



Conscious Life presents

Tools For Healing From Narcissistic Abuse

Guest: Ronia Fraser

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[00:00:10] Meagen Gibson

Welcome to this interview. I'm Meagen Gibson, your conference co-host.

Today I'm speaking with Ronia Fraser, a multi-award-winning trauma recovery coach and clinical hypnotherapist. And one of the leading experts in the field of narcissistic abuse recovery.

Being a survivor of narcissistic abuse herself, she's been helping abuse survivors from all over the world get back on their feet, regain their mental health, and recover who they were always meant to be.

Her pioneering approach is widely recognized as one of the most effective, structured, and masterful models for recovery from complex trauma. Ronia Fraser, thank you so much for being with us today.

Ronia Fraser

Thanks so much for having me.

Meagen Gibson

I want to start at the beginning, and can you tell us what is narcissistic abuse, and what makes it so dangerous?

Ronia Fraser

Yes, of course I can, I think it's also very important that we actually name it as it is. Because it's become such a huge buzzword over the last few years. It's just flying around left and right, and it's quite easy for people to just, somebody hurts our feelings, and then all of a sudden, now everybody gets labeled a narcissist, which actually isn't the case.

[00:01:21] Ronia Fraser

When we talk about narcissistic abuse, what we are actually talking about is emotional and psychological abuse at the most sophisticated level. It's not just like, oh, somebody hurts our feelings sometimes. There is much more to it, because what we are looking at is emotional blackmail. We're looking at the very tactical erosion of identity, systematic brainwash. It's really serious things.

Obviously, depending on where on the spectrum that person is, it can get really manipulative, very calculated, it's not just somebody who rubs us the wrong way. There is so much more to it.

Narcissistic abuse a lot of people think applies to romantic relationships only. But it's not exclusive to romantic relationships, because it can happen in the family, can happen in friendships, it can happen in the workplace, and the impact is the same on the survivor.

I think it's very important to clarify that even in a relationship with a narcissist, it's nothing like a normal relationship, and neither is the breakup. That's where oftentimes that disconnect happens.

Meagen Gibson

I'm so glad that you started there, because what comes up for me and what I want to ask next, is what is the difference between narcissistic abuse, and someone who is behaving narcissistically? Which a lot of us are capable of. How does it look and feel different? How can you decipher the difference?

Ronia Fraser

It depends, we all have narcissistic traits in us, and in a healthy, balanced way, we should as well. A lot of empaths are very proud for not having any narcissistic behaviors, or thoughts, or tendencies, or whatever, which isn't healthy either. Because if you think about it, if we are a balanced human being we also require a certain sense of self-love.

We have to like the person looking back at us in the mirror, and there is absolutely nothing wrong with it. A healthy sense of self, a healthy sense of self-belief. To that extent there is nothing wrong with it. There is also no harm caused to somebody else.

The classic definition of a narcissist, we think about narcissists falls in love with their own reflection in the mirror. If that was all it was, no harm would be done. When we talk about narcissistic abuse, it's really about how other people are treated, and as a consequence suffer really detrimental impact to their mental health, their physical health, their quality of life.

I think what's also important to point out here is, because a lot of people always ask me, are they doing this intentionally? Because you were just asking about the behaviors, and the label narcissistic abuse. It doesn't have to be intentional most of the time, most likely it isn't, unless it's really high up on the spectrum. At the end of the day, it doesn't matter though, because it's the impact that that behavior has on the person that's on the receiving end.

[00:04:48] Meagen Gibson

Absolutely. I'm so glad that we're talking about the scale of narcissism, because on the covert, I don't know what the exact words are, malignant narcissist, I think I've heard it called, is somebody who is behaving in a way that they're not even really conscious of. They're manipulative, but they don't even know that that's what they're doing, and they're trying to get their needs met, but there's maybe an emotional immaturity that shields them from the recognition of their manipulation, and the way that their behaviors are impacting other people.

Then on the other end, you've got the scheming, plotting movie version of a narcissist that is making someone question their entire existence, belief, value in the world. Is that right?

Ronia Fraser

No, I think that applies to any kind of narcissist, regardless of where you are on the spectrum. There is a shortcoming for them, because, as do all of us really, we have our needs that we want to have met, and that's being loved, belonging, which applies to the narcissist just as much as it does to an empath.

However, I think the big difference is that the self-awareness just isn't there. As I said, even just narcissistic behaviors cause a lot of damage. I think that's where the key is, and what we need to talk about, because those are the people that come to see coaches, and therapists, and medical professionals, and very often they are just written off.

It happened to me. That's how I ended up doing what I do, because I was looking for help and there was no help. I remember when I was really struggling with my mental health, I didn't know what had happened to me. I didn't even realize I had been abused. I thought I was the problem. I remember when I was looking for help I went to the GP, because that was my first thought, there's something not quite right with me.

So I go to the doctor and he just looked at me as like this little girl who had a broken heart, and tapped me on the shoulder, patted me on the shoulder, and was just like, "time will heal all wounds, just snap out of it already, poor little you."

I think that's why it's so important that we do talk about narcissistic abuse, and not only look at, how do we identify a narcissist? Because at the end of the day, it's always easy to find excuses for other people's behavior, but actually realizing what's going on for us.

As somebody who works in that field, and a lot of survivors go into the healing field, because they have a good heart, and they want to help other people. It's really important to raise the awareness of, what it is that we're actually dealing with, and how we identify it, and not just go like, "Oh, that woman just has lost the plot."

Meagen Gibson

I want to pause there for a minute so you can give us some more details, you briefly touched on it, but how might somebody feel when they're dealing with a narcissist? What are some of the things that are going to come up? What is some of that impact that's going to be so confusing and disarming, and that other people might not clock as what it is.

[00:08:18] Ronia Fraser

The first thing that will always apply, without exception, is walking on eggshells. When we deal with a narcissist, as I said, we can always find excuses for their behavior, maybe they had a stressful day at work, or whatever. That's why they need to lash out, that's why that mask comes off.

But actually, if you really go inside yourself, and you notice that in any kind of interaction pretty much, you're walking on eggshells because you're very scared about doing something wrong, saying something wrong, because you don't know what you do to unleash that wrath. When all of a sudden that really charming, loving, caring person turns into a monster.

What then happens in turn is because we are walking on eggshells all the time, we are really compromising our own needs, our own wants, just to accommodate that other person. If that is how you feel, then it's a big indication that you're dealing with a narcissist.

Really interestingly I had an email the other day where somebody was like, "Oh, I just wanted to reach out. I don't think it's as bad for me. I don't suffer from anxiety." And then I just asked her, "So do you have the sense of walking on eggshells?" And she hadn't even connected those two things, that that actually is anxiety of doing something wrong. Walking on eggshells is really a big, big indication, and again, it doesn't matter if that's at work, or in a relationship, or with a parent maybe even.

Another indication is that you look into the mirror and you do not recognize the person that's looking back at you anymore. That indicates that tactical identity erosion, that I already mentioned earlier. Because that's what a narcissist does, they take away everything that we think we are, and then we turn into ghosts.

I remember I was just a shell, I looked in the mirror, I didn't recognize that person. Sometimes there is nothing there at all anymore, because it's almost like see-through. It's very interesting when you see photos of survivors as they're going through that very active stage of the abuse, it's like all the color drains out of them, it's like you become see-through almost. You can actually see it on photos.

Another thing that really is a high indication that you are dealing with a very toxic person, is that you feel like you're losing your mind, and you kind of are, which is true. However, there is somebody sitting there pulling the strings. It doesn't happen from out of nowhere.

Gaslighting nowadays, everybody knows what gaslighting is. It was the word 2022. How sad is that? A few years ago, it meant absolutely nothing, it was just a movie. It really is, because the abuser distorts the reality to such an extent, that what happens to us is that everything we remember doesn't seem to be true.

Then you start questioning your own reality, you are questioning yourself, your sanity, and it's very, extremely destabilizing. Of course, when we walk on eggshells and we question ourselves, we don't trust ourselves anymore. That just makes the work of the narcissist even easier. There are so many indications, but as you can tell, it's really what's going on for us.

[00:12:01] Ronia Fraser

I think one more that's really important, because especially when it happens the first time, or the first time we kind of become aware of it, we don't know what's happening to us. We just know that something is really wrong, so that is an indication itself. I haven't met anybody who hasn't known right from the beginning that something was wrong. But because you cannot put your finger on it, you just brush it off for the sake of love.

Especially in the beginning, when you know something is wrong, you're not sure what is wrong. We don't have the language to explain what has happened to us. I know that I've used those words myself, I've heard it from other survivors as well. When we try to explain what's happening, we often refer to something along the lines of, "I don't know what's wrong with me. I feel like an addict," or "he or she is my drug, he or she is my heroin."

It doesn't only feel that way, it is an addiction. That's where the trauma bonding comes in, which is a whole session on itself. There is so much happening in the brain, but if that's how you feel, if that's how you describe yourself, of what's going on, very big indication that you're dealing with a narcissist. Because it feels like really true love, but actually what it is, is a chemical dependency.

Meagen Gibson

I love all of those explanations, and I think there's a lot of people at home probably hearing those and going, "Oh, oh, oh"

Ronia Fraser

Exactly, that's why we need to talk about it, because I don't care about the narcissist, they can tick all the boxes. You will always find a reason why, in your case, it's different. But those things, they're happening for us, and there is no excuse, there is no denying it that's actually happening.

Meagen Gibson

It also makes it really clear how if you're in this confused state, you're losing yourself on the surface, all of that describing, I can imagine you go into traditional therapy, and you're like, "this is how I feel, I'm confused, and I'm not satisfied with my relationship."

The well-meaning therapist is going to try to teach you good communication skills, and conflict management, or boundaries, and things like that. I know that for you, you say that traditional therapy isn't going to work in these situations. Can you tell us why that is?

Ronia Fraser

The reason why traditional therapy doesn't work, when I say traditional therapy, I talk about talk therapy, I talk about CBT, is because our brain cannot distinguish whether something's happening for real, or whether we are imagining it.

[00:15:01] Ronia Fraser

The chemical responses, the neurological reactions in the brain are all the same, whether we imagine it, or talk about it, or whether it's actually happening right now. As you go into your therapy every week, and I did the same thing, you talk about it, you analyze it, and cognitively you might get to a point where you understand how you ended up in this situation.

Or what's even worse is when the therapist, or the coach actually focuses on analyzing the narcissist's behavior. Because it's not about them, it never was, it's about the person that came out of it. Because the brain cannot distinguish whether it's happening, or whether we are talking about it, or imagining it, what happens in the body and the mind is exactly the same.

That's how you basically retraumatize yourself after every session. And what we have seen with traditional therapy is that people leave their sessions, and they actually feel worse after they leave, than before they came in. They go to therapy for years without actually having any results.

There is a time, and there is a place for traditional therapy. By no means I'm saying it's not useful, or have anything against it, not at all. But complex trauma just isn't it.

For example, if somebody is at a stage to just getting their heads around, and maybe needs a little support to get out of that relationship, for example, then a counselor, or therapist, or a coach, in that context might be quite good. Because at that stage, you still cognitively get your head around.

But once you reach the point where you want to do your healing, you want to leave that nightmare behind, and come out the other side. You need to go so much deeper than that, because the damage caused by narcissistic abuse is literally on any level of our being, it's emotional, it's mental, it's physical, it's spiritual.

There are so many different layers to it, so you can try as much as you want to cognitively figure it out, but no healing is happening, and we see it all the time, because I've literally never met a survivor who couldn't write a Ph.D. on the topic.

All of us have such an in-depth, theoretical knowledge, we know everything about narcissists, about narcissistic abuse. Then you start reading everything about trauma, but it all remains in the cognitive function. Despite having all this in-depth knowledge, people still suffer with their mental health, they are still struggling, and nothing is really changing.

That's why it's really important to move the healing at one point. First, it has to be in the cognitive function, just to understand, we are brainy people. But there will be a point where you know everything you need to know. And I'm intentionally saying everything you need to know, rather than everything there is to know. Because there's literally every day someone's coming up with something new. It doesn't matter.

There is a point where you know everything you need to know, and then it's really time to step outside and shift the focus, and then really dive deeper into the healing work, which is outside of the cognitive.

[00:18:35] Meagen Gibson

Absolutely, so important. What are some practical steps that abuse survivors can take right now, to kick-start their recovery?

Ronia Fraser

The first one, and the hardest one, is no contact. Everybody who has experienced narcissistic abuse, and has done the research, knows that this is rule number one of narcissistic abuse recovery.

But because you're an addict, of course it's very hard to do, and there will be a lot of excuses, why in your particular case it doesn't apply. I'm telling you, it does apply, and it is possible, and it's also necessary. Because if you think about that addiction element, the narcissist isn't only the drug, they are the drug dealer at the same time, which gives them complete control how you are allowed to feel.

You really need to cut off your supply, and your conscious mind will come up with a lot of excuses. In some situations, no contact really isn't possible, like for example, you are having legal proceedings going on, or you share custody with the children. It is still possible to really minimize the contact to such an extent that still allows you to create a safe space around you, that you require to heal.

That isn't possible if you are in regular touch with the narcissist, because you can put all your money, all your time, all your tears, into your recovery, you can have the best therapist in the world. As long as you are in touch, you will not heal, period.

That's why it's very important, as I said, it's the hardest step to do. Once you've done it, the impact is instant, because what happens is that your body starts regulating. It's literally like the poison very instantly starts leaving your body, and all of a sudden the brain fog lifts. You can start to think more clearly again, which then also allows you to navigate.

Yes, it is difficult, it is scary, and I'm not going to lie, it really is. But once you do it, the impact is immediate, and it is a complete game changer. That's a very practical step that you can do right now, block and delete. Not only them, but everyone that has anything to do with them, even if they were nice to you, whether that's family, or friends, or whatnot. Really you will notice the difference very quickly, I promise.

Another practical step what you can do right now, is stop telling your story. I just already explained why, and I'm not saying you don't have the right to tell your story, you absolutely do have your right to tell your story. But there is a time, and there is a place.

When we haven't done our healing yet, when we talk about it, it comes from a place of bitterness, and hurt, and resentment, and hate even. And that makes us appear as a crazy person because we are emotionally very charged. Of course you feel the need to tell your story, because what has happened to you is so horrific, and so out of this world, it's only natural that we want validation, and that we want to be believed.

[00:22:08] Ronia Fraser

However, when we are in those very acute stages, when we've just come out of that relationship, and we are really struggling with our mental health, the way we come across is crazy, which is part of the game.

Because if we are really emotionally charged, if we're emotionally unstable, if we cannot control our emotions, which are all symptoms of what we have experienced, then people think that there is something wrong with us. They just won't listen. So for now, stop telling your story, stop retraumatizing yourself. Remember, your brain cannot distinguish whether it's happening right now, whether you're talking about it.

Focus on your healing, and then you can tell your story, and the way you will tell your story at that point will be from a very, very different energy. You will notice how people actually start listening, and actually believing you.

So no contact, stop telling your story, shifting the focus. I just mentioned that already. How can you shift your focus? Self-care is an incredibly powerful thing to do, which I know is uncomfortable, but the beautiful thing is they can be learned, and it's designed to make us feel good. So self-care, self-care, self-care, very important.

Another thing is, I know it's a very difficult time right now for some of you that are listening, you're right in the midst of it, and it would be so nice to just meet somebody who takes all this pain away. That romantic notion of a knight in shining armor. The knight in shining armor doesn't exist, never has, never will. So please stop waiting for this knight and shining armor, and really put the work in for yourself. Because what has happened to you isn't your fault, but the healing is your responsibility.

I know it sounds very cliché, but I've walked that same road myself, and what awaits you on the other side is going to be worth it. The path that you're on right now, it's a very painful path. But, first of all, it doesn't have to be as long and painful as it's made out to be, because if you have the right support, and the right tools, it's so much quicker than you could imagine. It's also not a life sentence.

It really is such a fast track to personal development, because you are actually in a situation where you're now forced to really look at yourself. I mentioned it earlier already, all of this is not about them, this is all about you. I would like to invite everybody who's going through this right now, to really welcome this opportunity.

As I said, there are tools, and resources, and support available now, just a few years ago that wasn't the case, that really can kick start that recovery. All those practical suggestions that I just had is something that you can put into place right now.

And there will be resistance, but usually when we feel this kind of resistance, it just means there is something really incredible waiting on the other side of that.

[00:25:34] Ronia Fraser

Those are really small, really practical things to do right now that will make the biggest difference. And then from there, you can navigate much easier.

Meagen Gibson

I also think that if you're at the very beginning stages, you haven't made a single move yet, and somebody's hearing you talk, I am imagining them thinking, "Oh, my gosh, I don't have even an ounce of energy to begin." I just want to encourage people that all of the energy that you spend walking on eggshells, and trying to anticipate somebody else's behavior. And once you go no contact you reclaim all of that energy comes back to you.

I've literally experienced this, and it's freaky. All of a sudden you're like, oh, I didn't realize how much I was like, what a horrible leak I had of my life force, and energy, and focus was all over there. Once I closed off the leak, I had so much more fortitude to actually do all the things that you've already mentioned in addition to going no contact.

Ronia Fraser

One of my favorite sayings is, energy flows where the attention goes. You can write that down, and you can read it out loud three times, because the first time it might sound a bit weird, but it is so true. The energy always flows where the attention goes. So what are you actually going to focus on? Is it them, or is it you, and your well-being, and your healing? And actually moving forward.

That's two very different kinds of energies that you're engaging with. That reminds me, another practical step you can do right now is leave all of those social media groups. The ones with the trigger warnings, the victim support, the PTSD groups, because the content it's well meant, but it's created in a very unhealthy way, because it comes from this energy that you don't want to engage with.

That dark energy that drags you down, that's where we want to step out of. It's also linguistically very bad because it's usually done by survivors that haven't done their healing yet. They are not trained in linguistics, language is incredibly powerful. Another very practical suggestion I have for you is really step out of that.

Meagen Gibson

Some of the folks that I talk to around chronic pain, chronic disease, things like that, say the same thing. They're like, get out of the message boards, get out of the groups, the support groups. Everybody loves support, support is good, but at some point you got to take back the reins, and do a little bit of discomfort with yourself, and allow yourself to get to know yourself again, and build on your own strength.

Ronia Fraser

Support is important, and especially when we have experienced narcissistic abuse, it's such a lonely endeavor. Because there is such a huge disconnect between what we've experienced, and

what the rest of the world thinks they know. Because it's one of those things unless it has happened to you, there is no way that a healthy brain could even comprehend the horrors.

[00:29:02] Ronia Fraser

It is a very lonely journey, so support is important. But be very mindful where you're looking for support. And those support groups, most of them that you have online, or the Instagram accounts, the TikTok accounts, they are just not in the right energy.

If you are wondering right now, how would I know? You know, because you watch it, it makes you feel good, or you watch it and it gets you stuck in your head, and start overthinking things, remembering, replaying memories, just dragging you down.

If you've experienced narcissistic abuse, you're very perceptive to energies anyway, so you can trust yourself in that. If something makes you feel good, by all means, carry on. But if you feel that this is really keeping you stuck and dragging you down, just come out of those groups, unfollow those accounts, and do yourself that favor and find other accounts that move you in the right direction. Makes a huge, huge difference.

Meagen Gibson

Some of the things that you've been talking about are not trying to overthink, or over-learn our way out of pain, and that's not the way into healing. Lots of body-based practices are very much, trending is the wrong word, but lots of therapists and coaches are going toward body-based trainings and practices, which is awesome.

One of those that I know you're familiar with is havening. I was wondering if you could tell us about it, and the impact that it has on people.

Ronia Fraser

Yes sure, havening is one of my favorite things. I think everybody should have it in their toolbox. It's a very simple tool, and there are various ways you can apply it in more serious, more deep ways, but for that you would work with a practitioner.

However, havening is something that you can use yourself, and it's really beautiful because it regulates your nervous system literally within seconds. The way it works, all you need is your hands, that's all you need.

I can show you, you can follow along with me if you want, that's without any particular application, that's just a very basic havening touch, but you will notice what a difference this actually makes.

You put your right hand on your left shoulder, your left hand on the right shoulder. It's less complicated than it sounds, just cross your arms, and then in a gentle downwards motion from the shoulder to the elbow in just one direction. If you're wearing a really thick hoodie jumper, take it off, because it's about the touch. And just by doing this, you will already notice how calming this actually feels just within a few seconds.

[00:32:04] Ronia Fraser

What's happening here right now, is that we create delta brainwaves. If you go on the havening website, you can find all the research studies. King's College in London has run a research study on Havening and post-traumatic stress. If you're a geeky, brainy kind of person, go on havening.org, where you can find all the science-based stuff.

So that's the arms, then you can also use the face. Some people like it, some people not so much. I quite like it. That's obviously something that we do anyway, it's not rocket science. What do we do when we get stressed? We rub our forehead. That also feels very soothing, very calming.

My favorite version, is the public-friendly version, because that one you can literally do anywhere, it's just rubbing your hands together in a circular motion, just like that, at whatever speed feels right for you.

You're calming your nervous system. This is something you can do whenever you feel any sort of emotional overwhelm, any kind of anxiety, maybe you have to deal with a difficult person, you have to have a difficult conversation, or whatever it is.

The beautiful thing about this is you can literally do it anywhere and nobody knows what you're doing there, but what you are doing is you're regulating your nervous system. When we regulate our nervous system, we become responsive, response able rather than reactive. Because if our nervous system is on high alert we are very reactive.

We get triggered and then whatever the reaction is, it just blows up. Whereas when we regulate our nervous system, it gives us the capability to basically pause, and then you respond rather than react.

If you use havening as a self-care practice, which I think it's self-care tool number one, then it also helps to really build up your resilience. Because it changes the landscape of your brain, you're releasing serotonin, you're releasing oxytocin, it's all feel good hormones.

It's a really beautiful thing to do. I would encourage anybody to just give it a go, and go on the havening website if you would like to have more information. I love it, I teach it. It's the first thing I teach my clients because that way they can manage their own emotional state independently of me.

Meagen Gibson

I love that, too, because as opposed to something like tapping, which is also a great tool, I'm not going to be in conversation with a difficult person, because that also signals to them that I'm trying to comfort myself. But all of the things that you just named, I can do, and nobody will know why I'm doing them, or what my intention is, but they will still have a great impact on me. That's great.

Ronia Fraser

Yeah, I love it. It's a really good practical tool, and you can do it under the table, on the table. I even do it when I do public speaking, I just stand there and I just go like that. Don't tell anybody, but I do.

[00:35:38] Meagen Gibson

Your secret's safe with me.

Ronia, how can people find out more about you and your work?

Ronia Fraser

You can find me on my website, roniafraser.com.

I also have a freebie on there for you, especially because you mentioned people that are very early in the recovery process, just having found out about it. It's a framework that I have designed it's called *The Road to Recover Me*.

It's a timeline that will help you see how far you've already come, which is probably much further than you think you are, where you are at right now, and also what lies ahead of you. Because it's such a whirlwind.

I designed this framework based on my own experience, and then also working with clients. The interesting thing is even though all of our stories are straight out of the movies, the tactics used by the abusers are all the same, and the consequences for us as survivors are all the same. I noticed that the recovery also follows the same motions. Everybody in their own time, but it's the same motions. So that book, that freebie ebook, will allow you to get a bit of an idea, a bit of a clearer understanding on where you're at, and how to move forward.

Ronia Fraser

You can find me on social media, so swing by and give me a like, I'm on Facebook, on Instagram, it's rocknrollcoachroni.

I just released a book, which I briefly want to mention because we talked about shifting the focus. For shifting the focus you need practical resources, we talked about self-care, and self-care isn't just getting your hair and your nails done. Self-care goes so much deeper than that.

I know from my own experience how difficult it seems to do self-care, to practice self-care. I created a book, it's called *Me, Myself and I*, which is a workbook, it's a journal with over 50 practical tools and exercises. It's basically me just dishing out a self-care buffet. You can try out all those tools, very simple tools, and if you like them, you put them in your toolbox, and if they don't resonate just yet, you just come back later.

Me, Myself and I, it's on Amazon, US, Europe. And because narcissistic abuse doesn't discriminate, I have a version for men as well. That's for the ladies, that's for the boys. If you need a little kickstart, if you're looking for practical tools, and really something that makes a quick difference in your recovery, go check it out.

Meagen Gibson

Ronia, thank you so much for being with us today.

[00:38:30] Ronia Fraser

Thank you so much for having me.