



EFL “Brieflet”: Engaging with Narcissism

At times, we all find it hard to: accept criticism; listen and empathise with others; not put our needs first; have realistic expectations of others; accept rules; accept responsibility for when things go wrong or when we get angry. However, a disproportionate amount of thinking and behaving in this way may indicate a narcissistic tendency. In brief, common traits of narcissism include beliefs relating to: being superior to others and rarely wrong; and believing that your needs are more important than others. Narcissist-like individuals may also become angry with, or manipulative of, others if their aims are thwarted. Living or working with such a person often leaves others feeling disempowered and doubting of their own skills.

Understanding narcissism

For some narcissist-like individuals, deep emotional wounds experienced in childhood can often lead to shame and a very fragile self-esteem. In order to protect themselves, they find it difficult to trust others. With a lowered self-worth, they may try to put others down to make themselves feel good. On the other hand, some narcissist-like individuals may have been over-indulged in their past and have developed an inflated sense of themselves. In most cases, they will be unaware of their insensitivity toward others. However, unaccustomed to others challenging or being better than them they will feel most aggrieved when they perceive this.

Engaging with Narcissism

There are ways to engage individuals who present with a narcissist-like personality. They have strengths that can be identified, acknowledged and utilised in a way that can assist others. These include:

1. High Conscientiousness, Standards & Self-Motivation - give them tasks that require single-minded self-directed focus that others may find too challenging
2. Courage in Public - invite their contributions to problems and processes that require robust debate and challenge
3. Creativity & Passion - steer towards projects and ideas that stir their interest
4. Attention-seeking - radiate their ability to attract external validation to include the whole team

Sources for your further interest

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A Brief Guide to Engaging with Narcissism

Signs	Strategies to help them	Strategies to help self
Exaggerated sense of self-importance/ entitlement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Habituate them to a more regulated response from you. Appeal to their desire for autonomy (but not too much) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Don't take their behaviour personally - it's not about you, it's about them
Inconsistent loyalty; selfishly motivated; impulsive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide tasks that require self-motivation and that meet both their and the organisation's needs Only encourage their leadership when strong direction is needed, and there are capable "buffering" colleagues 	
Perfectionism; unreasonable expectations of self/others; controlling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prepare and stick to what you want to talk about Politely acknowledge their agendas Keep it brief & focused on your points Keep to solution focus (away from preference for problem focus) Acknowledge and support realistic conscientiousness and effort/focus Provide options 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Respond quickly, confidently and calmly to unacceptable behaviour - e.g. encroachments on boundaries, or excessive demands - rather than attempt to meet unrealistic expectations Avoid doing more to please them - they might ridicule or hijack what you do
Charismatic; excessive need for admiration & reinforcement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make use of their ability to rally others (but not to undermine you/others) Speak selectively - they may catastrophise their misinterpretation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Avoid getting sucked in by flattery Maintain your dignity
Lack of empathy - manipulation & devaluing of others; toxic emotionality - rage, pouting, arrogance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be empathic and genuine Avoid direct confrontation: provide feedback indirectly Whilst being careful about attributing fault to them, don't make yourself vulnerable to them blaming you Encourage them to cool off before resuming a difficult conversation Stick to facts Careful about sharing your feelings with them (unless you are sure that there is a degree of empathy) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prioritise <i>your</i> needs (they can take care of their own) Build your own 360 support network - ensuring they see it Document interactions to reassure yourself & evidence formal record If the behaviour can't be resolved, be prepared to leave rather than continue suffering They take advantage of slow, over-emotional or over-analytical reactions

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