

This Is What Narcissistic Abuse Looks Like by Marissa Pomerance

from: <https://www.thecandidly.com/2019/this-is-what-narcissistic-abuse-looks-like>

“Abuse,” like “trauma” or “mental illness,” is often invisible. And for those suffering from abuse at the hands of a capital-N Narcissist—whether it’s a parent, partner, or friend-- abuse can be esteem-destroying and identity-shattering and, sometimes, it’s so slow and careful and quiet and subconscious, it slips beneath our radar, undetected and ignored. Eating away at us from the inside out. But identifying a Narcissist and their abusive ways isn’t easy. A Narcissist isn’t just someone who ascribes to our classic definitions of the word “narcissism.”

Narcissistic Personality Disorder is a diagnosable condition, like Borderline Personality Disorder. According to Tanya Gaum, an Associate Marriage and Family Therapist and co-founder of the Narcissistic Abuse Awareness Alliance, NPD is “driven by self-interest, a desire for power and control, and an avoidance of unpleasant emotions and personal accountability. The narcissistic person struggles with emotional regulation and has a very low tolerance for their own emotional world; their efforts to avoid and deflect having to face their own emotions manifest as minimizations and invalidations of the other’s, often in terribly abusive ways.”

Here are some of the signs of narcissistic abuse, and which types of people they target:

1. Verbal Abuse: Narcissists are actually, on the surface, pretty likeable. They like attention, and they know how to give attention to make you feel special. According to Tanya Gaum, “a narcissistic person...will often appear quite grandiose with high charm and charisma.” But, a Narcissist’s charming personality usually belies an insidious tendency for verbal abuse. They shame and bully and belittle and threaten and criticize. And often, this verbal abuse can escalate in frequency and tone.

They use verbal abuse to intimidate others, and prove themselves as dominant and superior. “All varieties of narcissism, from covert to malignant, are most often accompanied by entitlement, antagonism...and a lack of empathy,” says Tanya.

Often, survivors feel like they have to walk on eggshells for fear of setting them off. All of this verbal abuse is an attempt by the Narcissist to shift blame and embarrassment—to prove that they are right. And it leaves the survivor of this abuse feeling wrong and fearful and embarrassed, because the Narcissist is trying to shield themselves from their own self-loathing.

These are acts of self-protection; using bravado to avoid anything that makes them feel bad about themselves because they desperately crave admiration and external validation.

This Is What Narcissistic Abuse Looks Like by Marissa Pomerance

from: <https://www.thecandidly.com/2019/this-is-what-narcissistic-abuse-looks-like>

2. Manipulation And Gaslighting: Remember how Narcissists try to shift blame and avoid their own emotions? Well, their favored mechanisms are gaslighting and manipulation. They often use their “charm” to manipulate; “the Narcissist becomes highly skilled at feigning concern for others or, at the very least, they learn to dazzle and seduce into submission those who cross their path,” says Tanya.

Making someone question their own memory, their sanity, and their behavior are all effective means for instilling self-doubt. They use gaslighting to flip any critiques from the survivor, so you can never quite hold them accountable for their behavior. Again, these are methods of self-protection. Attempts by Narcissists to undermine others’ experiences to feel better about themselves.

And this is incredibly damaging to a survivor. “After years, or even mere months, of gaslighting, invalidation, and devaluation from a narcissistic partner or spouse, the survivor often becomes disconnected from their intuition and sense of reality, and stuck in a constant state of fear, obligation, and guilt,” says Tanya.

3. Lying: Of course a Narcissist has a tendency to lie. How else can they manipulate and gaslight without bending the truth? But it’s not just a few little white lies. It’s persistent, pathological lying to avoid responsibility and accountability for their actions. They use lies to maintain their power in the relationship. To aggrandize their actions and traits to gain more admiration and external validation. To avoid shame.

Narcissists even lie to themselves to protect their fragile egos. “While the behaviors that constitute narcissistic abuse appear to be motivated by a desire to hurt, degrade, and destabilize the target of the abuse...the abuser’s primary focus is on themselves and their desperate need to avoid engaging with their own painful emotions,” explains Tanya.

Narcissists don’t want to be self-aware—they have no desire to learn from their mistakes and evolve. So they tell themselves that what happens to them, and how they treat others, isn’t their fault. And when you add gaslighting to the lies, it’s a recipe for blame-shifting.

4. Withholding and Neglect: Narcissists withhold love and affection (or even money, sex, and communication) to get what they want. And since they’re so focused on their own feelings and needs, they’re neglectful of others. Unfortunately, this neglect is especially common for children

This Is What Narcissistic Abuse Looks Like by Marissa Pomerance

from: <https://www.thecandidly.com/2019/this-is-what-narcissistic-abuse-looks-like>

with Narcissistic parents, whose emotional neglect can actually create cycles of Narcissistic behavior. Because if their emotional needs weren't met as a child, they might grow up to become Narcissists who only focus on their own needs.

Tanya has seen this firsthand, explaining, "A person could potentially develop narcissistic traits if they are raised within a narcissistic family system where a parent or caregiver is highly critical or controlling, or fails to validate, mirror, or be attuned to their emotional experiences."

5. Control: According to Tanya, "Narcissistic abuse is about power and control," which "can be verbal, emotional, psychological, financial, sexual, and/or physical." Often, a Narcissist suffers from feeling a lack of control in their life, so they try to control the people around them. And this control comes back to self-esteem and ego; it's "an essential defense against the risk of receiving a Narcissistic injury."

Narcissists are terrified of losing control, so they try to control the people around them (through lying, manipulating, etc). "Over time, the Narcissist manages to control every detail of the survivor's life, from what they wear, eat, and do to their appearance, work, and relationships. Those who are caught within this system of control tend to walk on eggshells and defer to the Narcissist's needs, desires, and demands in order to avoid or de-escalate conflict," says Tanya.

Tanya believes this desire for control can be especially troubling in sexual relationships, explaining, "Sexual consent is impossible in relationships where there is such a glaring imbalance of power and control. When you have to 'go along to get along' in every single aspect of your relationship in order to avoid the escalation of abuse, this dynamic of coercive control doesn't just magically disappear in the bedroom."

6. Love Bombing and Isolation: Let's not forget—though the Narcissist can verbally abuse and gaslight and lie, they can also be charming. Affectionate. And they want people to love and adore them. So they shower the people around them with love and affection and big, grand gestures—called "Love Bombing." This helps them attract others early on, creating a sense of attachment and stronger bonds.

"Because of the trauma bond created by the idealization and devaluation pattern of a narcissistic relationship, the Narcissist's partner or spouse can literally become addicted to the spike in serotonin, oxytocin, dopamine, and adrenaline that happens when the Narcissist switches to love-bombing after a period of abuse," Tanya explains.

This Is What Narcissistic Abuse Looks Like by Marissa Pomerance

from: <https://www.thecandidly.com/2019/this-is-what-narcissistic-abuse-looks-like>

By giving others a peek into the wonderful, loving person they can be, Narcissists get survivors to keep coming back, who hope that the Narcissist will return to that kind, sweet version of themselves. Or, as Tanya describes, “The Narcissist becomes the sole dealer for your drug of choice; they are both the cause of and the salve to your painful withdrawal. The survivor’s heart and mind becomes anchored to the first intoxicating date, the first blissful few months, the first lavishly romantic vacation. The idealization and love-bombing stage of the cycle becomes an addictive ‘drug’; hope becomes the victim’s visceral ‘craving’ for more.”

Plus, love bombing helps feed the Narcissist’s ego. It maintains their fragile sense of self as someone that’s good and kind. It’s an effective manipulation tactic, too— a way to maintain control. Narcissistic abuse also cuts survivors off from their other friends and family, as “The emotional destabilization, fear, and self-doubt...can cause the survivor to recede and disengage from friends, family, and colleagues causing even further isolation from support, reality, and their intuition,” explains Tanya.

7. Narcissists Target Certain Personality Types: While these types of abuse are common in other abusive relationships, Narcissists specifically target certain personalities who are more susceptible to this abuse. According to Tanya, “Relationships for Narcissists are transactional, meaning the Narcissist will only invest in someone who has something they can exploit for their own personal gain.”

Mostly, Narcissists attract, and are attracted to, empaths. Empathetic people see the good. They want to be supportive. They blame the Narcissist’s failings on their mental health, or their childhood. They want to save and “fix” the Narcissist. And empaths are perfect targets, because they’ll internalize the abuse and blame themselves, which is exactly what Narcissists want. “Narcissistic people are attracted to those who are empathetic, kind, generous, agreeable, adaptable, and forgiving, because these are the kinds of people who are most likely to wrap compassion and context around their increasingly disturbing behaviors,” says Tanya.

Narcissistic abuse can take many forms. It can be blatant, or insidious. It can go undiagnosed. But that doesn’t mean it isn’t real. In fact, it’s very real. And untangling oneself from a Narcissist’s web is a process. One that might require therapy and support groups and years of work.