

Women's Community Counsellor
Inspiring and Empowering You To Become Even More Fabulous
Published by Esther Kane, MSW (<http://www.estherkane.com>)

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Welcome

Welcome to April! Whew! We made it through the winter! Time to break out the sandals and treat yourself to a pedicure...

Featured Article: How to Deal with Narcissists

For this month's e-zine, I decided to write about a topic that many of my clients bring to therapy- dealing with narcissists. It seems that when dealing with difficult people, one of the most challenging types is someone who is narcissistic. Without getting all psychobabble on you and boringly academic, I would like to simplify things by generalizing. While narcissism is actually considered a mental illness, not everyone who displays narcissistic behaviours is necessarily suffering from a mental illness. They're just extremely challenging to deal with on a regular basis.

To get us started, I will give you the actual psychiatric definition of someone who has the Narcissistic Personality Disorder just to make sure I don't leave anything out. This comes from the standard text, the DSM-IV, which psychiatrists use to diagnose people. Here's their definition:

A pervasive pattern of grandiosity, need for admiration, lack of empathy, as indicated by at least five of the following:

1. a grandiose sense of self-importance
2. is preoccupied with fantasies of unlimited success, power, brilliance, beauty, or ideal love

3. believes that he or she is "special" and can only be understood by, or should associate with, other special or high-status people (or institutions)
4. requires excessive admiration
5. has a sense of entitlement, i.e., unreasonable expectations of especially favourable treatment or automatic compliance with his or her expectations
6. is interpersonally exploitative, i.e., takes advantage of others to achieve his or her own ends
7. lacks empathy and is unwilling to recognize or identify with the feelings and needs of others
8. is often envious of others or believes that others are envious of him or her
9. shows arrogant, haughty behaviours or attitudes

Have you ever met someone with at least some of these qualities? Chances are you were dealing with someone who was at least slightly narcissistic. I think what defines a narcissistic personality is someone who thinks they truly are, "the bee's knees". They think they are better than everyone else, deserve special treatment, and seem to live in their own little world. In common parlance: SELFISH. There's usually an 'entitlement' thing going on; where he/she acts like a king or a queen and expects people to drop everything to 'serve' him/her.

Unfortunately, many women have the experience of being raised by parents like this and/or being in friendships and intimate relationships with such people. They come to therapy feeling 'crazy' because they are angry with such people, yet don't think they should be because the narcissistic person has convinced them otherwise.

I'll give you an example. A client of mine, let's call her Linda, came to me because her husband had been having an affair with another woman and told her he wanted a divorce. They had two children who had just reached adulthood and no longer lived with them. Linda felt like she'd been hit in the head with a sledgehammer. When she got angry with him for being unfaithful and expressed her sense of betrayal and hurt, he said that she "deserved it" for being such a "lousy wife" for all the years they had been together. Also, he called her "frigid" and said that since she wouldn't provide sex, he was forced to find it somewhere else. He actually saw himself as the victim, not her, and believed that she had caused him to have an affair with another woman.

Not only that, but he called her "crazy" for being so emotional and said he thought she needed "professional help." He took absolutely zero responsibility for his behaviors, lacked empathy for the wife he had betrayed, and even blamed her for his unfaithfulness. He even said he realized that he was "too good for her" and was wasting his time with someone so "beneath" him.

When his children reacted with horror and devastation he called them "wimps" and thought they were being "selfish" for not being happy for him now that he had "set himself free and found happiness."

I could go on, but you probably get the gist of it by now. This guy definitely meets at least five of the criteria for “narcissist”! You’ve probably dealt with someone like this yourself- unfortunately, they’re everywhere. My work with Linda focused on helping her to trust her own reality; that what she was feeling was not only sane, but normal. She felt unheard, abandoned, betrayed, and blamed for things that she wasn’t responsible for. In therapy, I gave her the space she needed to feel her feelings and have them validated and to differentiate between what was “his stuff” and what was “her stuff.”

Since she had no contact with him, I suggested that in order to find closure with her marriage and to move on, she could write her ex letters saying whatever she needed to say and not mail them. This is a very helpful technique for dealing with ‘unfinished emotional business’ when the other person is either not available to do this with, or not safe emotionally. Boy, did she have a lot to say! She wrote and wrote until she could write no more.

I also got her to examine all of the things she had internalized that he had said about her and to find the faulty reasoning in each of them. In this way, she was able more and more to externalize all of the ‘garbage’ that she had taken in from him and put it back squarely onto the shoulders of the one whom it belonged to- him.

Narcissists are some of the most frustrating and crazy-making people to deal with in the universe. My hope is that you have no clue what I have just spoken about because you’ve never experienced it, but I bet you do know from personal experience. Narcissism abounds in this crazy world of ours.

In order to protect yourself from people like this, use the criteria for narcissism listed at the beginning of this article to discern whether someone in your life may be narcissistic. Then do whatever you have to do in order to protect yourself from being a victim of this person and their insanity. There are a lot of good books and websites out there, which will help you in this vein. I suggest doing a search on the internet or on your local library’s catalogue. Read as much as you can. Educate yourself. Then take the steps necessary to protect yourself and your children (if they are affected). It may be helpful to see a reputable psychotherapist as they will be able to give you helpful tools to learn self-care in the face of narcissistic personalities. Sometimes this means getting away from these people all together, and sometimes you can have milder but distant contact. The most important thing to remember in dealing with these people is that it is them who has the problem, not you.

Here’s to a narcissistic-free month....

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About Esther Kane, MSW, Registered Clinical Counsellor

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Esther Kane, MSW, Registered Clinical Counsellor, is in full-time private practise as a psychotherapist in Courtenay, B.C. Esther has over a decade of experience counselling women and their loved ones with a multitude of presenting problems. Her main focus is helping women to become free of barriers which keep them stuck so that they can become all that they dream of being.

To book a session or to set up a free 15-minute phone consultation (**only if you reside in the Comox Valley or surrounding areas**), call Esther at (250) 338-1800.

To learn more about Esther's services, please visit her website and read glowing testimonials from many satisfied clients, <http://www.estherkane.com>

Please note: due to the high volume of e-mails received, Esther only replies to potential therapy clients and the media.

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Books by Esther
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"WHAT YOUR MAMA CAN'T OR WON'T TEACH YOU: GROWN WOMEN'S STORIES OF THEIR TEEN YEARS"

"Esther Kane, MSW, RCC, has collected a delightful set of stories in her book, "What Your Mama Can't or *Won't* Teach You: Grown Women's Stories of Their Teen Years." The voices of 20 women are interweaved with each other to create a conversation-like book of women talking about their early struggles. The issues discussed are diverse and cover so many things that affected the way they grew into adults. Their insight back into what shaped them the most is sometimes funny, other times heartbreaking and often poignant. Esther interviewed these women on topics that she asked her teen clients they would most like to read about. What amassed is wisdom from a generation of women who survived and are willing to share their experiences to the youth of today."

- Lori Henry, Eating Disorders Writer, Suite101.com

To find out more about the book, go to:

<http://www.guidebooktowomanhood.com>

"DUMP THAT CHUMP: A Ten-step plan for ending bad relationships and attracting the fabulous partner you deserve"

"This is a well written and easy to follow guide for all women that struggle to find that perfect match for a lifetime relationship. The information you will gain will help strengthen your understanding in how very important positive self-talk is: it will strengthen your ability to not repeat wrong decisions in regards to relationship choices. It will also show you how that phrase, "settling", is not and should not be acceptable to

you. You will learn that settling for someone or something eventually drowns your own ideas of what you deserve in life as far as a partner is concerned. People choose to settle because it is safer, more predictable, easier to control and a lot less challenging than actually striving for more.

The author uses this very powerful phrase to help you look at the core of your bad decisions, "What You Expect Is What You Get". If you expect nothing then you will get nothing. DTC will also teach you how to retrain your mind so that you can get to know yourself through positive self-acceptance. To know and understand who you are is a definite key in helping you to make the correct choice in relationships. Lets face it, no one wants to be stuck in a bad relationship. Womensselfesteem.com highly recommends, "Dump That Chump" as a very good source book in opening your eyes to the many reasons that we end up in failed relationships!"

-Review by Dorothy of Womensselfesteem.com

To find out more about the book, go to:

<http://www.dumpthatchump.com>

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Archives
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To view previous editions of Women's Community Counsellor, visit
http://www.estherkane.com/free_stuff.htm

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Pass it on and Enjoy
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Workshops
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*COMING SOON- a 6-CD audio series of Esther's "Making Peace with Food and Our Bodies" (including 2 bonus workshops!) and a self-help book based on the same material!