

The Biggest Misconception About Narcissism

The biggest misconception about narcissistic individuals is that they are wounded people who don't really mean to hurt others and they are simply acting out on a condition which they were left with from childhood wounding and that we should show them great patience and sympathy, since, by doing so, there is hope that their behavior will change and we will have a better future with them.

While it's true that most narcissists were wounded as children, we must realize that those children are now gone. In their place are adults with underdeveloped levels of emotional maturity, deficient attachment capabilities, and a complete inability to empathize with others. What's left in the place of those wounded children are scheming manipulators who don't give a care about anyone except themselves and their own immediate needs.

The myth that there is "hope for a narcissist to change" is perpetuated by people of all sorts, from the licensed psychologist to self-proclaimed narcissistic individuals themselves who hop on forums to defend themselves and their conduct. (Many of the people in this category are self-diagnosed and may not actually have narcissistic personality disorder, so their ability to speak for the narcissist is questionable.) But the proof is in the pudding, and finding a "changed narcissist" seems to be like discovering a "square circle." It just can't be done.

What is most distinctive about narcissists is that they display behaviors that come straight from the Power and Control Wheel which can be found on most domestic violence websites. This fact alone shows that, contrary to the popular myth, they are fully aware of what they are doing and the effects that their behavior has on those around them. Those effects are precisely what they are trying to achieve. Another indication that narcissists are aware of what they are doing is the way they display two distinct "personalities". With the outside world, they are capable of being agreeable and showing proper respect. It's only with you (and others close to them) that they show their true colors and trample all the rules of human decency. The public face they show reveals that they know how they should behave with others; it's just with you that they lack all sensitivity. Their abusive behavior, therefore, cannot be explained by a lack of awareness. They "know the rules" and simply choose to ignore them in their private relationships. If narcissists were truly unaware of the consequences of abusive behavior, they would act the same way in all environments. But that is not their way. And because they already know what they are doing, it is a mistake to hope that the narcissist will change by becoming "self-aware".

For these reasons we should resist the call that we show greater sympathy for these abusive individuals, at least to the extent that by doing so we are causing greater and unnecessary harm to ourselves and other members of our family. Why show patience with the narcissist when they are repeatedly inflicting deep wounds upon us and when they are having such harmful effects on our children and their emotional development?

It is, of course, an individual's prerogative to sacrifice themselves for the sake of an unworthy cause, but when that involves creating a toxic environment for children, who deserve much better, then we must seriously rethink our motives and their likely repercussions. We have an ethical obligation to remove ourselves and our children from such abusive situations, since whatever good may be achieved by sympathy and understanding for the narcissist is far outweighed by the inevitable harm that will come to ourselves and our children from remaining in a hopelessly toxic relationship.

Our energies are wasted on the narcissist and are better devoted elsewhere to improving our own lives and giving children the sort of childhood that will enable them to have healthy relationships and happy lives.

For some people, these will be harsh truths. The pain that ending a relationship with a narcissistic partner will bring leads people to hope and look for some other way. But the truth is: it's dangerous to keep a narcissist in one's life. The ripple effect from doing this is far beyond the scope of what people can generally comprehend while in the midst of abuse. There are no miraculous transformations or divine epiphanies that will finally bring narcissists to see the error of their ways and change the irredeemably self-centered way they approach relationships and life in general.