



# Controlled Contact

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“The most dangerous thing is illusion”-Ralph Waldo Emerson

It really is. Illusion is dangerous. As much as you want to be rid of the horror of a pathological relationship; as much as you want the chaos to end; as much as you try to make the quiet moments a sign of peace, it is all really an illusion. Just because it's over does not mean that it's done. In fact, the relationship being over can often mean the beginning of a new phase; wash, rinse, repeat.

In many cases you may be facing parallel parenting or endless court battles. The problem is, you are different. You know what you are up against. The truth is, he is not different. You can't forget that. So how do you manage what is in front of you?

When “no contact” is not possible because of kids or court, you can institute a policy for yourself called “Controlled Contact”. Controlled contact as in you are in control. You set the rules; you create and hold on to the boundaries. There is no denying that this will be like walking on a tightrope...with gators in the pond below...this is going to be hard. But when you have control your path will be less challenging, easier to manage. Most importantly, without illusion you will decrease the psychological impact that he has on you.

Controlled contact begins with evaluating how you communicate. You must look at email, text, phone and in person. The first step is to completely eliminate contact in the most ways possible. So, ask yourself “Do I need to see him?”, “Do I need to call or talk on the phone with him?”, “Can I limit my contact to email only?” Make a choice to eliminate at least two methods of contact. This means that you will no longer have ANY communication with him via those methods. You will not respond nor will you reach out via those methods.

The second step in controlled contact is to follow some simple communication rules. Begin with limiting the words you use. This means that instead of a lengthy email or text you limit your words to 3 or 4. You can respond with “OK.” or “Yes.” or “No.” Those are complete sentences by the way. Next, if you must use more than a couple of words eliminate all emotional language. You can do this by not using phrases like “That's not fair.”, “You keep hurting me.”, “You just don't get it.” etc. All of these phrases and phrases like them convey emotion. This emotional language is just the thing that he needs to hook you...just the thing that he will know has you still hooked.

The third step is to be an observer during contact. Stay alert by using linking and labeling. Linking and labeling is a technique to link the behavior of the cluster b with the label of the behavior – identifying it as projection, gaslighting, crazy-making triangle, etc. For example, pay attention and identify when you see the crazy making triangle. Listen to his words and the position he speaks from, is it victim, persecutor or rescuer? When you know which role he is speaking from it will help you to remember that you do not want to be in any of those positions with him...so be the wall. Give him nothing back. You have to stay outside of the crazy-making triangle because he never will.

The fourth step is to track your success. Write down what works and what doesn't- when you make a mistake, write it down and don't do it again. When you do this you are paying attention to patterns of his reaction to things. This allows you to get your feet back underneath you and actually be able to predict his responses.

Finally, write down rules for yourself. For example, when I talk I am only going to talk on the phone to him for more than 15 minutes. Another rule might be when you talk stay on a certain topic-like the kid's school issues. When you set rules for yourself you are taking back your power. Throughout the relationship he controlled the conversations, content and all. Now, you decide.

For you to preserve your mental health you must stay in control when you can. The aftermath of a pathological relationship is not perfect and it can often leave you feeling like you will never get control back again. But, the truth is, once you rid yourself of the illusion that he will ever be any different, you gain some power back.