



## **Narcissistic, Needy or Normal?**

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*What is really going on with my teen's behaviour?*

### **Teens by definition are narcissistic.**

They are at a time in their life where narcissistic behaviour is both natural and can be healthy. Unless of course you are seeing amoral or criminal behaviour on an ongoing basis. What is being experienced by you, the parent is typical teen self-absorption and although it might be disturbing and bothers you, try to come to grips with the reality that it's not going to change overnight and there are ways for you to maintain the connection with your teen.

### **From you teens' perspective**

The whole world revolves around them and what would you, as a dorky parent, really know what it is like for them. The teen is not looking for expert advice, especially before they have asked for it. The real nature of narcissistic thought is to believe that nobody else in the world is capable of the kind of thoughts, feelings, insights and perceptions that they, the teen, experience regularly. They are sensitive to and suspicious of any adult who says or even implies "I know what you are going through".

### **The research**

Dr. Twenge of San Diego State University studied more than 16,400 students who took the Narcissistic Personality Inventory between 1982 and 2006. In 1982, only a third of the students scored above average on the test. In 2006 that number is over 65%. This trend toward self-centeredness and self-love might be bad for society. Dr. Twenge warns that narcissists lack empathy, overreact to criticism, and favour themselves over others. Although some may disagree with Dr. Twenge's picture of Generation Y. Current Australian research, for Gen Y, shows that smoking and marijuana use has dropped significantly in the last decade. Pregnancy and abortion rate for girls under 18 has dropped - the teenagers say they are having less sex and protecting themselves more. There has been a boon in youth volunteering - even though a lot are activities organised by the schools many students continue on.



## Concrete or Abstract?

Teenagers are moving from the concrete thought processes of childhood to adult- like abstract thought. Their brain development and the inherent narcissism causes them to often say things and defend a point of view that you know they do not really want to say or defend. But they are too narcissistic to admit they are wrong. It is at this point that your next communication is vitally important. Resist saying something very cutting as this will undermine your connection with them. Instead, don't take it personally, take a deep breath, shake your head in disbelief and quietly walk away. This lets them know you have their best interests at heart and they can trust you even when you don't know all the facts. In the words of Dr. Wayne Dyer "If you have the choice between being right and being kind choose kind instead"

## The Therapist View

Therapists who work with troubled teens often talk about their sense of entitlement as a major hurdle in the struggle to help them. Teens feel entitled to their life-styles, no matter how self-destructive. If a parent reared her child with the attitude "I don't want to interrupt his happiness for even one moment," the teen will have a hard time establishing the discipline and willpower necessary to work through behaviours and addictions such as alcohol abuse, substance abuse, promiscuous sex, mismanagement of anger, compulsive shopping, and so forth.

## Tips and strategies to help with narcissistic behaviour

- Put limits on spending by giving your teen an allowance. When it's gone, there's no more until next month (only for 15yrs and over)
- Let your teen face the natural consequences of their behaviour. If he bangs up your car, let him pay for it. If she doesn't get her dirty clothes into the laundry they won't get washed.
- Teach your child to apologise to others, to understand their point of view, and otherwise demonstrate "emotional intelligence."
- Delay gratification and practice inhibiting impulsive actions
- State boundaries and allow others their boundaries
- Help them deal with frustrations in socially acceptable ways
- Model altruistic behaviours (helping others) to help them gain self-esteem.
- Assist them in becoming their own coach and cheerleader for making good choices
- Develop a healthy type of narcissism based on the balance between giving and receiving

*"Children pay little attention to their parents' teachings, but reproduce their characters faithfully."*

*Mason Cooley*