

Was Your Family Healthy or Narcissistic?

Jennifer Degler, Ph.D.
Licensed Clinical Psychologist and Life Coach

What kind of family did you come from? In a healthy family, parents recognize and meet their children's needs in appropriate ways and get their own needs met by other adults or by themselves. Children are expected to learn gradually how to meet their own needs as they become independent adults.

In a narcissistic family, the reverse happens. The parents don't recognize and meet their children's emotional needs, and the children are expected to meet the emotional needs of the parents. The family motto could be "It's all about mom/dad." Because these children are deprived of opportunities to connect with their own feelings, needs, opinions, etc., they may become adults who suffer from:

- Indecisiveness.
- Oversensitivity to perceived criticism/feeling self-conscious.
- Lack of self-confidence and self-trust.
- Chronic mild depression with possible bouts of moderate to serious depression.
- Strong people-pleasing tendencies.
- Difficulty identifying feelings, wants, and needs.
- Difficulty with expressing feelings directly and then asking for wants/needs.
- Feeling very angry on the inside and holding this anger in for a long time until finally exploding over something minor.
- Difficulty trusting other people, but occasionally self-disclosing too much material too quickly.
- Feeling a sense of emptiness and dissatisfaction despite achievements.
- A history of unsuccessful relationships.
- Difficulty with boundaries and saying 'no.'

If this list feels disturbingly familiar, please educate yourself about narcissism and talk to a counselor/pastor about your concerns.

Jennifer Degler, Ph.D., is a licensed psychologist, life coach, and co-author of *No More Christian Nice Girl: When Just Being Nice—Instead of Good—Hurts You, Your Family, and Your Friends*. A frequent speaker at women's events and marriage retreats, she also maintains a counseling practice. She is a member of the American Association of Christian Counselors and the founder of CWIVES, an organization devoted to helping Christian wives enhance their sexuality (www.cwives.com). Jennifer and her husband, Jeff, live in Lexington, Kentucky, with their two teenage children. Visit her Web site at www.jenniferdegler.com.