A blurred background image showing several hands of different skin tones clasped together in a supportive grip. The hands are positioned in the center and lower right of the frame, with a soft, out-of-focus effect. The overall color palette is warm and muted, with shades of beige, light brown, and soft blue.

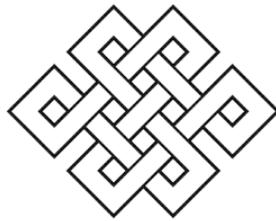
5 ESSENTIAL MOVES

to Grow Beyond Narcissism in Your Relationship

by Jeff Pincus, MSW, LCSW

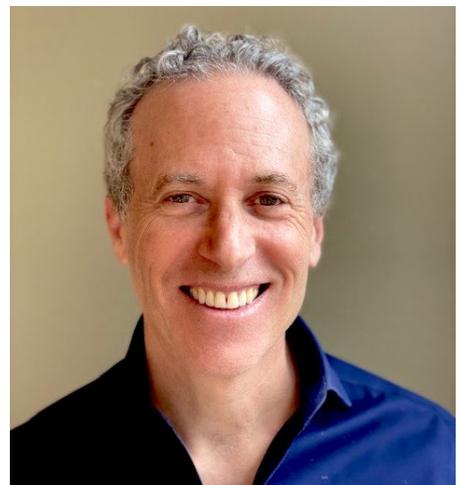
Having met with thousands of couples over twenty five years as a marriage coach and couple therapist, I've seen how unworked narcissism gets in the way of real intimacy and connection. I'm talking about garden-variety narcissism that doesn't make headlines or warrant a psychiatric diagnosis, but does prevent a couple from getting the most joy and satisfaction from their relationship.

Here are my top five suggestions for how to begin to break free from this type of self-distortion to create dynamic, adult love.



Jeff Pincus, MSW, LCSW has 30 years of experience as a clinician, teacher and trainer. He specializes in helping committed couples to heal, grow and love.

Jeff offers three day Couple Intensives, Loving Well Accelerator workshops, and on-line coaching for couples ready to make the transformational leap.



Visit his website and contact him at www.JeffPincus.com

MOVE

1

Utilize Courage to Be Real

Practice letting go of your fixation on perfection for yourself and your partner. Being a real person means that you own your strengths, talents and gifts and acknowledge your shortcomings and liabilities. Give up the illusion of being fearless and flawless, as that just doesn't exist in a genuine multi-dimensional person. Understand that who you are is bigger than your intelligence, physical attractiveness, wealth or accomplishments. You can appreciate these aspects of yourself, but understand that they are a flimsy foundation to erect a self on, and over-identifying with external qualities inevitably creates suffering for you and those you love. Risk revealing the aspects of your experience that are grounded in your humanity, including your imperfections, fears and doubts.

Your Practice

Next time you feel vulnerable, awkward or anxious, resist the impulse to inflate yourself or deflate your partner. Instead, reveal your emotions to your partner.

MOVE **2** Tolerate Your Partner's Emotions (especially when they're about you)

Because narcissism creates a fixation on a grandiose, superior, perfect self, people who haven't matured and grown through this developmental arrest have difficulty with their partner's feelings, especially negative emotions like anger, frustration, disappointment, and even sadness. These affective expressions in your partner are often experienced as a personal attack. To develop a real self that is both robust and resilient, practice demonstrating genuine interest in your partner's experience...especially if it's about YOU, and most especially when it's not positive. To do so, you will need to allow for a different perspective from your own and you'll also need to hold on to a sense that you have basic inherent value which doesn't depend on others' reflections of you being perfect.

Your Practice

Next time your partner is upset with you, don't buy into the instinctual drive to defend, justify or counter attack. Move against instinct, lean in towards him or her and demonstrate curiosity in their experience by saying "tell me more..."

MOVE

3

Drop the Judgement

We all judge. It's a process that's wired in to us by our evolutionary need to manage and cooperate in a complex social environment. It has survival value; yet, when these cognitive programs drive our interaction with the one that is most near and dear, love and trust degrade. If you're still strung out on feeling superior, then you are instinctually going to put your partner down at times. This might make you feel powerful temporarily, but you'll create a negative effect on your relationship by triggering pain in your partner. Your loved one will likely push back, which can create conflict, or they will just feel bad about themselves when they're around you. You'll be experienced as harsh and unloving. This judging and comparing mind also creates more anxiety for yourself as it doesn't allow you to just be you. Life shouldn't feel like a final exam or an olympic event for either of you as it steals the joy away from being together.

Your Practice

Tolerate your differences and resist the impulse to compare your partner or others to yourself in any way.

MOVE

4

Get Curious about the Real Stuff

If you are in relationship with someone who hasn't resolved their narcissistic issues, there is a good chance that you were seduced by appearances. Perhaps it was their charm, intelligence, attractiveness or power that magnetized you. It's likely that you will begin to feel an emptiness in the relationship over time, as those qualities, appealing as they are, aren't an avenue for connection and shared happiness. There is more to your partner than you've been led to know, so stop reinforcing that their value comes from their perfected veneer. Demonstrate a genuine interest in their deepest humanness by being curious about their longings and fears. When they are courageous enough to reveal emotional experiences that have remained hidden, be respectful and compassionate. Never use it against them in any context.

Your Practice

Facial expressions reveal our inner experience. Your partner likely learned to mask vulnerable and "undesirable" emotions like sadness and anxiety as it wasn't valued in the environment in which they grew up. Learn to read your partner's more subtle facial expressions. Look closely in their eyes and at their face, without being creepy or intrusive, to find their hidden experience.

move

5

Look at Yourself

Finally, if you love someone with narcissistic traits, you should look more deeply at your own narcissism. Do you bask in the glow of your partner's qualities? Are you using him or her to boost your own self esteem? If you are courageously honest with yourself, you may find that you use your partner's inflation to feel better about yourself by association. In this way, the two of you are not as different as it seems, just that your narcissism is the "quieter" kind, more internal rather than being on display. If this description fits your experience, get interested in your own creativity and self development. Stop trading on your partner's accomplishments. What are your secret longings? Risk setting your own goals and work towards accomplishing them, and get in touch with your innate worth that is separate from success, appearance or intelligence.

Your Practice

What are the qualities that you admire in your partner that you feel that you lack? Realize that you can cultivate whatever positive attributes you value through intention, commitment and practice.