

How To Fight Off Elon Musks Narcissism

No sane person chooses to befriend a raging narcissist but, with their slippery behaviour and manipulative charm, it can be difficult to identify self-obsessed friends.

‘People who are awful all of the time are easy to spot, and you stay away from them,’ says Dr Sarah Davies, a chartered counselling psychologist and author of [How To Leave A Narcissist For Good](#) and [Raised By Narcissists](#).

Narcissism exists on a sliding scale and the stereotypical ‘extreme narcissist’ is rare. However, go slightly lower on the spectrum – think of your average mid-range narcissist – and, says Dr Davies, ‘there’s a lot of it about’.

With these more common narcissist types there are some warning signs, but they’re not glaringly obvious. So it can take years for the shocking truth to dawn.

‘It’s only when you take stock of the friendship overall that you realise there’s a pattern,’ says Dr Davies. Other friends show genuine remorse if they behave selfishly, and you know it’s a one-off. But this one regularly betrays a startling, stone-cold lack of empathy. The narcissist rarely says sorry, and never means it. They’ll turn it back on you by implying you’re needy.

Here, Dr Davies explains how to spot the subtle (and blatant) signs of a narcissistic friend – and how to protect yourself...



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The narcissist is vain and eats up compliments. When you joke that they look vaguely like Keira Knightley or Keanu Reeves, you're being nice but also teasing. They, however, will fully believe it (picture posed by model)



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Everything is about them

If your friend is an 'overt' narcissist, they will typically be charismatic, loud and dominate any conversation, casting themselves as the star of every story. They are charming and entertaining, so you don't resent it – much. But at some point you'll notice their hurtful habit of making everything all about them. So perhaps you confide that you've been recalled for a mammogram and you're upset. As narcissists are mainly interested in themselves, their response might be, 'Oh I have to get one of those. Last time I had one I was fine'. There's no empathy or compassion, no 'I'm so sorry to hear that – are you OK?'

They thrive on secrets and lies

Some narcissists are harder to detect as they aren't overtly self-obsessed. This type seems to be a great listener, but at some point you realise you're doing all the disclosing, all the talking, and it feels oddly unequal. Getting them to reveal anything personal is exhausting, like interrogating a spy. This narcissist is secretive because they hate to feel vulnerable. They'll tell you a distorted version of the truth, and often lie outright. This keeps you at an emotional distance – and puts you at a disadvantage in terms of knowledge. It's a way of controlling you. Having secrets or a double life makes them feel untouchable and superior to others, which is how the narcissist prefers it.

They will love bomb you

Just as you think, 'That's it, I'm never seeing them again,' they make a grand gesture. Because if a narcissist senses that you're pulling away, they can whip 'being caring' out

of the bag. They might buy you a lavish gift. Or treat you to a spa day. Using money to control and manipulate is a low-effort way of keeping you in their thrall. Flashing the cash, if they have it, doesn't require any real thoughtfulness or emotional energy. Their sprees of generosity are a version of love bombing.

They are surprisingly vain

The narcissist is vain and eats up compliments. When you joke that they look vaguely like Keira Knightley or Keanu Reeves, you're being nice but also teasing. They, however, will fully believe it. But you might notice that they rarely give you a compliment. If they do, it's because they want something.

EXCLUSIVE

You get drawn into their drama

Some narcissists always have a drama raging, and draw you in to listen or become embroiled. You'll give your time and heartfelt advice, yet the conflict is never resolved as they prefer it that way. These narcissists thrive on being 'the victim' – and if you're wondering why your top is damp, it's because you're their shoulder to cry on. They love being the centre of attention. Also, if their dispute is with a mutual friend, if you offer an opinion on it they will twist your words or use them as ammunition: 'Sarah agreed with me!' You'll feel mortified – and misrepresented.



They ditch friends who outgrow their use

They will be in touch when they want something, but if you need them they ghost you. Your friendship is on their terms, and you do most of the giving. Narcissists are envious people, and tend to be jealous rather than happy for you. They can even try to sabotage your successes – whether that's a new role or a relationship. Yet many narcissists are obsessed with looks, money, power and careers, and judge people superficially on their

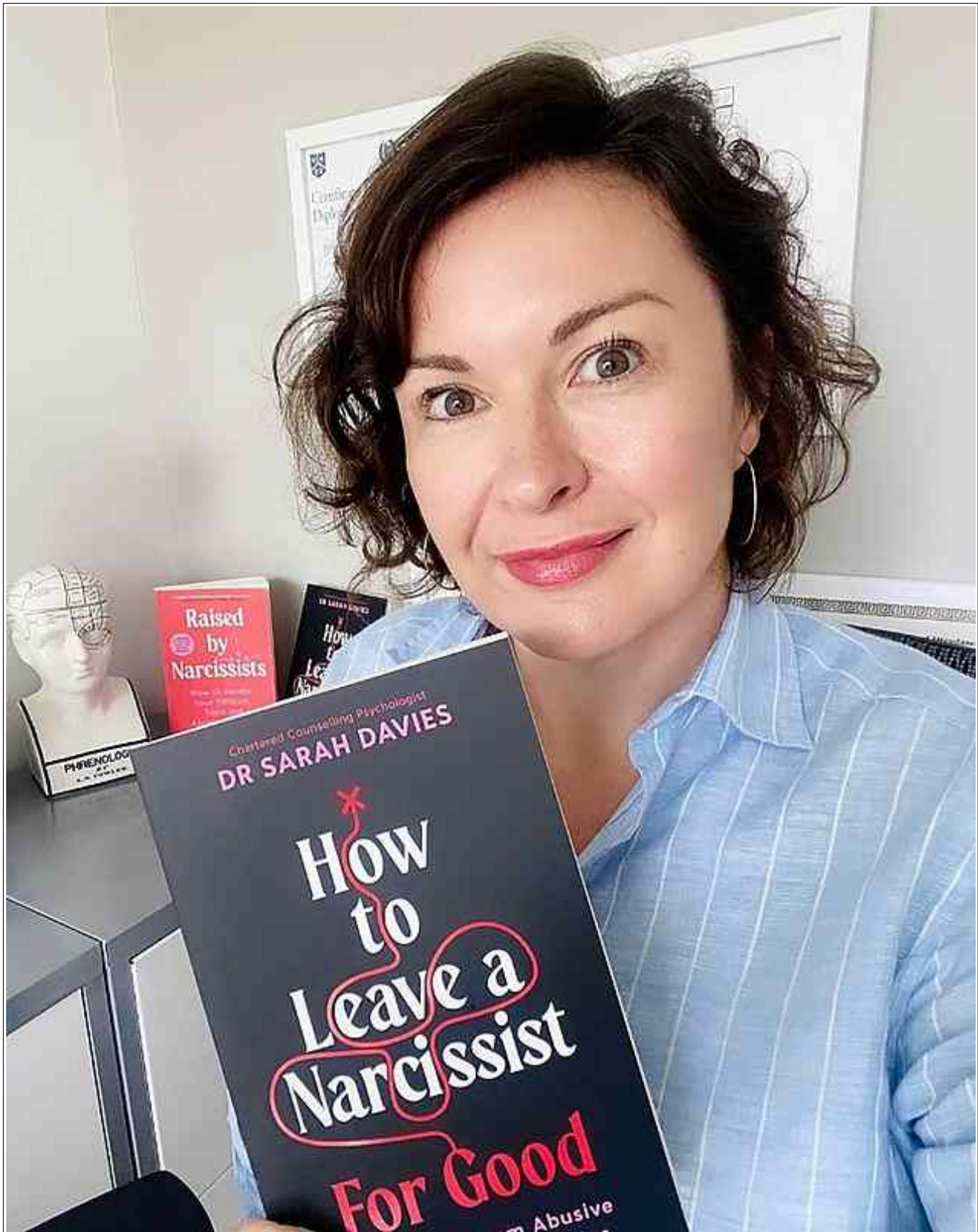
achievements. So it's complicated. If they count you as a friend, it's partly because of your impressive job or who you know. Their thinking is, 'Who can serve me?' Lose status and you'll be dropped.

You find yourself making excuses for them

You're out together and it's lovely – until your friend says something breathtakingly rude or arrogant to the waiter. You're mortified; they're oblivious. Narcissists lack self-awareness. You've been on the receiving end of their cruelty and felt shamed. They might have casually said, 'You must be ready to lose that weight now?' Narcissists often deploy snide comments. And they'll never apologise (and mean it) or admit responsibility – they are incapable of reflecting on how they impact others, and of feeling remorse. It's always somebody else's fault. Challenge them and they will get defensive.

You feel wretched after spending time with them

Narcissists hate to compromise. And they can't empathise. So, often, you'll feel swept into doing what they want. If they're a high earner, they will ignore your hints that you can't afford to meet in a fancy restaurant. In fact, they might even forget their card, and you'll end up footing the eye-watering bill. If you were to object, they'd shame you: 'It's not my fault you don't earn enough.'



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HOW TO DEAL WITH A NARCISSISTIC FRIEND...

Avoid getting pulled into their dramas

Have some phrases prepared to avoid committing to any plans they want to rope you into. For example, 'I'll have a think about that and come back to you.' Or, if they are regaling you about why they had to cheat on their partner, say 'Sorry to hear that.' Give them nothing.

Gain some perspective

Narcissists are great manipulators, and that can be confusing, especially if you have a kind heart. So take a step back and try to assess the nature of your friendship as a whole. Ask yourself, 'How do I feel after spending time with them?' Are you buzzing and happy, or bad about yourself and drained?

Understand that you won't change them

Know that it's not your responsibility to make a narcissist better. And anyway, you can't fix them. There's no cure for narcissism. A narcissist won't change. But they will keep lying, and telling you what they think you want to hear.

Gradually decrease contact

You might want to respond immediately if the narcissist contacts you, but resist. Stop replying to every message. Delay your responses. Make yourself less available. Avoid one-on-one time and, if you must meet, do so in a group to 'dilute' their power.

Avoid confrontation

If they challenge you on why you are seeing them less, don't bother confronting them about their behaviour. You'll only make an enemy. Just say you're busy. And don't be drawn into conversations you don't want to have. Say, 'I don't feel comfortable talking about this. If you keep bringing it up, I'll have to leave/end the call.'

Don't let them guilt-trip you

It's normal to feel guilt and an obligation to continue the friendship – especially if the narcissist has had a hard life, or you've known them for ages. Be aware that a narcissist will use anything at their disposal to excuse and justify their unpleasant or abusive behaviour, and will take advantage of your compassion (they see it as a weakness).

Prioritise your wellbeing

Reflect on what a healthy, rewarding friendship looks like to you, and how you wish to be treated. Once you're clear on that, it's easier to focus your energy on relationships that reflect your values. Remember, you have no obligation to spend time with toxic people.