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"Now We Are Six"

[Apologies to [A. A. Milne](#).]

If you had a narcissist for a parent, you lived in a world governed by whim enforced without mercy.

Narcissists have normal, even superior, intellectual development while remaining emotionally and morally immature. Dealing with them can give you the sense of trying to have a reasonable discussion with a very clever six-year-old -- this is an age when normal children are grandiose and exhibitionistic, when they are very resistant to taking the blame for their own misbehavior, when they understand what the rules are (e.g., that lying, cheating, and stealing are prohibited) but are still trying to wriggle out of accepting those rules for themselves. This is the year, by the way, when children were traditionally thought to reach the age of reason and when first communions (and first confessions) were made.

Having a narcissist for a mother is a lot like living under the supervision of a six-year-old. Narcissists are always pretending, and with a narcissistic mother it's a lot like, "Let's play house. I'll pretend to be the mother and you pretend to be the baby," though, as the baby, you'll be expected to act like a doll (keep smiling, no matter what) and you'll be treated like a doll -- as an inanimate object, as a toy to be manipulated, dressed and undressed, walked around and have words put in your mouth; something that can be broken but not hurt, something that will be dropped and forgotten when something more interesting comes along. With narcissists, there's also usually a fair element of "playing doctor," as well -- of childish sexual curiosity that may find expression in "seductive" behavior towards the child, such as inappropriate touching of the genitals, or it can also come out as "hypochondriacal" worries about the child's health and/or being most interested and attentive when the child is ill (thus teaching the child that the way to get Mother's kind attention is to get sick). Having a sick child can also be a way for the narcissistic mother to get the sympathetic attention of authority figures, such as doctors and teachers.

Selected Characteristics of Normal Six-Year-Olds

[Based on [Your Six-Year-Old](#), by Louise Bates Ames and Frances L. Ilg.]

The items below are not intended to be a comprehensive description of six-year-olds, but only the selected bits that seem to be related to adult narcissists' [traits](#) discussed elsewhere [and, yes, I really did compile the traits list weeks before finding this little book]. Besides being difficult and bewildering,

six-year-olds are also wonderfully warm and enthusiastic, fine companions, active, curious, intellectually ambitious, philosophically speculative, very interested in the world and how it works, fond of novelty and amusement -- games, music, stories, outings, adventures.

My interest here is in pointing out that many of the narcissistic characteristics that are abnormal in adults are completely normal at six years of age and that the survival of these childish characteristics into adulthood is, essentially, immaturity rather than bad intentions. But bear in mind that, while everyone who grows up passes through this stage of development, most of us spend only a few months this way before moving on to more integrated behavior. Narcissists, on the other hand, apparently spend the rest of their lives in this state of highly volatile ambivalence and uncertainty. I don't mean to play down, in any way, the very bad effects adult narcissists have on their own children, but, for those who've survived being raised by narcissists, it may give a different way of looking at family history. [See "[It's A Good Life](#)" for one person's idea of what it would be like if a six-year-old ran the world -- and, I'll add, what life may seem like to a six-year-old with a narcissist for a parent.] It has also bothered me that the little clinical literature I've found is quite hostile to narcissists; I certainly know that they can be utterly impossible, but the truth remains that the narcissists I've known were genuinely lovable about half the time -- the problem being that they want to be treated as "special" in ways that they just ain't special and will hate you for loving them for what they regard as the wrong reasons (though most of the rest of us are far less demanding and are simply pleased when attractive, decent people love us for any reason, special or not).

- ♦ "Six can, oh so often, be expansive and out-of-bounds, contrary, violent, hard...to live with." (p. 4)

- ♦ "Your typical Six-year-old is a paradoxical little person, and *bipolarity* is the name of the game. Whatever he does, he does the opposite just as readily. In fact, sometimes the choice of some certain object or course of action immediately triggers an overpowering need for its opposite." (p. 1, the first paragraph of the book) [Emphasis in original]

- ♦ "Six's reversals are truly something to be reckoned with." (p. 2)

- ♦ "I love you" rapidly changes to "I hate you." (p. 2, 6)

- ♦ stubborn **and** can't make up mind (p. 2)

- ♦ "*The child is now the center of his own universe.*" (p. 2, 15) [Emphasis in original]

- ♦ delighted by any silly thing that calls attention to himself; may do silly, show-offy things to call attention to himself when he feels neglected or shut out (pp. 71-72)

- ♦ arrogant (p. 7)

- ♦ self-important ("extremely aware of the importance of being Six") (p. 22)

- ♦ demands rather than asks (twice on p. 6, 16)

- ♦ thinks own way is always right (p. 7)

- ♦ once started, will stick to a course of bad behavior or bad judgment regardless of the inevitability of being punished for it (p. 7)

- ♦ asks to be flattered and praised as "good," even ("rather sadly and touchingly") following his worst behavior (p. 6)

- ♦ can't accept criticism (p. 7)

- ♦ feelings are hurt over very small criticisms, comments, failures (p. 6)

- ♦ "He is so extremely anxious to do well, to be the best, to be loved and praised, that any failure is very hard for him." (p. 6)

- ♦ wants to win every time (p. 4, 21, 45)

- ♦ poor sport, can't stand to lose (p. 7, 16)

- ♦ argumentative and quarrelsome (p. 21)

- ◆ defiant, pert, fresh, snippy (p. 6, 17)
- ◆ competitive, combative (p. 20)
- ◆ belligerent, verbally and physically aggressive (p. 21)
- ◆ threatens, calls names, gets physically violent (p. 21)
- ◆ violent temper tantrums may require physical restraint because of striking out (p. 29)
- ◆ jealous, envious (p. 7, 21)

-
- ◆ to make sure of winning, will cheat or make up own rules (pp. 21-22, 45)
 - ◆ complains that others are cheating and not following the rules (p. 45)
 - ◆ some are very cruel to younger children (p. 22)
 - ◆ does not always tell the truth (p. 16)
 - ◆ will not admit to wrongdoing (p. 41) *[Note: A technique is given for getting the facts out of kids that also works with narcissists: instead of asking if they did it, ask how they did it.]*
 - ◆ goodness means the things explicitly required or allowed by parents or other authority figures; badness means the things explicitly disapproved of or forbidden (p. 66)

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- ◆ little forgiveness (p. 22)
 - ◆ very critical of others' conduct (p. 22)
 - ◆ expects friendships to be resumed immediately following tremendous complaint and conflict (p. 22)

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- ◆ wants to boss (p. 21)
 - ◆ "Many children think their father knows everything -- even what goes on at home while he is at work." (p. 16)
 - ◆ thinks his teacher knows the best and only right way of doing things; may not know which rules to follow when school rules differ from home rules (p. 18)

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- ◆ "highly undifferentiated -- everything is everywhere" (p. 7)
 - ◆ can't always tell the difference between "yours" and "mine," and so often steals (pp. 39-41)

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- ◆ "random and unconstructive expenditure of energy" (p. 31)
 - ◆ more interested in merely handling or using tools than in what is accomplished with them (pp. 53-54)
 - ◆ less interested in actual final products than in whatever he may be doing at the moment (p. 56)

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- ◆ "Sixes love to dress up and pretend they are somebody else...." (p. 49)

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sex & relationships

impossible mums: the narcissist named after the son of a greek god who fancied himself a lot, the narcissistic mum demands her daughter's total love and attention

The most significant quality of the Narcissist – and the most damaging – is that she is oblivious to her impact on you because she is so involved in admiring herself.

This type of mum has a double barrel in her arsenal: not only is she self-involved and unresponsive to your needs, she has also taught you that only her needs are important and that if you fail to fulfill them you have committed the worst sin a daughter can perpetrate.



impossible mums - the narcissist fancies herself quite a bit
posed by models

A famous example of a Narcissist is actress Marlene Dietrich. She insisted on breastfeeding her baby but made her daughter Maria feel guilty for the rest of her life because her mother sacrificed her youthful breasts to her daughter's greed.

Mother's sense of purpose

This type of mother comes to her newborn with unsatisfied yearnings of her own. She is or has been unloved, or is in a bad marriage and is unfulfilled as a person, or may have little self-esteem. She sees the infant as someone to fill these gaps.

The baby's total dependency gives the Narcissist a sense of purpose and power she has never before achieved. Now she is finally admired, adored and constantly watched, as if her responses and needs were the most important thing in the world.

The problem arises when the baby starts crying and won't stop. Mother gets angry. Why? Because the Narcissist wants a doll to hold and cuddle, someone to adore her. She doesn't want a toddler who will explore, leave her, and make a mess, or a teenager developing ideas of her own.

What's in store?

The truly loving mother offers us her love simply because we are, not because of how we perform. This nurturing gives us a sense of value on which all else can be built. The daughter of a Narcissist, however, expresses only what she has learned will get her mother's approval, and becomes totally dependent on her mother.

When your needs have not been met in infancy, when something has gone wrong and roles have been reversed, you can spend your entire life trying to right the wrongs – in your love life, at work, in your very identity.

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You are attracted to people who fit into your memories; you manipulate them into playing roles you need filled and re-enact ancient scenes trying to find relief. Yet as long as you repeat the cycle, you never do.

The only way for a daughter to overcome the negative impact of a narcissistic mother is to separate herself from it so that it no longer rules her life. The most difficult and painful step in the separation process is the first one: standing aside and taking a good look at what is going on. Once you take that step, you're well on your way to breaking the cycle.

Strategies for change

Avoid confrontations with your mother. A head-on with a Narcissist never pays off. She is not going to change; her pattern is too deeply established.

You might, with patience, get her to be a little nicer to you. But as to changing her feelings or fears, forget it. She will always want to be the Queen of the Manor, with you as her lady-in-waiting.

Return to the source. The only way to straighten out the past is to go back to the source. See it the way it was and change your relationship to it. Do this by seeking help of a third eye – a friend, book, sister or therapist – who will help you see things more clearly.

Talk about your feelings! Talking brings up who you really are and allows you to sort through the real picture. It allows you to give up the denial and self-doubt, to accept your anger, when justified, and, most importantly, lets you let go and move on to be the Queen of the Manor of your own life.

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impossible mums

constant nagging, incessant guilt trips, and non-stop interference – how to deal with the nightmare mum

Many mothers can't let go when their daughters leave home. In fact, that's often when the real trouble begins. Meddlesome mums come in many varieties. No doubt you'll recognise your mother in at least one of these ten categories – maybe more.



impossible mums:
sometimes mother
doesn't know best

These mums may mean well, but even their best intentions can wreak havoc in their daughters' lives. Their tactics might change as their daughters mature, but the relationship remains unhealthy – and often mired in the negative patterns that are passed down from generation to generation.

And that may be the greatest danger posed by poor mother-daughter relations: repeating the mistakes you learned from your mother's example. Those mistakes can eventually affect your relations with friends, lovers, husbands, and, ultimately, your own daughter.

Seize the freedom

The first step into changing this unhealthy dynamic between you and your crazy-making mum is to identify what category your mother falls into. Once you do that, you will be better able to step out of the wreckage of failed relationships and seize the freedom to be yourself and make your own decisions.

"Impossible" mums come in many forms. Does yours sound like one of these?

- The **Narcissist** doesn't want a daughter – she wants a huggable doll whose world revolves around mum.
- The **Controller** has a rule for every occasion – and she lets you know every time you break one.
- The **Yenta** is worried about what the neighbours will think – never mind that you moved out of the house years ago.
- The **Smother** mother just wants to help – whether you want her to or not.
- The **Merger** mum takes your accomplishments (and disappointments) personally – too personally.
- The **Seductress** wears the latest fashions – just a little too short, a little too tight, and flirts just a little too much with every man she meets – including yours.

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