

Me, Me, Me

Learning to Live with Someone
with Narcissistic Personality Disorder



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The term narcissist has become synonymous with the word "vain." We imagine narcissists always looking at themselves in the mirror and believing themselves to be beautiful people. It comes from the Greek mythology story of Narcissus who falls in love with himself and rejects the love and advances of Echo.

However, narcissistic personality disorder is much different than pure vanity. To be sure, some narcissists or people with NPD are attractive and like the way they look. The disorder actually runs much deeper than physical beauty, though. Over the course of this report we'll take a look at:

- What narcissistic personality disorder is
- The signs and symptoms of NPD
- The treatments
- The causes
- How it's diagnosed
- The problems it can cause for your life
- How to tell if you're in a relationship with a narcissist
- Complications of NPD
- And how to live with someone who has NPD

It's estimated that one in ten people has a personality disorder and that 35 percent of those people have NPD. That means there's a very good chance that sometime in your life you'll know, and maybe love, someone with narcissistic personality disorder. So let's start at the top and talk about what it is.

What Is Narcissistic Personality Disorder?

Narcissistic personality disorder or NPD is a disorder where someone has an inflated sense of self-importance. They believe, for a variety of reasons, that they're far superior and more important than those around them.

People with NPD actually share many behavior traits and characteristics with those who are bipolar, those who have borderline personality disorder, and sociopaths. In fact, NPD is often misdiagnosed. However it is much different than those conditions.

First, it's important to know that narcissistic personality disorder is a disorder, not a disease. There are no lab tests or chemical imbalances that can help someone diagnose this condition. It's a psychiatric or personality disorder which means that it's only diagnosed through talking with a therapist. We'll talk a bit more about diagnosis later.

Narcissistic personality disorder often begins in childhood. As the child grows and develops, their behavior patterns are ingrained. They become part of who they are and how they relate to the world. If this child grows up to believe that they're more important than anyone else, then by

adulthood this can cause some serious problems. We're talking about issues with relationships, in their career, and ultimately with finding happiness.

As you might imagine, NPD can be a serious disorder to manage. And, it can lead to a number of other conditions or disorders. So let's next take a look at the signs and symptoms.

Understanding and accurately diagnosing this disorder is essential to living a productive and satisfying life.

What Are the Signs and Symptoms Of Narcissistic Personality Disorder?

Let's start off by saying that everyone will exhibit some symptoms of narcissistic personality disorder. They range from craving attention to having fantasies about unlimited success, wealth, and power. Who doesn't occasionally fantasize about having unlimited wealth?

The point is to not panic if you find that you share some of the same qualities or behaviors that are on the list for someone with NPD. If you share all of the behaviors, though, it may be time to go to the therapist for a discussion. So let's take a look at those behaviors and then we'll talk a bit about how to assess your own, or someone else's.

Wants to Be the Center of Attention

Someone with NPD will take this to extremes. They'll interrupt conversations to talk about themselves. They'll brag about what they've accomplished and often embellish, exaggerate, and lie to make themselves look good to others. (Some people with NPD actually believe their own exaggerations and lies).

Has an Extremely High Sense of Self-Importance

Someone with NPD expects others to recognize them as superior. They believe that they are better than everyone else. Unfortunately, this means they treat others as if they are lesser people. They manipulate people to get what they want and often use people to help them portray the image that they believe.

For example, someone with NPD may choose a highly successful or extremely attractive mate - not because they love them but because they believe they are worthy of that type of mate and they make them look good.

Focused on Their Image

Many people who have NPD are obsessed with fantasies of having unlimited money, success, or power. They usually believe that they are not only worthy of it but that they deserve it and are completely capable of achieving it. They may also believe that they are worthy of perfect beauty.

Is Unique and Special

NPD people believe that they are special flowers. No one understands them except the rare person who has equal status. They often don't associate with people they believe to be beneath them.

Manipulative and Exploitative

This is a trademark sign of someone with NPD. They are incredibly persuasive and manipulative. They believe that they deserve to control others and work very hard to manage this task. However, when the person they're trying to manipulate or control doesn't cooperate, they can become vengeful, hateful, and even aggressive.

Lacking Empathy

Someone with NPD is unwilling, and often unable, to realize that people have their own thoughts, needs, and feelings. A narcissist believes and behaves as if everyone is there to serve them.

Has Problems with Jealousy

Finally, if someone has NPD they often struggle with jealousy. They can believe that others behave the way they do around them because they're jealous. They are often also competitive

and jealous of other people. In a relationship this can manifest when they isolate their mate from their friends and family and exhibit a lack of trust.

Did you recognize any signs? Generally speaking a person needs to exhibit five or more of the tell-tale signs or symptoms. Additionally, they need to be chronic behaviors. If you're jealous sometimes or lack empathy sometimes, that's not narcissism. That's normal life. However, if someone consistently lacks empathy and uses others to get their way, then that's a sign of NPD.

So let's talk about treatment next because if you've recognized these signs in yourself or someone else, treatment is available.

Is Narcissistic Personality Disorder Treatable?

To get right to the point; yes, narcissistic personality disorder is treatable. It is not, however, curable. There is no cure for a personality disorder. There are only things that you can do to manage it.

When it comes to many personality disorders, there are medications that can be taken to help alleviate the symptoms. For example, someone with bipolar disorder will take medications to help control the ups and downs of their condition.

If someone has NPD, there are no medications. The only treatment is psychotherapy. Now you may know someone who has NPD and is taking medications. They may be taking antidepressants, for example. This medication isn't for NPD, though. Rather it's for the depression that can often be a comorbidity or a condition that often goes along with other conditions.

It Begins with Acceptance

Treatment for NPD begins when a person is willing to accept that they may have a condition and they're willing to go talk to a therapist and get diagnosed. Now you've read the signs and symptoms of someone with narcissistic personality disorder so you know that this first step is incredibly difficult.

If someone believes that they are perfect and that everyone around them should bend to their will, why would they visit a therapist? In many cases a person with NPD visits a therapist because their life just isn't going the way they think it should. They seek answers. They may have just lost a mate or a job, or be dealing with something else that was a blow to their ego.

Or they may take the step of visiting a therapist because a loved one talks them in to it. Again, knowing what you know about NPD, you realize how difficult this might be.

At the Therapist's Office

Talk therapy with a psychotherapist is really the only treatment for NPD but it can be very effective. First, a therapist will diagnose the disorder. From this point, it's all about teaching the patient to recognize their behaviors and to begin to modify them.

Keep in mind that NPD begins in childhood so the behaviors that a person has are deeply rooted. They can be extremely difficult to become aware of and even harder to change. That isn't to say that it's not possible but it does take time, patience, and hard work. Because of the delicate nature of treating someone with NPD, it's important to go to a psychotherapist that specializes in the disorder.

Group Therapy and Residency Programs

In addition to one-on-one psychotherapy, there are also group therapy opportunities and programs where the patient may live at a facility and receive treatment. Group therapy can be effective for teaching empathy.

A residency program can be required if the narcissist is dealing with a major life change, like a debilitating illness. Or they may be suicidal, impulsive, or destructive. These patients may reside in a hospital until they can get the help that they need.

It's important to stress that treatment is an ongoing process and psychotherapy is the only real treatment for narcissistic personality disorder. Medications may be prescribed for other conditions but they don't treat or cure NPD.

Next, let's talk about what causes NPD because unlike some other disorders or diseases, there's no chemical imbalance or change in the body.

What Causes Narcissistic Personality Disorder?

With many diseases or conditions, we know what causes them. For example, with type II diabetes we know that it's caused by insulin resistance. Over time and chronic exposure to high blood sugar levels, the pancreas stops releasing insulin. Diabetes develops. Medications and lifestyle changes can help treat and even reverse this disease.

With bipolar disorder we know that there's a chemical imbalance in the brain. Medications and therapy have shown to be effective in managing this disorder. It cannot be cured, but it can be effectively treated.

With narcissistic personality disorder there is no known cause. There are however, a few schools of thought on what may cause this disorder, so let's look at those. Keep in mind that neither of these theories has been proven.

Childhood

Many people believe that a person's childhood can lead to NPD. If a child is overloaded with excessive praise, they may begin to believe that they are the most important person in the world.

If a child learns early on that they can readily manipulate their parents with cuteness, persuasion, and threats, they may carry that behavior into adulthood.

If a child is never taught empathy, they may not learn it.

If a child is ignored and neglected, they may feel like they have no one to turn to and their survival instincts take over. They make themselves the most important person to the exclusion of everyone else.

It's easy to see why many psychologists believe that how a child was parented can cause narcissistic personality disorder. However, many children are overwhelmed with excessive praise and manipulate their parents, and they don't grow up to be narcissists. There is another theory on the cause for NPD.

Biologic and Genetic

Most psychotherapists believe that the cause of NPD is a combination of factors. These factors include biological and genetic, social, and psychological. Remember that only one in ten people have a personality disorder and only 35 percent of those have NPD.

Social factors that influence someone developing NPD include how they interact with their friends, family, and other people when they're young. For example, if a child learns at an early age that they're able to readily manipulate people, they may hold on to that behavior. However, that alone won't cause NPD. They may need to have a genetic and psychological disposition to NPD as well.

Psychological factors include their temperament, personality, and how they deal with stress – their coping skills. There's also research to support that NPD can be passed down to children. Parents with this personality disorder may have an increased risk of passing it on to their own children.

Once you're diagnosed, understanding the causes of narcissistic personality disorder is really only part of the solution. Treatment is essential and in order to get the right treatment, you have to get diagnosed. We'll take a look at that next and talk about how NPD is diagnosed.

How Is Narcissistic Personality Disorder Diagnosed?

As mentioned earlier, the path to treatment for NPD begins with awareness and acceptance. A person has to realize that they may have a problem and be willing to get help for it. This first step can take years. Once it happens - once there is realization and a desire to take action, the next step is a diagnosis.

At the Psychotherapist's Office

The diagnosis is a three-step process. It includes, and usually begins with, a conversation about signs and symptoms. This conversation may be with the patient alone or it may be with family members if the patient decides that they want others involved in the appointment. The doctor will note the signs and symptoms that are discussed and then move on to the next step of the process.

A Psychological Evaluation

The next step is to go through a thorough evaluation. The evaluation may include answering a list of questions verbally, as well as filling out questionnaires or taking personality type quizzes. The quiz may ask patients to answer questions or to rank statements on a scale.

The statements might look something like this:

- I have a natural talent for influencing people.
- The world would be a better place if I ruled it.
- I can usually talk my way out of anything.
- I will be a success.
- I am assertive.
- People are easy to manipulate.
- I can live my life in any way I want to.
- I am more capable than other people.
- People are often envious of me.

After the psychological exam, the next step will be to have a physical exam. The physical exam is designed to make sure there isn't a physical cause for your symptoms and to explore other potential diagnoses.

The process to diagnose narcissistic personality disorder may take more than one visit. And knowing the diagnosis is just the first step. Remember that there isn't a cure and psychotherapy can take time and patience. However, it's better than the alternative because NPD can wreak havoc on someone's life. Let's explore how NPD can cause problems for your life.

How Narcissistic Personality Disorder Can Cause Problems for Your Life

It's not easy to be a narcissist. It may seem like an ideal mindset. After all, someone with NPD believes that they're better than others, they exude confidence and they can be quite persuasive. However, as you might quickly realize, reality and what you want to be true don't always agree. This difference between fantasy and reality can cause significant problems for people with NPD. It can negatively impact every area of their life.

Social Challenges

Many people with NPD can make friends quite easily. They're generally confident and charming. However, over time the friendships can struggle. No one likes to be chronically manipulated.

No one wants to have their feelings disregarded. So while friendships may start off with a bang, they can quickly fizzle out. Additionally, many people with NPD generally feel that they're above most people and can be choosy about who they choose to make their friends.

Career Challenges

Working with a team can be extremely challenging for people with narcissistic personality disorder. They tend to want to control everything and everyone and most people don't like to be controlled. When a narcissist cannot get their own way through persuasion and manipulation, they may resort to threats.

This isn't productive at the workplace and can backfire. Vengeance is also a common method of responding to someone who challenges them. Again, not a productive career move.

Additionally, while many people with NPD believe that they can, and should, rule the world, others have tremendous insecurity. This insecurity causes them to avoid taking any type of risk that might result in failure. This can hold someone back in their career.

Family

It can be difficult to live with someone with narcissistic personality disorder. You have to have firm boundaries and a genuine understanding that they have a disorder. If they don't have a diagnosis of NPD, then understanding the disorder becomes difficult.

Additionally, children can struggle with a parent that has NPD. NPD parents tend to be either controlling or they ignore their children. Neither is great for the child. Most parenting experts agree that children need attention, structure, and acceptance.

Many people with NPD marry someone based on their ideal image of who they should be with rather than someone that they love. They build a picture in their mind of what their fantastic life should look like and then find the person that fits that picture.

Eventually, the trophy wife or husband may get tired of that role. The narcissist then becomes more controlling, critical, and vengeful. Siblings and parents may also struggle when they have a loved one with NPD. They may feel manipulated and frustrated with their loved one's behavior.

Health

Finally, it's important to talk about health problems for people with NPD. It can, and often does, lead to some extreme behaviors. Some people may develop eating disorders as they strive to achieve perfect physical beauty. Others may develop substance abuse problems in a desire to perpetuate the fantasy or to deal with the reality.

Signs That You're in a Relationship with a Narcissist

It can be difficult to realize that you're dating, or in love with, a narcissist until it's too late. You may be invested in the relationship and your future. However, it's extremely important that you know what you're getting into.

Therefore, the earlier you know that the person you love, or are falling for, is a narcissist, the better it will be. You can get out of the relationship if you choose to, or you can continue moving

forward with knowledge that you're in a relationship with a narcissist. So let's look at the signs that you're dating a narcissist to help you make the best decision for you.

Charming and Romantic If You Comply

Narcissists or people with narcissistic personality disorder can be extraordinarily charming and romantic. They can shower you with attention. They can inundate you with material items like jewelry, vacations, and more. And this behavior will continue as long as you give them what they want.

What they want can change from day to day. They may want you to behave a certain way or look a certain way. They absolutely want you to shower them with attention and adoration and when you stop doing this, or you disagree with what they want you to do, they may withhold their attention. They may give you the silent treatment or withhold sex. They might even get a little verbally abusive or critical of you.

Lies, Exaggerations, and Embellishments

How often do you sit through long stories about how wonderful they are? The stories often contain blatant lies and exaggerations. They may live on a house on a cliff when in reality it's just a small hill. They may brag about their position at work assisting the head of surgery when in fact all they did was observe a surgery. Narcissists love to talk about themselves and they love to make the story look larger than life. Unfortunately, they believe the story and they expect you to as well.

They Isolate You

If your significant other strives to dominate your time, they may have NPD. Narcissists are generally jealous of the time that their partner spends with others, including friends and family. They may guilt you, threaten you, or worse.

Narcissists lack empathy and really won't listen to you talk about your day. They don't really care unless it involves them. They won't ever admit they're wrong. You get all the blame and they get all the credit. People with NPD may also be poor at following through on what they say

they're going to do. They're self-centered and if they don't feel like doing something, they won't – even if they gave their word. They're very concerned with image and how they're perceived, and any deviation from their fantasy can cause an emotional outburst.

It can be quite a challenge to be in a relationship with someone who has NPD. Whether you're dating them, married to them, just friends or even family members, it's important to have clear boundaries and some understanding.

Narcissistic personality disorder is difficult to deal with on many levels. Those who have it often have additional complications, too. We'll explore those next.

Complications of Narcissistic Personality Disorder

As it is with many personality disorders, conditions, and diseases, there can be complications. There can be additional disorders or diseases to contend with. You might be surprised to learn that many of the complications of narcissistic personality disorder can be as damaging and dangerous as the disorder itself.

Depression

If NPD is left untreated, it can and often does result in depression. Imagine if your relationships never work out and people never live up to your expectations. And imagine that in your mind those failed relationships aren't your fault. Now add to that failures and struggles at work with your employer and your co-workers.

This often happens again and again for people with NPD. They lose friends, they struggle in relationships and their professional life can suffer. The end result is often depression and it can be significant.

Substance Abuse

It's not uncommon for someone with NPD to turn to substances to help them cope. It may be a way for them to treat their depression. It may also be a way to not deal with their reality. And still others abuse drugs and alcohol as a way to feel better about themselves or to feel more

successful. For example, cocaine is a stimulant and can make you feel both powerful and productive.

Body Dysmorphia

Many people with NPD struggle with body dysmorphia and/or eating disorders. Their constant struggle for physical perfection can cause serious health problems.

There are other risky behaviors that can happen as a result of NPD, including aggression and picking fights with others, gambling, and lashing out or taking risks when they're under the influence of drugs or alcohol. Not diagnosing and treating NPD can worsen the problem. However, narcissistic personality disorder can be managed and you can love, and live with, someone who has NPD. Let's wrap this up by discussing how to live with NPD.

Living with Narcissistic Personality Disorder

You may find that you love someone with NPD. You may even realize that you have NPD. It's okay. There are ways to live with this disorder.

Get a Diagnosis

This is non-negotiable. If you have NPD or love someone who does, it's imperative to understand this disorder and that cannot happen without a diagnosis.

Get Help

Therapy is also non-negotiable. You may think that the behavior can be managed, but it's much better and easier to manage when the narcissist has tools and techniques to identify and control behaviors. In addition to one-on-one psychotherapy, there is also family counseling which can help families dealing with NPD stay together.

Set Boundaries

For those who are living with someone who has NPD, it is important for you to decide what you can, and cannot, put up with. Hold true to those boundaries. People with NPD will push them and if you don't hold firm, they'll walk all over you. That means not tolerating emotional blackmail or outbursts.

Learn to Negotiate

Whether you have NPD or you live with someone who does, learning to negotiate (not manipulate) can help you both feel like you're in an equal relationship. Negotiation is about creating a win/win resolution. It can take time to learn this skill; however, a therapist can help you both learn to communicate effectively to resolve conflict.

Protect Yourself

If you live with and love a narcissist, it's vitally important that you protect yourself. They're not known for being frugal, because they usually value material goods and believe they deserve the best. So they can spend all of the money you have in a second. Protect yourself by having your own account that they cannot access. Also protect yourself legally, emotionally, and physically. Boundaries and therapy are your two biggest assets with someone who has NPD.

Narcissistic Personality Disorder is common enough that most people will know several individuals with this disorder. Living with them, loving them, or living with the disease yourself can be a challenge, but it's not an insurmountable challenge. It is possible to live a full life with this disorder.