

NARCISSISTIC ABUSE RECOVERY



TECHNIQUES FOR OVERCOMING
EMOTIONALLY ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIPS

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As a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist, I have counseled hundreds of people experiencing narcissistic abuse in their personal lives. Although the terms "gaslighting," "narcissist," and "toxic relationship" are widely used in our culture, they are rarely understood.

Narcissistic abuse is often hiding in plain site and in most cases victims think something is wrong with them. Over time, the abuse has been normalized and the victim bends over backwards to attempt to manage and improve the relationship, to no avail.

This worksheet is designed to you understand and identify narcissistic behaviors, as well as provide clear techniques to help you overcome emotionally abusive relationships.

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FIVE TYPES OF NARCISSISM

Narcissistic abuse is often difficult to explain or make sense of when you are in the midst of it. Victims tend to feel alone, hopeless, helpless, and confused. Depending on the type of narcissist you are dealing with, the presentation of the individual and levels of abuse vary.



OVERT. Someone with overt narcissism might come across as:

- outgoing
- exploitative
- overbearing
- arrogant
- competitive
- having an exaggerated self-image
- entitled
- lacking empathy
- needing to be praised and admired



COVERT. Also known as vulnerable narcissism:

- expressions of low self-esteem
- introversion and avoidance
- higher likelihood of experiencing anxiety, depression, and shame
- insecurity or low confidence
- defensiveness



ANTAGONISTIC. Subtype of overt:

- arrogance
- rivalry focused
- tendency to take advantage of others
- disagreeability
- tendency to compete with others
- proneness to argue



COMMUNAL. Subtype of overt (opposite of antagonistic):

- become easily morally outraged
- describe themselves as empathetic and generous
- react strongly to things they see as unfair



MALIGNANT. More severe form of overt narcissism:

- vindictiveness
- aggression when interacting with other people
- sadism, or getting enjoyment from the pain of others
- paranoia or worry about threats

THE CYCLE OF NARCISSISTIC ABUSE

HONEYMOON

ABUSER:

Begins to groom and "love-bomb" victim ♥ Puts victim on pedestal ♥ Rushes Intimacy ♥ Compares victim favorably to ex-partner(s). Flattery, excessive attention, intense sexual seduction ♥ Acts of perceived kindness, empathy, and generosity ♥ Grand gestures, gift-giving, elaborate dates, romantic vacations ♥ Early desire for commitment, premature talk of marriage ♥ Over-protection and isolation in the name of "love" ♥ Over-sharing details of traumatic childhood ♥ Testing/crossing victim's boundaries ♥ Trying to draw victim back in (hoovering) after inappropriate behaviors through gaslighting, justifying, possible apologies, possible promises to change and/or seek therapy.

ABUSE ESCALATION

ABUSER:

Displays cruelty, contempt, coercive force, rage (loud or silent) ⚡ Commits escalated act(s) of verbal, emotional, financial, sexual, and/or physical violence ⚡ Commits significant betrayal(s) ⚡ Makes excuses, gaslights, and minimizes abuse/betrayal ⚡ Invalidates victim's emotional response and blames victim for causing the abuse/betrayal ⚡ Discards victim temporarily or permanently.

TENSION BUILDING

ABUSER:

Begins to make subtle suggestions for change and "improvement" of victim under the guise of "concern" ▶ Delivers criticism, degradations, insults, and name-calling (sometimes under the guise of humor) / Begins to more overtly isolate victim and restrict / control victim's resources and activities ▶ Emotional withdrawal, silent treatment (aka "stonewalling") ▶ Nit-picking, gaslighting, intimidation, threats, violation of victim's boundaries ▶ Communication breaks down ▶ Triangulation / "love-triangle" begins.

10 STEPS TO RECOVER FROM NARCISSISTIC ABUSE

It takes time, introspection, and help to recover from narcissistic abuse. The first step is, however, acknowledging the abuse. Additionally, you must prepare for the narcissist's possible reactions and ensure that you have self-care strategies in place. No matter how difficult things appear to be, recovery is always a possibility.

01 LABEL THE ABUSE

Recognizing abuse can be challenging. However, naming what occurred and validating your experience enables you to keep your sense of objectivity.

- ▶ Abusers may oscillate between being cruel and charming (and present as kind or compassionate in public). But, severe jealousy, name-calling, controlling behavior, intense blaming, and humiliation are forms of abuse.

02 END THE RELATIONSHIP - IF YOU HAVEN'T ALREADY

Abusive relationships rarely, if ever, improve on their own. In almost every case the best option is to break up with the narcissist. Heads up - they will respond inappropriately, beg you to reconcile, promise to change, try to ruin your reputation to others, or make idle threats about destroying your future.

03 SET CLEAR, DEFINED BOUNDARIES

Avoiding all contact with your abuser is the ideal response for moving on. Although difficult, this eliminates potential opportunities for connection and "feeling tricked" back into the relationship. If you must maintain some contact (such as when you're co-parenting with a narcissist), aim to create defined, specific limits about communication.

04 SEEK IMMEDIATE SUPPORT

If you recently ended the relationship, you need people who will validate, comfort, and help you. Reach out to trusted friends or family, or consider joining a support group for survivors of abuse or domestic violence. Seeking support still applies to those who suffered from abuse that happened a long time ago. It's never too late to reach out for help.

05 ANTICIPATE GRIEF

- ▶ Most people feel profound grief after ending a toxic relationship. This grief may be complicated. You may experience a sense of numbness or detachment, difficulty trusting others, a sense of longing for the abuser, or difficulty engaging in everyday routine. Keep in mind that these feelings are common and dissipate as you move through your healing process.

06 EXPRESS YOUR EMOTIONS

- ▶ Your emotions may feel highly intense when you first begin healing from narcissistic abuse. Try to avoid suppressing or bottling them up. Instead, identify and release them. If you aren't sure how to talk about your emotions directly, try engaging in creative activities like journaling, artwork, or music.

07 REDISCOVER YOURSELF. BUILD YOUR SELF-ESTEEM

- ▶ Many people sacrifice their identities in narcissistic relationships. Once they start recognizing the abuse, they feel as if they don't know who they are or what they like anymore. Focus on all the benefits of rediscovering yourself. To spark some inspiration, consider making a master bucket list or writing down at least three to five activities you want to try in the next month.

08 IMPLEMENT SELF-CARE AND SELF-FORGIVENESS

- ▶ Tend to your physical and emotional well-being by attuning to your basic needs. Engage in conscious actions that promote self-esteem, happiness, fulfilling relationships, and a sense of purpose. Aim to be compassionate and kind to yourself when possible. Practicing self-forgiveness reinforces your emotional well-being, healthier relationships, and a more positive attitude.

09 TAKE TIME BEFORE YOU BEGIN DATING

- ▶ If your abuser was a romantic partner, avoid the temptation of distracting yourself with someone new. You may be especially fragile right now which can heighten your risk of attracting another toxic person. Focus on processing what happened and building a relationship with yourself. Allow yourself to grieve and reconnect with people who can support and love you.

10 REFLECT ON WHAT YOU LEARNED

- ▶ It's easy to dwell on the negative parts of narcissistic abuse. In fact, reminding yourself of all that negativity is important in helping you avoid a repeat situation in the future. However, if these memories make you feel badly about yourself, try to remember how you grew, learned, and gained perspective from this experience.