

# How to Raise a Narcissist

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As a psychotherapist, I find it interesting (and more than a little disturbing) to listen to people confidently diagnosing others as having serious mental challenges. “He’s definitely a narcissist,” one says. A statement like that is problematic, because we are first human beings created in the image of God—not walking, talking mental conditions. In addition, people pronouncing mental health diagnoses generally don’t have the extensive training necessary to correctly assess others’ mental health (and might not even be aware narcissism exists on a spectrum).

We all have some narcissistic tendencies. Even when “humble,” we can be self-absorbed. **God describes the human heart as deceitful above all things and it is extremely sick; who can understand it fully and know its secret motives?** (Jeremiah 17:9, AMP). The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) lists specific criteria for narcissistic personality disorder (NPD) ranging from a grandiose sense of self-importance, being preoccupied with fantasies of unlimited success, believing he or she is so special and unique only other special or high-status people can understand, a sense of entitlement, taking advantage of others, lacking empathy for others’ feelings or needs, and/or being envious. The many facets of NPD wreak havoc on human relationships.



**The word *Narcissus* is from the Greek *narc*, which means *numbness*.** In *Emotional Vampires*, Dr. Albert J. Bernstein writes, “If you’re a narcissist, the most important thing you can do for yourself is to try to understand and value other people. It’s especially helpful to listen quietly when people are criticizing you...[and] think about all the ways the criticisms could be right.”

In *When Narcissism Comes to Church: Healing Your Community from Emotional and Spiritual Abuse*, Chuck DeGroat describes the myth of Narcissus, “While often told as a tale of excessive self-love, it is precisely self-love that Narcissus was lacking. It’s a story of being stuck, immobilized, fixed in a death dance.” **Narcissus “would let no one touch his heart. This is the wound of shame. One who is ashamed cannot connect and cannot become vulnerable. He is immovable, untouchable.”**

**If your goal is to raise a narcissist, then, you must:**

1. Avoid teaching your child godly self-acceptance. Make him or her think others’ approval is the main goal of living.
2. Help your child avoid consequences for unkind behavior to others.
3. Never admit it when you’re wrong.
4. Ignore, minimize, or deny your own or your child’s emotions.

**Instead of raising children who are numb to life and the real needs around and within them, we can raise children who are fully alive, with tender hearts to God.** We can train ourselves to apply Jesus’ teaching about the Greatest Commandment: *You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind...a second is equally important. ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’* (Matthew 22:37-39).

**Rather than reinforcing narcissistic behaviors and attitudes, you can:**

1. **Teach your children godly self-acceptance.** *For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago* (Ephesians 2:10, NLT). Help them see their lives have eternal significance, with purpose, power, and God’s *peace that passes understanding*

(Philippians 4:7). If your children feel disappointed when they're not "the best" at a sport or a class, help them apply God's Word, such as Colossians 3:23, NLT: *Work hard and cheerfully at whatever you do, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people.*

2. **Model godly behaviors.** Whether interacting with people at church, restaurants, or at home, **be kind.** Whenever you fail, admit you're wrong and show how you can do it better. If you've been rude, counteract disrespect with kindness, and **model ERQ—emotional relational intelligence.** In James 4:7, God says *humble yourselves*, then adds *Don't speak evil against each other, dear brothers and sisters* (James 4:11). When we behave badly, we can admit it to our children or others we've offended. "I'm sorry I [said, did, or failed to do that]. Please forgive me."
3. **Apply God's Word** in every interaction. Help your children increase their empathy by doing things with them to reach out and help others. Be creative—it could be anything from mowing someone's lawn to reading to a neighbor or providing food. God tells us, *Be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you* (Ephesians 4:32, NLT).
4. **Help your child learn emotional self-regulation** throughout life. By skillfully managing your emotions, you're modeling important life skills. If your baby is agitated, talk calmly. Rather than saying, "You're OK," when it's clear he or she isn't feeling "OK," smile and say something like, "You're feeling uncomfortable? Let's figure this out." As the child grows older, you've already established a pattern for teaching them to identify and manage big emotions.

One practical way to help your child avoid a narcissistic mindset is to practice **breath prayers** together as needed throughout the day. Each addresses specific emotional concerns:

<b>Emotion</b>	<b>Inhale</b>	<b>Exhale</b>
<b>Anxiety</b>	<i>When my anxious thoughts multiply within me</i>	<i>Your consolations delight my soul</i> (Psalm 94:19, NASB)
<b>Fear</b>	<i>God is our refuge and strength</i>	<i>a very present help in trouble</i> (Psalm 46:1, ESV)
<b>Anger</b>	<i>A gentle answer turns away wrath;</i>	<i>but a harsh word stirs up anger</i> (Proverbs 15:1, NASB)
<b>Depression</b>	<i>Come to Me all who are weary and carry heavy burdens</i>	<i>and I will give you rest</i> (Jesus, Matthew 11:28, NLT)
<b>Rejection</b>	<i>I have loved you with an everlasting love:</i>	<i>therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you</i> (Jeremiah 31:3, ESV)

To discover effective tools for life and growth, read or listen to *Core Healing from Trauma*, a biblical counseling workbook for individuals or groups, available on Amazon (<https://cutt.ly/occdejH>). You can also watch "Strengthening Your Core," a 12-week video series on YouTube at <https://cutt.ly/Or6EiiW> or subscribe to my blog at <https://corehealingfromtrauma.com/>.