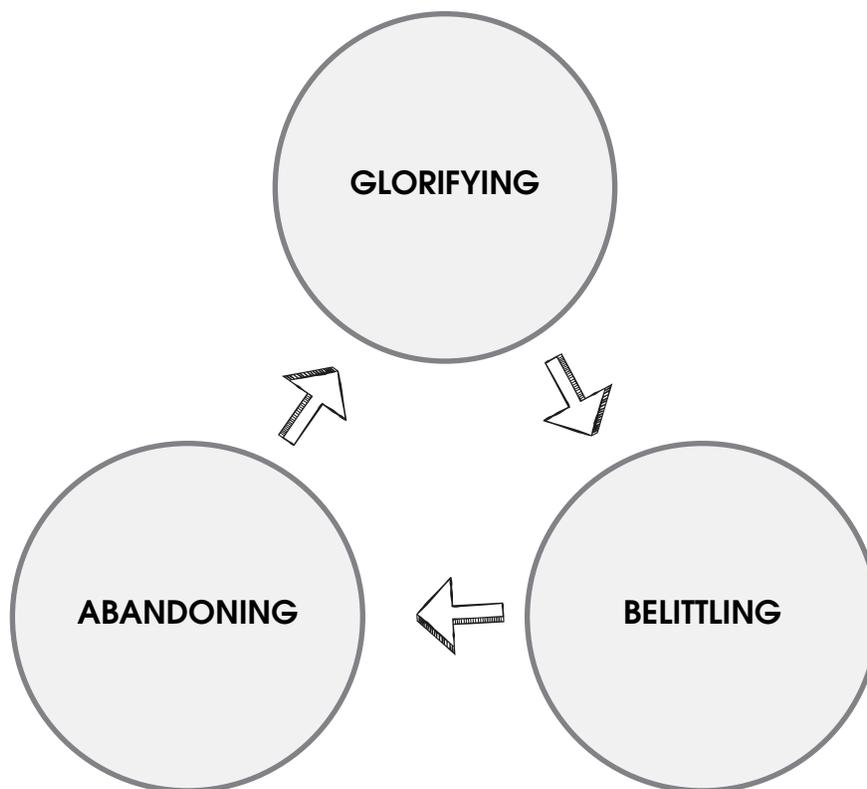


Addressing and Changing Maladaptive Patterns

From my workbook: *The NPD Toolbox* (2018). [Click here to learn more.](#)

BREAKING THE CYCLE OF GLORIFYING, BELITTLING, AND ABANDONING

A common issue in relationships with individuals who are along the narcissistic spectrum is the cyclical experience of:



The cycle of glorifying, belittling, and abandoning creates an emotional system that perpetuates itself to the point where the partner loses his or her sense of efficacy and/or self-control. When a relationship begins with an individual along the narcissistic spectrum, all of the stories and presentations seem so impressive that the individual is glorified, and the partner tends to feel as though he or she has met someone magical and that he or she has found his or her “soul mate.” This phase of the relationship is called the glorifying phase. During the glorifying phase, the individual along the narcissistic spectrum gives the identified partner all that he or she desires, such as attention, sex, elaborate trips and gifts, and whispers of a perfect future together.

This phase does not last long, and the attention, sex, trips, gifts, and painting of a perfect future begin to diminish. Red flags begin to appear in the form of subtle, or not so subtle, micro-abusive jabs, such as degrading language, demeaning comments, withholding affection and emotional expression, and

gaslighting (e.g., a form of psychological abuse where the abuser manipulates someone into questioning his or her own reality, memory, or perception; see the activity on **Contending with Gaslighting** for more information).

The individual along the narcissistic spectrum will then disappear and abandon the partner, physically and/or emotionally. The partner is usually the one who is seen as having failed and is blamed by the individual along the narcissistic spectrum for any problems and the now broken relationship. Being discarded sends the partner into a frenzy to restore what was once so seemingly perfect, beautiful, and fulfilling. The individual along the narcissistic spectrum takes the partner back, but with conditions. When the relationship resumes, there are smatterings of the good times, which are just enough to keep the partner present and invested. A lesser form of glorifying is present but enough to keep the partner hooked and along for the ride. The cycle then repeats in which the partner again engages in belittling, then abandoning, and so forth. This unhealthy relationship pattern can continue for years or decades in some cases.

It is important for mental health providers to be aware of this pattern and to help clients increase their awareness of it and to use methods to block these maladaptive patterns that are so harmful.

NEXT STEPS

Provide your client with the **My Relationship Cycle** worksheets. These can be filled out in session or as homework. The first part entails asking the client to identify if the relationship has the components of glorifying, belittling, and abandoning. If so, ask your client to place a large X in the box(es) provided. The boxes are large so that clients can clearly see that they acknowledge the presence of these issues. The last box is included to allow your clients to recognize that this cycle exists and that it is not a one-time issue. If this cycle has occurred once, it is likely thematic in your client's life.

In the next section, clients will identify instances of glorifying, belittling, and abandoning by providing clear instances of how these issues manifest. In the final part of this exercise, clients answer "yes" or "no" questions regarding what keeps them stuck in the cycle. It is followed by questions to help them challenge glorifying, belittling, and abandoning behaviors and to teach them how to untether themselves from this cycle of relationship abuse. If your client marks "no" for all of the questions, you may want to revisit the relationship, clarify the relationship cycle and their role within it.

It is very beneficial for clients to be cognizant of these issues by writing out how they can overcome them and empower themselves to prevent the cycle from occurring. Increasing this awareness is a great start to working with a client who wants to break out of the cycle of abuse often seen in relationships with individuals who are along the narcissistic spectrum.

MY RELATIONSHIP CYCLE

Below are descriptors of the glorifying, belittling, and abandoning cycle that is often seen in many relationships with individuals along the narcissistic spectrum. Go through each step and place a large X in the box if your relationship has components of the glorifying, belittling, and abandoning cycle. Next, clearly identify instances in your relationship that pertain to each stage, and then answer critical questions about yourself and this abusive cycle.

Finally, answer questions to challenge glorifying, belittling, and abandoning behaviors so that you do not have to be tied to this relationship cycle. Breaking this cycle is not an easy thing to do, and working with your therapist is critical so that he or she can provide support and insight along the way. You can break this cycle.

Place a large X in the box if your relationship has the component of the glorifying, belittling, and/or abandoning cycle.

<input type="checkbox"/> Glorifying	When we first met, my partner was full of exciting stories, experiences, and approached life with passion and shared this with me. We clicked emotionally, and s/he felt like my "soul mate." The relationship had everything anyone could want: attention, sex, elaborate trips and gifts, and whispers of a perfect future together.
<input type="checkbox"/> Belittling	Eventually, routine set in, and the attention, sex, trips, gifts, and painting of a perfect future diminished. Red flags began to appear in the form of subtle jabs, such as degrading language, demeaning comments, withholding of affection, and manipulation to the point that I questioned my own reality, memory, or perception.
<input type="checkbox"/> Abandoning	My partner began to disappear, and the feeling of abandonment arose. My partner blamed me for the problems in the relationship and the now broken relationship. I felt a sense of frenzy to restore the relationship that once was seemingly perfect, beautiful, and fulfilling. My partner took me back, but with conditions. When the relationship resumed, there were reminders of the good times, just enough to keep me present and invested. My partner continued to engage in a lesser form of glorifying, but enough to keep me hooked and along for the ride.
<input type="checkbox"/> Cycle Continues...	

Clearly identify instances of glorifying in your relationship. You can use all three spaces or write on the back of this worksheet if you have more than three.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Clearly identify instances of belittling in your relationship. You can use all three spaces or write on the back of this worksheet if you have more than three.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Clearly identify instances of abandoning in your relationship. You can use all three spaces or write on the back of this worksheet if you have more than three.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

To start to overcome the glorifying stage, you have to examine those qualities and experiences and ask yourself:

- YES NO Is my partner giving me something that I am missing?
- YES NO Is this something that I can give myself?
- YES NO Can I empower myself to meet my own needs and expectations?
- YES NO Can I look at my relationship objectively and clearly?
- YES NO Do I glorify my partner to overcome my own shame, doubt, and wounds?

1. I will give myself what I need by: _____

2. I will empower myself by: _____

3. I will overcome my shame, doubt, and wounds by: _____

To start to overcome the belittling stage, you have to examine those instances and experiences and ask yourself:

- YES NO Do I deserve to be spoken to with respect at all times?
- YES NO Would I be okay with someone belittling my friend the way that I am belittled in my relationship?
- YES NO Can I challenge the red flags that I see?
- YES NO Do I deserve respect and attention that makes me feel good about myself?
- YES NO Is there anything that would be so demeaning or belittling that it would warrant ending the relationship? If yes, what is it:

1. When someone speaks to me disrespectfully, I will: _____

2. I will challenge the red flags I see by: _____

3. When I feel belittled, I am going to: _____

To start to overcome the abandoning stage, you have to examine and ask yourself:

- YES NO Will I be okay if the relationship ends?
- YES NO Do I believe that once I am alone, I will always be alone?
- YES NO Do I need to take 100% of the responsibility for the relationship's success or failure?
- YES NO Can I see a future without this person in my life?
- YES NO Can I accept myself and be self-reliant?

1. If the relationship ends, I am going to: _____

2. My responsibility in the relationship includes: _____

3. Being more self-reliant and accepting of myself involves: _____

