

Why Some Exes Never Really Leave: Narcissistic Family Loyalty, Unfinished Business, & Hidden Agendas

Today's podcast is called, "Why Some Exes Never Really Leave: Narcissistic Family Loyalty, Unfinished Business, & Hidden Agendas."

When a relationship ends, most people understand there must also be a shift in loyalty. If there are no shared children, no business ties, or other practical reasons to remain connected, it is natural for contact to fade. Some former couples may remain cordial, exchanging polite greetings on occasion. That is not necessarily unhealthy.

Another scenario that raises deeper questions. That is when an ex remains closely connected to their former partner's family long after the relationship has ended, especially when the breakup involved betrayal, harm or unresolved conflict.

In a healthy family, loyalty should come first with their own. Even if they once cared about the former partner, boundaries are respected. They do not maintain ties in ways that dishonor their relative or undermine a new relationship. Scripture is clear about the shifting of allegiance in adult relationships. Genesis 2:24 in the Amplified Bible says, "***For this reason a man shall leave his father & his mother, & shall be joined to his wife; & the two shall become one flesh.***" That principle applies to emotional loyalty as well as physical union.

When a family continues an unnecessary, unhealthy bond with an ex, something unhealthy is clearly at work.

For the ex who keeps reaching back into that family system, unfinished emotional business is frequently the driving force. Perhaps they sabotaged the relationship & will not fully own their mistakes. Rewriting the narrative becomes easier if they can point to ongoing contact as "proof" that they were not the problem. Continued acceptance by the family soothes their conscience & bolsters their fragile self esteem.

In some cases, it keeps a door cracked open. Staying visible by attending the same events, frequenting the same restaurants, living nearby, or orchestrating "accidental" encounters can be a way of attempting to remain in the forefront of a former partner's mind. Even if reconciliation is unlikely, the sense of not being forgotten feeds their ego, particularly if their current relationship is disappointing or unfulfilling.

Narcissistic families, however, are not motivated by genuine affection. Narcissists do not form relationships based on love, but on utility. If an ex provides status, admiration, connections, financial advantages, or (most commonly) just drama, they become useful. That usefulness translates into narcissistic supply – attention, validation, or leverage.

Sometimes the ex "looks good" to outsiders by coming from an affluent background, holding a respected position, or enhancing the family's image. In other cases, the ex becomes a convenient weapon. If their relative has moved on & the family disapproves of the new partner, maintaining visible loyalty to the ex creates comparison. Photos remain

displayed. Stories are retold. The ex's name surfaces frequently in conversation. Messages are sent: You are not first. You are not acceptable.

This dynamic is incredibly disrespectful & deeply toxic. It undermines trust in the current relationship. A marriage must come first. Remember Genesis 2:24? Emotional triangles, divided loyalties, & deliberate provocations have no place in a marriage.

The motives behind this behavior may include attachment wounds, insecurity, jealousy, rivalry, or even simple boredom. Some people cannot tolerate being replaced. Others fear irrelevance more than they value integrity. For narcissists, maintaining control or influence, even indirectly, can feel more important than respecting boundaries.

None of these motives make the behavior acceptable.

Healthy closure requires humility, accountability, & restraint. It recognizes that once a relationship ends, especially without shared obligations, stepping back is an act of respect. True maturity releases what is no longer theirs. It does not hover on the outskirts, hoping to be noticed or used as leverage.

Likewise, a healthy family understands that honoring their own means protecting current commitments, not preserving past attachments for nefarious motives. When people refuse to let go, it reveals more about their inner emptiness than anything else.

In the end, lingering where one no longer belongs is avoidance of growth. No amount of proximity, comparison, or carefully staged encounters can be a substitute for genuine healing, accountability, & the courage to move forward with dignity.

Thank you for listening to my podcast!