

## Narcissistic Traits

A pervasive pattern of grandiosity (in fantasy or behavior), need for admiration, and lack of empathy, beginning by early adulthood and present in a variety of contexts, as indicated by five (or more) of the following:

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- Lacks empathy: is unwilling to recognize or identify with the feelings and needs of others
- Has a grandiose sense of self-importance (e.g., exaggerates achievements and talents, expects to be recognized as superior without commensurate achievements)
- Has a sense of entitlement, i.e., unreasonable expectations of especially favorable treatment or automatic compliance with his or her expectations
- Is interpersonally exploitative, i.e., takes advantage of others to achieve his or her own ends
- Is often envious of others or believes others are envious of him or her
- Requires excessive admiration
- Shows arrogant, haughty behaviors or attitudes
- Believes that he or she is "special" and unique and can only be understood by, or should associate with, other special or high-status people (or institutions)
- Is preoccupied with fantasies of unlimited success, power, brilliance, beauty, or ideal love

### **Lacks empathy: is unwilling to recognize or identify with the feelings and needs of others**

Lack of empathy is one of the most striking features of people with narcissistic personality disorder. It's a hallmark of the disorder in the same way that fear of abandonment is in borderline personality disorder.

"Narcissists do not consider the pain they inflict on others; nor do they give any credence to others' perceptions," says Dr. Les Carter. "They simply do not care about thoughts and feelings that conflict with their own." Do not expect them to listen, validate, understand, or support you."

Here are examples from partners of narcissists:

- *He would actually get mad at me if I was sick. I said, "I sat here with you for days when you were depressed and couldn't get out of bed. And now you can't even be a little nice to me when I am sick?"*
- *My partner would hurt my feelings just when things were going well. When I would question him about it, he would make up excuses and tell me I'm wrong for feeling the way I did, and if I didn't like it there was something wrong with me.*
- *I could spend an hour detailing how I felt hurt and she would sit there, cold as ice. When it was her turn to speak, she tore down every word that came out of my mouth until I had to apologize for expressing how I felt. I ignored this red flag and made excuses to myself and others.*

Note that narcissists can pick up on social cues and can "fake it" when necessary. Aside from looking "normal," the hope is that they will get something back.

This lack of empathy is so foreign to us—even some animals show evidence of empathy—that shocking instances can break through the denial and the hoping that one day we will get our turn. While it may leave us outraged, hurt, and feeling betrayed, it can be an eye-opening incident that we really need to acknowledge the limitations of individuals with NPD. As painful as it can be, though, we no longer feel as confused by the push-pull (or in some cases, just the push).

### **Has a grandiose sense of self-importance (e.g., exaggerates achievements and talents, expects to be recognized as superior without commensurate achievements)**

Grandiosity" means, a sustained, unrealistic sense of being superior—better than other people. It also refers to a sense of uniqueness; the belief that few others have anything in common with oneself and that one can only be understood by a few or very special people. A narcissist says:

*I have always believed I was destined to do or be something great. Known, loved, or admired by all—not that I took any steps to ensure that I actually did anything worth mentioning. I hand-pick friends who support my own ideal of myself.*

*My best friend in high school was another guy who, like me, knew we were better than everyone else. Gods among men. I surrounded myself with women I knew were attracted to me, even if I wasn't attracted to them, to show how desirable I was.*

A man who had a narcissistic partner says:

*My ex Sarah believed herself to be above everyone in Chicago after living in the suburb of Skokie, Ill. When I met her she told me she had been the creative director at a big advertising agency, her children had attended Ivy League universities, and she had jet-setted with celebrities. She said she was superior in her breeding, background and culture.*

*After a few months, I found out she had been only an assistant production intern and had heavily used cocaine and amphetamines. Before she met me, she had been a stay-at-home mom for 15 years while married to an abusive husband.*

*And for the ten years before I met her, she had taught high school. She was born to an abusive mother who hit frequently when she was a child.*

### **Has a sense of entitlement, i.e., unreasonable expectations of especially favorable treatment or automatic compliance with his or her expectations**

Narcissistic entitlement is not the same as self-worth; for example, that is, the belief that one is worthy of accomplishments earned through hard work. Instead, the narcissist is like a toddler who never learned he is not the center of the world and becomes enraged when others don't meet his immediate demands.

Some of these narcissists are honest about their dealings with others. They will practically tell you that they have an utter disregard for others. Other narcissists are a bit more subtle about the unwritten guidelines for living with someone who becomes irrationally angry when others don't go along with their demands.

Some examples from family members:



- *Deanna felt entitled to special treatment because of her professional background, her good looks, and her upscale childhood in New York City. She would become abusive, paranoid, and angry whenever she did not get her way. Other people would give in because they didn't want to cause a scene. She was charming and emotionally seductive to get people to cater to her requests.*
- *After their final breakup, James broke into his girlfriend's house while she was at work. When she got home, the house was ransacked. She immediately called him about the mess: he said yes, it was him, and if she had a problem with it then she should call the police.*
- *Although the family didn't have a lot of money, Sheila bought herself expensive silk dresses and pearl earrings. She had unnecessary plastic surgery that was not covered by insurance. When her husband dared to question it, she lied about cancelling the surgery."*
- *Dan tried to convince his wife that he shouldn't have to warm up dinner himself when he gets home late, so she shouldn't go out at night with the kids.*

### **Is interpersonally exploitative, i.e., takes advantage of others to achieve his or her own ends**

Narcissists lack empathy, feel entitled and above the rules, and see other people as appendages whose sole purpose is to fill them with narcissistic supply. Yet sometimes the narcissist doesn't get everything she needs through more subtle means. She needs to take a more direct approach. They take advantage of others to achieve their own ends.

An exploitative relationship may take many forms. But it generally involves using others without regard for their own feelings and interests. The narcissist doesn't even think about what's best for others. He places no value on open, fair and honest exchanges.

He's too concerned with satiating his own hunger for whatever it is that he needs, be it physical, emotional, financial, whatever. For narcissists with some kind of power, such as religious figures, chief executives, politicians and the like, this is like taking candy from a baby

For example, Mona fell under the spell of Matthew, her psychiatrist. The two became lovers after he shared details about his cold and distant wife and confided how lonely he was. Mona says:

*He pursued me, a client, to fulfill his need for love and adoration (I was a willing participant, yet I was so fragile at the time). He needed someone to split the rent of his office, so he went into business with a long term client who needed office space. A client became his vet, a client became his financial planner, a client who led golf trips asked him to come to a premium golf outing at some island.*

Fear, obligation, and guilt hook family members into giving as much as they can even when it's clearly against their best interest. Narcissists and people-pleasers/codependents have a way of finding each other. The cycle only stops when the non-disordered partner accepts that things will only change when he or she becomes aware that this is a one way relationship and that they will always be in the giving, not getting, role.

### **Is often envious of others or believes others are envious of him or her**

Narcissists must be superior to others in every single way. So when someone else has something they don't have that they want: admiration, status, skills, objects, etc.--the narcissist sees it as a major threat. Like so much else in the narcissistic mind, it is unconscious, discounted and denied, which makes it more treacherous for the object of his envy. Therapist Sandy Hotchkiss says, "To admit to envy would be to acknowledge inferiority, which no good narcissist would ever do."

Partners of narcissists say:



- *When an article about me was published in the local newspaper, he remarked that it was only in the community section that 'only old people read.' He will also remark negatively about people at his work who he thinks are unjustly in higher positions than he is, as he is 'much more intelligent' than them.*
- *To avoid being envious, he was always the first one to purchase a new gadget that came out, and he bought more than one so he could look like a big shot when he gave them away.*
- *He has told me he is envious of my faith. I can have peace inside and a good attitude even if the world around me is a mess. I know he turns up the charmand brags to make women interested/envious of him and his lifestyle.*

## **Requires excessive admiration**

Narcissists need admiration *all the time*. They surround themselves with others who will give them positive reinforcement for their sparkling wit, wonderful personality, and so on and so on. When someone with NPD in your life is in immediate need for admiration, he may have experienced cracks in his superior self-image and need an admiration injection.

Here is how another narcissist describes his need for admiration:

*Since I have risen from such adversity, I expect others should look on me with admiration and respect at getting this far from so little. They should be awed at my accomplishments and know the man before them has done things they themselves have never even had the balls to even dream of doing. My kindness should be praised, my wisdom should be sought, and my touch should be craved.*

Karen, who had an NPD girlfriend, says:

*My ex-girlfriend constantly needed to be acknowledged, adored, and admired. She would get mad at me if I didn't call her each morning on my way to work and on the way home (we didn't live together), yet she would also get upset because she said it felt like pressure for me to call her. She said, "I don't want to have to answer, but I want you to call and at least leave a message because I need to know that I matter." The same thing occurred with her wanting me to text her all the time. If I didn't respond to her texts within a few minutes, she would text again and say, "did you get my text?"*

*She would get mad at me while we were watching television if I got too involved in watching the show and didn't respond and talk to her at least every few minutes. I couldn't shift my gaze at all while she was talking to me. If I did, she would get mad and say that I wasn't paying attention to her and that she didn't matter enough for me to stay present to her.*

## **Shows arrogant, haughty behaviors or attitudes**

Arrogance is another defense mechanism that keeps the narcissist a legend in his own mind, free from the stain of the imperfection of other human beings. Remember, narcissists (and borderlines) split, seeing themselves and others in black and white.

Someone has to be on top, and someone has to be on the bottom. Being judgmental and power hungry staves off the stink of imperfection.

Spouses say:

- *In her highly abusive moments, her entire demeanor would change as she adopted highbrow attitudes, vocabulary, manner of dress, and feelings of superiority. She refused to do virtually any chores in the household for five years because they were beneath her and her alleged background of privilege and power.*



- *My husband bought at least 11 exotic, expensive cars in the space of four years. He always showed them off. I thought it was obnoxious that he brought them to work and had a different car every six months but he always brushed me off and told me I didn't know what I was talking about. He also did this every time he bought an expensive watch, like a Rolex.*
- *She will often foster relationships in which she can gain something or look good. Then, she would criticize them behind her back.*
- *When he was feeling good about himself, then he would act as if I wasn't good enough and that he needed to move on. He would say things like, "I don't know if you are what I want. I guess I'll never know. I think I want more and I know there are a lot of other girls that express their interest in me. Maybe I should be dating them." When I would say, that's fine, if that is how you feel I will walk away. But when I would say that then he would turn around and say, "No, I don't want to lose you." It was all a game. When I stop playing I became "evil."*

### **Believes that he or she is "special" and unique and can only be understood by, or should associate with, other special or high-status people (or institutions)**

It's great to be better than everyone else and sometimes hang around with people who think you're the best. But as they say, it does get lonely at the top (well, at least it does for those narcissists who allow themselves to feel anything resembling pain).

People who are not special--the waitresses, secretaries, and janitors of the world--may be rudely treated by narcissists (and NPs may demand special favors to boot). They have no patience with those who are there to serve them, while making extra efforts to reach out to those who are as special (*but not more special*) than they are.

Some examples from family members:

- *She only wanted to associate with people she deemed "spiritual" and more "conscious" than most people. Her friends had "higher" up jobs that she could benefit from, like attending cool parties, gatherings, workshops, poetry readings, etc.*
- *He thinks because of his wealth he is above others. He wouldn't go to my son's school fundraiser because the people there are "common." He needed to know, "Will anyone there be in tuxedos?"*
- *His kids go to schools where you have to be rich to afford the tuition. Even though we really can't afford it, they go because he likes to associate with the fathers: the famous football players and rich businessmen. He talks about the big names he knows and makes them seem like best buddies even though he barely knows them.*

### **Is preoccupied with fantasies of unlimited success, power, brilliance, beauty, or ideal love**

This refers to the narcissist's need to fend off inner emptiness, feel special and in control, and avoid feelings of defectiveness and insignificance. While we all fantasize, the trouble with narcissist fantasy is that the narcissist treads a fine line between what is magical thinking and what is real. As unhealthy as it is for the narcissist, it becomes gaslighting for his family members and contributes to their own confusion, frustration, and magical thinking.

A woman says, "Before my husband went into therapy, he frequently based our plans on fantasy scenarios of sudden wealth (winning the Lotto) rather than on a realistic in-the-here-and-now plan. In terms of our relationship, he had built up a happy-ever-after scenario that had no basis in reality. He had himself so convinced of the happy-ever-after scenario that he wasn't even able to hear me when I expressed the need for the trust/honesty issues between us to be addressed."

The narcissist and his or her partner all get caught up in idealized, obsessive relationship in which "I love you's" are declared more quickly than the time it takes to download "Hello, I Love You," by the Doors on the Internet.

Relationships begin with the terms "white knight," "princess," "fairy tale" and "soulmate." And too often, the tale ends unhappily when the person who was split "white" either becomes split black (often in the case with BPs) or discarded when they start making demands and fresh narcissistic supply comes along. People confuse *intensity* with *intimacy*, which takes time, self knowledge, honesty, consideration, and willingness to be vulnerable.