies with the kids.

BUILDING A CASE AGAINST YOUR NARCISSIST WIFE

Many spouses of covert narcissists admit to feeling lonely or alienated during their divorce. Their friends and family members have a hard time seeing the narcissist's true nature, which means the non-narcissist spouse often ends up feeling unsupported during this difficult time. This is one reason why it's vital to work with a men's and fathers' divorce lawyer who understands how narcissists operate. Even if your mutual friends or family members can't comprehend what you've gone through, your lawyer will always be available to offer support.

In many instances, those with narcissistic personality disorder live in their own worlds. Still, they are often convinced their delusional thinking is reality. Narcissists can be very convincing in court because they speak their truth with so much conviction. Your ex may truly believe that you are an unfit parent, but based on what evidence? Generally, narcissists will draw this type of conclusion based only on their own opinion.

The best antidote to a covert narcissist's tactics is hard evidence. When you work with our men's divorce rights lawyers in New Jersey, we'll help you collect financial statements, text messages and emails, social media posts, and even witness statements to prove that your covert narcissist wife is not in touch with reality. We'll also help you show the judge that your spouse is engaging in parental alienation, a practice that is forbidden and may result in a change to your custody arrangement.



FATHERS' RIGHTS AFTER SEPARATION AND DIVORCE

Regardless of how far along your divorce is in the process or if you've been divorced for some time, my divorce advice to fathers in New Jersey whose narcissist ex is alienating them from their children is consistent. There are several key things to remember.

First and most important, retain a skilled family law attorney for men and fathers in New Jersey. Keep your attorney informed of all attempts by your ex to alienate your children from you. Even if we did not handle your original divorce, The Micklin Law Group's attorneys are here to provide you with advice on how to proceed. We can also develop a strategy to take to a judge to obtain an order to stop your wife from continuing her destructive behavior.



COVERT NARCISSISTS AS SPOUSES

Here are some additional tips for fathers who know there's parental alienation afoot:

- **Keep in mind that your kids are a victim of your ex and don't blame them for her actions**
- **Don't speak badly of the mother to your kids.**
- **Be mindful of the time you're with the kids. Don't be late for visits or cancel time with them except in extraordinary circumstances. If you have to cancel or change a visitation, you should tell the kids yourself; don't let your ex frame the message the way she is likely to try to do.**
- **Don't engage in arguments with your ex. It is very likely that she is trying to get a rise out of you so she can collect evidence to try to show that you are a bad parent.**
- **Try to communicate with your ex in writing as often as possible. If your ex says one thing in court but another when it's just the two of you in a text message thread, it will show the judge that she can't be trusted.**

If you follow these tips while working with your attorney to stop your ex's inappropriate behavior, the judge is more likely to believe your side of the story. The truth will always come out eventually, so act with integrity and keep the faith.



DIVORCE TACTICS FOR FATHERS TO MAINTAIN RELATIONSHIPS WITH KIDS

So, you know how to handle your ex's attempts at parental alienation, but how can you maintain a healthy relationship with your kids while your lawyer handles their mother's poor behavior? First, keep telling your children that you love them unconditionally. This might seem obvious to you, but if their mom has been lying to them, your kids may question your love. The occasional reminder makes a big difference.

Remind the children of the good times you have shared. Younger children have short attention spans and may not remember what life was like before the divorce. Spend some time with them going through photo albums or reminiscing about family vacations so your kids don't lose those memories and succumb to the false information your ex is providing.

Arguably the most important piece of advice is to always stay true to yourself and your morals. It's difficult to be the bigger person when your relationship with your children is on the line, but it will ultimately pay off if you can salvage and even strengthen your relationship with your kids. To that end, don't try using emotional manipulation or bribes to lure your children away from their mother. This could backfire long term as your children grow up and realize what you were doing. Avoid the temptation to stoop to your ex's level and keep your focus on the positive.



A man with a beard is looking down at a child who is lying in a crib. The man's face is partially visible in the upper right, and the child is in the lower center. The background is dark and out of focus.

TALK TO A DIVORCE LAWYER FOR MEN IN NEW JERSEY

As a parent, it's crucial to not play the game that an angry ex-spouse seems intent on playing. It's no shock that a loving and protective fathers' first instinct is to fight for his children and resort to combat tactics to protect them. But when you stop to think about it, this is a self-defeating strategy. It makes the children victims again of a fight between you and your ex. Children value stability, and as they get older, they will come to respect and appreciate that fact that your love and attention was always positive – even when their mother was using them as a pawn in a twisted game.

It can be heartbreaking when an ex wife turns a child against the father. It can also be tempting to take drastic actions to keep your children close. But remember, the best way to handle your trouble with your ex is in court.

Follow the tips we've laid out to ensure you have credible evidence of your ex's wrongdoing. Judges don't want to see children alienated from either parent, so the odds are good that your kids will eventually see you as the loving father you are.

You may face a difficult battle while divorcing and coparenting with your covert narcissist wife, but you don't have to go it alone. Our men's and fathers' family law attorneys know how to render your spouse's manipulative tactics ineffective. To learn more about our divorce and family law services for men in New Jersey, schedule a consultation with one of our dedicated attorneys.



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