

Can Narcissists Change?

Intro

At some point in your life, there's a high chance you've encountered a narcissist. These self-centered people may be your significant other, family, or friends, and you hope that they can become better, leaving you stuck with the question, "can narcissists really change?"

First off, a narcissist or someone with narcissistic personality disorder (NPD) is a person who thinks they're better than everyone else, craves attention, and lacks empathy. However, having some narcissistic traits isn't the same as having NPD. Narcissistic personality disorder is a diagnosed mental condition marked by extreme self-admiration, arrogance, and a sense of entitlement.

Narcissism can be genetic or as a result of environmental factors like upbringing and life experiences. Childhood trauma and shame can lead to narcissism as individuals develop traits like arrogance and entitlement to cope with deep-rooted pain. These traits, often inherited through generational trauma, serve as a shield, hiding inner insecurities and making them feel superior.

Dr. Ryan Sultan, a psychiatrist at Columbia University, explains that while treating Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) is difficult, it is possible for those with NPD to change. With proper therapy and a genuine desire to improve their relationships and lives, significant changes are possible. He added that for people to change, they need to recognize that they have a problem that needs to be fixed.

Narcissists often lack self-awareness because they believe they are perfect. They don't feel the need to change because they don't see a problem with themselves, or lack empathy to realize how their behavior hurts others. Even if they go to therapy, it's tough to keep them committed because they'd rather protect their ego than do the hard work needed for real change.

Another school of thought believes narcissists are capable of self-awareness, yet it isn't enough to trigger a change in them.

Professor of Psychology, Sam Vankin, explains that when someone with narcissistic personality disorder finds out about their condition, they understand it mentally but not emotionally. It doesn't really

make them want to change how they act. He believes that the only things that can make narcissists want to change or work on themselves are traumatic experiences or life-altering crises.

For instance, if a narcissist becomes self-aware of their personality disorder, it doesn't change how they feel about themselves. They may have to go through divorce, bankruptcy, or time in prison before they decide that they want to change.

Professor Sam explains that once they make it out of the rock bottom situation, they revert to their old narcissistic ways.

In another video, he explained that narcissists aren't really in touch with their true selves anymore. It's like they've traded it in for this inflated sense of importance, what he calls a "false self." So, in his opinion, they can't really be healed because they no longer exist as their "true selves." Instead, they're just walking around as these distorted reflections of who they used to be. He puts it like this: the false self takes over and acts as a shield, protecting the narcissist from feeling vulnerable or hurt, also known as narcissistic injury. They start believing this false self is the real deal and expect everyone else to buy into it too.

Let's look at the real-life situation of Lee Hammock, a clinically diagnosed individual with narcissistic personality disorder. He started the self-aware narcissist movement and he has been getting psychotherapy treatment for about 6 years.

While therapy can help manage narcissism, Lee believes that a complete personality change is rare, especially for deep-seated traits.

He talks about how it is much easier for narcissists to snap back into old behaviors than learn new patterns.

Lee reminds us that true behavioral changes take time and consistency, and he doesn't mind getting therapy for a long time, as long as he can continue to improve himself.

So back to our question, can narcissists change?

There is no simple yes or no answer to this question. Research is still ongoing, but recent studies suggest that long-term therapy can make a difference in developing better patterns and relationships.

Remember that change doesn't happen overnight, it's a slow process that needs patience and consistency.

A narcissist seeking help is a good indicator that change is possible, however, no one outside of them can force them to change. They have to make that decision themselves. Also, it's important to never tolerate manipulation and abuse. If you're dealing with narcissists, remember to set boundaries and take care of yourself first. It can be exhausting but stay hopeful. With time and support, things can get better.

Outro: Have you met a narcissist who turned a new leaf completely? Do you think they can actually stop being narcissists? Share your thoughts and experiences in the comment section. Curious about narcissistic behavior? Watch this video for more insights.  9 Signs Someone is a Narcissist .

References

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