

## How to Identify a Narcissistic Parent: Information and Resources

From: *The Narcissistic Family: Diagnosis and Treatment*. Stephanie Donaldson-Pressman and Robert Pressman

Healthy narcissism is having just the right amount of self-centeredness to get some of your own needs met and as well as some of the needs of others. It's a balance between giving and taking. Healthy narcissism means using appropriate adult communication, having appropriate boundaries and setting limits for your own self-protection. It means giving up old survival patterns that no longer work and using adult behaviors that give you more of what you want.

### Characteristics of the Parenting Styles in a Narcissistic Family

- \_\_\_\_\_ I was not allowed to have feelings that might upset my parents.
- \_\_\_\_\_ As a child, I had to meet the emotional needs of the parents.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I learned early on that my needs weren't valued so I stopped trying to get them met.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I felt that I had to act in ways that pleased my parent(s) to avoid being abandoned.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Our family had to look good to outsiders, so I was required to keep the family secrets.
- \_\_\_\_\_ At times my parent's need to look good to others did help me get some positive attention.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I was expected to read my parent(s) mind and give what they wanted without their asking.
- \_\_\_\_\_ If I tried to set limits and boundaries, they were overrun by my parent(s.)
- \_\_\_\_\_ I was not allowed to make mistakes or change my mind.
- \_\_\_\_\_ The less emotional support I got from my parent(s), the more fearful I was that I'd lose it.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I learned to be super responsible to please my parent(s.)
- \_\_\_\_\_ The rule in my family was that parent(s) got to do selfish things because it was their right.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I have had life-long problems making and keeping intimate relationships.
- \_\_\_\_\_ In relationships, I worry about the other person finding out how defective I am.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I have an overwhelming need for external (outside of myself) validation.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I learned to achieve early on to bring glory to my family OR Even though I did well in school, my parent(s) ignored my achievements.

\_\_\_\_\_ I became fragmented trying to figure out what my parent(s) wanted from me.

\_\_\_\_\_ It was dangerous for me to recognize and express my own power as a child.

\_\_\_\_\_ I had no inherent value other than what I could do for my parent(s).

\_\_\_\_\_ My parent(s) became hurt or angry when criticized so I learned not to rock the boat.

\_\_\_\_\_ I had to give up my own sense of self to survive in my family.

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### **Characteristics of Narcissistic Parents**

From *Children of the Self Absorbed: A Grownup's Guide to Getting over Narcissistic Parents*  
by Nina Brown

- Turns every conversation to him or herself.
- Expects you to meet his or her emotional needs
- Ignores the impact of his negative comments on you
- Constantly criticizes or berates you and knows what is best for you
- Focus on blaming rather than taking responsibility for his own behavior
- Expect you to jump at his every need
- Is overly involved with his own hobbies, interests or addictions ignoring your needs
- Has high need for attention:
- Brags, sulks, complains, inappropriately teases, is flamboyant, loud and boisterous
- Is closed minded about own mistakes. Can't handle criticism and gets angry to shut it off
- Becomes angry when his needs are not met and tantrums or intimidates
- Has an attitude of "Anything you can do, I can do better"
- Engages in one-upmanship to seem important
- Acts in a seductive manner or is overly charming
- Is vain and fishes for compliments. Expects you to admire him
- Isn't satisfied unless he has the "biggest" or "best"
- Seeks status. Spends money to impress others
- Forgets what you have done for them yet keeps reminding you that you owe them today
- Neglects the family to impress others. Does it all: Is a super person to gain admiration
- Threatens to abandon you if you don't go along with what he wants
- Does not obey the law—sees himself above the law
- Does not expect to be penalized for failure to follow directions or conform to guidelines
- Ignores your feelings and calls you overly sensitive or touchy if you express feelings
- Tells you how you should feel or not feel
- Cannot listen to you and cannot allow your opinions
- Is more interested in his own concerns and interests than yours
- Is unable to see things from any point of view other than his own
- Wants to control what you do and say—tries to micromanage you
- Attempts to make you feel stupid, helpless and inept when you do things on your own

- Has poor insight and can not see the impact his selfish behavior has on you
- Has shallow emotions and interests
- Exploits others with lies and manipulations.
- Uses emotional blackmail to get what he wants
- May engage in physical or sexual abuse of children

### **Secure Parents**

- Meet the emotional and physical needs of the children
- Have healthy boundaries and can be assertive in stating them
- Respect children's boundaries and rights to be safe
- Resist intrusion and mind games by others
- Have strong, positive values and priorities for family
- Allow children to express their feelings
- Use appropriate self disclosure
- Have the ability to develop intimacy and happy relationships

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### **Recommended reading:**

- ***Will I Ever Be Good Enough?: Healing the Daughters of Narcissistic Mothers*** by Karyl McBride, Ph.D. (2009) This book is not a Christian resource, but it's excellent and specifically addresses the mother/daughter relationship. Highly recommended for sons of narcissistic mothers too.

Two classic resources:

- ***Children of the Self-Absorbed: A Grown-up's Guide to Getting over Narcissistic Parents*** by Nina Brown (2nd edition came out in 2008).
- ***Why Is It Always About You? The Seven Deadly Sins of Narcissism*** by Sandy Hotchkiss

A helpful, eye-opening (to our own narcissism) resource that is written by Christian mental health professionals is:

- ***You Might Be a Narcissist If... - How to Identify Narcissism in Ourselves and Others and What We Can Do About It*** by Paul Meier, Cynthia Munz, and Lisa Charlebois (2010).
- Also written by a Christian author is ***Enough About You, Let's Talk About Me: How to Recognize and Manage the Narcissists in Your Life*** by Dr. Les Carter (2008). Great information on how relating to a narcissist can lead to you developing your own set of unhealthy behaviors.
- ***Disarming the Narcissist: Surviving and Thriving with the Self-Absorbed*** by Wendy Behary is a resource if you want to learn some strategies for communicating more effectively with a narcissist. I found this elegantly written book to be a bit harder to stick

with. However, the author is a counselor who has a lot of experience treating narcissistic clients so she knows what she is talking about.

- If you are divorcing a narcissist or someone with Borderline Personality Disorder and will share custody of children, check out *Splitting: Protecting Yourself While Divorcing Someone With Borderline or Narcissistic Personality Disorder* by Bill Eddy and Randi Kreger. The book description on Amazon says that it “offers readers help for navigating the entire process of divorce: hiring and managing a divorce lawyer, reaching a reasonable settlement, protecting oneself and one's children from emotional and/or physical abuse from the former spouse, resisting false accusations, and getting enforceable court orders. The book also delves into the difficult-to-understand, aggressive behavior of persuasive blamers, offering readers psychological explanations for their former spouse's actions and help for coping emotionally with the spouse's extreme mood swings and impulsivity.” One of the authors is a counselor and the other wrote the bestseller *Stop Walking on Eggshells*.