

7 Signs of a Narcissistic Parent and How to Cope

By [Michelle Pugle](#) | Updated on June 01, 2023

✓ Medically reviewed by [Steven Gans, MD](#)

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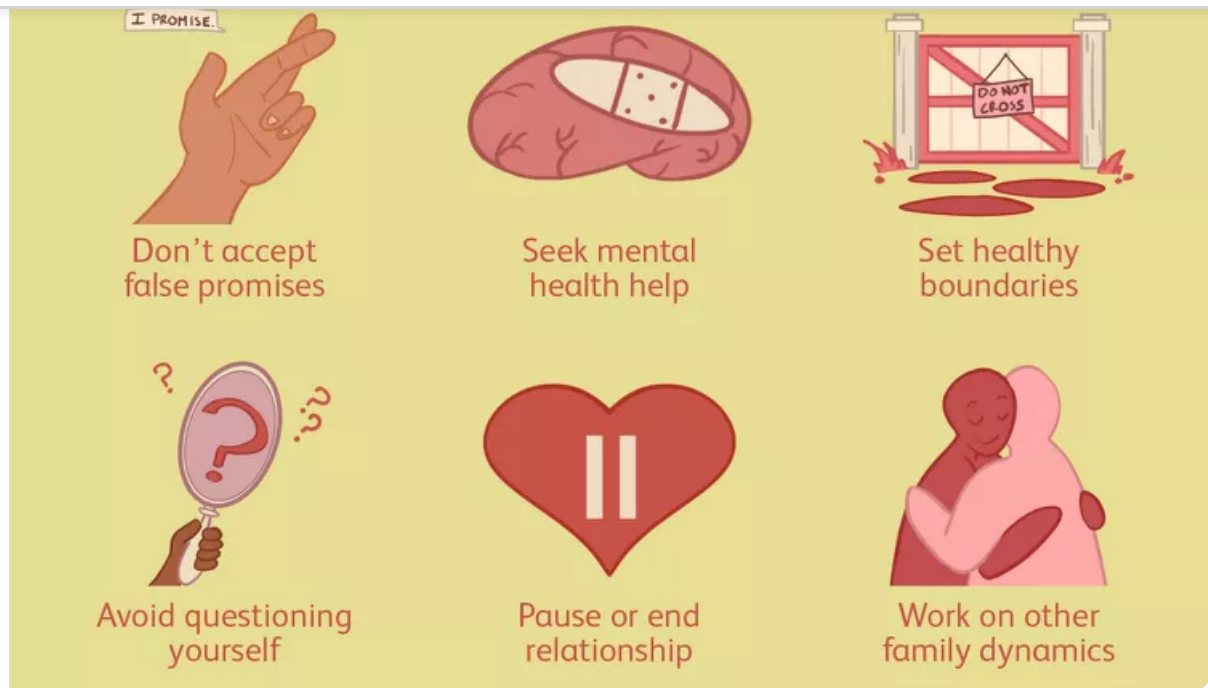
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Narcissistic parents may have a set of personality traits that include being self-centered and attention-seeking. If you suspect you have a [narcissistic mother or father](#), you may be wondering how to deal with them in order to preserve both your well-being and your relationship with them.

This article discusses how to tell if you have a narcissistic parent, ways to interact with them, and treatments that may help you cope.



Verywell / Laura Porter

Narcissism vs. Narcissistic Personality Disorder

Someone who is a narcissist isn't necessarily living with [narcissistic personality disorder](#) (or any [personality disorder](#)). Narcissism isn't a diagnosis; it refers to a set of personality traits.

Signs of a Narcissistic Parent

Your parent's genetics, [childhood](#), early relationships, general personality and temperament, trauma, and more factors impact their feelings and behavior. Characteristics of narcissistic parents may include the following.

Focusing all the family's time and attention on themselves

Narcissists often need continuous validation to make up for low self esteem. They also tend to focus more on their own feelings than those of other people. With a narcissistic parent, this may manifest as always wanting to be the focus of the family's attention.

Not showing concern or compassion for their children or other family members

concern or compassion for other family members, including you or their other children. They may be most concerned about how your feelings and behavior affect them, not about how you or other family members may be feeling.

Not taking accountability when things go wrong

Narcissists may jump to blame other people when a plan crumbles, even if they are the one at fault. Admitting to their own mistakes or flaws may shatter their already unstable view of themselves.

Being codependent or controlling

A narcissistic parent may be overly controlling so that they can make sure every situation goes their way. Often, their self-esteem isn't high enough to handle setbacks. They may also have a constant fear of being abandoned, leading them to compensate by being codependent in relationships.

Ruling by domination, fear, or manipulation

Narcissists people will do whatever they can to make sure they are in command of a relationship or situation, even if it means exerting control by dominating, instilling fear, or manipulating. Because their main concern is themselves, a narcissistic parent will use these tactics to keep you behaving in a way that suits them.

Will tease, mock, bully, or gaslight

A narcissistic parent may try to bring you down through teasing, mocking, bullying, or gaslighting so that they can always seem to superior to you. In this way, they can exert control over you.

Only be able to show conditional love

A narcissistic parent may make you feel like you will not love them if they do or say certain things. Withholding love is a way for them to instill fear to further control you.

Related: [Emotional Abuse: Signs of Mental Abuse and What to Do](#)

Mental Health Hotline

If you or a loved one are struggling with self-harming behaviors or other distressing mental health concerns, contact the [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration \(SAMHSA\) National Helpline](#) at **800-662-4357** for information on support and treatment facilities in your area.

For more mental health resources, see our [National Helpline Database](#).

As a child, you may not have had much choice other than to try to meet the demands of the narcissistic parent. If you were raised by a narcissist, it will undeniably have some impact on the way you see yourself and your role in the world. This means you may have developed toxic traits or unhelpful ways of thinking about your value and sense of worthiness or purpose. Maybe you have spent years trying to please or earn the recognition, respect, and love from a narcissistic parent only to be continuously let down.

Consider if any of the traits of adults raised by narcissists apply to you: ^[1]

Low-self esteem or feelings of self-worth

Feelings of chronic shame or guilt

Overly sensitive to criticism or rejection

Dependent relationships where you're trying to "earn" love and validation

[Depression](#) and [anxiety](#) influenced by a lack of agency or independence during childhood

Poor understanding and enforcement of boundaries

Challenges with healthy emotional regulation

Competitiveness (to win love)

Feeling like you don't deserve success and happiness

[Self-destructive and self-harming behaviors](#)

Self-shaming or internalized gaslighting

Learn More: [What Is Psychological Stress?](#)

How to Deal With a Narcissistic Parent

you will and will not tolerate moving forward. It may take time to figure out what type of relationship (if any) you want to work on with this parent. Ups and downs are to be expected.

When in any relationship with a narcissist, it's good to prioritize self-care and emotional well-being. Narcissists can drain energy and twist facts to the point that may have you wondering whether you're the one with the problem. That's because the finger has likely always been pointed in your direction. ^[1]

Here are some ways to deal with narcissistic parents: ^[2]^[3]

Remind Yourself You Are Dealing With a Narcissist

Keep in mind that it will be difficult to change a narcissistic parent's behavior or get them to truly understand how you feel. Reminding yourself that you may never win can prevent frustration and disappointment.

Know You Cannot Change the Narcissist

It will be impossible to change a narcissistic parent unless they've recognized the problem and want to change. Trying to change them will only cause you frustration because you're unlikely to get the result you want.

Avoid Questioning Yourself

Narcissistic people can be convincing, and it can be tempting to start questioning whether you're in the wrong. But it's best to stay confident and avoid questioning yourself; narcissists purposefully manipulate to get you to see things their way.

Don't Try to Explain Narcissism to the Narcissist

A narcissistic person likely doesn't want to understand themselves or change, and any attempt to explain narcissism to them likely won't go the way you hope.

Don't Isolate Yourself With Your Narcissistic Parent

time with your parent in a group setting will minimize your contact with them and provide a buffer if they do attempt to engage in hurtful behavior.

Set Healthy Boundaries

You will need to be firm with your narcissistic parent about any boundaries you have, whether your boundary involves the amount of time you want to spend with them or the topics you're willing to discuss. If they try to cross those boundaries, be assertive.

Don't Accept False Promises

A narcissistic parent may try to placate you by offering promises they don't intend to keep. Because narcissistic people tend to do what's best for them, assume that they won't follow through with these promises.

Be Direct About Their Role in Your Life

Be clear about the role you'd like your narcissistic parent to play in your life, even if it means telling them that you want that role to be small. Narcissistic parents may try to push boundaries, so it's important to be clear about the type of interaction you want to have with them. By being upfront, they can't act surprised by your reaction.

Seek External Help and Support

Dealing with a narcissistic parent is difficult in many ways. Lean on friends and loved ones to help you through it. Your support network can also help guide you if you fear you may have difficulty parenting your own child as a result of your upbringing.

Be Willing to Pause or End the Relationship

Although it's not easy to end a relationship with a parent, it may be the best course of action if you feel that the relationship is causing you distress. If you're not ready to put a permanent end to the relationship, you can also take a break and revisit the situation once you've had time away.

As an adult raised by a narcissist, there are many options for dealing with them and coping with unhealthy family dynamics and trauma. You don't need to repeat the past. You can work toward diminishing the impact of early childhood trauma to reduce the negative impact on your life.

There is no set treatment plan for children of narcissists. You may decide to do self-work by reading about narcissism and the effects of having a narcissistic parent, putting space between yourself and this person, or seeing a mental health professional like a counselor or therapist to determine how best to move forward.

If you are considering the ways in which growing up with a narcissist may have impacted your life, it may be helpful to have professional guidance. Depending on their training and services, psychotherapists may offer help in the following ways.

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)

[Cognitive behavioral therapy](#) is a form of [talk therapy](#) that takes place over several or many sessions. It can help you recognize unhealthy beliefs you learned in childhood and how they may contribute to your current problems. Your therapist can also share information on narcissism to help you see how it influenced your home dynamics and relationship with your parents.

CBT is about how to change thought patterns in ways that can help you live the life you want, including how to change the way you feel about yourself and your capabilities so you can work on your goals. These goals may or may not involve the narcissistic parent; that will be your choice.

CBT is currently considered the gold standard for certain mental health conditions as it's the most well-researched form of psychotherapy. However, there are other evidence-based psychotherapies, such as psychodynamic psychotherapy, that can help you better understand and master the impact of your early relationships on your current life. ^[4]

Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR)

If you have lasting effects of living with a narcissistic parent like trauma flashbacks, being easily triggered emotionally, or issues with emotional regulation, eye movement desensitization and reprocessing may be an

EMDR therapy uses a structured eight-phase approach over multiple sessions that includes: ^[5]

Phase 1: History-taking

Phase 2: Preparing the client

Phase 3: Assessing the target memory

Phases 4–7: Processing the memory to an adaptive resolution

Phase 8: Evaluating treatment results

EMDR therapy differs from other trauma-focused treatments in that it does not include [extended exposure](#) to the distressing memory, detailed descriptions of the trauma, challenging of dysfunctional beliefs, or homework assignments.

Interpersonal Family Therapy

Certain types of family therapy, including [interpersonal family therapy](#), may be considered in addition to the other methods of treatment, but typically only if both you and the narcissistic parent agree to work together on your relationship. However, getting a narcissist to acknowledge their role in poor relationships or toxic behaviors may be particularly challenging since they often believe they can do no wrong. ^[2]

Related: [What Is Family Therapy?](#)

Seek Help If You Need It

If you are experiencing signs and symptoms of mental health problems such as anxiety or depression, consider talking to a mental health professional about how you feel right now and opening up about your past. Telling your healthcare provider about any signs and symptoms is always a good way to begin the healing process.

Summary

Growing up with a narcissistic parent is a unique challenge that can have lasting effects on mental and physical health. However, it's never too late

There are many options like CBT and EMDR that can help you deal with trauma, set healthy goals, and find and maintain healthier relationships.

Only you can decide whether or not working on a relationship with a narcissistic parent is worth your time, effort, and energy. Working on healing yourself from damages done, though, will always be worth it.

5 Sources 



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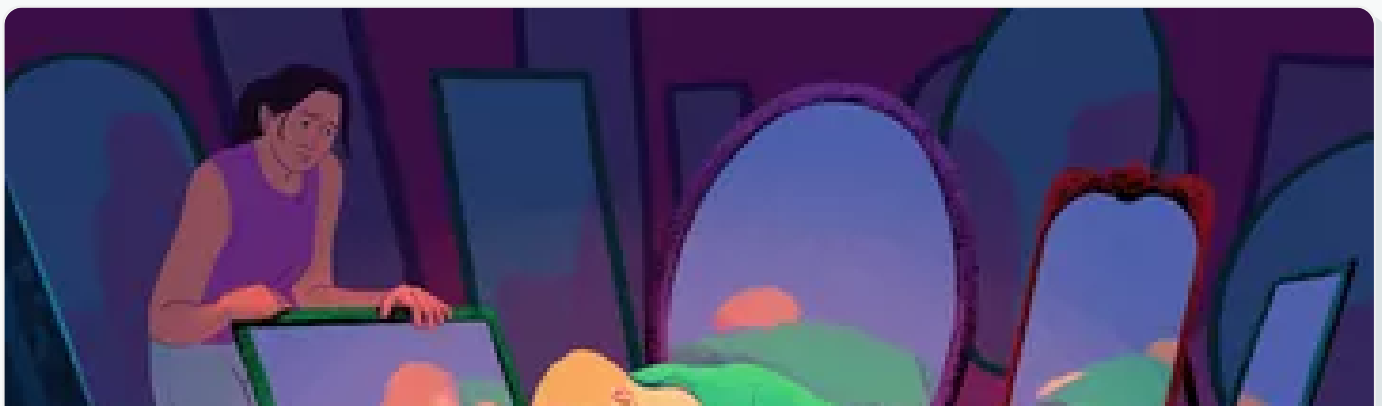
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