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# The Narcissistic Mother

## Are you dealing with a narcissistic mother?

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### **Everyone Needs Validation:**

Normal parents often experience their children as narcissistic (<http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-intelligent-divorce/201301/the-narcissist>) extensions of themselves.

Normal parents also let go. After all, the goal of raising healthy kids is for them to fulfill themselves.

Yet, not all children are permitted to grow up and be themselves

(<http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-intelligent-divorce/201302/was-your-dad-narcissist>).

In past blogs, we've looked at the child rearing practices of the narcissistic father

(<http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-intelligent-divorce/201303/the-narcissistic-father>), but, what

if narcissism affects the nurturing mother (<http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-intelligent->

[divorce/201205/motherhood](#))?

Validation, or the lack thereof, is a critical part of [parenting \(/basics/parenting\)](#). And, [some mothers fall short \(https://cdn.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-intelligent-divorce/201312/surviving-narcissistic-mother\)t](#).

*“The mother gazes at the baby in her arms, and the baby gazes at his mother's face and finds himself therein...provided that the mother is really looking at the unique, small, helpless being and not projecting her own expectations, fears, and plans for the child. In that case, the child would find not himself in his mother's face, but rather the mother's own projections. This child would remain without a mirror, and for the rest of his life would be seeking this mirror in vain.”—Donald Woods Winnicott*

Did you have a [narcissistic \(/basics/narcissism\)](#) mother?

### **She's a Winner, At Least in Public:**

Establishing the ‘ideal,’ successful world—[career \(/basics/career\)](#), owning your own home, family— isn't a simple walk in the park. And no one said it was going to be easy. But there's someone in your life that makes it look that way: your mother.

She's the woman everyone admires—she's a judge, lawyer, doctor, or teacher. She's on the PTA or is the power behind your church or synagogue. She smoothly balances being socially nimble, while contributing to the community in a way that leaves others in awe. In their eyes, she's superwoman.

Most people don't know that this superwoman has a secret. Like everyone in this world, she has a flaw. No one is the epitome of perfection, and in mom's case, the issue is narcissism.

The outside world may embrace her, but you know mom as self-centered, brittle, easily angered and “always right.” *She may be loved by her friends and colleagues, but they don't know the mom you know.* You get maternal [love \(/basics/relationships\)](#) now and then, but it's unpredictable and punctuated by control, [anger \(/basics/anger\)](#) and a need to walk on eggshells.

Most kids decide just to please her, and hope they get whatever good they can.

### **Success is Not a Synonym for Narcissism:**

Let's be clear. The vast majority of [successful people \(http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-](#)

[intelligent-divorce/201303/making-your-own-luck](#)) are not narcissists, nor do [extroverts \(/basics/extroversion\)](#) make bad parents. The narcissist is [psychologically constructed to garner attention](#), be it from charisma, beauty, smarts or finances (<http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-intelligent-divorce/201308/the-rich-narcissist-woody-allens-latest-target>). Many people are like this, and a few have narcissistic traits, but healthy people reorient themselves when raising children.

- Healthy mothers come home and support their kids—not control them.
- Narcissistic mothers continue to need attention and control, even at home.

If you had a narcissistic mother, the key element was that she had little patience or [empathy \(/basics/empathy\)](#) for the independent and demanding needs of her children (and kids need a lot).

This can be costly to the growing child.

### **Children Need to Please:**

As a child, you don't immediately realize your mother's confidence is brittle. She's always right because she *needs* to be right. Everything she says goes without question—that's the way it is with parents when you're a child.

You please because you are trained to do so. As a nine year old, you don't take your mother on because, like most school age kids, you want whatever nurturance you can get. Still, she may get mad at you for forgetting your homework, making a mess or annoying her in some random way. You think it's you and find yourself anxious in her presence.

Then you get a little older, your consciousness continues to evolve, and you realize your mother's actions and behavior lacks normal maternal nurturing. You see other kids and their parents.

*Psychology Today* blogger, Karyl McBride, Ph.D. puts it this way:

*"Narcissists are not in touch with their own feelings. They project those feelings on to others and are **not capable of empathy** (<http://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/empathy>). They cannot put themselves into your shoes and feel or understand how something might affect you. They can only see how it affects them. They are hypersensitive to criticism and judgment, but constantly criticize and judge others."*

Your mom comes home and demands attention. If you hold back, she takes offense and attacks. She's

tired. She's irritated. She just wants it her way, and your feelings better align with hers. If you have to hear the word "ungrateful" one more time you'll scream. But, most times you don't.

It pays to wait for the rage to abate. *If you fight, she fights to win.* Many normal parents get into power struggles with their kids, but a narcissistic parent truly needs to win. It is both desperate and scary.

So, you grow up with everyone tiptoeing around mom, hoping that she's in a good mood, and anxious not to trigger a rage attack.

All it takes is a little frustration, so you better be good.

### **Narcissistic Mother + Children = Instability**

Children experience continued psychological whiplash being raised by a narcissistic mother. You realize she controls with the threat of withdrawal or rage with you and your siblings. Your father goes along to get along, or is long gone.

Here are some characteristics a narcissistic mother:

- **The socially engaged mom** becomes the controlling mom at home. She's no longer the woman wearing the perpetual smile that never falters, or at least in everyone else's eyes. She is demeaning, criticizes, and lets you know in more ways than one that you are not up to her standards.
- **She makes you feel like a failure** if you're not doing what she wants right now. Your mom is really good at manipulation, especially when your emotions are involved. If you aren't fulfilling her desires to make her feel like her needs are at the utmost importance, be prepared to experience pain in the way of criticism or an attack. And, if you are looking for validation, you may be waiting a long time.
- **She is easily offended**, claiming that she does so much for you. If you don't give her what she wants, she's upset and pulls the "you don't love me because if you did, you would do what I wanted" card or she'll simply accuse you of taking her for granted and not appreciating her as a mother. It's not above her to compare you unfavorably to someone else who is "good" to his or her mother.
- **She is privately opinionated**, blasting people, while more [forgiving \(/basics/forgiveness\)](#) in

public. Mom needs to look good in front of everyone, even if she isn't too fond of them. She is charismatic (/basics/charisma), smiles and even holds chats with them while saving her criticism and opinions for the house.

- **She finds fault in you.** And when you make it right, you barely get a validation. "I'm sorry Mom" is never enough with her and you can never figure out how to please her with an apology.
- **She makes you anxious**, not filled with self-confidence. She makes you feel inadequate, even if you do something that deserves praise. We all need validation, especially early on in life. A narcissistic mother can instigate self-doubt in everything that you do.
- **The world revolves around her.** Your mom has to be the center of attention at all times. She needs to be waited on and adored and expects you to provide her with all of the above and more.

Yet, we all require maternal love.

The consequences of being raised by a narcissistic mother can be subtle or dramatic, often affecting adulthood. Neither the mother nor child may realize this until then. Remember, that children must adapt to their early childhood (/basics/child-development), and the way we do it influences who we are to become.

### **Sons of Narcissistic Mothers:**

Boys and girls of narcissistic mothers both have to deal with a deficit of maternal nurturing that their upbringing lacked. With a boy, here is one way development can go: when you were a child, you desperately sought praise and validation from your mother, inadvertently tying yourself to her will. This may have even resulted in being labeled a "momma's boy" because you did everything your mother asked just to please her although it hardly helped your relationship with her. You aim to please, but now lack the ability to appreciate your own needs. You may end up with a demanding, narcissistic woman as a mate (<http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-intelligent-divorce/201205/control-intimacy>), because this is all you know. It will exhaust you.

Or, you can identify with your mother and become narcissistically (<http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-intelligent-divorce/201306/narcissism-and-other-kinds-hurt>) inclined yourself. You become successful, mom is pleased (because you reflect well on her) and you assume that women should admire you as well. But, where is the empathy required for good

relationships? Therein lies the problem.

### **Daughters of Narcissistic Mothers:**

Like with a boy, the daughter of a narcissistic mother hasn't received the maternal empathy every child deserves. Mom wants to be the center of attention—the one everyone desires, and you become an extension of her need to show off. Are you pretty enough? Are you smart enough? Are you too heavy or too thin? And, how about your hair? To add to the confusion, a narcissistic mother may compete with you as well, especially because of your youth and [sexuality \(/basics/sex\)](#). It's a double bind for you.

Your mom tells you time and again that she's a great mother. Most kids believe mom's stories or simply choose not to take her on. It's too costly. Down deep, your [self esteem \(/basics/self-esteem\)](#) is damaged. You haven't been validated for who you are; instead you've been ducking her judgments or pleasing her. When you try to individuate, it's a fight. And, sometimes, that's the best solution.

Damage is done. Just like with a son, you may identify with mom's narcissism and become narcissistic yourself. You have a desperate need for validation, which can't be filled, no matter how rich or pretty you become. Love for yourself has its origins in sensing the love of your parents. This is [damage \(http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-intelligent-divorce/201301/every-day-trauma-8-ways-feel-better\)](http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-intelligent-divorce/201301/every-day-trauma-8-ways-feel-better) that's hard to undo.

On the other hand, narcissistic mothers can [produce daughters who become perpetual \(http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-intelligent-divorce/201208/who-wants-be-needy-six-solutions\)](http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-intelligent-divorce/201208/who-wants-be-needy-six-solutions) pleasers. They please too much, and [often settle for men \(http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-intelligent-divorce/201309/the-dangerous-attraction-powerful-men\)](http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-intelligent-divorce/201309/the-dangerous-attraction-powerful-men) who [don't appreciate \(http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-intelligent-divorce/201202/the-narcissistic-ex-part-i\)](http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-intelligent-divorce/201202/the-narcissistic-ex-part-i) them, thereby re-enacting the [deprivation \(http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-intelligent-divorce/201208/why-nice-people-cling-bad-boys-or-girls\)](http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-intelligent-divorce/201208/why-nice-people-cling-bad-boys-or-girls) of their youth. Such women often come for treatment when they've [matured \(http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-intelligent-divorce/201309/getting-unstuck-the-toxic-relationship\)](http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-intelligent-divorce/201309/getting-unstuck-the-toxic-relationship) and have kids themselves. They may present with [depression \(/conditions/depressive-disorders\)](#) or anxiety, but at its core is a realization that they're not getting what they really need.

### **Overcoming a Narcissistic Mother:**

It isn't easy dealing with a narcissistic mother, because of the lasting impressions she can leave on

you. But it's possible to survive and rise above her behavior. Look at others around you—like your father, school faculty, even your siblings or friends who appreciate you just the way you are.

See mom as she really is; it will help.

Not all self involved mothers are bone fide narcissists. Some just have narcissistic tendencies, but children will be affected nevertheless. By coming to terms with your mother's shortcomings, you can truly emancipate. Knowledge is power.

If in doubt, get a consultation with a quality therapist. Your mom did the best she could; she loved you as she was able. But, it did not give you the bedrock to build on. Now, as an adult, you find yourself empty, [clingy](http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-intelligent-divorce/201207/clingy-intimacy) (<http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-intelligent-divorce/201207/clingy-intimacy>) or depressed. It's your job to recognize what happened, get your [anxiety](http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-intelligent-divorce/201203/stop-being-anxious-about-being-anxious) (<http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-intelligent-divorce/201203/stop-being-anxious-about-being-anxious>) or [depression](http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-intelligent-divorce/201203/stop-being-anxious-about-being-anxious) ([/basics/depression/depression-and-society](http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-intelligent-divorce/201203/stop-being-anxious-about-being-anxious)) treated and [find a deeper appreciation of yourself](http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-intelligent-divorce/201305/the-unhappy-marriage-stay-or-go) (<http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-intelligent-divorce/201305/the-unhappy-marriage-stay-or-go>) and [others](http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-intelligent-divorce/201303/love-is-action-verb) (<http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-intelligent-divorce/201303/love-is-action-verb>).

Just [remember](http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-intelligent-divorce/201209/forgive-him-5-reasons-and-5-reasons-against) (<http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-intelligent-divorce/201209/forgive-him-5-reasons-and-5-reasons-against>)—you were always good enough for her. If she didn't get it, that was her problem. [Try not to make it yours](http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-intelligent-divorce/201207/sometimes-happiness-is-choice) (<http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-intelligent-divorce/201207/sometimes-happiness-is-choice>).

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**Mark Banschick, M.D.**, is a psychiatrist and author of *The Intelligent Divorce* book series.

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