



Beware the Narcissist

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I have a lot of people come to me in my practice, who it turns out, have come face to face on an almost daily basis with someone with narcissistic traits. This could be in a personal relationship or a work relationship. And mostly, they are confused, full of self-doubt, don't trust themselves to make decisions, lack confidence and self-esteem, and keep asking me to fix what is wrong with them. It turns out, usually, that there is nothing wrong with them. They have been blindsided by a narcissist.

There is a lot written and spoken about in the media on the topic of "narcissists". Sometimes it is done without truly understanding what narcissism is and what the characteristics of a narcissist are. However, the topic is an important one, as being involved in some way with a narcissist can be one of the most traumatic and exhausting experiences you can have. Quite a number of people have some of the traits of a narcissist, to a great or lesser extent. And some people have full-blown narcissistic personality disorder.

Although we would like to believe that most people mean well, some people are not good for us. No matter what we say or do they will behave in ways that upset and harm us. They are also usually people who will not own up to their faults, "Someone else is always to blame", and think everything is right with them. They are people who must have things their way.

So, what are some of the characteristics of a narcissistic person.

1. They lack empathy. Sometimes they are quite good at feigning empathy to get you on their side. However, they don't truly care how you feel, and in the long run your needs don't count. They just don't care about the emotional needs or experiences of others, including so-called loved ones.
2. They assign superficial value to people. People are a means to an end. People exist so the narcissist can have their needs met. Relationships can be, and often are, exploitative.

They are based on surface attributes not the unique qualities of the person. They value people only to the extent that people benefit them. Relationships exist only to shore up their grandiose self-image.

3. They have an exaggerated sense of self-importance: they feel superior to others and believe that they are deserving of special attention. Their thoughts and feelings are often accompanied by fantasies of unlimited success, brilliance, power, and beauty.
4. They have an excessive need for admiration. They need to be the centre of attention. To ensure they are the centre of attention they will often monopolise conversations or cut others off or refuse to give others a chance to express their opinions and needs. Should they feel ignored (which may be real or perceived) they will act slighted, mistreated and enraged. They are always right. And to ensure that other people understand that they are always in the right, they will act the hero or the victim. The belief that he or she is "special" and unique means they think they can only be understood by, or should associate with, other special or high-status people or institutions
5. They have a sense of entitlement. Often, they may think laws and rules are not applicable to them. These are the people we often talk about who "have one set of rules for themselves and another set for others".
6. They don't have a strong sense of self, and in fact are usually very insecure. Their sense of self is highly superficial, very rigid and fragile. Their emotional stability depends on maintaining the view that they are exceptional, and this sense of self is easily threatened. In which case they can turn nasty and bully. They are masters of projection. Aspects of themselves which they don't like, but which they are too insecure to own up to, they project onto others, accusing them in harsh and belittling ways of the very characteristics they themselves possess.
7. Despite the sense of their own self-importance, they often envy others, or turn this around and believe that others envy them.

If you have been in regular contact for some time with a person with narcissistic traits, or full-blown narcissistic personality disorder you may find yourself left with very little self-esteem and confidence. You may doubt your own experiences and reality sometimes. You may feel you make bad decisions or doubt your decision-making ability. And as long as you stay in contact with, or involved with, a narcissist this can just get worse. So you do want to get out of the clutches of a narcissist as quickly as possible. You may even need some help to get back your confidence, self-esteem and self-belief.