

When Marriage Is All About Them: Divorcing a Narcissistic Spouse

October 13, 2026

Source: Vows to Verdict: Saiber Family Law Blog

Often, a divorce is contentious and litigated because one party or both are unreasonable in their positions or actions. In these cases, I frequently hear from my clients that the unreasonable behavior on the part of their spouse is because, among other reasons, that spouse is a “narcissist.”

Recognize Patterns, Not Just Labels

Narcissistic traits can include entitlement, an exaggerated sense of importance, limited empathy and difficulty handling criticism. However, selfish behavior does not establish narcissistic personality disorder, which requires professional evaluation.

When an allegation of narcissism is made, I tell my clients to focus on concrete questions: Does your spouse dismiss your concerns, resist reasonable compromise, or use money to pressure you? Do discussions about practical arrangements become arguments about blame? Does your spouse put the children’s best interest above those of themselves?

If there are children involved, and custody and parenting is a contested issue, it is often best to involve a mental health professional to weigh in on how the answers to the above questions may affect the best interest of those children.

What Matters in a New Jersey Divorce

You do not need to prove that your spouse is a narcissist to obtain a divorce. New Jersey permits no-fault divorce based on irreconcilable differences that have lasted at least six months, with no reasonable prospect of reconciliation, provided the applicable residency requirements are met.

Similarly, while narcissistic traits may make it more difficult to negotiate matters and resolve your case amicably, the Court will divide your property equitably regardless of the narcissistic traits of your spouse. Further, if a Court makes a determination and you can prove that the other spouse was unreasonable or acted in bad faith, you may be entitled to recover legal fees.

When children are involved, however, those narcissistic traits really come into play and are concerns that should be raised in the context of any harm it may cause the children. N.J.S.A. 9:2-4 focuses custody decisions on the child(rens) best interests, including safety and the parents’ ability to communicate and cooperate. Accordingly, it is important to focus on how specific conduct affects your children or parenting arrangements, rather than relying on accusations that your spouse is narcissistic.

Protect Yourself Without Fueling the Conflict

Start by preserving relevant messages and financial records, along with a dated account of significant incidents. Ask counsel which materials are legally relevant and how to obtain them appropriately. Keep necessary communications brief and factual, and discuss whether structured written exchanges would be suitable for your circumstances.

Discuss access to money, temporary living arrangements, and parenting expectations early. Set realistic settlement priorities so that responding to every provocation does not become the objective. Keep children out of adult disputes, and resist the temptation to litigate the relationship on social media.

Consider support from a licensed mental health professional as you manage the emotional strain of separation. Threats or safety concerns call for prompt, individualized guidance, not simply a firmer boundary.

Ultimately, the goal is not to persuade your spouse to admit fault or acknowledge your sacrifices; it is to develop a practical plan for financial stability, appropriate parenting arrangements, and a life beyond the conflict.

If you are looking for guidance regarding a potential divorce, please contact Stacey A. Cozewith, Esq., Chair of Saiber LLC's Family Law practice.