

What is Narcissism?

This blog will explore what narcissism really means, how to recognise it, and the impact it can have on relationships.

Narcissism stems from someone who is excessively focused on themselves. Narcissism is not simply about self-love or confidence; it's about an inflated sense of self-worth that often comes at the expense of others.

Psychologically, narcissism can be classified into two categories such as:

1. **Narcissistic traits:** Individuals with narcissistic tendencies may exhibit selfish behaviours, an overemphasis on appearance or achievements, and a need for validation. These traits might appear in varying degrees in everyday life.
2. **Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD):** This is a diagnosable mental health condition characterized by persistent grandiosity, an overwhelming need for admiration, and a lack of empathy.

Not everyone with narcissistic tendencies has NPD, but understanding these traits can help in identifying toxic patterns in personal or professional relationships.

Key Traits of a Narcissist

1. **Grandiosity:** A narcissist believes they are superior or exceptional, deserving special treatment. This can manifest in the workplace, friendships, or even romantic relationships, where they expect others to admire them without question.
2. **Constant Need for Attention:** Whether it's through social media, at social gatherings, or in personal conversations, narcissists crave the spotlight. They rely on others for validation and often become irritated or angry when they don't receive the admiration they expect.
3. **Lack of Empathy:** The ability to understand and share the feelings of others—is often missing in narcissists. They struggle to genuinely connect with others' emotions, which can lead to manipulative behaviours. In relationships, this can make the narcissist seem cold or detached when their partner is in need.
4. **Sense of Entitlement:** Narcissists believe they are entitled to special privileges. Whether it's expecting people to bend to their will or assuming that rules don't apply to them, their inflated self-image often comes with unrealistic demands on others.
5. **Manipulation and Exploitation:** Narcissists often use others as tools to get what they want. They may exploit relationships for personal gain, be it in their careers, friendships, or romantic lives, and feel little guilt or remorse for their actions.

The Impact of Narcissism on Relationships

Being in a relationship with a narcissist can be emotionally draining and toxic. Narcissists are often charming and charismatic at first, which makes them attractive partners. However, over time, their need for control, validation, and admiration can become overwhelming.

Here are a few common dynamics in relationships with narcissists:

- **Emotional Manipulation:** Narcissists may use guilt, flattery, or even anger to manipulate their partners into doing what they want. Their lack of empathy means they rarely understand the damage they cause.
- **Gaslighting:** Narcissists are notorious for making others doubt their own reality. They may twist situations, deny things they've said or done, and make their partner feel like they are overreacting or imagining things.
- **Lack of Accountability:** Apologies are rare. When things go wrong, narcissists will often blame others, refusing to take responsibility for their actions. This can make resolving conflicts or moving forward in a relationship extremely difficult.

How to Deal with a Narcissist

1. **Establish Clear Boundaries:** Narcissists often test limits, so it's important to set firm boundaries. Don't be afraid to say no, and don't feel pressured to meet their constant demands for attention.
2. **Don't Engage in Power Struggles:** Narcissists thrive on control, so avoid getting drawn into battles where they can manipulate the outcome.
3. **Protect Your Emotional Well-Being:** Prioritize your own mental and emotional health. Whether it means limiting interactions with the narcissist or seeking therapy, make sure you're looking out for your well-being.
4. **Seek Support:** If you are in a relationship with a narcissist, it can be helpful to talk to a trusted friend or therapist who can offer support and guidance.

At Mackenzie & Co., we have substantial experience in dealing with high conflict cases.

Dealing with high-conflict divorce with a narcissistic spouse

Divorcing a narcissist is often an emotionally draining and protracted process, as their core traits—such as a need for control and an inability to accept blame—drive them to prolong the legal battle. Initially, a narcissist may resist divorce and delay matters to assert some control. Later, they may use extended legal proceedings and custody disputes as a weapon to punish their spouse for perceived wrongs.

Experienced divorce lawyers observe several common tactics used by narcissistic partners, including:

- Concealing information during financial settlements.
- Refusing to negotiate or resorting to mind games.
- Exploiting their children as pawns.
- Drawing out the court process.

Recognising these behaviours and understanding the stages of divorcing a narcissist can help you navigate this challenging situation more effectively.

Divorcing a narcissist

While the general legal stages of divorce apply, divorcing a narcissist requires specific strategies. The process typically includes:

1. **Deciding to divorce:** Living with a narcissistic spouse can be exhausting due to constant manipulation, mind games, and emotional abuse. Recognizing the negative impact on your well-being is the critical first step toward ending the relationship.
2. **Preparing for legal proceedings:** Preparation is key. Gather all necessary documents, organize your finances, and seek support from specialised organisations that can provide assistance with housing, benefits, and emotional support.
3. **The negotiation phase:** Ideally, a settlement can be reached through negotiation or mediation. However, narcissists often make this difficult and may withdraw from the process entirely. While frustrating, their refusal to engage can weaken their position if the case proceeds to litigation.
4. **Pursuing a court resolution:** If negotiation fails, you can apply for a court resolution. Court proceedings should be a last resort, as they are often costly and time-consuming. Even with the most extreme narcissists, seeking a peaceful out-of-court solution is always advisable.

How to get help

If you are struggling to make progress in a divorce with a narcissist, it's beneficial to seek assistance from experienced legal professionals who can help you navigate these unique challenges.

Narcissists are not simply people who are confident or love themselves. Their extreme self-focus, lack of empathy, and manipulative behaviours can cause significant harm to those around them.

If you would like further information, contact us on 02085696289.

Mackenzie & Co Solicitors.