

Do you ever wonder if a relationship is more difficult than you can bear? Why are you hurting so much? Feeling confused and always wondering what's wrong with you/your relationship? Are you continually being told that you are the problem? Do you carefully weigh your words before you speak them for fear of lighting the fuse that will set off the next explosion? If so, you may be dealing with a narcissist.

A narcissist often presents as super confident, but what hides behind their mask is a fragile self-esteem and a low sense of self-worth. They need to always be proving how great, special, and wonderful they are. They have a tendency to overreact to the slightest criticism. Simply stated, their ego cannot handle criticism.

Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD), as defined by the Mayo Clinic, is a mental disorder in which people have an inflated sense of their own importance, a deep need for admiration, and a lack of empathy for others. Research indicates that narcissism exists in both males and females, with a slightly higher percentage being males.

It is important to note that narcissism exists on a spectrum. The most severe narcissists are highly manipulative and will frequently engage in chronic lying, insulting and screaming behavior. Consequently, the more narcissistic traits an individual possesses, the greater the damaging influence that they will have on others.

NPD is complex and difficult to identify because narcissists often present as highly competent and socially charming. On the outside they appear to be wonderful. They may even hold positions of power and influence in their community. Narcissists captivate the news with their need for attention and admiration. They can be easily spotted in Hollywood and the political arena. Many are drawn to them like a moth to a flame.

Are you in a relationship with a narcissist? Anyone trapped in a narcissistic relationship is likely to feel as though they are on an emotional roller coaster.



NARCI SSISM

The relationship **killer**

by Michelle Kelley

Most people get into relationships for love and connection, but a narcissist has a different agenda. A narcissist is not capable of love and emotional connection. Lacking empathy prevents them from being able to emotionally connect to others. A narcissist seeks control and admiration from a relationship.

Many of my clients involved in a narcissistic relationship feel as though there is no use in talking about their situation because they expect no one will believe what they are experiencing (behind closed doors). Victims are likely experiencing a combination of emotional abuse, verbal abuse, physical abuse, control and emotional manipulation.

It may appear that the narcissist lives a double life. They present as caring, connected and socially confident, but within their personal relationships they are often cold, uncaring, self-absorbed and filled with insecurity/shame. Without validation, the victim is likely to have self-doubt, confusion and depression. Underlying difficulties (i.e. abuse, control, manipulation) in a narcissistic relationship are rarely seen by others. If you are in such a relationship, you know what I am talking about. The impact of being in a narcissistic relationship can only be measured by the pain the perpetrator inflicts on the victim.

Narcissism is a term which is often used loosely. It is not the same thing as selfishness or vanity. Taking a ton of selfies, placing a great deal of emphasis on looks, or hogging a conversation does not make one a narcissist. A true mental health diagnosis can only be made by a doctor or mental health professional.

I feel strongly that knowledge is power (i.e. empowering). In my counseling work I see many individuals struggling and experiencing great pain and confusion in their relationships because they do not have adequate information (about NPD). They find themselves falling deeper and deeper into a black hole of self-doubt and depression wondering if they are crazy, deeply flawed, or both.

My general rule is that if you are the one asking “what’s wrong with me” and you are the one seeking help and deeper understanding, then you are most likely not the one with a personality disorder. Most of the time it is the victims (of any personality disorder) that end up in therapy asking

the “why” questions. A hallmark trait of a personality-disordered person is that they do not look at themselves, they seek to blame others.

Common Characteristics of a NPD individual:

- Grandiose sense of self-importance
- Sense of entitlement / arrogance
- Lack of empathy
- Requires excessive admiration
- “My way or the highway” attitude
- Easily rages (especially in interpersonal relationships)

In a healthy relationship between two adults, there is mutual respect, trust, and balance of power. In a narcissistic relationship, the narcissist seeks to dominate and control the other person. Most never realize they are being controlled. They live a life that isn’t their own anymore. It may feel like a life of quiet desperation!

Narcissism can be found in various relationships: the parent-child relationship, family relationships, significant-other relationships and work relationships. Adult children of narcissists will often struggle with issues of self-worth and depression. They have difficulty seeing “reality” as they are continually told what their reality looks like.

Four Parts to the Healing Journey:

- Setting limits
- Standing your ground
- Implementing self care (This is very important as you have likely not been caring for yourself as it takes all of your time and energy to care for the NPD individual)
- Seeking professional help

Is narcissism on the rise? What percentage of relationships are affected by narcissism? These are hot questions currently being debated in the field of psychology. My hope is to raise awareness of narcissism. You cannot have a healthy relationship with a narcissist.

I believe narcissism affects many people’s lives. The closer a NPD individual is to your inner circle, the more affected you will be. Don’t despair if you see yourself in some of these descriptions. There is help available. The more you know and understand about narcissism, the more equipped you will be to empower yourself and seek professional help. It’s all about having information, being self-aware and striving for healthy relationships. You deserve to have peace of mind. ❖

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RECOMMENDED READINGS:

The Wizard of Oz and other Narcissists
by Eleanor D. Payson

Trapped in the Mirror, Adult Children of Narcissists in their Struggle for Self
by Elan Golomb

Will I Ever Be Free of You? How to Navigate a High-Conflict Divorce
by Dr. Karyl McBride

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