



Ten Signs You Are In A Relationship With A Narcissist



There are certain experiences I see over and over when people are in a relationship with a narcissist. Often, they end up caught in the swirl of it all, just trying to keep their head above water. Nothing makes sense.

Once we talk about the signs of narcissism, it's like the light finally comes on in the room. When we talk about how narcissists operate, it is often an enormous relief for people. Everything finally makes sense. It's incredibly validating. It's one reason I feel passionate about getting information about narcissism out to people like you.

Here are the most common signs I see when someone is dealing with a narcissist.

1. You Can't Feel Them.

This dynamic intrigues me. I've not heard anybody else talk about this, but almost every time I describe it, people say, "YES, omg, that's it!" As I discussed above, it's the weird and creepy experience of not being able to sync up with the person. It often leaves you feeling anxious without knowing why.

This can look like:

- ❖ You try to make a light joke and get a blank stare back.
- ❖ The rhythm of the conversation will be off.
- ❖ They use non-sequiturs. The conversation can feel confusing and hard to follow. It can feel disjointed, like there is no flow with them. You get weird answers from them and blank stares rather than a response.
- ❖ Rather than going back and forth with you when you are talking to them, they will often hijack the conversation (either verbally or non-verbally). They talk at you rather than with you.
- ❖ They won't allow you to empathize with them. This is often a bizarre experience. They will complain about something, but when you chime in to say, "Oh it sounds like you are really frustrated" they will look at you and say, "No I'm not!". Even though they just spent the last five minutes talking about how frustrated they are.
- ❖ You will often get a kind of blank wall feeling from them if you are talking about yourself.

2. You Can't Get Grounded.

One of the core elements of being in a relationship with a narcissist is a constant sense of confusion, frustration, and intimidation/fear. You keep trying to figure out how to make the

relationship work. The problem is, unless you understand what narcissism is, it's an endlessly futile game of trying to figure out how to get the narcissist to show up for connection.

The problem is the narcissist is not there for connection. They are there for control. While you are trying to establish reciprocity, they are working to get their needs met. They will use whatever means necessary to get that. If you don't understand this, you will be at their mercy.

This leads to a constant sense of being off balance. *They put you through mental and emotional whiplash.* It's often the experience of feeling utterly confused about why the narcissist is reacting the way they are and hurt by the lack of care from them. You can never quite get grounded in the relationship. If you manage to get grounded, it won't last long. You'll get your knees knocked out from under you again.

You will often experience a mix of:

- ❖ They attribute motivations to you that have nothing to do with you.
- ❖ The energy in the conversation or the room feels somehow menacing.
- ❖ You feel on guard while simultaneously feeling the need to get reassurance they are not mad at you.
- ❖ They will have strong negative reactions to things that feel minor or innocuous. They will blindside you by suddenly being angry or offended.

The narcissist is not interested in making this better for you. In fact, the more off balance you are, the easier it is for them to maintain control and blame you for all their woes. Rather than being willing to have an authentic conversation about your concerns, the narcissist is going to tell you that you are crazy. Which will lead you to feeling even more off balance and less grounded. It's a vicious cycle. You know how this goes.

Let's say they don't show up when they said they would.

You: "Hey, where were you? I've been waiting for 45 minutes."

The Narcissist: "What are you talking about? I said I would be here at 5:00, I'm early!"

You: {{feeling nervous}} "But we said 4:00"

The Narcissist: "No we didn't! You are always messing the time up! WE SAID 5:00."

At this point, you just back down. You're no longer sure. Maybe you *did* say 5:00. Either way, it's too stressful to argue about it. You just get quiet and small.

I'll talk more about the ways the narcissist controls you a bit later in this manual. It's crucial for you to understand the methods they use. The relationships with them are often emotionally abusive and can feel devastating. It can truly make you feel crazy.

3. You Constantly Chase Trying to Be Good Enough for Them and Trying to Keep Them Calm.

If you are in a relationship with a narcissist, you will always feel like you need to fix something. They are very good at making you feel you have done something wrong, so you end up living in fear of making them angry and trying to avoid getting it wrong.

It ends up feeling like you are constantly walking on eggshells, trying everything to avoid breaking those fragile shells. It's one reason it is so devastating to grow up in a home with a narcissistic parent or sibling. Everything is in service to keep the chaotic one calm. Your needs and wants will always come second to keeping them from getting upset.

But here's the thing, the narcissist is *always* angry about something. You may as well let the eggshells break because you are not going to stop them from getting upset.

I talk about the *Narcissistic Relationship Cycle* in the next section in this manual. Make sure you read it! It will explain more in depth how this plays out.

4. Your Needs and Emotions Don't Matter.

In healthy relationships we go back and forth with our partner so that we meet each other's needs and show up for emotional connection. This is never perfect, but there is at least reciprocity. *The narcissist will make you feel guilty for having needs and emotions.*

Anything that does not benefit the narcissist is considered a waste of time. Your needs, wants, and emotional experience are dismissed and minimized. If you try to let them know you are distressed or are upset by something they have done, they are most likely going to flip it on you. How dare you make them feel bad by pointing out what they did! They are incredibly adept at *always* being the victim. Trying to get a moment of validation from them is like crawling through the desert yearning for water. *They train you not to have your own needs.*

Your experience will never be validated and there will never be room in the relationship for what you need. To add to the pain, the narcissist will shame you and try to convince you that you are doing something wrong when you ask them to step up to meet your needs and validate your emotions.

One of the primal needs we have as human beings is to know that we matter. We can get desperate in our pursuit of this. It's one way you end up getting held hostage in the cycle with

the narcissist. You keep trying and trying to get them to show up for the relationship, to let you know you matter. They keep letting you down. It's an incredibly lonely experience.

5. Your Pain and Distress Make Them Angry.

There are certain movie scenes that are iconic because they stir such deep emotions in us. Do you remember a movie scene that made you cry? How that felt? That's the experience of normal human empathy. When you see someone in pain, even someone who is make believe, you also feel pain. Their pain invokes an emotional resonance in you.

This does not happen in the narcissist. Your pain and distress do not create resonance or empathy in them. *It leaves them agitated and angry.* They cannot tolerate your pain and rather than showing up with validation, compassion, or nurturing they will shut you down. At best you will simply get ignored but most often they will be angry and disgusted with your pain. They will shame you for being "too sensitive" or "weak" and will make you feel guilty for being a bother to them. "Why are you crying? Don't you know how busy I am right now? How can you do this to me?"

This is what broken empathy looks like. This is also one of the most confusing aspects for the people around the narcissist. It's incredibly hard for us to understand the lack of emotional resonance. We feel it so strongly ourselves, so it's hard for us to conceive that someone simply does not feel it. How do you not care what someone else is feeling? Not understanding this is a huge mistake people make with the narcissist. They truly do not experience emotions in the same way you and I do.

6. The Narcissist Will Never Apologize, Never Be Accountable, and Will Always Blame Others.

It. Will. Never. Be. Their. Fault.
Hard stop.

This is one of the most maddening things about them. Trying to get them to see the light about what they have done is like trying to nail Jell-O to the wall. You can literally have a video of them taking the cookie out of the cookie jar and they will look you dead in the eye and say, "I didn't do that!" Worse, they will say it with such conviction that you will doubt your own eyes. You often feel crazy in the relationship.

They have what I call “*playdough reality*” meaning, reality is whatever they want or need it to be at any given moment. This can change on a dime. They create it as they go, and I truly believe they could pass a lie detector test.

This is intensely frustrating and confusing for us. It can make you doubt that the sky is blue. It can also leave you feeling rage when the narcissist won’t admit what they have done and will never give you a genuine apology.

This is the danger zone for many people and where they get held hostage in the dynamic, tied to the narcissist for years. Even after people leave the relationship, they can spend tremendous amounts of time and psychic energy trying to get the narcissist to see the light, do the right thing, and take accountability. You just want them to take responsibility for what they did, even one time.

They won’t.

You will never get it from them. Your only freedom is to work through the process of letting go of trying to get it from them. This is much easier said than done and very few people can do this process alone. It generally takes some hard work with a therapist who understands narcissistic dynamics.

7. If You Try to Leave, There Is a Clear Cycle. They Panic, They Charm, They Rage.

The narcissist’s core wound is abandonment. They can’t stand to be alone, so if you try to leave them it will trigger intense emotional reactions in them. They will experience any type of separation from them as abandonment.

This can be anything from healthy separations, such as a child going off to college, to you breaking up with them. Being left triggers intense anxiety and distress in them. They will make it very uncomfortable for you if you decide to end the relationship. Again, even if this is a normal healthy separation, they will make it hell for you. If it’s an actual breakup, be prepared. They will make it next level hell for you.

I talk more about leaving a narcissist later in this manual, but here is what it often looks like when you start to separate from them. This is a part of the *Narcissistic Relationship Cycle* I’ve explained in more depth in the next section. Make sure you look at it and keep it as a reference. It’s crucial to understand it.

As always, with anything dealing with human behavior, people can be unpredictable. This is very common, but your narcissist may play it out differently.

Step 1. You decide to leave or separate. You start to pull away.

Step 2. The narcissist panics. They get anxious, sad, pleading. This fires up your empathy and you start to feel guilty and bad for upsetting them.

Step 3. The narcissist turns on the charm. They suddenly become the person they were when you first met them. Charming, attentive, patient, fun to be with. Wow! This is the person you've been trying to get to show up! They make you feel special and make you feel like you matter to them! Man, does this feel good. As someone recently said to me, during this phase she "lost the monster". The 'monster' gets tucked away.

This is often the point where people get pulled back into the relationship because it ignites hope in them. It's going to be OK after all. It just feels so good to finally feel like you matter in this relationship. *Your empathy for the narcissist's sadness has found a reason to stay and you don't have to cause all that mess and terrible pain if you leave.*

People often need to go through this phase of the cycle multiple times before they realize it really is never going to truly change.

If you decide to really leave, get ready for step 4.

Step 4. Once they realize you are going to leave for real, they get nasty. This is when the narcissistic rage comes out. This is also when they can feel very scary.

The narcissist is not afraid of conflict. They love to fight because they get a tremendous amount of energy and attention from you. They also get to control. The narcissist is happy to burn down the house and salt the fields. They will do everything they can to pull you in and intimidate you. They are feeling rage and need to make you feel as bad as possible.

If you are going to leave a narcissist, **do not do it alone**. Again, I talk more about this later in this manual, but it's crucial that you understand the dynamics and the strategies to deal with them.

8. Projection. They Blame You for What They Are Doing.

Think of the term projection this way: if you have a movie projector, it casts the images onto a screen. It's the same thing, only the narcissist is the projector, and you are the screen.

Rather than taking accountability for what they are doing, the narcissist will blame you for what they are doing, saying, and thinking. It is a bizarre experience and will make you feel crazy. I remember one conversation I was a part of. The narcissist kept interrupting someone. It was intense. The other person could not finish a sentence without the narcissist stopping them. Finally, the person managed to get out some thoughts to which the narcissist responded, “Stop interrupting me!”. It felt crazy.

The narcissist will look you dead in the eye and flat out lie. If the narcissist is accusing you of something, chances are they are the one committing that very crime.

If they have been cheating, they will not only deny it, but they will also accuse you of cheating. If they are hiding money, they will insist you have a secret stash of cash. They will do it will utter conviction and not a trace of doubt. It can be convincing, confusing, and will leave you feeling terribly off balance.

This often serves to knock you off balance if you are trying to hold them accountable. It allows them to shift the focus of blame to anyone but themselves. It’s one of the crazy making ways they avoid accountability.

9. They Know What You Are Feeling, But They Don’t Use It for Reciprocity or To Build Relationship.

When you or I see someone experiencing distress, our empathy kicks in. We want to make it better for them. Sometimes to a fault. Their experience *matters* to us. *The narcissist knows what you feel, but it does not matter to them.* At best, it will be neutral information for them. At worst, they weaponize it.

Think about how many times the narcissist in your life has been angry with you and will use your vulnerabilities to hurt or shame you. They are good at zeroing in on your soft spots and using them as a salvo to emotionally manipulate you or punish you.

As I discussed earlier in this guide, their brains are not normal. They do not have the capacity for normal reciprocity. They will not try to connect with you, they will try to control you. Again, this is super confusing for those of us who do have empathy – we can’t conceive that they don’t. We keep trying to get them to do the dance with us.

It often feels emotionally dangerous to be in relationship with them. Vulnerability does not feel safe once you have experienced how they use it.

10. The Relationship with Them is Always About Power and Control.

I'm going to sound like a broken record here, but it bears repeating, narcissists are not about reciprocity, empathy, or connection. They can identify what you feel, but it does not matter to them. You exist to serve their needs. They do not truly see *you*.

This means that relationships are a zero-sum game for them. It's about winning or losing, power or weakness. They don't gather a community around them; they gather a fan club. You are in or you are out of the fan club. There is no in-between. There also is no "us". For the narcissist, there is only "me".

