

CO -PARENTING HANDBOOK



A practical guide to co-parenting with a narcissist

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My name is Sarah Squires and I am The Nurturing Coach.

I used to work as a child protection social worker so thought I had a really good understanding of abuse but 5 years ago a narcissist came into my life and challenged everything I thought I knew.

Narcissists are chameleons. In public they are kind, caring, supportive and simply wonderful. Everyone loves them. They may even hold positions of power and have a lot of respect.

But behind closed doors they are a completely different person. Controlling, manipulative, bullying and abusive.

They seem to ruin lives for fun.

And as parents they have more influence and power.

They use their children to further their own lives whether it be pushing their child to extremes in order for them to stand out which strokes the narcissists ego, or to use as weapons to maintain control over someone. And so much in-between.

But the abuse goes unnoticed and is often dismissed because to the outside world, the narcissist is perfect. They lie and manipulate everyone around them to ensure they maintain this facade. And professionals don't look past the mask. They too believe the lies and so children and adults are left helpless in the clutches of this abuser. You see a narcissist abuser is so dangerous because they have built their whole life around this image of themselves which they play out to the world. Perfect wife/husband, parent and employer. Anything that threatens this illusion is at risk of being punished or discarded. And this can mean violence and even death.

I therefore felt it was my duty to put something together to help people who are dealing with narcissistic parents and trying to co-parent with them.

I hope you get value out of it and please feel free to share with professionals who aren't seeing the reality of what you are experiencing. I want to lift the veil on narcissistic parental abuse and help you and your children on the road to recovery.

Love in abundance

Sarah xxx



CHARACTERISTICS OF A NARCISSIST PARENT

1. Emotional manipulation

A parent will use emotional manipulation to maintain control over their child.

Guilt- a child who feels guilty if they “let their parent down” in either a real or perceived way

Blame- the child is blamed for everything to ensure the narcissist maintains their persona of perfection (eg an accident gets blamed on the child rather than the parent taking responsibility)

This can cause the child to doubt himself and weaken his self-esteem.

Gaslighting- a narcissistic parent will convince a child that they are not abused or badly treated by him. They will often say that they want the best for the child and sacrificed their life so that the child has what they need. By saying these positive things over and over, the child will start thinking that they are exaggerating and, that their parent is a good parent. Even though the child experiences verbal, emotional, physical or even sexual abuse.

2.They are always in control

A narcissistic parent will decide what the child does regardless of whether the child enjoys it or not. A narcissist parent won't really get to know their child and instead turn them into the child they want them to be to best represent the narcissist

3. They are not able to be 'introspective'

Narcissists struggle with their own emotions and so are unable to model healthy emotional responses to their children. This can lead to children being unable to regulate their own emotions and having inappropriate reactions

4. They put people down

The narcissist needs to feel superior to everyone so will put other people down to raise themselves up (although they will be careful not to do this in public as they don't want to ruin their facade)

5. They are inconsistent in their behavior

A narcissist parent is very inconsistent in their anger and praise therefore a child will walk on eggshells, unsure what will set the narcissist off.

6. They project a lot

A narcissist parent will put their emotions onto others so if they are feeling angry they will tell the child that it is them who is feeling angry which will confuse the child and leave them unsure what emotions are real and imaginary

7. They are the martyr who sacrifices their life for the children

A narcissist parent will make a child feel guilty for all that they have done for them. The child will feel responsible for making their parent happy or unhappy but the truth is that the narcissist will never be happy so the child will always feel like they have failed them

8. They know what's best for the children

Because there is no separation between the parent and the child, the narcissistic parent thinks that what they want and need, the child will want and need, too.

They would say that they know what's best for their own children because they raised them, they are the one who has been there for them when they were small and helpless.

The irony here is that, a narcissistic parent is not able to give attention and emotional support to their children.

9. They own the success of their children

The narcissistic parent feels they sacrificed many things for the child and the child needs to behave according to their expectations. Therefore, when the child receives praises or awards, they'll take credit for them.

10. They are defensive and rejects criticism

When you criticise a narcissist parent, you can shatter the perfect, false self they have built from an early age.

11. They like drama

A narcissist's emotional state is always fearful. Their mindset is fear-based and, unfortunately there is no cure for this condition. They will surround themselves with other negative people and emotions.

12. They never take responsibility for their own actions

At the core, a narcissistic parent has a deep sense of shame that makes them put on the mask of perfection. Thus, they can't be blamed for things that they actually did: even if they hit a child, they will rephrase this act as good discipline.

13. They live their life through their children

Narcissist parents neglect their children, ignoring their feelings, and treat them like they are forced to serve them or give them something.

14. They have favourites

They will have a child who is the favorite child, called 'golden child' who can do no wrong. The other child will take the blame for everything that happens in the family, also called 'scapegoat'.

15. They invalidate the child's feelings

When a child needs comfort they will get mad at them for making a mistake leaving the child confused about their own feelings and will eventually bottle them up or express them in unhealthy ways.

16. They violates emotional boundaries

A narcissist parent does not see their children as people with their own feelings and emotions, they see them as their property and therefore they can treat them however they want to and there is no arguing

17. They have children to gain attention, praise, recognition or to have someone who'll take care of them when he's old

A narcissist parent will have children to meet their own needs, not because they want to be a loving parent. The child will be used from day one in every way possible.

18. They 'parentify'

Some narcissistic parents rely on their children for emotional support when they go through tough times. They also expect their children to take care of them from an early age.

19. They never talk about their feelings because they have denied their existence

A narcissistic parent hasn't grown emotionally to the point where they can understand their feelings and is able to work through them. They are in a child-like state where they don't know what feelings are, thus, they are unable to talk about them or communicate their true self to others therefore failing to model healthy emotions to their children.

20. They lack empathy

The absence of empathy is common in narcissists, and, when it comes to narcissistic parents, this lack can do a lot of damage to the child's self-esteem. When the child gets into trouble, hurts themselves or is feeling sad, they won't receive the support that they'll need.

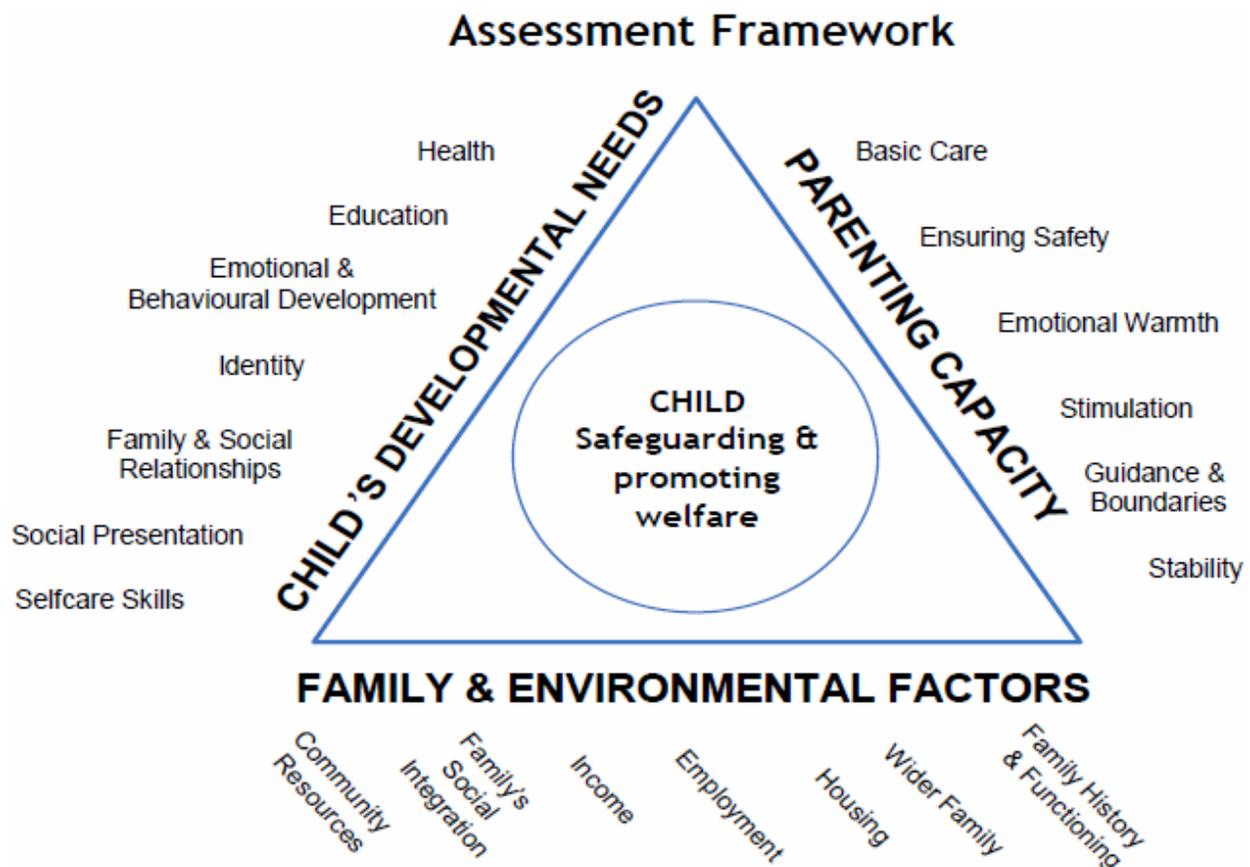
(adapted from <http://www.okfreud.com/20-hidden-traits-of-a-narcissistic-parent/>)

SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN OF NARCISSISTS

In the UK safeguarding children is assessed using the Common Assessment Framework (CAF). It takes into account the following three areas.

- children's developmental needs – covering the ways in which neglect may be manifested in terms of impairment to children's health and development;
- factors affecting parental capacity – covering parenting and the ways in which it can be compromised by a range of factors including family and environmental factors; and
- family and wider environment - covering family and environmental factors more broadly and the and practice issues that impede or facilitate effective practice.

Therefore, my report will use the same framework to demonstrate the impact and give an assessment guide for parental narcissistic abuse.



Children's Developmental Needs

Health

Through research I have found that narcissistic parents can often suffer with “fabricated illness syndrome” as well so regular, unfounded trips to the doctors as well as regular, one off days off school often with the same reason given can be a sign that the parent is using visits to GP to meet their own needs of being seen as a caring parent, attention seeking and using the child to keep themselves company

Abused children may also have developmental delay, mental health problems and behavioural issues due to trauma and learnt behaviour.

Education

A child of a narcissistic parent may work extra hard to achieve the acceptance and approval of their parent. They may get overly and disproportionately upset if they make a mistake.

They may struggle to concentrate because they are worried about their home life.

Parents may be very engaged with school, volunteering for everything, in an attempt to be seen as the perfect parent and to keep an eye on their child. They may also take credit for their child's achievements.

The child may struggle with discipline as it is inconsistent at home.

If the child of a narcissist gets in trouble, the parent may be angry with the child because it damages their status of “perfect parent”.

Emotional and Behavioural

Child may be very emotional and cry at the slightest things. They could suffer with hyperarousal and are constantly on alert for threats. They may also withdraw from friends.

Behaviourally they may struggle to manage their emotions so act out with aggression and anger. They could bully other children and struggle to share.

Before and after the weekend their behaviour or anxiety could be worse.

Children can have really low self esteem or have a superior view of themselves as better than anyone else (extremes dependant on how the parent's narcissism presents)

Identity

A child with a narcissistic parent will have no clear identity and will struggle to describe themselves. They could be easily lead by others, wanting to be accepted and liked. They could also use power and control to get others to do what they want them to.

Family and Social Relationships

A narcissistic parent will want everyone to believe that their child loves and adores them so they may be very affectionate in public which will confuse the child as they are not used to being treated like this at home.

The child will struggle to form relationships with peers and may be very socially isolated.

They may speak about missing one parent or not seeing much of that parent.

One child may be a "golden child" and seen as the favourite but will still be subject to abuse if they threaten the narcissists position. This can result in this child believing they are superior to their peers and may bully others. The child who is not the favourite will be ignored, subjected to extreme discipline and can do no right. Both children will exhibit signs of excessively wanting to please the parent, constantly seeking approval.

Social Presentation

Children of narcissists are often very well dressed. They will have the latest clothing and accessories. They will have lavish parties and put a lot of emphasis on how they look.

Some children of narcissists will be neglected and discarded though if they do not meet any of the narcissists needs.

Self Care Skills

A child of a narcissist may be advanced beyond their years as they have to care for themselves a lot at home. They may be able to make a cup of tea or cook their own dinner at a young age.

Parenting Capacity

Basic Care

A child of a narcissist could appear extremely well cared for, with new clothing and hair cuts. Everything will look perfect.

Equally a narcissistic parent may neglect additional health needs such as opticians, dentists.

Ensuring Safety

A child of a narcissist may be exposed to high risk behaviours and could witness domestic abuse. They won't have boundaries in place because the narcissist wants to be seen as the "fun parent" so the children want to spend more time with them which they know will hurt the other parent. They can be neglectful and leave children unsupervised whilst they meet their own needs.

Emotional Warmth

A child of a narcissist will not receive any love or affection from their narcissist parent because narcissists lack empathy. If the child cries, a narcissist won't offer comfort - they will simply tell the child to stop crying. They may put on a show of affection in public, which seeks to only confuse the child even more.

Stimulation

A child of a narcissist may have access to expensive toys but the narcissist will not engage in play with their child. They are given purely as a sign of status so a child will struggle to play with other children or even with play itself as they have not been consistently shown how to.

Guidance and Boundaries

A child of a narcissist will struggle with boundaries because the narcissist may be incredibly strict on certain issues which are important to them but will expose them to risky behaviours. They will also be left to their own devices when they are being cared for by the narcissist.

The other parent may struggle to implement boundaries as they don't want to seem cruel, like the narcissist, so the child swings from one extreme to the other.

A child of a narcissist will learn how to treat others and use manipulation to get their own way. They will also lash out when they don't.

Sexual boundaries may also be crossed as the narcissist sees everyone as their possessions and supply.

Stability

A child of a narcissist will have witnessed a lot of arguments and be given inconsistent messages by their narcissistic parent. The non narcissist parent may struggle with setting boundaries themselves so the relationship between parents may be on/off regularly.

The child will be used as a pawn by the narcissist to hurt the non narcissist parent so will be confused as to who to trust.

Parental alienation may also be prevalent with the narcissist parent trying to exclude one parent out of the child's life. If a child suddenly stops talking a one parent this could be a warning that parental alienation is happening.

Family and Environmental Factors

Family History and Functioning

A child of a narcissist may well have one or more grand-parents who are narcissists as well so the behaviour is "normal" and so the child socially learns how to behave.

The parents may well have split up numerous times leading to a lack of security. New partners may be introduced very quickly, confusing the child, and they may even be asked to call the new partner “mum” or “dad”.

The family will be dysfunctional in all aspects. Mental health issues are likely. Regular arguments and a lack of warmth between parents is commonplace.

One parent will imply they are the more competent parent, putting the other parent down using the guise of “protecting the children”

Wider Family

A child of a narcissist may only have contact with one side of the family and may be told negative things about the other side of the family leaving the child confused and with limited support

Housing

The house may be very well presented with modern decor

Equally the house could be neglected but excuses such as “it’s being renovated” or “so and so was supposed to tidy up” used to cover it up and transfer responsibility

Employment

The narcissist may hold a high powered job, one with responsibility or could perceive that they are powerful so talk about how important they are (phrases like “they couldn’t manage without me” or “everyone knows what I do for this company”)

Income

A narcissist is obsessed with money so will talk a lot about how much they earn or have spent. Even with a low income they will attempt to live a very “showy” life and can often run up debt to keep this illusion. Are often irresponsible with money.

Families Social Integration

Narcissists do not have friends, only people who they use to meet their own needs so they may mix with important or influential people in the community. The non narcissist parent may be socially isolated or used as a trophy by the narcissist

The children of narcissists will only be encouraged to make friends with people the narcissist approves of and if the narcissist falls out with the family, the child has to follow suit. It is unlikely friends will be allowed over to the house because the narcissist does not want anyone to witness the truth behind the closed door.

Community Resources

N/A

In addition look for inconsistencies such as brand new tablet for the child but worn shoes.

Narcissist Parents want to be seen as “perfect” to the outside world so will paint a wonderful picture of how well behaved the children are or will blame the children (rather than take responsibility themselves) for any behavioural problems.

Narcissist parents may ask their children to lie for them about the other parent so be aware of any sudden changes in a child’s opinions of a parent.

Narcissist parents may make their children take part in activities which the child doesn’t want to do so be aware of children saying they don’t enjoy something but their parent makes them

THE REALITIES OF CO-PARENTING WITH A NARCISSIST

When you break up with a narcissist, you are saving yourself a lifetime of hurt, pain and misery. BUT if you have children together the torture does not end easily. By understanding the realities, characteristics and how to safeguard your children you are armed and ready for the battle.

1. Parental Alienation

The narcissist parent will tell the child(ren) lies to scare them (e.g. “your mum/dad is going to take you away from me and we’ll never see each other again”) to try and make the child not want to see the non-narcissist parent

They will also limit or control access with the non-narcissist parent by saying when, where and how the other parent will see the children. They can use access as a way of trying to lure you back in

2. Constantly Changing Plans

The narcissist parent will constantly try and make changes to pre-arranged plans in order to retain control over the situation and cause maximum disruption

3. Constant Lies

A narcissist will tell services what they think they want to hear. They will paint a picture of being a perfect parent but if you join all the dots you will see that there are many holes in their stories

4. Manipulation of Services

A narcissist will try to use services to meet their own needs and often will play the victim to transfer blame to the non-narcissist parent, accusing them of doing the things that they themselves have done. They may be in a position of power themselves so will use that to belittle and demean the other parent, making others believe their lies and take their side.

5. Blocking

The narcissist will block access or holidays/outings simply to cause disruption and regain control

6. Financial Control

The narcissist will use money to manipulate the non-narcissist parent, ensuring

that they don't have any money or lying that they themselves have no money to get out of paying for their children

7. Maintain Control

The narcissist parent will do everything they can to maintain control over their ex partner in whatever way they can. They may not tell them about doctor's appointments or school appointments OR give them so little notice that it is almost impossible for the other parent to attend or not turn up late which the narcissist then uses to prove how unreliable the other parent is

8. Restrict/Control Visitation

The narcissist will try to dictate the terms of access and deliberately choose times when they cause the most disruption to the other parent. If they are mad with the other parent they will restrict their access. They may also make the other parent come to their house to ensure they remain under their control

9. Belittle the other parent

The narcissist will pick on every little thing the other parent does, making out they are not capable and trying to get everyone else, including the children, to believe that they are the better most capable parent

10. False Allegations

The narcissist will attack when they are in danger of losing control and this can result in them making false allegations of violence and abuse. Women particularly use this tactic because gender stereotypes see women as the victims of abuse as opposed to the perpetrators.

11. Refusal to engage

A narcissist will not want an outsider telling them what to do so will often refuse to engage with services. However, some narcissists believe they can outsmart services by telling lies and manipulating professionals. They will make out they are fully co-operative and that the other parent is the problem

12. Strange and Sudden life changes

A narcissist will do whatever it takes to regain control over the other parent and this can often result in them making sudden and strange life changes. For example, a parent who has always held a good job may suddenly leave work to ensure they have no money to pay child support or to try and show that they are

a dedicated parent and want to be at home for their children

13. Family, Friends and New Partners

The narcissist will use their family and friends to spread lies about the ex partner. They may also get a new partner very quickly if they were the ones who ended the relationship and can even walk away from their children completely for long periods of time.

Narcissists who did not end the relationship will threaten family, friends and new partners in order to get their ex partner back under their control. They may try to contact the new partner and bully them. They will likely tell everyone how the ex has wronged them in some horrific way but then refuse to move on and maintain regular contact with the ex. They may lie and say that their ex wants them back or that their ex owes them money if anyone questions their behaviour. They can stalk, harass and intimidate anyone close to the ex and use the children to find out more about the ex's life.

14. Pets

The narcissist will use family pets to inflict hurt and exact power of the other parent. They may steal, hurt or even kill pets.

15. Violence

The narcissist will hurt anyone who threatens their false view of themselves. This can include family members, new partners, their ex and even the children themselves. This is the ultimate act of power and control.

TOP TIPS FOR CO-PARENTING WITH A NARCISSIST

- *Keep your own emotions in check*
Go greyrock (rocks don't respond, they just sit)
Overreacting with emotion and anger to the narcissist gives him or her what they want. Plus the narcissist will use everything you do in anger against you so don't give them any evidence.
- *Maintain your dignity*
Bringing your own conduct to the narcissist's level only serves to create more conflict and lowers your own self esteem. It also shows the narcissist how much power they still have over you. Plus it doesn't look good in court. Always ensure your behaviour and requests are focused SOLELY on the best interest of the children. As long as you can evidence that, the court will be on your side.
- *Make a stand*
Every time you let the abuse of you or your children happen, you are telling yourself and your children that it is acceptable. In child protection terms this is also called "failure to protect" and doesn't look good if you go to court. If you don't feel confident to walk yet at least let your children know that what they are experiencing isn't OK and that things will get better (remember that the child may be under the influence of the narcissist so if you share anything about leaving they may relay it back to win favour so be careful what you tell you them)
- *Document everything*
When you are ready to leave you are going to need to have evidence to protect yourself and your children in the future. Any evidence you can gather now (video's, written notes with dates and times etc) will help your case. Especially if the narcissist makes false allegations against you. The court will frown upon parents who get embroiled in a tit for tat case but if you have evidence then they are far more likely to take you seriously and it won't look like you are just throwing mud.
- *Stick to the order*
If you don't enforce any court orders you have in place you are weakening your own case in court and the narcissist will know that they can still control you. Use the court order to enforce boundaries and if necessary use the police to enforce them

If you require more support, head to www.thenurturingcoach.co.uk/Booking to book your one:one session.

I hope you enjoyed this workbook and I look forward to speaking to you soon.

Sarah Squires
The Nurturing Coach

PS Why not follow us on our social media channels to gain more insight and inspiration to move forward?

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