

Can I Change A Narcissist?

By Dr. Margaret Paul

Sometimes we are clueless regarding the subtle ways we are trying to control, while being very aware of a partner's controlling behavior.

Tara asked me the following question:

"Dear Dr. Paul, How do you reach your spouse if they are narcissistic and shut down emotionally? He does not say anything when I explain inner bonding, intent or control - just stares. Even if I declare my love for him and my wish to be closer, he just nods his head! He is the son of narcissist father and borderline mother who both stepped out of his life when we married. He sees no reason to forgive anyone and he is not only defensive - he is offensive!!! Any conversation he must be in control. Help!!!"

Tara, I'm going to make the assumption that you knew some of these things about him before marrying him, or that you got swept off your feet by the narcissistic charm and didn't take the time you needed to really know him before marrying him.

If you knew some of these things before marrying him, then why did you marry him? The main reason people marry someone like you are describing is because they are coming from a big false belief that their love can change the person.

"How do you reach your spouse if they are narcissistic and shut down emotionally?"

You don't! You can't. And you are not coming to grips with this truth – that you can't have any control at all over anyone's intent to be open or closed, learning or protected, loving or unloving.

The first thing you need to do is take your eyes off your husband and put them on yourself. You need to explore where the belief comes from that you can change him – that you can 'reach him' – and you need to accept that you are totally helpless over him.

"He does not say anything when I explain inner bonding, intent or control - just stares."

You need to explore what feelings you are avoiding by trying to change him. You need to come to terms with the fact that while you are explaining Inner Bonding and explaining the intent to learn and the intent to control to him, your own intent is to control!

He is likely in complete resistance to being controlled by you. You need to either completely accept him exactly the way he is, or leave the relationship, but 'reaching him,' changing him, controlling him is not an option. Leaving the relationship before healing your end of this system – which is very much about trying to control him – will only delay you in healing your end of the system. So I suggest that, for the time being, you accept him as he is and put your attention on learning to love your little girl in the face of his disconnected behavior. Every time you focus on him instead of you, you are disconnecting from yourself and making him responsible for you.

"Even if I declare my love for him and my wish to be closer, he just nods his head!"

It sounds like you are declaring your love in the hopes of getting him to open up, which means that declaring your love is a form of control – which he will continue to resist. Why not focus on loving you rather than on trying to get him to change?

"He is the son of narcissist father and borderline mother who both stepped out of his life when we married, He sees no reason to forgive anyone and he is not only defensive - he is offensive!!! Any conversation he must be in control. Help!!!"

It would be very valuable learning for you to see that you are trying to control as much as he is – it's just that you do it in different ways. His may be more overt and yours more covert, but it is control nevertheless.

The bottom line is – people can change if they want to, but we can't change them or get them to open up. So, focus on changing what you can change – you!