

## Are You a Narcissist? 6 Sure Signs of Narcissism

"I know best" and "It's all about me" suggest narcissistic non-listening.

[Narcissistic](#) folks who are fun, good at things, and appear in public to be compassionate and generous often look like they would be as desirable friends and even as [marriage](#) partners. They can be very enjoyable to hang out with. At the same time, are they also good partners when it comes to talking through differences of opinion? Or is there something about [how they communicate in a relationship](#) that makes narcissistic folks provocative?

Ever tried to be friends or a love partner with someone who is *all about me*?  
Someone who only listens to him or herself?

A partner who changes the topic, gets defensive or gets mad at you when you try to talk about difficulties you've been experiencing?

Narcissistic functioning at core is a disorder of listening. Think of it as one-sided listening, with multiple features that emerge as a result. The desire to sustain a [friendship](#), never mind a love relationship, can quickly fade with someone who does not seem to see or hear you, who dismissively pushes away what you say, and who may be quick to [anger](#) if you attempt nonetheless to express your viewpoint, .

## THE NARCISSISM QUIZ

The following quiz suggests six dimensions for assessing narcissism. Score each dimension from 0 to 5. Zero is not at all. Five is all the time.

First assess yourself. Then circle back to score someone in your life who is difficult to deal with.

The goal: See your and others' patterns clearly. Clarity is a strong first step toward being able to make changes for the better.

### \_\_\_Sign #1: Unilateral listening.

What I want and what I have to say are all that matters when we talk together. When we make decisions what you want, your concerns, your feelings..these are mere whispers, inconveniences and irrelevancies. So when we discuss issues, my opinions are right. Yours are wrong or else of minimal importance. If you expect to have input, you are undermining me.

Narcissistic listening dismisses, negates, ignores, minimizes, denigrates or otherwise renders irrelevant other people's concerns and comments. A tone of contempt is particularly strong narcissistic indicator.

Another narcissistic indicator is responding to what others say by beginning with the word "*But...*" *But* is a backspace-delete key that negates whatever came before, such as what someone else has said. The *but* eraser deletes others' viewpoints from the discussion.

### **\_\_\_Sign #2 It's all about me.**

I know more, I know better, I'm more interesting, When we talk, it's mostly about me. In conversations, I take up most of the air time. Almost all of my chatter is about what I have done, what I am thinking about.

If you begin to talk about yourself, I link back to something in my life so that the focus of the discussion again turns onto me. Maybe that's why people say I suck up all the air in a room.

When I want something, I need to have it. Never mind how you feel about it; it's all about me. I'm big and important and you are merely also here, mostly to do things for me, like a third arm.

### **\_\_\_Sign #3: The rules don't apply to me.**

I can have affairs, cut into a line where others are waiting, [cheat on](#) my taxes, and ignore rules that get in the way of my doing what I want.. Rules are for other people to follow.

Narcissists suffer from what I call Tall Man Syndrome. They experience themselves as above others, so the rules don't apply to them.

### **\_\_\_Sign #4: Your concerns are really criticisms of me, and I hate being criticized.**

Narcissists paradoxically manifest both an inflated idea of their own importance and quickness to feel deflated by negative feedback. Criticism hurts. I can criticize others, and often do, but if you criticize me you're hurting my feelings so I'll hurt you back.

If you say you are at all unhappy, that's a way of indirectly criticizing me.

Because narcissists think everything is about them, they hear others' attempts to talk about personal feelings as veiled criticisms of themselves. Since "it's all about me" your feelings must be about what I have been doing. If you are talking about your feelings, even if they were engendered by situations at work or with friends that have nothing to do with me, I interpret your negative feelings as indirect criticism of me.

The clinical term for taking others' concerns as personal criticism is personalizing. "I'm feeling lonely," gets heard by someone who is narcissistic as an accusation: "You don't spend enough time with me."

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**\_\_\_Sign #5: I'm right. You're wrong. So when things go wrong between us, it's always your fault.**

I can't be expected to [apologize](#) or to admit blame. I'm above others and above reproach. If you expect me to say how I've contributed to a problem, I'll get mad at you.

Unwillingness to take responsibility for mistakes may come from confusing the part with the whole. "If I've done one thing that's not right, then I must be all bad." That's all-or-nothing thinking.

Whatever the source of the sensitivity to criticism and difficulty admitting mistakes, the upshot is a tendency to blame others when anything has gone wrong. Blaming and fault-finding in others feel safer to narcissists than looking to discover, learn and grow from their own part in difficulties.

While narcissists are quick to blame, they may be slow to appreciate. Appreciation and [gratitude](#) require listening.

**\_\_\_Sign #6: I may be quick to anger but when I get angry, it's because you . . .**

You made me mad. You didn't listen to me. You criticized me. You're trying to control me. Your view is wrong. So you need to apologize, not me.

If I'm mad, it's because I'm frustrated by what you are doing. I'm only made because you ... "

Narcissists often show major [charm](#) and social agility. At the same time, these seemingly super-confident folks can be quick to anger. When they do become inflamed, they then immediately blame their anger on others.

**TOTAL SCORE: \_\_\_\_**

**What does this score indicate?**

**Scores of 10 or less indicates healthy to average range.**

Too much narcissism in your habits would be indicated by a total score higher than 10. Pay [attention](#) to your "narcissism lite" and you may fairly easily be able to lower that score considerably.

A total score of 18 or higher spells significant narcissistic habits that probably do not serve you well. Time to make some serious habit changes!

A score of 24 or higher would indicate serious problems with narcissism. Hopefully you will commit yourself to some serious personal growth.

Note that these score interpretations are based on general patterns, not an experimentally validated scoring system. They are meant as a personal heads-up, not a clinical diagnosis.

**How about you?**

Do people tell you that you seem to take up all the space in the room because conversations with you so frequently take an "it' all about me" turn?

When others express feelings and concerns, is your reaction "Well what about me?"

Do you monologue or pontificate, assuming that you know best, instead of sharing equal air time and valuing others' inputs?

These habits all are narcissistic indicators.

**How well—or poorly—a person listens is a primary indicator of narcissism.**

Someone who looks to understand what's interesting in what others say, what makes sense about it, is probably reasonably emotionally healthy. Disparaging or ignoring others' input suggests narcissistic patterns.

Similarly, being all about others can be problematic. Excessive altruism invites co-dependency and enabling behaviors.

The bottom line is that healthy folks in [healthy relationships](#) are able to listen responsively to their own concerns and also to others'. They are able to be self-centered in the best sense (taking care of themselves), and also [altruistic](#) (taking heed of others' desires).

I refer to the ability to hear both oneself and others as bilateral (2-sided) listening.

When differences arise, folks who do bilateral listening are pros at taking into consideration both their concerns and others'. Ability to do bilateral listening enables creation of win-win solutions, sustaining on-going goodwill in their [relationships](#).

For instance, if you are tired, you would listen to that feeling and head for bed. At the same time if you have just received a call from a friend who has a problem and urgently wants to talk with you, you might suggest that the two of you talk at least for a few minutes now, and plan to talk more at length in the morning. That could be a win-win solution.

By contrast, if you tend toward narcissism, you might respond with an immediate "*No. I'm too tired,*" to your friend's request. Narcissistic listening is one-sided listening. What *I* want, think, or feel is all that matters. What *you* want, think, or feel does not register as information worth attending to.

### **Narcissistic folks can be generous.**

Narcissistic folks actually are often very generous. They may, for instance, give away large sums of money to charity. Generous giving makes the giver feel good and also feels appropriate, like "the right" thing to do. They may well therefore pride themselves on their compassion and altruism.

At the same time, in a situation in which someone who tends toward narcissism wants something, and that desire is in conflict with what someone else wants, that's when the selfish side takes over.

Often, narcissistic individuals can show compassionate generosity toward strangers yet not to the people they are supposed to love. In part that may stem from

narcissistic tendencies to judge everyone as either higher or lower than themselves. Family members may be treated as lowly, while outsiders or those with high status, for instance from power or wealth, get treated with respect.

## **What are your options if you are uncomfortable with your score?**

The bottom line is that "narcissism" is basically habit-patterns, and habits can be changed. Awareness of your narcissistic tendencies is a strong first step that can empower you to notice and fix slippages. [Learning skills for becoming a better listener](#) can be an important next step

You also might want to check out my blogpost on [overcoming narcissism and borderline personality habits](#).

What if you are using this checklist to score how narcissistic someone you know may be?

If someone you interact with regularly shows narcissistic patterns, it's not up to you to change them. Better for you to focus on how you yourself can change the dance you do with that person.

For instance, you can [choose that you will no longer let yourself be intimidated or controlled by fear of anger](#). Just gracefully leave the situation for a cool down period ("I need to get a drink of water."), and then return for a calmer second-go at the conversation.

### **Just about everyone becomes increasingly narcissistic with anger.**

Anger promotes the sense that "What I want is holy, and what you want is irrelevant." That's why it's so vital that in important conversations you stay calm. Talking about sensitive issues in calm good-humored ways [without arguing](#) has the highest odds of leading to mutual understandings.

## **The bottom line about narcissism?**

For a happier life and [more gratifying relationships](#), especially if your scores indicated some narcissistic tendencies, tame these trends with [better skills](#). Though some folks are more prone to narcissism than others, narcissism generally is not a fixed phenomenon like height or eye color. Rather, much of the time narcissism is a skills deficit. Upgrading your listening and shared-[decision-making](#) skills can make a huge difference!

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Note: One of my earlier [posts](#) has further suggestions for how to grow out of narcissistic habit patterns.

For therapists, I recently gave this [webinar](#) on treatment techniques for intervening with narcissistic habits.

**Bio and most recent book:**

**Susan Heitler, PhD, a graduate of Harvard and NYU, is a Denver clinical psychologist.**

For more information that can help you to break out of narcissistic habits check out the Well-Being chapter in Dr. Heitler's most recent book, [Prescriptions Without Pills](#). Look also at the free handouts and videos on the book's free website, [prescriptionswithoutpills.com](http://prescriptionswithoutpills.com)

If narcissism has become a problem in your marriage, get help at [PowerOfTwoMarriage.com](http://PowerOfTwoMarriage.com).

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