

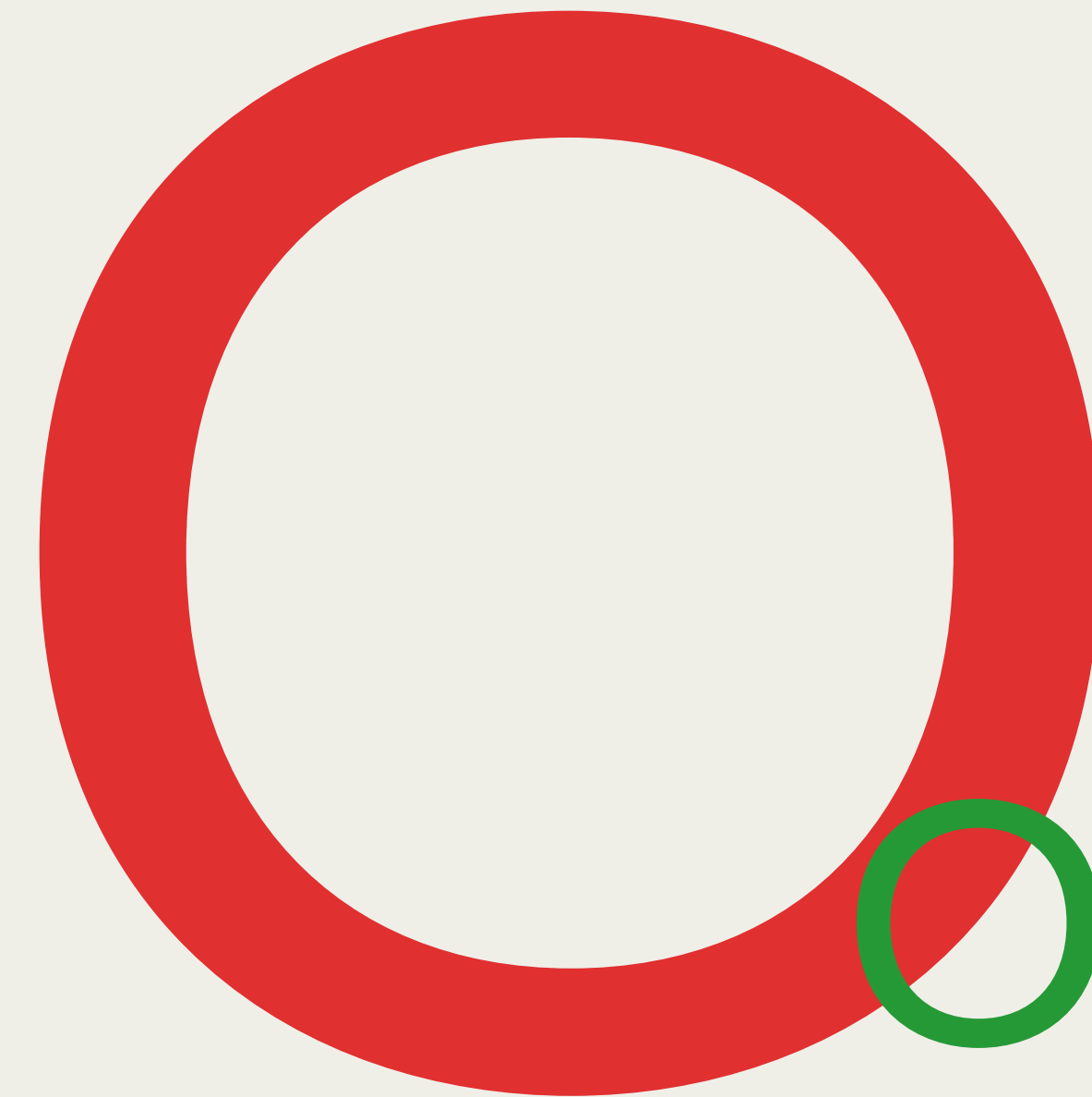
Onward™ Guides:

Narcissism:

What it Is & What it Isn't

We've all heard it — friends and family calling what may be just a self-involved person or partner a narcissist. The term is thrown around a lot these days, but let's be fair: Not everyone we dislike is a narcissist. That said, narcissism is a very real thing, and it's important to understand what it is, and what it isn't.

Narcissism can be used in both layman's terms and a clinical sense. In everyday conversation, it often refers to someone who is self-centered, vain, or excessively preoccupied with their own image or needs. However, in a psychological context, narcissism has a more nuanced meaning, especially when it reaches a level that can be considered pathological, as in Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD).





What Narcissism Is:

- **Self-focus and Self-Importance:** At its core, narcissism involves an inflated sense of one's own importance. People with narcissistic traits may feel superior to others and believe they deserve special treatment or admiration.
- **Lack of Empathy:** A hallmark of narcissism, especially in its more pathological forms, is a lack of empathy. Narcissistic individuals may struggle to recognize or care about the feelings and needs of others, often focusing only on their own desires and emotions.
- **Need for Admiration:** Narcissistic individuals typically crave validation and admiration from others. They may go to great lengths to ensure that they are the center of attention or that their accomplishments are recognized.
- **Fragile Self-Esteem:** Despite their outward arrogance, many narcissists have fragile self-esteem. They often require constant reinforcement and validation to maintain a sense of worth, and their self-esteem can be easily threatened by criticism or perceived slights.
- **Grandiosity:** Narcissistic individuals may have a sense of entitlement, believing that they are deserving of special treatment or privileges, and they often feel that their needs and desires should be prioritized over others.
- **Manipulative Behavior:** Narcissists may use others to get what they want, often manipulating people through flattery, guilt, or deceit.



What Narcissism Isn't:

- 1. Self-Love or Confidence:** Healthy self-esteem and confidence are not the same as narcissism. While narcissism involves an excessive or distorted sense of self-worth, confidence comes from a realistic understanding of one's strengths and abilities. Someone with strong self-esteem does not need to belittle others or demand constant praise.
- 2. Normal Self-Care or Self-Interest:** Taking care of yourself, pursuing your own goals, or occasionally focusing on your own needs doesn't make someone narcissistic. Narcissism implies a pervasive pattern of self-centeredness and disregard for others, not simply an occasional focus on one's own interests.
- 3. Healthy Assertiveness:** Being assertive and standing up for your needs or desires does not equate to narcissism. Assertiveness is about respecting both your own rights and the rights of others, while narcissism typically involves disrespecting others in favor of one's own desires.
- 4. Loving or Caring for Others:** While someone with narcissistic traits might struggle with empathy or be self-serving, many narcissistic individuals can still form relationships, though they tend to be shallow or one-sided. Narcissism isn't a total inability to form connections; it's a pattern of relationships that are largely about fulfilling one's own needs.
- 5. Occasional Vanity or Pride:** A person may be proud of their achievements or care about their appearance, but that's not inherently narcissistic. Narcissism becomes a problem when the preoccupation with self goes beyond healthy pride or vanity and interferes with the well-being of others or one's own functioning.

Narcissism is a term that's often misused in everyday conversation, but it has a distinct and serious meaning when viewed through a psychological lens. While some people may simply be self-centered or vain, true narcissism—especially Narcissistic Personality Disorder—involves a pattern of inflated self-importance, lack of empathy, constant need for admiration, and manipulative behavior, often masking fragile self-esteem. It's equally important to understand what narcissism is not: healthy confidence, self-care, assertiveness, or occasional pride. Recognizing these distinctions can help us better navigate difficult dynamics without over-labeling or misunderstanding others.





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