



# Can you spot the signs of a malignant narcissist?

18 August 2026

It is quite common to hear the term narcissist used to describe someone in general everyday conversation. All sorts of people use the term to describe a variety of people, usually people they don't like. The term narcissist though, has a specific meaning in psychology and psychiatry, which implies that to warrant that label certain behaviours need to be present. Professionals have gone even further to categorise different types of narcissists, some of which can be difficult to detect, and some which we would be surprised to learn would be given that term. A malignant narcissist is usually the narcissist which does the most harm to other people, and you definitely want to learn to spot the signs of one and subsequently avoid them as much as possible. The malignant narcissist enjoys intimidating people, engages in emotional abuse, humiliates others, and typically causes a great deal of suffering for others.

So, what are signs that someone could be a malignant narcissist? Recognising the signs means paying attention to behaviour towards you and others. And that means reflecting on how someone treats you and others, and observing their behaviour over time, not just one instance. In order to be a malignant narcissist, you need to have quite a few of the following. Someone who just displays one or two of the below characteristics may not warrant being called a malignant narcissist. If someone displays lots of these behaviours, then you want to be very careful in dealing with them.

1. The person acts very **arrogant and superior** to everyone else around them. This arrogance is usually not appropriate. So, someone may make out that they are better than others at everything. Sometimes people are very good at their work or hobbies or sports, and this does not automatically make them narcissistic. The malignant narcissist is, in their mind, fantastic at everything, and just so much better than anyone else could ever be. There is something in what they say that pushes the boundaries of the truth.
2. One of the reasons the narcissist does this is because they **crave admiration and need constant praise**. They have a need to be praised constantly. They need you to tell them how brilliant and wonderful they are all the time. We all want to be praised when we do something well. The malignant narcissist craves this and wants praise and admiration all the time. If you should not meet their needs, you are going to know what their temper is like.
3. Because of their need to feel superior, one of the ways they meet this need is to **belittle and denigrate others**. Especially others around them or whom they may see as colleagues or in

competition with them. The malignant narcissist not only talks about how wonderful they are, they make a point of talking about how useless and stupid everyone else is.

4. Because of their desire to be superior they also hate to see others around them being successful. So much so, that they can even take steps to **sabotage the success** of others. They may say and do things that cause others to fail, and they have no problem in disregarding the law in their quest.
5. They are able to knock others down because they **lack empathy**. They don't care about the feelings of others, and in fact enjoy watching other people suffering in pain.
6. They are able to cause pain over and over again because they **do not feel remorse** for their acts. They are never guilty or in the wrong. A fairly healthy person is usually horrified when they realise their actions may have caused someone great harm or pain. They may take an action without realising the consequences, but when they see how they have hurt others they stop and feel guilty. The malignant narcissist usually gets quite pleased when other people are in pain, especially when their actions led to the hurt.
7. They **exploit people** and often use lies and manipulation to do this. Many malignant narcissists are pathological liars. And unfortunately, because of their intense desire to be superior and their lack of remorse, can trick others into believing some incredible stories of how their victim is wronging them. They also exploit others to get their own way. The malignant narcissist wants what they want, no matter who is harmed in the process. It is also irrelevant what the law is. If they want it, they want it, and will engage in all sorts of tricks, cons, lies, and manipulative practices to have what they want.
8. A malignant narcissist will **never take accountability**. Do you know someone who always blames others for everything, even their own actions? You may have met a malignant narcissist. In their eyes they cannot do wrong. They cannot be wrong. Everyone else, and I mean absolutely everyone else is in the wrong. But never them. If someone does try to hold them accountable they are very quick to find another person to blame instead of owning up to their actions.
9. And then finally, and this is very true of a malignant narcissist as opposed to other narcissistic types, they are **vindictive, vengeful**, hold grudges (even when they have done wrong), and can even be somewhat paranoid, believing the person they are trying to knock down is acting against them on purpose to bring them down.

Having read all that, I hope you are scared enough to wise up. If you do end up involved somehow with a malignant narcissist for any length of time, you will not come out of it unscathed. No matter how tough, emotionally intelligent, grounded, and street smart you are, they will leave scars. And it will take time to heal. Some of the most dangerous predators that human beings can encounter are other human beings. Any attempt to try and get along with them, sort out conflicts, and just be yourself, are doomed. They simply are not capable of normal human relationships.