

## WHEN YOUR EX-HUSBAND TRIES TO USE YOUR KIDS TO CONTROL YOU AFTER THE DIVORCE

*Hi. This is Natalie Hoffman of [Flyingfreenow.com](http://Flyingfreenow.com), and you're listening to the Flying Free Podcast, a support resource for women of faith looking for hope and healing from hidden emotional and spiritual abuse.*

NATALIE: Welcome to Episode 188 of the Flying Free Podcast. I want to start this episode by sharing something with you. I started the Flying Free Podcast almost four years ago, and by God's grace, we have published a podcast episode every single week without fail during that time. Right now, we have over a million downloads on the Apple Podcast platform and over 14,000 listeners over there, and that is pretty incredible. And you know what? It's because of you, the listeners. I don't advertise this podcast. It's been a grassroots effort from the beginning, and you are the ones spreading the word. I feel like it's like an underground movement of Christian women and therapists and advocates who are reaching out to survivors one woman at a time and letting them know about this free resource.

You're also spreading the word when you leave ratings and reviews, because there's an algorithm on these kinds of platforms that perks up and recommends podcast episodes to others when it sees that people are responding, listening, and leaving ratings and reviews. So that part is thanks to those of you who have done that. And I want to share a few examples of those reviews right now.

Here's what one person said: "I listen on behalf of my daughter who endured fifteen plus years of abuse. It's helping me know how to help her and the four beautiful children who lived through it also." Here's another one: "Holy cannoli! Just listened to the episode about sexual reformation. Absolutely fantastic stuff. This podcast is both live-changing and life-saving." Here's a third one: "Oh my goodness — this podcast just described my life. I'm on the other side of the abuse now. I'm on the healing and empowering road. But I can relate with everything mentioned here. I will be following the podcast and recommending it to everyone I know." And here's a fourth one, and then we'll move on to our question: "The truth sets us free. Natalie has a gift for describing emotional and spiritual abuse. It's so confusing, but she is so clear and practical about expressing the reality of surviving soul-murder. I'm always wanting to share with others. If someone has eyes to see and ears to hear, she will illuminate this subject of abuse. I rarely remember sermons, but I remember what Natalie teaches. Natalie is so real, and she gives real hope about how to walk in the truth and become who you were created to be. The truth does allow us to thrive and fly free. Thank you for giving us wings, Natalie."

So those are just super encouraging, and I just want to thank you. My team and I do not take those ratings and reviews for granted, and we know that it requires a bit of your time and some emotional energy too, so we're very grateful.

Okay, today I'm going to answer two listener questions. And by the way, if you have a question, you can leave one too. Just go to the show notes for this podcast episode over at my website, [flyingfreenow.com/188](https://flyingfreenow.com/188), and there will be a little microphone there. You can do it on your phone or whatever device you're using and just click the "play" button and record a quick question. And then I may end up answering it on a future podcast episode. Okay, here's the first question for today:

LISTENER: Hi Natalie. I separated from my husband in November 2019, and the divorce was final in May of 2021. We have three sons, ages sixteen, fourteen, and eleven, who have been alienated from me and do not spend much time with me. J, my ex, continually shames and condemns me in one text and then sends a heart telling me that he loves me in the next. He's made no attempt to take responsibility for any part of the failed marriage. He's the victim and regularly falls apart in front of the boys, saddling them with his emotional baggage. He tells them everything we talk about, whether it's appropriate or not for them to hear — even private text conversations that we have.

Even with this, I'm wondering if I should go back home to be with my sons. I think about this daily and it's beginning to consume me. I'm depressed, I feel very alone and like a massive failure as a Christian and a mom, and a massive disappointment. I don't even know what I'm supposed to be doing besides working full-time as a nurse if I'm not being a physically present mom to my sons on a daily basis. I'm losing them, and he lets me know that very frequently. I feel like a marionette being controlled from afar. I'm believing all the negative things that he says about me, and I don't know what God is saying about me or to me. All I hear is crickets. If you have any insight or encouragement, I would greatly appreciate it. Thank you.

NATALIE: If I could talk to this listener, I would probably want to clear up a few things. I can't really tell by this question if she has no contact with her kids or if she's sharing custody in the way that a divorce agreement would stipulate. It sounds like maybe her ex is keeping them from her, and then I would want to know if that is in the divorce agreement, that she is not allowed partial custody of the kids, or what the divorce agreement actually says. I have seen situations like this where the ex-wife has legal custody of the kids for her share each month, but she doesn't take her rightful custody due to fear or maybe thinking that she doesn't have that right or maybe because the kids have been alienated from her by the ex.

But none of this is really explained that well in the question, so it's difficult to know what angle to approach this without knowing some of those details. So I'm just going to share some of my thoughts on each of her comments based on the information that I have, but please know, especially if you're the one that asked the question, I don't have all the facts, so I may give advice or information that doesn't apply because I just simply don't have all the facts.

You said that your kids don't spend much time with you, so without knowing why, I would encourage you to look into getting as much time as you legally can get with them. So if your divorce agreement, for example, says that you have them 50% of the time, then that agreement needs to be enforced. It's a legal agreement. And unfortunately, nobody is going to help you make sure that happens except you. Your ex isn't, and no one is going to do it. The courts will help you if they're made aware of it, but you're the one that needs to make them aware. You're the one who cares — these are your children. You can file a motion with the court to ensure that the agreement is being honored by your ex.

So if I were in your shoes and this was the case, I would do a google search on every question that you have about this process of filing a motion with the court to get the court to take a look at your divorce agreement and make sure that it's being enforced. Your local courthouse will also... Most courthouses have people specifically there to help walk individuals through these kinds of processes. So you can go to your local courthouse and see if you can get some help there.

Now setting that aside, I think the greatest issue that I'm seeing in this situation — again, only going by the information that's given in this question — is an issue of focus. Even though you are divorced, from what you're saying, it sounds like you're still in your ex's web. You are still spinning around in his universe. You are still texting with him. You're still communicating with him in ways that are really not necessary and that aren't helpful for your own personal healing as well as your own ability to focus on your own parenting relationship with your children. It's all about the ex — what he's saying, what he's doing, his emotions, his thoughts, his results, his drama. You have not yet established boundaries for yourself in this relationship. He is still successfully controlling your life from a distance through your mind, even though you're divorced. And he knows, based on past experience, that he can confuse you with his mixed messages. He knows that you will read his mixed messages and respond to them. So it's really the perfect setup for him.

Now, if I were coaching you this week (every week I coach women in Flying Higher and Flying Free), if you were in the Flying Higher program — that's my program for Christian

divorced women — and if you came into the coaching call this week and asked this question, we would be able to dive into all of this. We'd figure out exactly what's going on there. I'm guessing that it's some version of the thought that he has credibility — that his thoughts have credibility and yours don't. Somehow, his thoughts and experiences matter to you more than yours do. You're still throwing yourself under the bus, because when he says you're a failure and a disappointment and that you've abandoned the family, there is a part of you inside who, for whatever reason, chooses to believe him and give his thoughts and opinions weight and credibility instead of your own mind in this matter.

So I'm seeing that there are three voices here in your life overall in general: his voice is in your life, God's voice is in your life, and your voice is in your life, and all three voices are able to speak just fine. But you are focused, laser-focused, on only one voice, and that's his voice. And that's why you can't hear your voice or God's voice at this point.

So your challenge is going to be to either turn down the volume of his voice or take your focus off of it or maybe even turn off his voice altogether other than very transactional interactions that are related only to the kids — pickups and dropoffs and that kind of thing. That's my relationship with my ex. We don't have a relationship other than a quick text — "I'll be picking them up at this time," or whatever. And then next, you'll want to tune into or turn up the volume of your own inner voice, which could be complicated. Because right now, there's part of you inside that is basically parroting his voice. So you're going to want to find your own inner voice that is not connected to his.

We're going to talk about this in a minute, but this is basically detaching from his universe so that you can live in your own universe. So you'll want to tune in to your own inner voice as well as God's voice, which is also actually inside of you. I mean, the Bible says the Holy Spirit lives inside of us, and He promises to give us wisdom and direction. The issue is never that He's not there or that He's silent. He doesn't give us the silent treatment. He doesn't cut us out. He doesn't abandon us. He's always with us. Nothing can separate us from His love. The issue is what we choose to believe. We're not believing that He's there, and if we don't believe He's there, then we're not going to feel Him or sense Him even though He is there, because we're basically putting on blinders, and then we're not feeling Him, okay? And then we're not listening because we've chosen to listen to this other voice instead, alright?

Now, this is good news. This is not bad news — this is good news, because it means that you have control over this part of your life. We don't have any control over what this guy says or does, over what he texts us. We're going to talk in a little bit about how he does a good thing one minute and a bad thing the next. We don't have any control

over that. But we do have control over our own mind in the matter, and we do have control over what we focus on. That's where your power lies. That's your superpower, okay?

Now we all do these things, of course. We get our focus off of our own voice, off of God's voice, and we start listening to other voices, so please do not add to your anxiety and stress by shaming yourself for being a normal human being. But now that you're aware of this tendency that you have, this is going to be where your real work begins. You're not going to change by listening to a podcast episode. We need to work on this, and you can work on this with your therapist, or if you or if any of the rest of you that are listening, if you're divorced and you want to do this work with me inside of my program specifically designed for you, you can learn about my program. It's called Flying Higher, and you can apply by going to [joinflyinghigher.com](http://joinflyinghigher.com).

Now, if you are spending your allotted time that the court has given you to spend with your boys and it's just not very much time, then I would just encourage you to stay present with them and focus on them during that brief amount of time that you do have rather than, again, thinking about your ex and his universe and his opinions and all of his drama. You're going to enjoy your time with your boys so much more if you can tune out your ex and tune in your boys. Turn off his volume and turn up the volume of your kids. Rather than thinking about what you don't have with them — which, again, is not something you can control or change, unless, of course, like I said at the beginning, if you aren't taking your legally given time with them or if you aren't fighting to get that legally given time with them, then you could change that — but if you are getting all of your legally allotted time with them, then focus your thoughts and emotional energy during that limited time on your boys and what you do have with them.

An example in my own life is that the first year after my divorce, my then fifteen-year-old son chose to live with his dad full-time. And I didn't argue with him. I was not going to push it, because I just feel like, if we push a boy that age, they're just going to run the opposite direction, right? So what I did instead is I invited him to his favorite breakfast restaurant every Saturday morning. We just kind of had a standing date, and we would eat breakfast and chat for about an hour. That's it. That was my precious time with that child.

Now nine months later (and I'm not saying this is going to happen every time), but nine months later in my situation, he did choose to move in with me full-time, and he's been with me for the last five years. I'm not saying this kind of outcome is going to happen, but I honestly wasn't looking for that outcome anyway. I was just enjoying the time that

I got to have with my son, period. "One hour a week — is that it? Okay! Let's go!" And that entire time that I was with him, I was focused on enjoying him and his life and his presence. I let go of everything else. I didn't think about anything else during my time with him — I just thought about him. I asked him questions, found out how school was going, all that. That's it.

It's so simple, but it kept me in more of a state of joy and abundance rather than a place of lack and scarcity, and the only difference was in my mindset. It was always just one hour a week — that's all I got. But we get to choose what we make our circumstance mean for us. We can make it mean, "I only get an hour a week with my child. It sucks; it's terrible; it's horrible. I'm going to lose my child," or we can make it mean, "Hey, I get one entire, magical hour every single week with my child? This is amazing." Do you see the difference?

Just because your ex says that you're losing the boys, it doesn't mean you're losing the boys. That's his thought. He literally just made that up in his head and then he said it to you. Why do you think he says things like that? Because they're true? No. Because he knows you're going to react the way you do. He knows that you will buy in and believe his nonsense. He knows that when you believe his crap, you're going to feel like a loser, you will second-guess yourself, you will text with him, you will try to be better, you will believe you are losing your boys, and guess what? Here's the really tragic thing: When you believe that you're losing your boys, you feel terrible in your body, and when you feel terrible in your body, then you're not able to show up for your boys in the ways that both you and your boys need to build an attached and trusting relationship. And then when that happens, the result proves your belief that you're losing your boys. You end up losing your connection with them even during the time that you do get with them. Do you see how this works?

Your ex cannot make you lose your boys, alright? Even if you were enjoying the little amounts of time... And by the way, I have to say this. There are people in my program... I can think of one in particular who had a really serious case of parental alienation, and she just slowly worked at just building that relationship with that one child — it was also a boy — over time. Just the little amounts of time that she got here and there she just focused on them. We worked with her on this, and over time, she has repaired that relationship and reestablished a solid relationship with that child. So it can be done, but it's going to require a little bit of a different way of looking at the whole situation than perhaps what you're doing right now.

Alright, now I want to address the part where your ex condemns you in one text and then sends a heart emoji in another text. You know, where he thinks he's the victim and



he doesn't take personal responsibility. You need to know, and all of you need to know, all of that kind of behavior, that's just a given with abusers. Of course he does that. That's who they are. We don't need to be surprised when an abuser does this. That is what they do.

Being surprised or expecting them to be different than that is like going to the pet store and buying a duck and then being super surprised and disappointed when you get it home and it doesn't meow or curl up with you at night or feel soft and cuddly. Why would it? It's a duck. You thought you bought a cat? Well, you were wrong. You bought a duck. If you want a cat, you need to buy a cat. But expect a duck to do what ducks do, which is quack and make a mess, and don't be surprised or disappointed by that. When he lies to you and says, "You're losing the boys," he's just quacking, because that's what ducks do. That's it. You get to decide if you want to believe his quacks or not, if you want to give his quacks any credibility or not.

Now in both of my programs, Flying Free and Flying Higher, one of the biggest breakthroughs that women get is when they finally really see this. The lightbulbs go on, they finally make that connection, and they detach from their partner emotionally and intellectually. They detach from his universe. We have ten lessons in Flying Free specifically created to help you with this process. It's called "Detach and Detox." Once you are detached, truly, their spell over you is largely broken, and then you can actually be talking with them and watching the whole conversation go down without feeling much of anything other than fascination at how the ducks quack. But it no longer means anything about you.

Now, if you're listening and you're not divorced — you're married or maybe you're separated or maybe you're in the middle of a divorce — and you would like to see this kind of growth and ability to manage your own thoughts and emotions around your husband in your own life, then the Flying Free program is a very inexpensive but profoundly life-changing place where you can learn and practice in a community that will support you, and you can grow in this area. And you can learn about that program and apply by going to [joinflyingfree.com](http://joinflyingfree.com). Super easy. [joinflyinghigher.com](http://joinflyinghigher.com) is for divorced women, and then [joinflyingfree.com](http://joinflyingfree.com) is for women who are not divorced. Alright.

LISTENER: Hi. I just joined the Flying Free Sisterhood, and I've been in the group for gosh, maybe twelve days? And already I'm going, "Oh my gosh." "Aha" moments galore, not going to lie. The journaling exercises, taking a look at just little things, realizing that I wear a steady diet of black when I used to wear vibrant colors, realizing that the tiny little things that I used to love I stopped doing the minute I got married, and I started

doing them again. So in a very short period of time, there have been some really amazing “aha” moments, so thank you so much.

NATALIE: Okay, here is our second question:

LISTENER: Good morning. It's morning in South Africa. My husband and I have been separated now for almost three years. He is now the kindest, sweetest person I've ever seen. And I'm conflicted — I don't know what's going on. I mean, he was not like that in our marriage. He was very emotionally abusive, and I was broken down to every last bit of my soul. And now when he comes over to see the kids, he is the sweetest and kindest person I've seen in a long time. Why? Why would that be?

NATALIE: In the private forum where the women in my programs gather for online conversations, this is by far one of the most common subjects of conversation. There is so much confusion over the abuse cycle. You guys, in a normal relationship, there is no abuse. Period. Like, ever. When you are with a healthy person, they don't abuse you, because that's not who they are. They're like cats, okay? When I say they're cats, I'm referring to the whole idea of they're not ducks — they're actually a real cat. So when you go to the pet store and buy a cat, the cat is never ever going to quack. Ever. They just don't do that, because that's not what cats do. They respect other humans. Healthy people respect other people, including you. They are mature, they take personality responsibility all the time — not just when they want to manipulate someone. Not just as a pretend sort of a thing.

So let's talk a little bit about how predators in the wild as well as human predators work. Do they come out and show their hand? Do they come up to you and say, “Hi! You will want to get together with me, because I'm going to hurt you.” Does a lion come right up to a gazelle and say, “Hold still. I'm going to bite you now.” No. Why? Because if a lion did that, the gazelle would get away, and the lion would starve. If a human predator did that, the victim would say, “Oh, no thanks,” and get away. Predators have to be sneaky if they want to win. They have to pretend that they aren't there when they really are or they have to surprise their victim or they have to pretend that they're a good person, and thereby pull the wool over the victim's eyes.

So when survivors ask this question, “Why? Why is my husband acting so nice now that we're separated,” how do we answer that question? Think about it. What is an abuser's motive? They want to get you back under their control, so why is he being nice? To get you back under his control. Once he's got you there, what's he going to do? He's going to go back to being mean, right? We know this. How do we know this? Because that's his long history with you. Trust the history, ladies, not the nice words — the history, the



actions, the facts, okay? What they say doesn't count.

This is the abuse cycle. Mean, nice, mean, nice, mean, nice, mean, nice. But guess what? Is the nice really nice? No, it's not. So when we say, "Oh, he's just the sweetest, kindest man now," when he broke you down to the last bit of your soul before, is that really true that he's the sweetest, kindest man? No, that's not true. The real question is not, "Why is he being the nicest guy now," because we know the answer to that question. The real question is, "Why are we choosing to believe? Why are WE choosing to believe that he's the nicest guy now?" I think what he's doing is pure evil. Pretending and hiding and acting like a little lamb when he's actually a wolf — I'm sorry, but that is pure evil.

Here's the thing: The sweetest, kindest men in the world, of which I know a few, they are always sweet and kind to everyone. They would never in a million, trillion years break anyone down to the last bit of their soul — let alone their intimate partner — ever. I personally think that this woman's husband is extremely abusive, and his behavior, pretending to be the sweetest, kindest guy, is extremely abusive. So this woman's challenge is going to be to see his abuse for what it actually is.

And you guys, that is all I have for you today. Thank you so much for listening. Don't forget to leave a rating and review if you haven't already. Until next time, fly free.