



Insight and Inspiration,  
Innovation and Vision  
For the Developing and  
Evolving Self

Newsletter

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# INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR SELF DEVELOPMENT

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## Self-love, Narcissism, and Selfies

### SELFIES AND NARCISSISM

In the September 2017 newsletter, we explored the general phenomena of selfies and referred to the misuse and abuse of selfies. Misuse and abuse is a matter of how important we make selfies in our life.

Importance is expressed in how much time we invest in an activity. We can see the misuse and abuse in the excessive (too frequent) taking of selfies. One of the causes of the excessive taking of selfies is narcissism.

### NARCISSISM AND SELF-LOVE

Narcissism has given self-love a “bad name.” We are confused and ambivalent about self-love, on one hand condemning it as egotistical and selfish, on the other hand understanding the necessity for healthy self-love. “If I don't love myself, no one else will.” As we go through life and mature, we move out of the natural state of a child's and adolescent's narcissism to healthy self-love and to loving other people. Being clear about the difference between narcissism and self-love can facilitate this maturing process.

**Practice:** As you read the newsletter, seek to understand the difference between narcissism and healthy self-love so that you can develop the kind of

*self-love that vastly enriches your life.*

### DEFINITION OF LOVE, SELF-LOVE

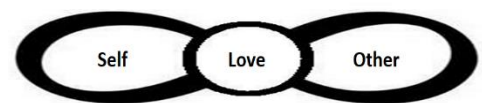
Love has many “definitions.” Let's define love as an action (what we do) that produces a certain kind of response from the loved one. The actions of love are to: care, give, respond, know, and respect. As a response, these loving actions produce: security, pleasure, feeling care for, trust, feeling known, and feeling respected. Self-love is directing the actions of love toward our self and experiencing the responses. As we live life, we develop a mature love that involves loving oneself and others.

**Point of Empowerment:** *Self-love is challenging because we don't really know what to do to love, and when we do love ourselves we often feel self-conscious, guilty, and ashamed because our parents (and our society) taught us that it is wrong to love ourselves.*

**Practice:** *Practice self-love by directing the actions of love toward yourself and being aware of the resulting feelings. Seek the good feelings that love produces. For example: give something to yourself and feel the pleasure of that.*

### DEFINITION OF NARCISSISM

Narcissism is a “state of mind” (a set of beliefs and attitudes, thoughts and feelings), whose motto is, “I am the center of the universe, only I count, and therefore only what I want counts. The world owes me. I am entitled (entitlement).” Extreme narcissism believes, “I am the only one who exists. Everyone else is an



extension of me.” Narcissism is self-centered, self-important, and selfish. This narcissistic orientation is a normal stage of development for a child and adolescent. We call it “healthy narcissism,” as it is the “best a child/adolescent can do”, and is necessary for his or her physical and emotional survival. *It is a strategy for getting needs met.*

### **Entitlement vs. Deserving**

**Point of Empowerment:** *Instead of entitlement—deserving: Healthy self-love gives rise to the feeling of deserving the good that life brings. A deserving person appreciates and feels grateful for the good that comes his way.*

### **EXTREME NARCISSISM: A DISTURBANCE OF THE SELF**

Narcissism comes in mild, moderate, and extreme forms. Everyone has some mild narcissism. It is the moderate and extreme versions that are a disturbance of the self, and cause great problems. Feeling entitled, the narcissistic person expects to get what he wants, whenever he wants it, and not getting what he wants results in unbearable frustration and anger. Additionally, extreme and persistent self-centeredness, self-importance and selfishness result in massive failures in life. These failures give rise to self-hate and self-loathing (a seething resentment toward the self).

### **ORIGINS OF NARCISSISM**

To understand the origins of narcissism lets contrast effective parenting with parenting that perpetuates and generates narcissism. *As we discuss this, we also need to understand that some children have tendencies toward willfulness (a strong will) and rigidity. They don't cope well with the frustration they feel when told “no.”*

### **Effective Parenting Dissipates the Narcissism of Childhood and Adolescence, Healthy Self-love**

Effective parenting is loving a child enough to set limits by saying “no” to unreasonable requests and demands. Frustration and anger follow when a child or adolescent hears “no.” Effective parents help the child cope with these feelings with firm empathy, saying for example: “I can understand that you feel frustrated at not getting what you want. I don't blame you, but the answer is still no.”

Since children are dependent on their parents, love their parents, seek their parents love and approval, and identify with their parents, they learn to “live with no,” to accept “no.” They learn that they can survive without getting their way all the time, learning frustration tolerance. As children and adolescents are loved and appropriately disciplined by their parents:

- Self-centeredness becomes self-worth
- Self-importance becomes self-esteem
- Selfishness becomes self-love

**Point of Empowerment:** *During the course of healthy development, the core narcissism of a child and adolescent dissipates, fades away, and is replaced with healthy self-love. Healthy self-love enables a person to develop effective strategies to get what she needs from her environment, and to form loving relationships with other people.*

### **Dysfunctional Parenting Encourages Narcissism**

Children and adolescents need to “get their way” with a reasonable frequency (“number of times/day”). The entitlement of narcissism comes when children “get their way,” too frequently. But, “not getting my way frequently enough” is a deprivation, and paradoxically, also creates entitlement. The child (or adolescent) thinks: “Since I have to make up for my deprivations, I am entitled.” In the face of dysfunctional parenting, the child/adolescent increasingly relies on narcissism as the strategy for getting what he needs and wants from the world.

When parents randomly and impulsively alternate between “too much and too little” giving in, they create a debilitating confusion in a child or adolescent. The world makes little sense and seems random and unreasonable. The child's or adolescent's response is to make random use of “strategic narcissism” to get what they need and want. This is very hard on other people.

**Point of Empowerment:** *If a parent, persistently and chronically, gives in to the unreasonable demands and out of control behavior of a child or adolescent, he or she is teaching the child and adolescent that they will get their way through tantrums and manipulation.*

**Point of Empowerment:** *Extremely dysfunctional parenting creates extreme distortions of the self, which become persistent disturbances of the self.*

#### **ANTIDOTE TO NARCISSISM: SELF-ACCEPTANCE, SELF-LOVE, SELF-ESTEEM, AND SELF-WORTH**

The antidote to narcissism is to develop these aspects of the self: self-acceptance, self-love, self-esteem, and self-worth. For the person struggling with narcissism, understanding and using these aspects of the self usually requires the help of others, especially professional assistance. This is often very challenging as the narcissistic person experiences negative feedback as criticism and attack, reacts defensively, and shuts out help.

**Point of Empowerment:** *Healing (recovering from) narcissism is a challenging but necessary life restoring process.*

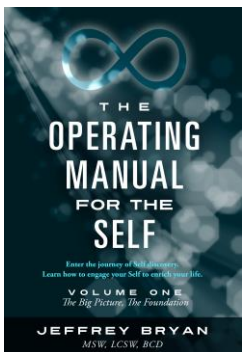
#### **CONCLUSION: SELF-LOVE**

We have explored self-love and the distortion of self-love—narcissism. We must be convinced of the absolute necessity for self-love. With it our life is rich and increasingly enriched. Without it we inevitably substitute narcissism as our strategy to get the love we need in life.

**ADDENDUM: USING THE NEW ANALYTICAL MATRIX.** If you are interested in learning to use the analytical matrix, here is a practice. See the August 2017 newsletter for a full explanation of the matrix.

**Practice:** *Plug “letting a child/adolescent get his way,” into the boxes of the analytical matrix. This can stimulate understanding and insight for you.*

Analytical Matrix	Use	Misuse	Abuse
Too much		4	5
Right Amount	1	2	3
Too Little		6	7



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**The Operating Manual for the Self contains exact definitions of self-acceptance, self-love, self-worth and self-esteem.**

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