

Narcissistic Abuse Research Notes

Source 1: HelpGuide.org

Definition

- Narcissistic abuse is abuse at the hands of someone with narcissistic personality disorder (NPD)
- Involves hurting or manipulating victims to feed the abuser's ego and maintain control
- Can be overt (mocking, criticizing) or subtle (ignoring needs, withholding affection)
- Occurs in various relationships: family, romantic, workplace

Key Signs of Narcissistic Abuse

1. **Gaslighting** - Making victims doubt their own perceptions or memories
2. **Love-bombing and devaluation** - Excessive affection followed by tearing down self-esteem
3. **Constant criticism and belittling** - Nitpicking, insulting, minimizing accomplishments
4. **Shifting blame** - Never taking responsibility, always blaming others
5. **Withholding affection** - Only showing love when demands are met
6. **Isolation** - Cutting victims off from friends and family support
7. **Financial abuse** - Limiting access to money, creating dependency

The Cycle of Narcissistic Abuse (4 Phases)

Phase 1: Idealization

- Narcissist appears charming and caring
- Victim feels valued, appreciated, heard
- Showered with compliments and attention

Phase 2: Devaluation

- Behavior suddenly switches
- Criticism, humiliation, disregard for feelings
- Victim feels hurt and foolish for trusting

Phase 3: Discard

- Abuser withdraws completely
- Victim feels uncared for and alone
- Abuser may deny abuse occurred, blame victim, or smear their reputation

Phase 4: Hoovering

- Narcissist tries to pull victim back in
- May apologize, offer help, present as "hero"
- If successful, cycle restarts

Psychological Impact

- Deep emotional scars
- Self-doubt and questioning of own feelings/experiences
- Low self-esteem, shame, guilt
- Depression and anxiety
- Sense of hopelessness and feeling trapped
- Complex PTSD (C-PTSD) from long-term trauma
- Difficulty trusting others after leaving
- Hypervigilance and social withdrawal

Source 2: Choosing Therapy - Recovery Strategies

15 Recovery Strategies

- 1. Label the Abuse** - Recognize and legitimize the experience to maintain objectivity
- 2. End the Relationship** - Abusive relationships rarely improve; leaving is often the best option
- 3. Set Clear Boundaries** - Avoid all contact when possible; if contact necessary (co-parenting), create specific limits
- 4. Avoid Retaliation** - Use "grey rock" method (remaining neutral and unresponsive) instead of engaging
- 5. Seek Immediate Support** - Reach out to trusted friends, family, or support groups
- 6. Create Consistent Schedule** - Routine provides stability and focus during chaos
- 7. Anticipate Grief** - Loss can trigger distress even when ending toxic relationships
- 8. Express Emotions** - Don't suppress feelings; use journaling, art, or music to process

- 9. Rediscover Yourself** - Many sacrifice identity in narcissistic relationships; explore interests again
- 10. Implement Self-Care** - Focus on physical and emotional well-being
- 11. Forgive Yourself** - Abuse was not your fault; self-compassion aids healing
- 12. Take Time Before Dating** - Process what happened before entering new relationships
- 13. Protect on Social Media** - Block abuser, make profiles private, be cautious with personal information
- 14. Create New Rituals** - Replace triggering patterns with new positive routines
- 15. Reflect on Lessons Learned** - Understanding patterns helps prevent future abuse

Therapy Approaches for Recovery

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) - Changes unhelpful thinking patterns internalized from abuse

Trauma-Focused Therapy - Heals trauma inflicted by volatile and confusing abuse

EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization) - Reprocesses traumatic memories to reduce distress

Attachment-Based Therapy - Examines childhood relationships and patterns to prevent repetition

Psychodynamic Therapy - Increases self-awareness by examining current behaviors and past experiences

Source 3: Choosing Therapy - Manipulation Tactics

12 Common Manipulation Tactics

- 1. Gaslighting** - Denying reality, making victims doubt their memories and perceptions ("it wasn't that bad," "you're losing your mind")
- 2. Love Bombing** - Excessive gifts, affection, and attention early in relationship to gain control
- 3. Triangulation** - Bringing third person into conflict to take their side or deflect from own actions
- 4. Projection** - Accusing others of behaviors they themselves are doing (e.g., accusing partner of cheating when they're unfaithful)
- 5. Playing the Victim** - Reversing roles after harmful behavior, using DARVO (Deny, Attack, Reverse Victim & Offender)

- 6. Smear Campaign** - Creating web of lies to discredit and isolate victim publicly
- 7. Revenge Seeking** - Retaliating when feeling wronged (sabotaging work, spreading rumors)
- 8. Guilt Tripping** - Making others feel bad to get what they want or maintain control
- 9. Hoovering** - Attempting to "win back" victim after breakup with gifts, praise, sporadic contact
- 10. Breadcrumbs** - Giving just enough attention to keep victim invested without true commitment; cycling between warmth and coldness
- 11. Silent Treatment** - Deliberately ignoring to maintain power, punish, and evoke guilt or fear
- 12. Isolation** - Systematically cutting victim off from friends and family to create dependency