

Joe Kort Narcissism

Okay, hello, everybody and Joe, welcome back to the show. I'm so happy to have you here again. It's great to be here.

Thank you so much. Yeah. So I had you on once before and it's such a pleasure talking to you.

You're so knowledgeable. And part of the reason I had you on for the first episode, which for those of you listening, who haven't tuned into that one, we talked all about the difference between sexual orientation and erotic orientation. And I had you on because you've gotten so popular on TikTok in the videos you've made regarding those topics.

And something I've been seeing a lot more pop up on your feed is videos about narcissism. And so I was like, we need to talk about that a little bit more too. So that is what we are going to tap into today.

It has become, I think a very highly Googled topic as I was preparing for the show. I think I put in the words like N A and Google like already knew where I was going with that. So I think it's something that a lot of people are wondering if maybe the person they're in a relationship with is a narcissist.

So let's just kind of start high level and talk about what some of the core traits are in someone who has a narcissistic personality. Yeah. So I really love doing it. By the way, it was accidental how I got into narcissism, even though I know a lot about it, that was not my goal on TikTok, but I kept getting my videos taken down because everybody was so bothered by my sexual orientation stuff.

So I thought, well, I better take this in a different direction and start talking about narcissism. And I couldn't believe myself. And I'm actually so grateful that there's so much talk about narcissism because that's not been the case.

I've been a therapist 37 years and narcissism is not something you can put your hands on, that you can actually see. It's not so overt. And in fact, when it's covert, it's even worse. So now at least people have a name for this kind of thing.

And so some of the traits would be that a narcissist and I'll do this, but I really prefer talking about the effects of the narcissist, because if you get online, everything's about the narcissist, it's like, art imitates life. Like, wait a minute, what about all the people that we see who have been traumatized by these people? You know what I mean? I hate it. I really hate it.

But it's really lacking accountability, blaming you for everything they are. I really teach my clients, if your partner or person in your life, that's narcissistic is saying, you're all these things they're telling you about who they are.

They're looking in a mirror, but they don't see the mirror. They think it's you, you know, this grandiosity self-inflated. And what is really hard is the covert when it's somebody who's always a victim, things are always happening to them, after everything I've done for you. And I'm a martyr. And how could you do this to me? People don't see that usually as narcissism, but there's two sides to it. Totally.

And I'm wondering, I mean, I think we kind of live in a narcissistic society these days, would you say that the prevalence is greater today than it was maybe 20 years ago? I don't know. I think that we have more healthy narcissism. I mean, I feel like the young people really kind of know their attractiveness and they're able to put it out there and embrace it in a way that my generation didn't do when I was young.

And so I don't know that there's more, I think there's just more conversation. I do know that people worry, a lot of worry out there. Am I a narcissist? Do you hear that a lot yourself? Yeah, I do.

I do. And I think it's because part of what you just said that people are getting more confident and, you know, worrying less about what people think about us. And so I think a lot of people assume that that may mean they have an inflated ego.

I mean, I've even thought like, Oh my God, I'm putting all these videos out there as an expert. Like, am I a narcissist? Of course I know myself well enough. And when I put my therapist hat on for myself, I'm like, okay, I'm not a narcissist, but I think that's part of the reason why people ask themselves that question.

So let's talk a little bit about the difference between an overt narcissist versus a covert narcissist. Cause we're going to focus a little bit more on covert narcissism, but I think it's really important for people to understand the differences so they can do their own self-assessment and kind of begin to assess the people who they're in relationships with. It's a great point.

Overt are very obvious, right? So people might point it out. I've heard it said that Trump is a narcissist, like celebrities, different celebrities are narcissists. Will Smith or his wife, or I don't know, whatever, you know, these are people that are out there engaging in behaviors without accountability. That's the primary thing. And if you are involved with somebody and they don't take accountability and they blame you for why they did something, that's traumatizing because most people that they're involved with are empaths or codependents or people that want to please or people that want to follow the rules.

So if I'm involved with you and you're the narcissist, and now you're telling me I'm the bad guy, I'm going to self-reflect and believe that. But if I say, wait a minute, I'm not the bad guy. And there is no bad guy, but you've done some really bad things.

They're going to Teflon that there's no sticking. Right. And they can be so manipulative about the way that they belittle you and cut you down.

And really it's a reflection of their own deep-seated insecurity that they're not at all tapped into consciously. So that's the more overt narcissism. How does covert narcissism show up? Yeah.

And that can look like a person who has low self-esteem and, you know, always putting themselves down, unconditionally doing things and feeling badly that after everything I did for X, Y, and Z, and look how they treat me now. And just engaging in self-deprecation doesn't always signal to somebody that that's a form of narcissism, but it hijacks the situation. So if you are engaging in a conversation and the person says, I feel victimized by you.

I feel like you're dangerous to me now when maybe you're not at all, but they feel uncomfortable. Now they've hijacked it and made it all about them. That's a form of covert narcissism.

Totally. And I've seen cases where, for example, someone is very altruistic and they help a lot of people who are around them, close to them, but their desire to others is really far below the satisfaction they get as being seen as a helper. And so it's really not a selfless act as much as it is something that is selfish because a lot of times these people will kind of keep people around them who are dependent on them because that feels good to be needed.

Right. It keeps them in the power position and keeps you disempowered. Sometimes covert narcissism will keep you in a state of chaos, but they're the one creating the chaos and then they're going to rescue you.

Oh, I've got this. This is horrible. This happened to you.

But they were the actual person that put you there. So that's why they can always save the day because they created the problem. Exactly.

So let's talk a little bit about what some of the roots of narcissism are. How does someone develop narcissistic personality? It's such a great question. I do want to say this if we could.

A lot of people who worry that they're narcissists are really narcissistically defended. I must use that phrase every single day. And I put it on TikTok.

It went viral twice on two different videos. And then I looked it up because people were like, even therapists were like, no, therapists would say they'd use that word. But the public was like, what does that mean? And so I went to Google.

It didn't exist. I couldn't believe it. I mean, because really what I'm saying are people have narcissistic traits.

So in other words, if you're raised in a narcissistic home and everything's... So I would say this because I was. When my mother looked at me and I looked at her, she was looking at me looking at her. It was all about her.

It was all about my father, all about my grandmother, all about my stepmother. And so I had to develop defenses to hang on to myself. Nobody was hanging on to me.

Nobody was holding me. My attachment was to nothing. Nobody was attached back to me.

So I absolutely have traits of narcissism, but they're traits and they're defenses. And what makes me not a narcissist is if you like, I read those comments in my social media, they make me feel bad if I've said something wrong or somebody was upset. I want to work with that.

A narcissist would block you and say, I'm not into that. They wouldn't care. Right.

Yeah. I think that's really, I'm actually surprised too that that term isn't really out there on Google. I think there's a lot to learn about that.

So how else would someone know that they're raised in a narcissistic family? Yeah, see it's hard because it's like neglect, right? I always say this, when you're overtly hurt verbally, physically, then you can say, Hey, this happened. And you might be in denial about it happening, but once it clicks, it's obvious, somebody hit me, somebody said this, but when it's covert and you don't know the neglect, neglect is way worse I feel sometimes. Not to make one worse than the other, but it's like an invisible person in the room you're all constantly trying to help somebody see is right there. So it's really that it's like asking somebody, okay, I've had clients say, yeah, I was fed and I was clothed and they sent me to school. Okay.

That's great custodial care. How were you loved as a child? What did people do above and beyond that made you feel special? And people from narcissistic homes don't have that. Yeah.

And so people, I think it's important to realize, you know, energy should always move from a parent to a child, right? It should always go in that direction. But when emotional energy is coming from the child to the parent, I think that's a really key sign that maybe you were raised in a narcissistic family, because then it becomes the child's responsibility to meet the parent's needs, which can really suck the life out of you and it's a very confusing feeling because on the one hand, there's a sense of neglect that you're not getting your own needs met. On the other hand, there's a sense of power and control you have because you are so important to meeting the adult caregiver's

emotional needs.

And so those two feelings, the neglect and the power you feel get mixed up. And I think for some people it can result in a range of dependencies. There are some people who could grow up like that and become very codependent needy.

There are other people who are so far in denial of their own needs that this projected sense of self that they're putting out into the world. And we see that as more classic narcissism. It's really true.

And sometimes maybe your parent wasn't narcissistic, but the system, the family system was narcissistic. So we're all about the good of something else. It's not about any of us in the family.

It's all about the religion, or it's all about our culture, all about that can be a form of narcissism. So then you end up responding to that inappropriately. Right.

It's all about, I think an imbalance of needs at its core when we're looking at the family system. So I would encourage anyone listening to take a moment and reflect back on your own family system and ask yourself whose needs were being met in the family and how? Were your caregivers relying on you to meet their emotional needs or did they put their needs aside so that they could take care of you as a child? And of course doing that too much lends itself to other issues, but generally speaking, you always want the energy to go from the parent to the child. When it happens in the reverse, that's when we see a lot of dysfunctional personality traits show up and people enter into dysfunctional relationships.

And the reason I love this kind of podcast and doing these videos on TikTok is once you realize somebody is narcissistic, they're predictable. They're easy to get along with because now, you know, if you want something from them, don't ask one-on-one, don't be around other people that they also abuse. Make sure they're witnessed by people they value.

You will always get a different response, even if it's not the one you exactly want, but you will get a response if they're witnessed. If you learn to make sure that you don't wound their ego, you don't want to say to a narcissist, you know, like try to get them to see who they are. You're going to make things so much worse for yourself.

It's predictable. Rather, you don't have to subordinate yourself, but you also don't have to be invested in getting them convinced to see something the way that you see it. Yeah.

You are very unlikely to ever get a narcissist to see and empathize with the effect that their behavior has on you. It is a lost cause. I am telling you right now.

Right. You're always empathizing with them and the pain that they feel from whatever

they did that they can't see. Exactly.

Which makes you question your own feelings and ultimately makes you question your own reality. So what advice do you have for people who are in relationships with narcissists? Let's start with someone who might be married to a narcissist. You know, that, that can be really challenging.

Maybe they share children together and they've realized that their partner has these personality traits, but for various legitimate reasons, don't really see an out. Well, here's what I, that's a great question. What I always tell people is you can't change the narcissist, but you can get them to change how they treat you.

So if they value you enough, they would be willing to change behaviors based on you saying to them, this isn't working for me. I'm going to have to engage less with you in some ways. And by doing so, now there's a great, I just learned this on TikTok, gray rocking somebody.

Do you know what that is? I don't know that one. No.

It's actually on psychology today too. You can Google it. Gray rocking means I'm going to be neutral to everything you say and do.

Because if I react to you now, I'm giving you ammunition. I'm feeding you. Stop feeding the person. Now this can be scary because in a gray rock situation, if somebody is abusive, you could be inviting more abuse.

So you have to know your situation, but if it's a narcissist, who's not physically abusive, gray rocking stops the behavior because there's no reaction anymore. Yeah. It's kind of like just letting a child throw a temper tantrum.

If you give them too much attention that feeds the temper tantrum. And of course, if there's a negative reaction that also feeds the temper tantrum. And so a lot of times the best thing you can do is to stand back and just let them ride it out and react very neutrally and calmly. And, you know, I think it's helpful to think of narcissists really as what they are, which most of them is are wounded children at the end of the day. Very wounded, very young. Yeah.

Yeah. Let's talk about what a narcissistic injury is. Can you define that for people who may have stumbled across that phrase? Yeah.

I mean, a narcissistic injury, we all can have that, right? Like somebody who kind of says something to you that you don't want to hear, that you don't like, but you did do it. You know, you said it, you did it and you maybe hurt somebody or you went outside of your moral code, accidentally, not because you did it on purpose. And now somebody's like reflecting that back to you.

So it can feel like, I feel like a really bad person. See, a narcissist isn't going to feel like a bad person. They're going to be like, well, I'm sorry that happened to you.

I'm so sorry. Wait, how did they say it? I'm sorry you feel that way. Too bad.

I hope you worked that all out. Even though I'm the one who stabbed you with the pen, you know. To somebody who's not a narcissist, you're going to reflect. You're going to feel really badly.

To a narcissist, if you're asking me about their own injury, by doing that and pointing out their narcissism, you're going to make it worse. You're going to invite more abuse. It's not a good idea.

Right. Right. You should really never confront a narcissist about their own narcissistic behavior. Or try to out them. Right. So show the world that this person really is.

They're so good at not showing other people, particularly the covert ones. They're the worst. You'll never get somebody because they're to other, poor me, look at me, look how this person treated me.

And probably the worst of it, I know I'm saying a lot of things, but when it involves the children and parental alienation is really, really, really horrible where they can convince a whole system, a whole courtroom to take children away from other people. It can get that ugly. Yeah.

Yeah. And I think a lot of times the people who are covert narcissists, I keep saying narcissism, people who are covert narcissists, a lot of times they keep just enough distance with the people who are quote unquote close to them, that they don't ever really see who they truly are. And so that can be very scary because you've gotten close enough to them where you're getting injured by them.

You're getting abused by them. There's a lot of psychological trauma that's happening, but for other people who are in their cohort, there's just enough emotional distance that they don't see that darker side. And so I think that's another reason why it's really a lost cause to try to convince the narcissist themselves or anyone else who is close to them of their behavior.

My favorite story to say to my clients is don't try to teach a pig to sing. All you're going to do is get frustrated and piss off the pig. Don't do it.

Yeah. Yeah. Very, very applicable in this situation.

Yeah. So what about for someone who maybe does have an exit from a relationship? How can they develop the ego strength to finally leave? Because I think that's, what's so hard about being in a relationship with a narcissist is, you know, they will love bomb you

to bring you back into the relationship. It's like, they will push you away and then bring you back in.

And there's this back and forth that happens. And especially early on, it can feel passionate and romantic, but eventually you reach a point where you're like, okay, I got to get out. But that can be really, really challenging and scary.

Really. Yeah. Right. And then you get, you're exploited too.

Let's not forget that, that they will exploit you for all kinds of things because it's their need that they're trying to get met. And when you stop meeting that need, they're going to do all those things you just said, try to keep you in. It's so important.

I think people need therapy, have a coach, have support people around you. I know we say that, sometimes I feel like it's cheesy to say that because of course, but really have those people in place because eventually once the narcissist gets that you're really done, you're disposed, you're done. You're like garbage to them.

You're either a trophy or you're garbage and both are no good for you. And so you have to really, and you have to work through the trauma and complex trauma. You know, this culture is all about trauma, but people don't understand trauma is just one thing happening to you.

An acute thing, this is a complex over time, all the gaslighting, all the lying, all the lack of accountability has a hold over you. It could take years to recover from that. Totally.

And it can happen so gradually. And so suddenly that eventually you reach a point where you're like, or maybe you have a close friend or family member who comes to you and says, you know, we don't recognize who you are. And I think that that's a big light bulb moment for people.

It can be so hard to hear because you've been so convinced that this is like a wonderful person for so long. A lot of times I think people who are in relationships with covert narcissists don't even realize that they've been so abused and manipulated over a long period of time until it's too late and you've lost friendships or whatever. Right.

Cause you tell people when people are like, are they hitting you? Is there alcoholism? Is there, you know, and then when there's not, they're like, then what's your problem? You have a house, you have a husband, you have a wife, you have a partner, you have a family. Can't you just enjoy? People don't see it. And that's the worst.

I always say this, that it's one thing to be abused. It's one thing for everyone around you not to be able to see it or do anything about it. Sometimes that's worse than being actually, but if there's an exit, it's really important that you take that exit and that you find your, but you have to have a place to go and you have to have all your ducks in a

row so that you're not left hanging.

Cause you're going to end up coming back and it's easy to come back. Yeah. And I think that's when people have to be really careful when you've maybe alienated other meaningful people in your lives or let go of other meaningful relationships to feed the needs of this narcissist.

You may find that you're not really left with a ton of support and that can be a very lonely feeling and make it more easy, can make it easier to then slip back into this unhealthy relationship. So I think a really good first step for people is to start reestablishing some close relationship ties. As you said, I know it sounds cliché to have a support system, but it really is so true because you need people around you who are going to hold you accountable and remind you of who you are.

Because I think at that point in time, a lot of people have really lost their sense of self, but it is possible to get it back. And there is hope on the other end of a relationship with a narcissist. And do not make yourself feel like something's wrong with you. Like what's wrong with me that I got involved with a narcissist. It could be that you were raised by one, but sometimes they're very clever to grab somebody who's never been around somebody who's a narcissist and grab your attention. And there's nothing wrong with you.

What's wrong is if you don't get out of it, if you don't find a way to change that situation, that's what's not healthy. But to get away from this low self-esteem, like, because if you don't do that and really understand that you're going to find another narcissist and you might, but you might find a narcissistically defended person. Who's a better version of any narcissist you could ever meet.

Yeah. I think that's a really good point. A lot of times people will beat themselves up for being in an unhealthy relationship, like what we're describing, but sometimes it just happens.

I mean, narcissists can be very charming. And like I said, the abuse can be very slow and very gradual and you realize that it's happened. So much to say about this.

Thanks again, Joe, for being with me on the podcast today. Where can people learn more about you and get your books and all the resources that you have to offer? Yeah, thank you. They can go to my website, joekort.com, JOEKORT.com. Then they can find me on Twitter, TikTok, LinkedIn, Facebook.

It's at Dr. Joe Kort. And if you just plug that into any of those social networks, you'll find me. Awesome.

Well, I'll be sure to link everything in the show notes. So check that out. Thanks again, Joe, and I'll talk to you again soon.

All right. Thank you.