

Dealing with Narcissists
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I've written about bullies and narcissists before (see article on my website), but because I have so many patients who are struggling to get along with a narcissistic partner, parent, friend or boss - or still suffering the effects of growing up with a self-absorbed parent - I'd like to offer these additional tips (learned from experience):

Narcissists are among the most difficult types of people to deal with - while they can be extremely charming, entertaining and charismatic, they can also become hostile, full of rage, and "toxic" to those who have to live or work with them. They act as if the world revolves around them, or that their needs are all that matter. Looking good, or outward appearance, is extremely important to them, and they will do almost anything to get (and keep) the focus of attention on themselves. They must be agreed with at all times; they ignore, belittle, or simply refuse to accept differences of opinion, thought or feeling; and they will rarely admit to being wrong, or offer a sincere apology.

The first step in dealing with a narcissist is to understand their psychological make-up: they have an underdeveloped capacity for empathy (the ability to put yourself in someone else's shoes) and lack true compassion for others (though they can often fake it well). They can't tolerate any imperfection in themselves, so therefore deny its existence. Because all of their psychic energy is directed outward, to creating and maintaining this perfect image, they are disconnected from their inner self. As a result, they lack any real insight into their behavior, and are unable to see that they actually cause the very thing they most fear, which is to have other people avoid or dislike them. They often don't respect others' boundaries, and if you let them, they will suck the lifeblood and self-worth right out of you!

Wendy Behary, in her book, "*Disarming the Narcissist*", describes 4 types of narcissistic behavior: **The Show-Off** (like a child saying "look at me, look at me" or "I'm the greatest"); **The Bully** ("I'll make you do what I want," and "my way or the highway"); **The Entitled One** ("I answer to no one: your - or society's - rules don't apply to me"); and finally **The Addictive Self-Soother** ("I'm not addicted to work/porn/gambling/getting high - it just feels better than spending time with you/the children"). Of course, these descriptions are generalizations, and occur on a behavioral continuum from mildly annoying to severely pathological. They also often co-exist with substance abuse and addiction.

Nina Brown's book, "*Children of the Self-Absorbed*", has just been updated, and describes the negative impact on personality development and self-esteem that growing up with a self-absorbed parent can have. She's also written, "*Loving the Self-Absorbed*". All three books are published by New Harbinger (www.newharbinger.com).

Strategies for dealing with a narcissist include taking time out to calm down, reminding yourself to stay centered and to not take their attacks personally, modeling an empathic response (a trick: try to visualize this demanding diva or intimidating bully as an insecure, scared little kid), and setting firm limits around what you're willing to do for them. And for more help and support in coping with the narcissist in your life, contact me: