Deep Insights into Narcissistic Parents: Going Behind Their Controlling Behavior and Mapping Out Its Long Term Consequences

A Description of the Archetypical Narcissistic Parent
Recognize This?

What are narcissistic parents?

Well, I think most of us have actually already encountered one or two parents that could probably be labelled narcissistic to a more or less degree.

Here's the archetypical description of these kinds of toxic parents:

Imagine yourself being present at one of your kids' sports activities. For instance at the dance studios or soccer field sidelines.

You now take your time to look around at the other parents.

Now, the narcissistic parents may ones that at first seem positively and enthusiastically engaged in their kids’ performances.

Ok, being involved in your kids is good. So what's the problem?

Well, at closer look, it may feel as these parents' aim is less to support their children and more about wanting to make sure that their children's skills and abilities are duly noticed and properly approved of.

In other words, it seems as if their engagement is more about ensuring externally recognized performance than being joyfully involved with their kids!

To enhance the approval of their child, these parents will typically be calling attention to their child (and thereby themselves) by overemphasizing and praising their achievements.

Another thing that is characteristic is this: Narcissistic parents tend to be very organized and seeming to have their children's future all mapped out.
They fill their children's calendar with various activities focussed on improving their skills in various areas and immerse themselves into their children's lives whenever possible e.g. by running every event or sitting on every council.

Why do narcissistic parents seem to put so much focus on their children?

Well, it all comes down to needs!

Read on!

---

**A Narcissistic Parent Puts His or Her Own Needs for Recognition Before the Basic Needs of His or Her Child**

At first glance, living the life of a narcissistic parent seems like a true self sacrifice.

Everything is about the child and it looks as if the parent gives up a lot of adult pleasures to be involved in their children's life and activities.

However, as it happens the child is not an end, the child is a means for something else. Attention, among other things.

The self sacrifice is not actually a sacrifice! The self sacrifice is a self written, fictional story that aims at justifying the egoic need that lies behind the 'self-less' actions.

You see, the child becomes a means for the parent to live out his or her own unfulfilled needs. Often these unfulfilled needs go all the way back to their own childhood.

Also without being consciously aware of it, they place a huge responsibility upon their children's shoulders.

The child's job is to live out the lifelong dream that they themselves never got around to or had the opportunity to.

Even though narcissistic parents (or toxic parents as they are also called) often love their children and perhaps think that by pacing their children they are paving the way for the children's future success, their primary motive is satisfaction of their own needs of external recognition. Not the needs of their children!

---

**Narcissistic Parents Mold Children to Fit Their Own Ideal Image**

A newborn is completely dependent on his parents to meet his most basic physical needs.

However, the narcissistic parent will attempt to perpetuate this dependence to the point where the child is not permitted to develop his or her own identity but is rather forced to become 'one with' the narcissist until there is no perceived difference (on the part of the narcissistic parent) between the parent and the child.

In this way the child is considered to be part of the narcissist parent.

From the parent's unconscious point of view, the child becomes an instrumental extension of himself or herself.

The child becomes the parent's source of "narcissistic supply" and the means of satisfying the parent's high need for attention.

These children are molded and shaped to realize their parent's dreams, goals, and fantasies. It is 'life by proxy'.

---
A List of Archetypical Traits of Narcissistic Parents

The character traits of these kinds of toxic parents may be seen in a hundred different ways and to list all these traits would take several pages and an endless amount of your time.

However, there are a few major factors that generally describe the typical narcissistic parent.

1) Narcissistic Parents Take Ownership of Their Children’s Successes

As mentioned, the narcissistic parent feels deprived of recognition and lets this unfulfilled need guide their actions.

In other words, the goal is personal attention and external recognition.

If the child doesn't live up to these unspoken needs, the parents may react with quite a large emotional scale ranging from contempt, rage, pouting, silence to emotional, psychological, and even physical abuse, at the extreme end.

Basically, there is an unwritten, one-way agreement from parents to child, and when the parents feel that children are reneging on this agreement, they will feel they have been unjustly treated and betrayed.

In their mind they have 'sacrificed' everything for their children's successes, remember!

However, when the children are successful, the parents tend to take credit for their children's successes.

For example, if a child is congratulated for an award or recognition, the narcissistic parent might respond with something like, "He gets his academic ability from me. When I was his age I always had the highest grade in the class."

Or, "I spend hours at the hockey arena, get up early every morning to take him to practice, and work extra hours to make sure he always has the best equipment."

It sounds good, but what they are really saying is, "I have sacrificed my entire life for my child. They wouldn't be where they are if it wasn't for me, therefore, I am the one that really deserves the accolades."

In some cases, this can even go so far that the parents become envious or jealous of the children's recognitions and accomplishments.

Needless to say, this may cause a lot of confusion since these children are simply pursuing the goals outlined by their parents, yet they receive conflicting emotions when they realize success.

2) Narcissistic Parents Struggle with Empathy and Emotional Connection

The personal needs of these parents are so overwhelming and dominant, that there is little space for the needs of others.

This means that they have tremendous difficulty with tuning in to their children's thoughts and feelings. Their own feelings and unmet needs simply overshadow everything.

Think about it! When you find yourself in emotional turmoil how much are you able to not only feel other people but also satisfy their emotional needs? Not much!

According to statistics, narcissistic parents were most likely raised by narcissists who were unable to give them the unconditional love they needed.
As a result, when these children have children of their own, they tend to perpetuate the cycle because they are constantly focused on their own unmet needs.

3) Narcissistic Parents Often Use Emotional Blackmail

Narcissistic parents can be indulgent and very affectionate as long as children are obedient. However, they might also become angry when faced with disobedience.

The showing of love is conditioned on how good the children make the parents feel, and this inconsistency or unpredictability tends to create emotional insecurity and co-dependence. The parent needs the child in order to feel good. And the other way around the child becomes responsible if the parent feels bad.

Children become confused by the vacillation between approval and punishment, and these mixed signals may cause feelings of betrayal because the same person who gives them love and stability is also the one who takes it away.

Very unbalanced narcissistic parents will often be engaged in criticizing their children and then justifying these actions by saying that they are just trying to help because they 'know what is best'.

They tend to make demeaning comments and might use favoritism or comparison between siblings or friends as a form of manipulation. They will constantly exalt one child and list all their good points with the implication that another child is unworthy or does not measure up.

As adults, children raised by such toxic parents may feel like they have to earn love. That love is dependent on something else, like their achievements.

Because of the unstable emotional climate in their childhood, as adults they fear abandonment if they do not perform according to expectations.

In order to ensure that they are needed, they often perceive their primary role to be 'taking care' of their spouse, partner, parent, friend, or employer.

4) Narcissistic Parents Must Always Be in Control

Parents with narcissistic personalities exercise controlling behavior by telling their children how they should feel, how they should behave, and what decisions they should make.

The result may be that these children never really develop their own interests because they are always being told what their preferences should be. In this way the space for children's autonomy is very little.

As children grow, the natural desire is to pursue the development of their personality, independence, and boundaries.

However, independence is a threat to a narcissist parent because the consequence is that they will not be needed anymore. Remember, children are the source of narcissistic supply or self-esteem.

In an attempt to maintain status quo, narcissistic parents might resort to various types of controlling behavior and control mechanisms in order to enforce compliance and prevent autonomy.

Control Mechanisms and Controlling Behavior
There are several control mechanisms that narcissistic parents might employ to have their children meet their needs.

1) Guilt Driven Control:

This kind of control says, "I have given my life for you. I have sacrificed everything for you."

It creates a sense of obligation in children and makes them feel as if they 'owe' their parents and must show their appreciation by making them happy or complying with their wishes.

2) Co-Dependent Control:

This kind of control says, "I need you. I cannot face life without you."

Children are often prevented from having their own relationships or friendships because it threatens their status in the parents' lives. In this way, children come to feel responsible for their parents' happiness and well-being and are easily manipulated through guilt.

3) Goal Driven Control:

This kind of control says, "We must work together to achieve a common goal."

Unfortunately these goals are usually the dreams and passions of the parents and children are simply a way for parents to vicariously realize their unfulfilled needs.

Children feel like they will disappoint their parents or let them down if they do not live up to expectations, and believe that achieving the goal will earn them the love and acceptance they so strongly desire.

4) Explicit Control:

Often parents with narcissistic tendencies will use more subtle or less obvious means of control and manipulation, but some parents will very explicitly say, "Obey me or I will punish you."

Children are expected to do what they are told and behave according to the rules or they will risk anger, silence, guilt, shame, or violence.

5) Love Withdrawal Control:

This kind of control says, "You are worthy of my love because you behave according to my expectations."

Parents are loving as long as children allow complete control but will withdraw that love when children refuse to obey.
Children are hesitant to express their feelings for fear of love withdrawal so they bury or deny their needs, resulting in a lack of self-awareness or independence.

Basically, to earn love they find it necessary to become whoever their parents want them to be.

---

6) Emotional Incest Control:

Narcissistic parents will often use their children to fulfill needs that are not being met from other relationships in their lives.

In fact, children are often expected to deal with adult issues and are put in the middle of disputes that pit one parent against another.

This kind of control says, "You are my true love, my only passion, the most important person in my life, and together we can stand against the world."

This forces the child to make difficult decisions. How can he take his father's side when his mother needs him, or how can he defend his mother when his father is constantly feeding him negative or demeaning thoughts about her?

---

Two Possible Scenarios for Children with Unresolved Issues Because of Narcissistic Parents

Sadly, children of narcissistic parents rarely have their own emotional needs met, and if the issue goes unresolved, one of two scenarios typically results:

1) These children will become parents with narcissistic traits themselves, using their own children as a means of attempting to fulfill their unmet needs, thus perpetuating the cycle.

2) Or, they will become what is called an 'inverted narcissist' or a 'covert narcissist'. In this case, they remain the codependent and will actually seek out relationships with narcissists, despite the abuse they may experience.

Fortunately some children of narcissistic parents do manage to break the narcissist circle or the dependency pattern and become the creators in their own lives.

There are many resources out there to help adults recover from narcissistic abuse, for instance the self help group Adults Recovering from Narcissistic Parents or blogs with personal stories

---

Unconditional vs. Conditional Love

The approach of unconditional parenting or the unconditional positive regard focuses on complete full acceptance of children irrelevant of their behavior, achievements or personality.

The goal of this is to support the child's sense of self and pave the way for the child to realize his or her own full potential without him or her being afraid of failing or disappointing his or her parents in the process.

The goal of unconditional parenting is thus to install the belief that love doesn't have to earned or worked for.

As a child, you are simply loved because you exist! – Ally Birgette