



Red flags that you are dealing with a Narcissist

17 April 2023

I often get asked what behaviours indicate that someone is narcissistic. And usually this is from someone who has already experienced a bad relationship and wants to try and make sure they never end up in a bad relationship again. A relationship with a narcissist can destroy you. You are likely to come out with low self-esteem, few friends and family as you have been isolated from them, and possibly even with little financial resources, because narcissists are very good at finding ways to keep you dependent on them.

Narcissists can be found everywhere. They are at work. They can be your boss or your colleague. They can even be your subordinate. I have one client who was mercilessly bullied by a junior person reporting to her. Some of the worst damage they can do however, is if you are in a personal relationship with them.

So, what are some of the red flags:

1. The narcissist acts like they are superior to others and expects those around them to acknowledge this. **Others must be obedient to their wishes.** One of the ways of detecting a possible narcissist is to say “no” to them. They will pout, fume, get angry, and may even get violent. How dare you refuse them what they want. If you think someone may be a narcissist, watch what happens when they don’t get what they want. They believe they are entitled to have whatever they want.
2. In their minds, **rules and the law are not applicable to the narcissist.** They often commit traffic offences, they will steal things without being concerned about their actions, they jump ahead of people in queues, all in the name of demonstrating a lack of concern for others.
3. **They take no responsibility for their actions.** They only know how to blame. And everyone else is to blame except the narcissist. They will never own up to any wrong-doing or even mistakes. Is there someone who is always blaming others, and who never does anything wrong – be careful. When the narcissist is talking about their past relationships, they will often talk about how everything was their exes’ fault. Past relationships are spoken about negatively and the ex was to blame for everything going wrong. A psychologically healthy person will realise that usually both parties have issues to work on if a relationship breaks down. Not the narcissist. Everything is the fault of the ex. Sometimes the narcissist will spin a sob story to hook you. This works very well with people who are highly empathic and get caught up in feeling sorry for the narcissist. This is also an attempt to evade responsibility. If you are an adult, you must take responsibility for your life, including who you let into your life.
4. Narcissists want control. **They want to take control of everything.** After all, for them it is only logical they should be in control – they are better than everyone else. Part of that control is

that you are not allowed to have an opinion that differs from theirs. You are required to agree to everything they say and do. Some of the ways they try to control are by putting you down, hiding behind cruel jokes, criticising, sabotaging your efforts to achieve your goals, monopolising conversations, talking over others, and ignoring what you say.

5. They lack boundaries. Everything belongs to them. Everyone feels the same as they do. Everyone wants the same things that they do. **They don't see and respect others as individual human beings.**
6. They **constantly need and want attention and validation and praise.** You can't criticise them though, and you always have to be the one doing the apologising.
7. Narcissists can be very charming. Especially when people first meet them. Which is why so many people fall for them. They seem such nice people at first sight and on a superficial level. In the beginning of a relationship narcissists often engage in an activity called "**love bombing**". They flatter you and praise you and talk about how wonderful you are. You get lots of gifts. They spend lots of time with you and shower you with words you want to hear. They may promise to always look after you and be there for you. I have seen people give up their jobs and their homes and move to very out-of-the-way places because of the so-called promises of a narcissist. Narcissists get you on a high, which you get used to and crave. This is used to stop you from leaving a relationship when you realise something is not right. The narcissist may start out by wanting please and impress you, but eventually their own needs come first.
8. Narcissists use people to get what they want. **People are only there for what they can give the narcissist.** They don't appreciate people for who they are. They like you for what you can give them. If you don't look the way they want you to look, they will be on your case to change your looks or weight to please them.
9. **They lie.** They lie to make themselves look good. They twist what you say and can confuse you, to the extent that you question your sanity. They belittle you and instil fear, so you are too scared to go against their wishes or speak out against them.
10. **They lack empathy** – they are selfish and self-involved and usually unable to understand what other people are feeling. So true emotional connection with a narcissist is close to impossible. A narcissist does not have the capacity to think about, "How will the other person feel?" "Will this make us both happy?" "How will this affect our relationship?"
11. They **project their feelings onto others** around them, accusing others of being negative, unsupportive, mentally ill, not putting them first, not responding to their needs. They can make up stories about things that never happened or make the details bigger and brighter than they were.
12. In spite of acting superior, they have **low self-esteem and often harbour a lot of deeply repressed shame.** They are very afraid of being ridiculed, rejected, or seen as wrong. If they suspect this is happening then narcissistic rage can come out which is often what leads to violence.

I hope as you read this you are quite horrified and start to get an idea of the damage that such a person can inflict. Just one or two of these behaviours may not make someone a narcissist. The more of them the person displays though, the more you want to be on your guard. And remember that sometimes when we are in a relationship we are blind in the beginning to the truth of the person. So, don't be afraid to ask a good friend for their input. And if this is someone you have trusted and been close to for a long time, don't automatically dismiss their comments because they are not what you want to hear. People can and do get out of relationships with narcissists. They leave narcissistic bosses and workplaces. It is not easy though and a lot of work is required to rebuild yourself afterwards.