

What Narcissistic Patterns Can Look Like in Real Life

When you start reading about narcissism, you can go down a rabbit hole very quickly. There are so many labels and types that you can end up spending more time trying to figure out exactly what he is than looking at what is actually happening between the two of you.

I do not want you to get stuck there. For this guide, I care much more about the patterns you keep seeing.

These are not official clinical types. They are simply a few ways these patterns can show up in real life.



Look at the patterns you keep seeing.



The Typical Narcissistic Pattern

When most people picture a narcissist, this is probably closer to what they mean. He does not need to have every single sign, and some may be much stronger than others. But if you are thinking, okay, what am I actually looking for, these are some of the big ones.

Core Signs to Watch For

1 Grandiose self-importance:

He may think very highly of himself, expect special treatment, exaggerate what he is good at, or act like some of the normal rules should not really apply to him.



2 Refusal to take responsibility:

His mistake somehow becomes your fault, somebody else's fault, or the result of circumstances he supposedly had no control over.



3 Lack of empathy:

You tell him you are hurt and instead of trying to understand your side, he brushes it off, minimizes it, or tells you that you are being too sensitive.



4 Controlling behavior:

He may question where you go, who you talk to, or make certain friendships and choices so uncomfortable that you slowly start changing what you do just to avoid another issue.



5 Constant need for admiration:

He may need a lot of praise, attention, reassurance, or validation. Sometimes it can feel like there is always room for his ego, but not much room left for what you need.



6 Arrogance and entitlement:

He may act like he knows better, deserves more, or should get exceptions. Sometimes it simply feels like there is one set of rules for him and another one for everybody else.



7 Gaslighting or reality rewriting:

He denies something he said, changes the story, or remembers it so differently that you start thinking, wait... did that really happen the way I remember it?



What Happens When You Bring Up a Problem



One of the biggest things I want you to notice is what happens when you bring up a problem. Can he stay with what you are saying and say, 'Yes, I did that. That was not okay'? Or does it immediately become about your tone, the way you brought it up, something you did last week, or why you are too sensitive? Before you know it, you are defending yourself even though you were the one who came into the conversation hurt.



The same thing can happen with empathy. I am not saying he has zero empathy. He may be loving and supportive in plenty of situations. But when he feels criticized, defending himself can become so important that your feelings almost disappear from the room.



The Pattern in Real Life

Example: You tell him he embarrassed you in front of your friends. Instead of saying, “Okay, I can see why that hurt you,” he tells you that you are too sensitive, that you embarrassed him first, and that if you had not done X, he would never have said Y. Thirty minutes later, you are explaining yourself and thinking, wait... were we not talking about what you did?

This can make you feel:

confused, unheard, guilty, and almost desperate to get him to understand the original point. After enough of these conversations, you may even start wondering whether you really are too sensitive.

Keep in mind:

Please do not sit there scoring him on a checklist. Look at what keeps happening. If accountability regularly turns into blame, your feelings disappear the second he feels criticized, or several of these patterns keep showing up together, that is what I want you to notice.



The Charming Public Version



This one can really mess with your head because everyone else may genuinely think you won the husband lottery. He can be charming, helpful, funny, generous, and wonderful with other people. People may tell you, ‘Oh my God, you are so lucky to have him.’ And you are standing there thinking, yeah... if you only knew. Because the version they see in public can be very different from the version you live with behind closed doors.



Example: You are at a party watching him be the nicest, most helpful person in the room. Everybody loves him. Meanwhile you are still thinking about how cold or critical he was with you two hours earlier at home.



This can make you feel: isolated, unseen, and sometimes a little crazy because nobody else seems to see the person you see at home.



Keep in mind: You do not need to convince everybody. Please do not make that your new job. But have one person you trust who knows what really happens behind closed doors. Sometimes you need somebody who can simply remind you, yes, that happened. You are not imagining it.



The Punisher



I call this one the Punisher because that is what it can feel like on your side. You disagree, say no, criticize something, or set a boundary, and suddenly the warmth is gone. He may stop talking, pull away, become cold, leave the room, ignore you, or withhold affection. I cannot tell you whether he is sitting there consciously thinking, I am going to punish her now. I am talking about what it feels like for you.



Example: You say, 'I do not agree with you.' Twenty minutes later he is barely speaking to you. Now you are following him around, explaining what you meant, asking if he is okay, and maybe even apologizing for something you were not actually sorry about just to get things back to normal.



How It Feels

This can make you feel: anxious, rejected, and like you need to fix everything quickly so you can get the warm version of him back.



Keep in mind: Notice if you regularly start fixing things you did not actually break simply because you cannot stand the coldness. That is the pattern I want you to see.



The Rival



This one can be a little harder to spot because you may think, why would my own partner compete with me? But sometimes your success, happiness, friendships, work, independence, or even the attention you give your children seems to create tension. It may not look like obvious jealousy. It can be a little comment, minimizing your good news, or suddenly finding a problem right when something is going really well for you.

Example: You tell him you got a promotion and instead of being excited for you, the first thing he does is explain why it is really not that big of a deal. Five minutes ago you were happy. Now somehow you are defending why your own good news is actually worth being happy about.



*This can make you feel:
smaller, guilty for doing well, or like you should
tone yourself down so you do not create another problem.*



Seeing It Sooner

Keep in mind: One bad mood does not automatically mean he is jealous. Do not force it. Look for the pattern. Does something seem to go wrong again and again right when something is going really well for you?

The point of all of this is not to give him another label. It is to help you recognize what is happening a little faster. The less surprised you are by the same pattern, the less time you waste trying to force a completely different reaction. You see it sooner, and when you see it sooner, you have more choice in what you do next.

