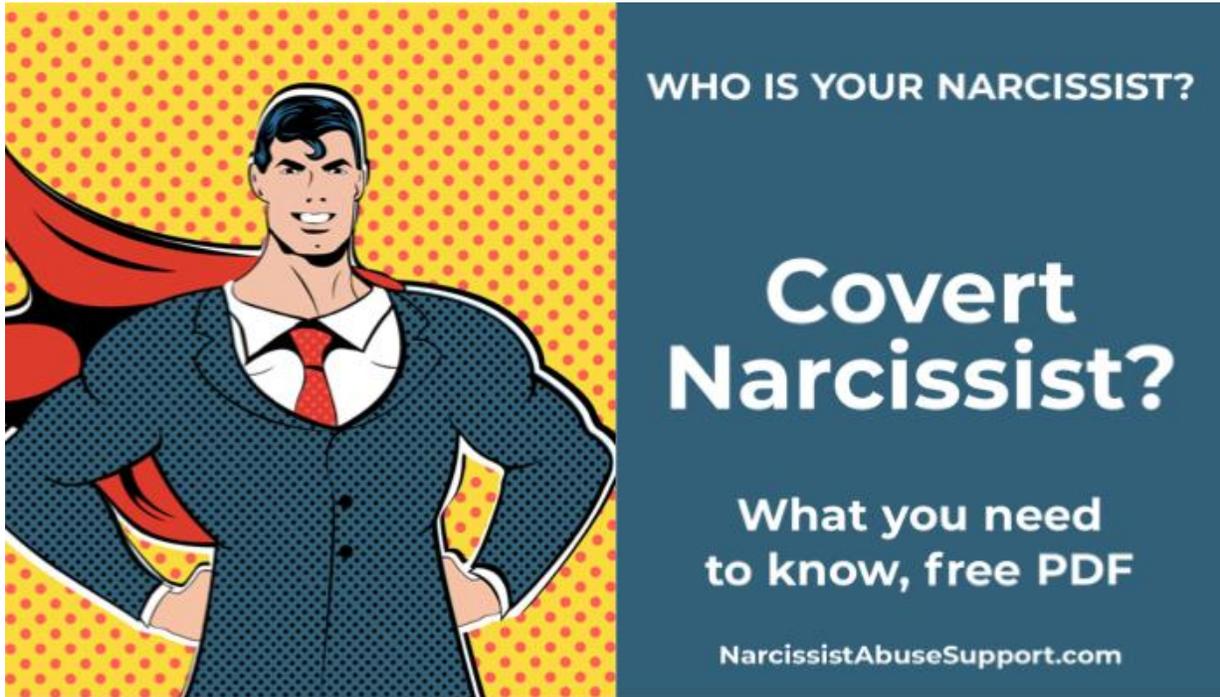


WHAT IS A COVERT NARCISSIST?



Covert (or Fragile) Narcissist

Narcissists come in many shapes and sizes. They are all vastly different yet generally the same, each with their own set of narc-individuality. They have traits that are similar and masks that they all don, but some are smoother about it than others. Covert Narcissists are the trickiest to pick out. With their mild personalities, they can be so low-key that you might actually second guess yourself and question what you think you are experiencing. Their abuse also can be the hardest to heal from because of their ability to hide their tricks.

Covert narcissists can be in a relationship or marriage, a friend, family member, neighbor, or they can even be coworkers. Narcissistic parents that are covert fool the world with their charisma and abuse their

children behind closed doors. No one is the wiser. The children are the only ones who suffer.

Covert narcissists **charm, love bomb**, and are **passive-aggressive**. They use **word salad, gaslighting, rewriting history, push-pull**, and **intermittent reinforcement** on the daily. Everything is **calculated** and they have an **agenda**. The **cognitive dissonance** that the victims experience is off the charts because everyone around them thinks they're great and unaware of their evil side. It makes the victim feel alone, constantly question their reality, and abandoned on an island of confusion. *The narcissist who covertly ebbs away your sense of self is just as dangerous as the one who overtly constantly belittles you.*

Do you know a Covert Narcissist?

- Everything will revolve around this person. It will be all about their **needs**, their **wants**, their **life**. *But they'll pretend to be selfless and label someone else "narcissistic."*
- Nothing will ever be **their fault**. Even if there is evidence to the contrary, *it is still never their fault*. They will convince you and everyone around them that *they* are the **victim**.
- Initially, they will **spoil** you, take you **out**, and **work hard** to make you feel **important**. As long as you're useful.
- **Selfish** is an understatement when you are dealing with them. *But they can seem generous.*
- They lack **empathy** and **compassion** - the only feelings that they care about are **their own**.
- Everyone around them are objects to be used for their own **gratification** and **needs**.

If you put a frog in a pot of cold water and steadily turn up the heat, the frog will adjust to the raising temperature and will boil to death.

Narcissistic covert abuse is often compared to this analogy because it happens slowly. Once caught, the heat (abuse) gets turned up. Most victims of covert narcissists report that they felt something was off, but it didn't feel like abuse because it was subtle and hard to put their fingers on the changes. The typical relationship pattern of a covert narcissist is to come on fast and intense, claim their soulmate, and propose quickly. It's the idealize phase of the relationship where the victim is placed high on a pedestal, not allowing the victim to really get to know the person or see their true self. The intensity of being the center of someone's world sounds like a fairy tale; but then there is a noticeable change in availability and the victim is no longer the priority...the first of many confusing moments that showcase reality.

At first, the narcissist will blame the change in attention on the need to get back to real life. That seems like a good excuse, so the first crumb offered is accepted. Later, the blame gets pointed at you, the victim. It's all your fault things changed and the internalized "if only you..." or "if you had just done..." taunts are released. This is the devalue stage test. You are being graded for your reaction to the withdrawn attention. If you continue to accept the justification as moving back to normal life, they know they have a low bar to meet, and you are controllable.

These tactics are common from a covert narcissist. They are unoriginal, often cowardly, and exceptionally low on the emotional intelligence scale. Most victims don't notice these methods or understand their

meaning. They don't see the person as they really are until they leave. The strategies are stealthy and designed to confuse.

Covert narcissists are exceedingly difficult to recognize and even harder to expose because they have built a fake persona with everyone they know. Most that are unaware of the covert traits see a charming, helpful, caring, compassionate, and often enlightened individual. However, this type tends to stick with the same tricks and methods, don't learn from them, and are extremely persistent.

Covert traits you may have seen:

- rushes relationships with very intense love bombing (idealizing phase) that “prove” how much they cherish you
- charming yet socially awkward and less skilled than the grandiose or malignant narcissist
- introvert – withdrawn and self-centered
- lack of empathy for you or others – fake empathy can be exhibited as a technique to get something they want or to find new supply. It is an act to make people think they have true empathy.
- Passive-aggressive communication and behaviors, usually done behind closed doors:
 - guilt
 - subtle insults
 - shaming
 - blaming
 - gaslighting
 - passive-aggressive anger
 - procrastination
 - ghosting
 - ignoring your concerns

- silent treatment
- stubbornness
- sullenness
- a sarcastic or argumentative attitude
- deliberately not doing the things they say they will do
- low self-worth – secretly depressed with exceptionally low self-esteem
- victimized – they play the victim, the world is out to get them, in divorce you are out to get them, they use their victimhood to trap victims, and they share stories of trauma and neglect.
- sullen, angry, and never content with a quiet rage simmering just below the surface
- overly critical and always believe they are better and smarter than everyone else, even their boss
- needy and vulnerable
- anxious
- resentful and jealous
- hostile and argumentative; must always be right
- not typically good in social situations – if they do go to events, they will ruin them with passive-aggressive behavior.
- no genuine friends – only admirers and people they can use for supply
- constantly seek validation – always bragging to convince others how great they are. In extreme cases this manifests as a God-like mask to be the savior to those lucky enough to be in their presence.
- arrogant and dismiss other's opinions because they believe they are better
- entitled and believe that they deserve the best of everything and seek those who will give it to them, even though they are not worthy of it.
- hypersensitive to feedback or criticism – they react with rage: "How could you!"

- need to control everyone around you – the need for control controls them.
- smug with an air of superiority: they don't need you
- expert justifier of their behaviors and usually present it by turning the mirror on you. If you catch them cheating, it was because you weren't being a good partner to give them what they wanted.
- the intense need to win and prove they did nothing wrong so they point fingers at you to deflect the accusations
- no remorse – able to apologize, but the apology is not genuine. They never learn from their actions. The apology is an act to give hope. They will turn around and pull the rug of hope out from under you again at another time.
- emotional actors to control the victim. Crying on demand creates drama, sells them as a sensitive person, moves the attention to them and garners sympathy.
- pathological liars - if their lips are moving, they're lying. Even when the truth would serve them better, they lie. They can't help themselves and you will wonder how they keep all the fake facts straight.

Weapons of passive-aggressive covert behaviors:

- **the silent treatment** – to punish and abuse their victims. When the covert narcissist goes dark (ghosting) and refuses to engage, the victim feels rejected and wonders what they did to provoke this behavior, making them feel like they did something wrong. Ultimately, the victim will get angry causing resentment from the narcissist because they believe they are entitled to treat people this way.
- **ignoring you** – pretending not to hear you or understand your request, completely aware that this is aggravating behavior.
- **reactive abuse** – pushing the victim to react with anger and then placing blame regarding their anger issues

- **playing the victim** – a control tool to garner emotions and evoke sympathy by always having a sad story about past mistreatment or making others believe they are team players by consistently accepting the short end of the stick.
- **the joke is on you** – off-handed jokes are designed to make the victim feel bad. Humor to tease and belittle someone is followed by a "just kidding" in an insincere attempt to ease the pain, but the objective is achieved.
- **name calling and constant verbal abuse** – typically done in private but sometimes the line is crossed, and it's done in front of family or friends.
- **pretending to forget the things they promised to do** – intentionally not doing something after they said they would and expressing anger or exasperation if it is mentioned.

The same behaviors are often not shared from one covert narcissist to another. Narcissists have created many masks throughout their lives that they present to the world. Imagine a mask as a character, role, or a false persona that they play. Masks of normalcy are routinely invoked to create the illusion to the world that they are normal and not disordered. Designed to entice the people they want to attract for various supply, it's ultimately all about the status, services, money, accolades, dedication, sex, and servitude. The masks are interchangeable so you may identify or cross-identify with several depending on the target of their influence. Narcissists don't need friends or partners; they need an audience so the mask must be selected very carefully.

The narcissistic mask is used as a tool to build a carefully tailored persona in order to friend people who they will later use for supply. When you see a contradiction to what they do in public and what they

say in private, you are observing the public mask being removed behind closed doors. The masks may seem familiar to you but look a bit deeper and observe other relationships they have and the way the "show" might have always been interchangeable depending on the crowd. Once an actor, always an actor and this performance theater will carry over in every social circle in their lives.

A quote from one of my favorite movies, *Sabrina*, is apropos – *"Illusions are dangerous people. They have no flaws."* The mask chosen for you is customized to your needs; they made themselves your dream illusion. The role was defined by your own imagination and carefully orchestrated to trap you. I envision the mask being removed at the door and placed on a hook like a hat. Once you see thru the fantasy and catch a glimpse of the real person, you can't unsee it. It's scary and the sense of betrayal may be overwhelming.

Narcissists do not want to be exposed. After their mask falls and they realize you have seen the truth, a narcissistic injury usually occurs. To reduce the risk of being unmasked, they know when the gig is up and begin planning their exit.

The Charmer (MASK)

Covert narcissists are infamous for their charming mask, even though all narcissists can manifest charm on demand. When in use, charm can ooze thick and gooey, but it is easily recognized after the fact as fake. In the beginning, they attract a person to them by finding commonalities to show the new victim how perfect they are for each other. If you like yoga, horses, and classical music, they do too. The passive-aggressive behaviors are more stealth than the more aggressive abusive behaviors

we have come to know. It's a slow drip that makes recognizing the coercive control difficult to see. As soon as the victim questions annoying or bad behavior, they are immediately shut down and accused of being wounded by past relationships and projecting that on them. Your ability to trust them will be probed as they doubt your loyalty, simply because you had the nerve to raise a concern. This gaslighting technique, followed by promises, makes it easy to give the impropriety a pass. You are charmed again, and they are back in control. The confusing dual personalities, mixed with intermittent charm, forms the victim's trauma bond like prey in a spider's web.

This is how your relationship began, with a persona you believed was the person you had fallen in love with. Until you are completely infatuated, the charming mask will be used both in public and in private; then they are free to act differently behind closed doors. The slippage of the mask can be gradual or immediate; the narcissist has studied and tested your reactions. The decision on how fast you are transported to narc-world is guided by your toleration tipping point. Inside your home, you start to see little things that are confusing.

The victim of the charming mask struggles to let go of the public persona because they believe that to be the real person. Holding onto the better version of the person will keep victims trapped for years as they try to love the narcissist more to help them find that charming happy person they believe to be deep inside. As the fog dissipates and the victim can see the narcissist clearly for whom they really are, they are no longer fooled. This is the real them; the charm was just an act.

Often when survivors listen to videos or read books on narcissistic abuse, they question whether their spouse is really a narcissist. What if they weren't the type that cheated, or stole money, or was verbally abusive? Not all narcissistic people check all the boxes; some are verbally abusive all the time and some utilize manipulation in a stealthier manner. I often hear, "We never even fought." If this sounds familiar, you may have been blind to the covert, passive-aggressive form of control that had been festering under the surface. Maybe you got used to it or justified the actions by thinking "this is just how they are." Don't be fooled into thinking that the charm and love bombing isn't abusive. It absolutely is. Equating obvious actions like fighting and throwing things with abuse is not the MO of a covert narcissist. Lies, hiding money, and passively making you feel like you're not good enough is.

Physical symptoms can be caused by emotional trauma: irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), for example. Your body has a memory and will store feelings in certain areas as a warning sign - what you choose to do with it is the complicated part. If you tend to feel unwell, your narcissist may make fun of you for being "sickly, just like your mother" (a passive-aggressive trigger to intentionally piss you off). Learn to listen to your body's responses. Once free of the covert abuse, the symptoms almost always disappear. You should never assume, however, that an illness is a certain thing and not get checked by a doctor. Always put your health first.

Someone with NPD cannot change. They can promise, misrepresent themselves, and fake change for a little while, but will soon unconsciously revert back to their bad behaviors. When it is a spouse,

once they know you aren't happy and that their mask has fallen, they will begin the discard process.

Recognizing the onset of the discard process may be obvious because the passive-aggressive manners escalate. If your abuse was physical, the mistreatment will surge as well because the gig is up and there is no reason for them to pretend to be nice anymore. If you are married to a covert narcissist, a more stealth discard may begin in the background. On the hunt for new supply, detachment from you will be quick. You may find them not being present for you or your family because in their mind, they have already moved on. If this is happening, don't be surprised by their sudden exit.

Other types of abuse may have been obvious all along be assured, any form of abuse will make your life a daily dose of hell.

Get help. Find a therapist or coach that understands narcissistic abuse.

My name is Tracy Malone, and I am the founder and author of NarcissistAbuseSupport.com I can coach you through this or help your child understand what is happening if they are ready.

You can learn about my coaching services @ on my website <https://narcissistabusesupport.com>

My new bestselling book on **Divorcing Your Narcissist** may also give you insights as to what your child may have to deal with if this comes to divorce. It is not like a normal divorce.

You can get the book on Amazon, Barnes and Noble and Kindle and Audible.

