



The Charlie Health Guide to

Understanding Narcissistic Personality Disorder



Letter From the Co-Founder & Chief Clinical Officer

To the Charlie Health community,

Many people throw around the word “narcissist,” but narcissism is more complex than the stereotypes suggest. Despite what people say online, it’s not just about someone being self-centered or arrogant; narcissistic personality disorder (NPD) is a real and often painful mental health condition that can significantly impact a person’s relationship and well-being.

At Charlie Health, we strive to foster empathy, education, and support for all mental health conditions, including those that don’t often get the treatment and understanding they deserve. This comprehensive guide to NPD aims to clarify the realities of the condition, offering key facts, helpful strategies for loved ones, and a path forward through evidence-based treatment.

As a therapist and someone who has personally seen the effects of mental health stigma, I encourage you to take the time to learn more, break down misconceptions, and open conversations with compassion.



Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dr. Caroline Fenkel".

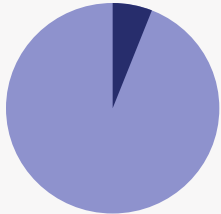
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Chief Clinical Officer and Co-Founder, Charlie Health

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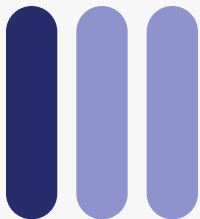
Facts & Figures About Narcissistic Personality Disorder



Up to 6%
The percentage of people in the United States who have narcissistic personality disorder (NPD)



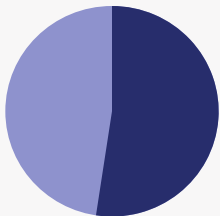
Up to 75%
The percentage of NPD cases diagnosed in men as compared to other genders



About one-third
The number of people with NPD who also struggle with drug dependence (34.9%)



21 times
The rate at which people with NPD complete suicide compared to those who only attempt it



Over half
The percentage of people with NPD who experience a significant reduction in symptoms after two years of treatment (52.5%)



1980
The year when NPD was first recognized as a clinical diagnosis in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders



Personality Disorders 101: Types, Symptoms & FAQs

Narcissistic personality disorder (NPD)

/ noun / nar·cis·sis·tic per·son·al·ity dis·or·der

A mental health condition characterized by an inflated sense of self-importance, a deep need for admiration, and a lack of empathy for others. People with NPD often struggle with maintaining healthy relationships and can be hypersensitive to criticism.

Types of personality disorders

Narcissism is a complex diagnosis that manifests in various ways based on a person's unique experiences and other underlying factors. Generally, narcissism can be categorized into three types: grandiose, vulnerable, and malignant. Each type has its own common symptoms, behaviors, and self-perceptions, highlighting the many different ways narcissism affects people and their relationships.

	Common symptoms	Behavioral traits	Self-perception
Grandiose narcissism	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Exaggerated sense of self-importance• Preoccupation with fantasies of success• Need for excessive admiration	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Arrogant• Dominates conversations• Exploits others	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Believes they are superior to others• Often lacks empathy
Vulnerable narcissism	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hypersensitive to criticism• Strong sense of inadequacy• Envy of others	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Insecure• Tends to withdraw• Often feels victimized• Seeks reassurance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Feels misunderstood• Struggles with self-esteem
Malignant narcissism	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lack of empathy• Exploitative behaviors• Antisocial traits	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Manipulative• Often deceitful• Engages in sadistic & harmful behaviors	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Believes they are above the law• Has a sense of entitlement

Ask a clinician

NPD is often misunderstood and surrounded by stigma. Here, clinical experts answer some of the most commonly asked questions to help clarify this complex condition.



How is NPD diagnosed?

NPD is diagnosed by a licensed mental health professional, such as a psychologist or psychiatrist, through a comprehensive evaluation using criteria outlined in The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-5).



Is NPD caused by childhood experiences?

In part. The exact cause of NPD is not fully understood, but factors such as neglect or abuse during childhood can be linked to its development, along with genetic predispositions.



So, is NPD genetic?

NPD may have a genetic component. Several studies show that genetics could account for over 50% of narcissistic traits. Research on twins shows that identical twins, who share 100% of their DNA, tend to have more similar levels of narcissism compared to fraternal twins, who share only 50% of their DNA. These studies indicate a likely genetic basis for narcissism, but the exact extent is still unclear, and more research is needed.



Are there other mental health disorders linked to NPD?

Yes, people with NPD often have co-occurring mental health disorders. Research indicates that many people with NPD also struggle with mood disorders, anxiety disorders, substance use disorders, and other personality disorders.



What treatments are available for NPD?

Therapy, particularly psychodynamic or cognitive-behavioral approaches, can help people with NPD understand their behaviors and develop healthier relationships. Medication may also be used to treat co-occurring conditions such as depression or anxiety.

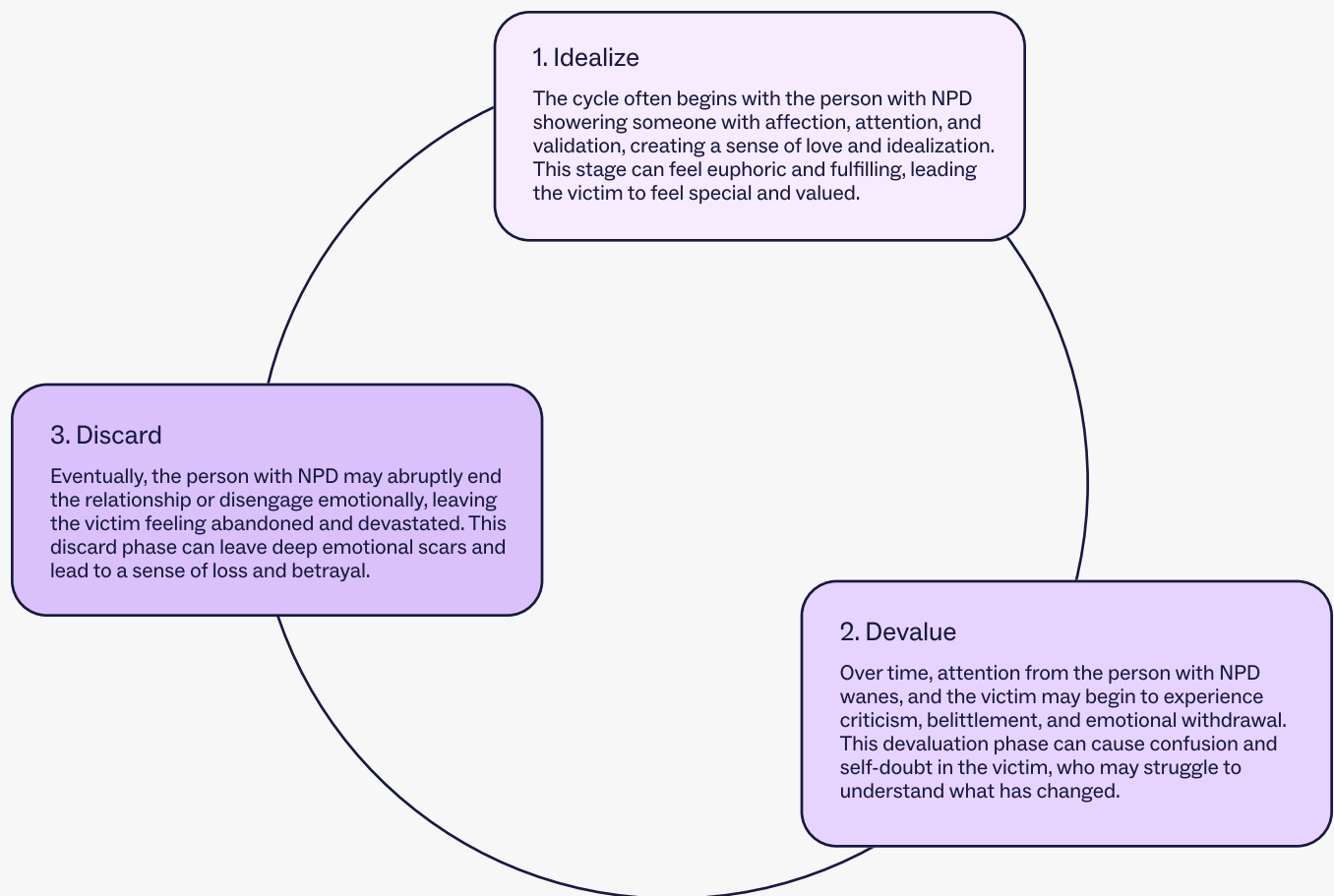
Check out page 11 for more information on treatments for NPD.

The Cycle of Narcissistic Abuse

Narcissistic abuse — a concept that has recently gained traction on social media — is any abuse experienced while in a relationship with someone who has narcissistic traits. Understanding this cycle is crucial for those affected, as it reveals how the dynamics of manipulation and control work for people with NPD.

However, a diagnosis of NPD (or any other mental health condition) isn't required for someone to engage in abusive behavior and people with NPD aren't necessarily abusive. People usually talk about the cycle of narcissistic abuse in three stages: idealize, devalue, and discard.

The cycle of narcissistic abuse



The cycle usually continues as a person with NPD tries to reconnect with a victim using manipulative tactics, such as promises of change or guilt, creating a cycle of hope and despair that makes it hard for the other person to escape.

What narcissistic abuse sounds like

Recognizing the language of narcissistic abuse is essential for understanding and validating the experiences of those affected. By identifying these patterns, victims can better understand their situation, which is a crucial step toward healing and empowerment. Here are examples of what narcissistic abuse might sound like in each stage of the cycle:

Idealize

"You're the most amazing person I've ever met!"

"I've never felt this way about anyone before; it's like we're soulmates."

"You complete me; I've been waiting for someone like you my whole life"

Devalue

"I thought you were different, but you're just like everyone else."

"Why can't you be more like my ex? They never let me down."

"You're not good enough for me; I'm not sure why I even put up with you."

Discard

"I'm done with you; you're just a burden."

"You're such a crazy person; I can't believe I wasted my time."

"This is all your fault; you brought this on yourself."

Narcissism in the Zeitgeist: Defining Terms & Debunking Myths

Narcissism is a popular topic in contemporary discourse, largely because of the traction it's gained on social media. While increased awareness of narcissistic personality disorder (NPD) can help people recognize unhealthy relationship dynamics, it can also lead to misconceptions and oversimplifications of this mental health condition. Here, we're clarifying trending terms related to NPD and debunking common myths about the condition.

Gaslighting

✗ What it isn't

Disagreeing or having a different perspective.

✓ What it is

A form of psychological manipulation where someone makes another doubt their perception of reality or memory.

Love bombing

✗ What it isn't

Overly romantic gestures.

✓ What it is

An excessive display of affection and attention to manipulate and control a partner in the early stages of a relationship.

Projection

✗ What it isn't

The act of blaming others.

✓ What it is

A defense mechanism where a person with NPD attributes their own undesirable feelings or behaviors to someone else.

Triangulation

✗ What it isn't

Harmless drama or gossip.

✓ What it is

A manipulation strategy where the person with NPD involves a third party to create tension or jealousy.

Empathy deficit

✗ What it isn't

Being socially shy or awkward.

✓ What it is

A core characteristic of NPD marked by the inability to understand or share the feelings of others.

Narcissism myths & facts

Myth

Fact

Everyone with narcissistic traits has NPD.

Not everyone who exhibits narcissistic traits meets the clinical criteria for NPD; it is a specific diagnosis that requires a pattern of behavior over time.

All narcissists are overtly arrogant and flashy.

Some people with NPD may display vulnerable narcissism, appearing insecure and hypersensitive rather than grandiose.

People with NPD can't feel love or empathy.

While people with NPD often struggle with empathy, they are capable of emotional connections, though these can be challenging.

All narcissists are abusive.

While people with NPD can engage in manipulative or controlling behaviors, not everyone with NPD is abusive. It is important to treat each case individually.



Narcissistic Personality Disorder Treatment

Most personality disorders, including narcissistic personality disorder (NPD), can be effectively managed with treatment. There is robust research showing that talk therapy and medication are effective at treating a range of personality disorders. Here, clinical experts at Charlie Health explore the benefits of various treatment options for NPD.

Dialectical behavior therapy (DBT)

Dialectical behavior therapy (DBT) was originally developed in the 1980s to treat suicidal people with borderline personality disorder. DBT remains a top treatment for many personality disorders, including NPD. In fact, DBT has been shown to reduce suicide attempts, self-harm, and risky behaviors in people with a range of personality disorders. DBT is taught as a series of skills to help people manage uncomfortable thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Some of these skills include mindfulness, emotion regulation, interpersonal effectiveness, and distress tolerance.

Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT)

Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) helps people with NPD and other personality disorders identify and alter distorted thinking patterns and behaviors. It focuses on recognizing negative or unhelpful thoughts, replacing them with more realistic ones, and promoting adaptive behaviors and coping strategies. By developing skills to manage emotions and improve interpersonal relationships, CBT helps those with personality disorders reduce distress and enhance overall functioning.

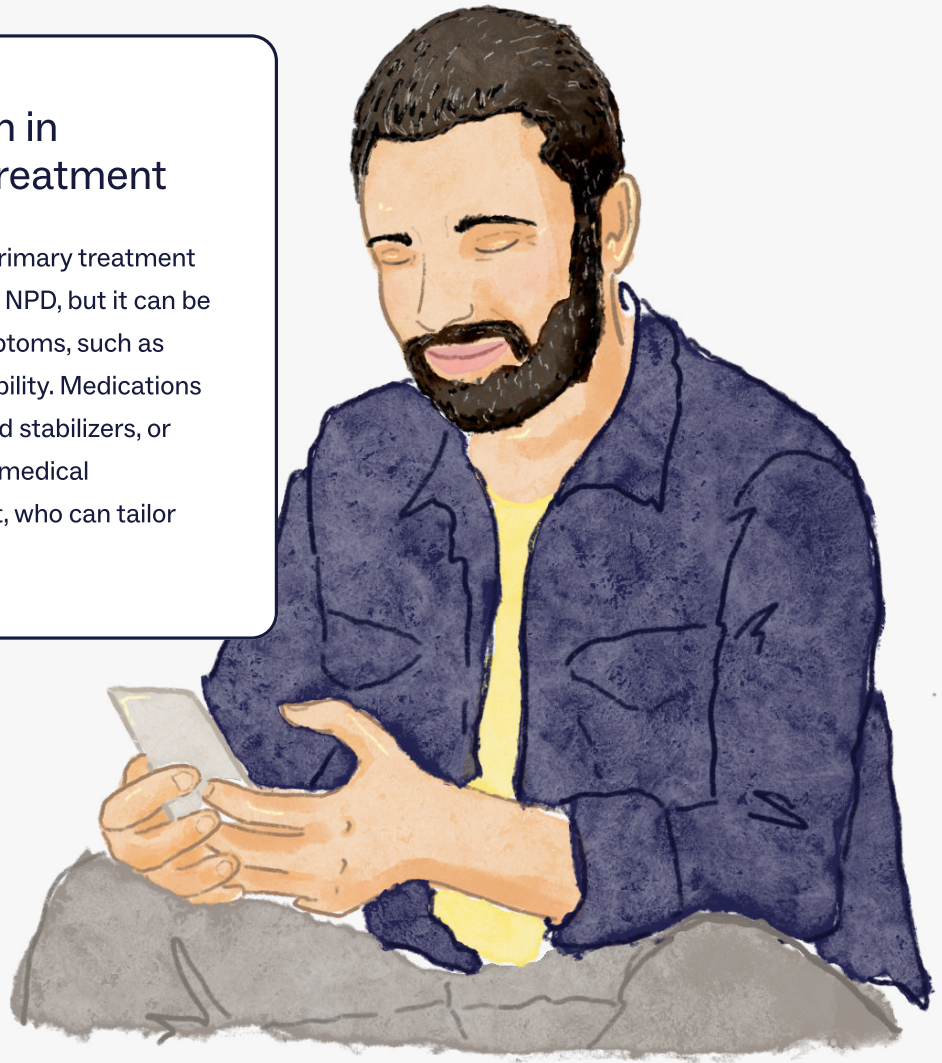


Schema therapy

Schema therapy targets deeply ingrained patterns, or schemas, that often originate from early life experiences and contribute to personality disorders. It helps people identify maladaptive schemas, understand their origins, and modify these patterns through cognitive restructuring and behavioral techniques. For those with personality disorders, like NPD, this therapy addresses the root causes of dysfunctional behaviors, leading to healthier self-perceptions and improved relationships.

The role of medication in personality disorder treatment

Medication alone is not usually a primary treatment for personality disorders, including NPD, but it can be helpful for managing specific symptoms, such as depression, anxiety, or mood instability. Medications may include antidepressants, mood stabilizers, or antipsychotics, as prescribed by a medical professional, such as a psychiatrist, who can tailor the approach to a person's needs.



Treating personality disorders with hyper-personalized care

Call our Admissions Team 24/7 or fill out our quick form to find out more about our program

Get Started

How to Support a Loved One With Narcissistic Personality Disorder

Certain personality traits and the widespread stigma surrounding narcissistic personality disorder (NPD) can prevent your loved one from receiving the support they need, but there are strategies and resources available to help you both. Here are some expert-approved tips for how to support a loved one with NPD (and take care of yourself, too).

Educate yourself

If your loved one has been diagnosed with NPD, understanding what they're dealing with is critical to supporting them. As discussed, many people have misconceptions about this condition. Reviewing the diagnostic criteria for their diagnosis will help you separate the truth from inaccurate and offensive media portrayals — and help you get a better sense of the reasons behind certain behaviors that may make your relationship more challenging.

Make sure they're getting the right kind of care

It can be really tricky to find appropriate mental health resources for people with NPD due to the stigma of the condition as well as some associated traits (like a strong need for control, difficulty accepting criticism, and a tendency to manipulate or exploit relationships). However, support is essential for managing and treating these conditions.

Do your research before sharing resources with a loved one. Does the provider or facility have experience working with patients who have NPD? Have they gone through anti-stigma training? Encouraging someone you care about to go into treatment with a judgmental or inexperienced provider may be traumatizing and make your loved one feel even more distrustful. If your loved one is struggling with thoughts of self-harm or suicide, this is a mental health emergency, and it's essential to contact [The Suicide & Crisis Lifeline 24/7](#) by calling or texting 988 (or another crisis resource, like 911).



Communicate, communicate, communicate

Effective communication is the key to any successful relationship, but it's especially true when one person has a mental health condition such as NPD. By improving your communication skills, you and your partner may be able to avoid miscommunications, minimize arguments, and create a more meaningful relationship.

If you're still working on improving your communication skills, here are a few tips to get started:

- Use “I” statements instead of “you” statements to avoid sounding accusatory. For example, you can say, “I feel upset when you...” versus “You made me feel upset.”
- Focus on one problem at a time instead of creating a mountain of issues.
- In the heat of the moment, it's easy to say something you don't mean or use disrespectful language. Instead, take a deep breath or even step away from the conversation.
- If you or your loved one find it difficult to verbalize your thoughts, then turn to paper. Write down what you want to say and ask your partner to do the same
- Encourage your loved one to always share their fears, insecurities, and triggers.



Take care of yourself

Supporting a loved one who has NPD can sometimes be overwhelming — and it can make it harder to remember that your mental health matters, too. Engaging in your own therapy or seeking out a dedicated support group for the friends, family members, and partners of people with NPD may benefit you and your relationship. Since NPD is often misunderstood, it's important to work with a therapist who specializes in treating people impacted by the conditions. The [National Alliance on Mental Health](#) can help you find the right support group for you.

Narcissistic Personality Disorder Resources: Tests, Guides, & Articles

Here are some mental health-focused tests and guides to help people explore whether they might know someone with certain narcissistic personality traits and learn about effective treatment options for the condition.



Am I Being Gaslighted?

Gaslighting is a form of emotional manipulation often linked to NPD. This quiz is designed to help you identify signs of gaslighting in your relationships.

[Take the Quiz](#)



The Long-Term Effects of Narcissistic Abuse

This article details how to recognize the signs and symptoms of narcissistic abuse and how to heal from this kind of emotional abuse.

[Read the Blog](#)



Is Narcissism Genetic? The Role of Genetics in Narcissistic Personality Disorder

If someone in your family has been diagnosed with narcissistic personality disorder or displays narcissistic tendencies, you may be more likely to develop NPD. This article reviews the condition's genetic etiology.

[Read the Blog](#)



10 Symptoms of Daughters of Narcissistic Mothers

Being raised by a narcissistic parent may have lasting effects on your attachment style, self-esteem, mental health, and more. Read this article to learn more.

[Read the Blog](#)



Charlie Health's Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) Skills Guide

Dialectical behavior therapy (DBT) skills are a cornerstone of treatment at Charlie Health, and a leading therapy in the treatment of NPD. This guide offers an overview of our DBT curriculum with examples of how to practice skills at home.

[Download the Guide Here](#)

These resources do not replace professional mental health support

If you or a loved one are experiencing suicidal thoughts or are in danger of harming yourself, this is a mental health emergency. Contact [The Suicide & Crisis Lifeline](#) 24/7 by calling or texting 988. [Crisis Text Line](#) is also available 24/7 when you text 'HOME' to 741741 (or chat online).

If you're looking for intensive therapy, consider Charlie Health. Our programs provide more than once-weekly mental health treatment for young people and families dealing with high acuity conditions, including personality disorders. Our expert clinicians incorporate evidence-based, trauma-informed therapies into individual counseling, family therapy, and group sessions.

Fill out this short form to start healing today.

[Get Started Today](#)

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