HOW TO GET OVER NARCISSISTIC ABUSE BY A SUPERVISOR?

By Sven Hendrix

If you feel like you're always walking on eggshells, your supervisor may be a narcissist and abuse you emotionally. Narcissists often use manipulation, control, and gaslighting to keep their staff members in line. Characteristic signs include micromanagement, excessive control, constant criticism, and put-downs. What can you do to get over narcissistic abuse?

What is narcissistic abuse?

Narcissistic abuse is a type of emotional abuse that is inflicted by someone with narcissistic personality disorder (NPD). Narcissists have an inflated sense of self-importance, a deep need for admiration, and a lack of empathy for others. They often use manipulation, control, and gaslighting to keep their victims in line.

Do not use the diagnostic term narcissistic personality disorder (NPD) in any context

In the subsequent section, I describe various traits often associated with narcissistic individuals. **You might recognize some of these traits in your supervisor or others you know as you read. However, be careful when communicating with others!!**

While it's acceptable to refer to these as 'narcissistic tendencies' or ''narcissistic traits,' it's essential to tread cautiously. Diagnosing someone with Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) requires a deep understanding and specialized knowledge. Avoid using this clinical term unless you're a qualified psychologist or psychiatrist. Mislabeling someone can lead to legal and ethical issues.

It can also easily be used against you by an abuser who may accuse or even sue you for defamation.

Thus, never use a clinical diagnosis for another person.

What are the characteristics of a narcissistic supervisor?

Narcissistic supervisors are often characterized by the following:

Grandiose sense of self-importance

They may have an inflated sense of their worth and accomplishments and may believe they are superior to others. It might attract you because it projects a lot of self-confidence and charisma.

Need for admiration

They may constantly seek admiration and praise from others. You might feel the need to show your appraisal frequently.

Lack of empathy

They may have difficulty understanding or caring about the feelings of others. You might feel invalidated, misunderstood, and emotionally drained.

Entitlement

They may believe that they deserve special treatment and privileges. You may feel belittled, overshadowed, and frustrated.

Exploitativeness

They may take advantage of others for their own personal gain. You may feel used, devalued, and manipulated.

Arrogance

They may be arrogant and dismissive of others. You may feel demeaned, dismissed, and disrespected.

What are the signs and symptoms of narcissistic abuse by a supervisor?

Psychological abuse by a supervisor can take many forms, but some common signs and symptoms of narcissistic traits include:

Micromanagement and coercive control

A narcissistic supervisor may try to control every aspect of your work, even down to the smallest details. They may also set unrealistic deadlines and expectations and then criticize you for not meeting them.

Constant criticism and put-downs

A narcissistic supervisor may constantly criticize your work, even if it is good. They may also make personal attacks or put you down in front of other people.

Taking credit for your work

A narcissistic supervisor may take credit for your work or ideas, or they may pass your work off as their own.

Gaslighting

Gaslighting is a form of emotional abuse in which the abuser makes you question your reality and sanity. Your confusion and emotional pain is a form of abuse and part of the narcissistic game. A narcissistic supervisor may gaslight you by denying things that happened or telling you that you are misremembering things.

Isolation and sabotage

A narcissistic supervisor may isolate you from other coworkers or try to sabotage your projects. They may also spread rumors about you or try turning others against you. Each of these behaviours is a type of abuse.

However, while a person might display some of these traits mentioned above, it doesn't necessarily mean they have narcissistic personality disorder (NPD).

The Narcissistic Relationship in the Workplace

The effects of narcissistic abuse in the workplace share similarities with a toxic relationship with a narcissistic partner in private life. The

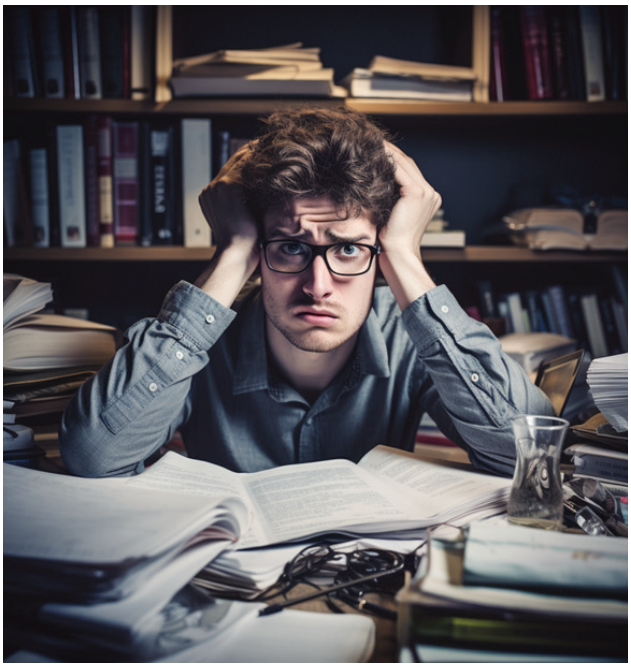
abusive behavior often targets the victim's mental health, leading them into a state of low self-esteem. Similar to romantic relationships, in the workplace narcissistic supervisors can display a behaviour that some experts term **love bombing**. Especially at the beginning of a working relationship, **the supervisor showers the staff member with attention and compliments, only to shift into abusive modes later**.

What are the Long-Term Effects of Narcissistic Abuse in the workplace

The long-term effects of narcissistic abuse in the workplace can vary but may include post-traumatic stress disorder, intrusive thoughts, and triggers related to childhood trauma or past abusive incidents.

The workplace, often considered a second home for many, should ideally be an environment of collaboration, respect, and mutual growth. However, when an individual is subjected to narcissistic abuse within this setting, it profoundly disrupts their psychological and emotional well-being. Such abuse often stems from individuals who wield their power and control to belittle, manipulate, and exploit their colleagues or subordinates.

Over time, the victims can experience heightened feelings of inadequacy, self-doubt, and extreme anxiety when merely thinking about work.



The persistent stress from this abuse can exacerbate mental health conditions, promote substance abuse to handle the stress, impact job performance, and strain personal relationships outside the workplace.

As they wrestle with feelings of worthlessness and betrayal, many victims find it challenging to trust others or even themselves, which can hinder their career advancement and personal development.

How do you protect yourself from a narcissistic supervisor?

To truly protect oneself from narcissistic abuse, it's crucial to recognize the signs of narcissistic behavior. Such behaviors can range from verbal abuse to manipulative games. A key feature is their inability to prioritize the needs of others, leading to a hard time building healthy relationships with the team members.

Being vigilant about the warning signs of a narcissistic relationship can save individuals from significant emotional turmoil.

If a romantic partner consistently undermines your feelings, it's a red flag pointing toward narcissistic tendencies. The same is true for a supervisor!

Another warning sign is when a supervisor employs manipulation tactics to control or gaslight you. Understanding these signs for the first time can empower you and let you understand that it is a narcissistic game and not your fault.

If you are experiencing any of the signs and symptoms described above, taking steps to protect yourself is essential. Here are some steps you can take:

10 Stages of Healing After Narcissistic Abuse in the Workplace

It is a challenging journey, often marked by the difficult emotions and traumas associated with a relationship with a narcissist. When embarking

on this path, it's important to recognize the psychological and emotional abuse you have endured.

It's common to feel a whirlwind of emotions, especially if you've recently ended an emotionally abusive relationship. During the first stage, victims grapple with the cognitive dissonance and emotional response from the narcissistic abuse cycle they've been trapped in. As one of the most difficult stages, it may involve recalling abuse associated with narcissistic personality disorder from a narcissistic family or partner.

Therapy may be a step in your healing, and choosing therapy partners with leading mental health expertise can provide convenient and affordable online therapy. The goal is to start healing, to heal and move forward, and creating clear boundaries to prevent any form of abuse in the future. Get support from trusted individuals, and remember, while the road to recovery is long, healing is possible.

Here is a table summarizing the 10 potential stages of healing.

Stage		Description
1	Acknowledgment	Recognizing the psychological and emotional abuse in the workplace.
2	Information Gathering	Researching narcissism and narcissistic behavior to better understand the abuser's actions.
3	Documenting	Keeping records of abusive incidents, including emails, messages, or witnessed events.
4	Setting Boundaries	Creating clear boundaries in professional interactions to safeguard oneself.
5	Seeking Support	Consulting HR or a trusted supervisor and connecting with colleagues with similar experiences.
6	Professional Guidance	Engaging in professional help for narcissistic abuse in the workplace, like therapy or counseling.
7	Career Evaluation	Assessing if staying in the current role or organization is beneficial in the long term or if seeking a new opportunity is better.
8	Skill Enhancement	Focusing on self-development, attending workshops or courses to rebuild confidence.
9	Reintegration	Slowly establishing a positive presence in the workplace, networking, and rebuilding professional relationships.
10	Empowerment & Advocacy	Sharing one's experience (if comfortable) to help others or advocating for a safer, more aware workplace environment.

Please be aware that this is an approximation. The 10 stages of healing are not linear, and people may experience the stages in a different order or move back and forth between stages.

Educate yourself about narcissism

The more you know about narcissism, the better you will understand your abuser's behavior and why they are the way they are.

Accept that a narcissist will probably not change

Accepting that a narcissist will probably not change is a challenging but vital step in healing from narcissistic abuse. Narcissists have a deep-seated need to feel superior and in control and are often unwilling to admit they are wrong or need help. This can make it very difficult for them to change their behavior, even if they want to.

It is important to remember that you are not responsible for your abuser's behavior. You cannot change them, and you should not try. The only thing you can do is focus on your own healing and well-being.

Distance yourself from the narcissist and narcissistic abuse!

If possible, avoid the narcissist. Leave the job or change the group/department/institution. If you are contractually bound or can not find another position, avoid the narcissist or reduce the contacts to a minimum until you can leave.

But be prepared: Narcissists will not leave you in peace. They will actively seek to reactivate the narcissistic interaction because they thrive from abusing other people.

Document everything

Record any instances of abuse, including what was said, when it was said, and who witnessed it. Save all incriminating emails. Write down the date, time, location/context, and names of witnesses of bad behavior.

This will help you to build a case if you need to file a complaint or take legal action. A narcissist will probably not let you go, lie, and seek to damage your reputation.

Set boundaries

It is vital to set clear boundaries with your supervisor and to enforce them. This may mean saying no to extra work, refusing to work overtime, or simply walking away from a conversation that is becoming abusive.

Find another position and quit

A narcissistic supervisor will probably not change – and the abuse will continue. It is essential to accept this fact for your well–being and look for a way out.

If you are in the final phase of your PhD or in the last year of your postdoc contract, **you might endure the abuse until the end** because the costs of quitting might seem too high at this point.

However, you should consider leaving if your contract runs longer than a few months.

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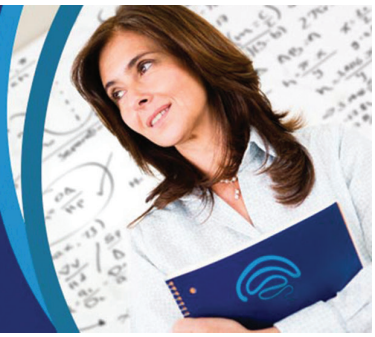

First, critically analyze the consequences of starting a new PhD elsewhere or quitting your postdoc early. Read more here: Should I quit my postdoc?

As a next step, search for a new position. Do this in private. The narcissist will not want you to flee from the abusive relationship. If you can not find another position, you might consider quitting anyway for the sake of your well-being.

Be prepared: You might also feel illoyal due to trauma bonding. Trauma bonding refers to the deep and complicated emotional bond that can form between an abusive supervisor and you, particularly within the context of ongoing cycles of abuse, neglect, and reconciliation. The bond is forged in a situation where the supervisor intermittently mistreats or abuses the other, interspersed with moments of kindness or attention.

Thus, do not be fooled. You should always leave an abusive relationship with a supervisor.

Build a support system to escape from the narcissistic working relationship

Talk to trusted friends, family members, or coworkers about what you are going through. Having a support system in place is a healthy way to cope with the abuse and decide what to do.

A narcissist will not let you go. Thus, you need people who support you when leaving this abusive relationship – for example, by starting a new PhD elsewhere or finding a new postdoc position.

Seek professional help for narcissistic abuse recovery

A therapist can help you to process what you are going through and to develop coping mechanisms for this challenging journey. They can also help you create a plan for dealing with your supervisor or leaving your job if necessary.

It is important to remember that you are not alone. Many people experience narcissistic abuse by their supervisors. If you are experiencing abuse, please know that you have options and help is available.

How to get over narcissistic abuse by a supervisor with a professional?

To truly recuperate from severe relationship trauma in the workplace is a complex process. It is often recommended to seek guidance from a licensed psychologist or social worker. They help address the emotional and practical challenges of leaving a narcissistic working relationship and recovering.

Healing Journey: From Victim to Survivor of narcissistic abuse by a supervisor

Embarking on a healing journey is a crucial step for victims of narcissistic abuse. The recovery process often takes a long time, but acknowledging the trauma of narcissistic abuse is the first step. Seeking out a support group (see below) is one of the best ways to navigate the recovery journey.

These groups provide a safe space for sharing traumatic experiences and coping strategies. Unfortunately, support groups are often created for victims and survivors of an abusive partner in a romantic relationship. Thus, they have a different focus and may be less functional for problems with a narcissistic supervisor. Seeking groups specifically tailored to workplace issues is the best approach.

For scientists, acknowledging emotional trauma and seeking help is often challenging and associated with shame. Especially in science, typically, many do not like to talk about feelings. There will be a lot of lamenting. However, recognizing and discussing the narcissistic traits of a supervisor and your emotional reaction to them can be challenging.

Reconnecting With Yourself After Narcissistic Abuse in the Workplace

It's common for victims to lose sight of their own needs and desires after enduring narcissistic abuse. Rebuilding self-esteem and focusing on self-care are crucial aspects of the healing process. It's essential to surround yourself with close friends and support networks that understand the nuances of narcissistic abuse recovery. It might also be a good idea to consider cutting contact with the abuser, even on social media accounts.

Will you make this mistake again? Maybe YES!

For many, ending a narcissistic relationship in the workplace is just the beginning. You might realize that you were – and are – **attracted to narcissistic individuals**. If this is the case, it is probably related to a childhood experience with a narcissistic parent or other family member.

Thus, you may navigate yourself quickly into the next abusive relationship.

It's essential to set firm boundaries with other narcissistic abusers and to avoid new narcissistic relationships at all costs. Check each new relationship for red flags. As you progress in your healing journey, remember to prioritize your best interests and emotional health. With time, the goal is to establish healthy relationships without manipulation.

What are good resources to learn about narcissists and narcissistic abuse?

Here are some good resources to learn about narcissists and narcissistic abuse:

Youtube

- TedED: The psychology of narcissism - W. Keith Campbell-https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=arJLy3hX1E8 -
- MedCircle: Dr. Ramani Durvasula explains the 4 types of narcissism-https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_uJs0iGQN0M

Websites

- PsychCentral: What Is Narcissistic Personality Disorder?-https://psychcentral.com/disorders/narcissistic-personality-disorder
- Mayo Clinic: Narcissistic Personality Disorder-https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/narcissistic-personality-disorder/symptoms-causes/syc-20366662
- HelpGuide.org: Narcissistic Personality Disorder-https://www.helpguide.org/articles/mental-disorders/narcissistic-personality-disorder.htm
- National Domestic Violence Hotline (US): Narcissistic Abuse - https://www.thehotline.org/resources/narcissism-and-abuse/

Books

- Why Is It Always About You? The Seven Deadly Sins of Narcissism (affiliate link) by Sandy Hotchkiss
- The Narcissist Next Door: Understanding the Narcissist in Your Life (affiliate link) by Jeffrey Kluger
- Emotional Vampires: Dealing with People Who Drain You (affiliate link) by Albert Bernstein
- The New Science of Narcissism: Understanding One of the Greatest Psychological Challenges of Our Time—and What You Can Do About It (affiliate link) by W. Keith Campbell ad Carolyn Crist

Support groups

There are many support groups available for survivors of narcissistic abuse. You can find a list of support groups in your area by searching online.

In the US, you can contact the National Domestic Violence Hotline.

However, make sure that the support group addresses your specific experience. Many support groups have a focus on narcissistic abuse in a romantic relationship. Take care that the group is helpful for problems with a narcissistic supervisor. Thus, seek groups that specifically focus on workplace issues.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

How do I get over narcissistic abuse?

The most critical steps are educating yourself about narcissistic abuse, cutting off all contact with your abuser, building a strong support system, and seeking professional help, although you might be ashamed of it.

What is the first step in recovering from narcissistic abuse?

The first step in recovering from narcissistic abuse is to acknowledge that you have been a victim of emotional abuse. Recognizing the manipulation and control tactics used by your supervisor is essential in beginning the healing process.

Should I end the relationship with my narcissistic supervisor?

If it is possible and safe, ending the relationship with your narcissistic supervisor is generally recommended. Continuing contact with an abuser can hinder your healing process and perpetuate the cycle of abuse.

What if ending the relationship with my supervisor isn't possible?

If ending the relationship with your supervisor isn't possible, such as in a work setting, setting boundaries and creating distance is essential. Limit interactions to professional matters only and seek support from trusted colleagues or a therapist.

Can therapy help me heal from narcissistic abuse?

Yes, therapy can be a crucial part of the healing process for survivors of narcissistic abuse. A qualified therapist can provide guidance, support, and tools to help you navigate the emotional distress and begin healing your emotional wounds.

Are there any self-care practices that can help me in my recovery?

Engaging in self-care is essential for survivors of narcissistic abuse. This can include practicing mindfulness, setting boundaries, engaging in hobbies, seeking support from loved ones, and prioritizing your physical and emotional well-being.

What are some ways to recover from narcissistic abuse?

There are various ways to recover from narcissistic abuse, and what works for one person may not work for another. Some strategies include therapy, journaling, educating yourself on narcissistic personality disorder, joining support groups, and rebuilding your self-esteem.

How long does it take to heal from narcissistic abuse?

Healing from narcissistic abuse is a process that varies for each individual. It can take time to heal and fully recover, and the length of the healing process depends on factors such as the duration and intensity of the abuse, your personal resilience, and the support you have in place.

What should I do if I am still experiencing emotional distress after leaving the abusive relationship?

If you are still experiencing emotional distress after leaving the abusive relationship, it is important to seek professional help. Narcissistic abuse can be difficult to handle alone.

Survivors of abuse may need to heal with the help of a professional. A therapist can help you address any lingering trauma and provide further guidance on your road to recovery.

Are there support groups available for narcissistic abuse survivors?

Yes, there are support groups available for narcissistic abuse survivors. These groups can provide a safe space to share experiences, find validation, and gain support from others who have gone through similar situations.

Acknowledgments & Disclaimer

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Disclaimer: This article is for informational purposes only and should not be taken as a substitute for professional medical or psychological advice. I am not a psychological professional and cannot provide you with personalized advice. If you are struggling with narcissistic abuse by a supervisor, please seek professional help. I am not responsible for any negative consequences that may result from following the advice in this article.

Recommended Reading

The following articles may also interest you:

- Should I quit my postdoc?
- Will I find a job as a scientist?
- How long does it take to complete a doctorate?
- For how long should I be a postdoc?
- Am I good enough for a career in science?
- I have no idea where I will be in two years
- Am I doing enough for my scientific career?
- The emotional phases of your research project and "the dip"
- How to choose the best postdoc position?
- Four myths about scientists that let you work too much!
- The most intelligent strategy to get hired in science
- The 8 best tips to find your dream job in science

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