

[00:00:00] **John Moe:** Two fundamental, psychological, existential questions. One: why do other people act like that? And two: why do I act like this? As always, we'll try to make some progress on those questions. It's *Depresh Mode*. I'm John Moe. I'm glad you're here.

[00:00:20] **Music:** Spirited acoustic guitar.

[00:00:28] **John Moe:** And yeah, of course, I'm not going to be able to explain all of human behavior in one podcast episode. Sorry. But let's take a whack at one particular perspective. Let's look through one small window to get some psychological behavioral answers. Let's take a look at narcissism and narcissistic personality disorder.

(Music fades out.)

Now, these are terms that get thrown around a lot but that maybe need a little clarifying. When is someone just being selfish vs. having an actual personality disorder? How does the world actually work according to a true narcissist mind? We're gonna look beyond the narcissist, though—something I guess the narcissist has trouble doing. We're gonna look at the effect they have on the people around them. If you've had a parent with narcissistic personality disorder, how does that shape what you have become? If you have a spouse or a partner like that, what is the effect on you?

My guest is Dr. Stephanie Kriesberg. She's a clinical psychologist with a practice in the Boston area, and she's the author of *Adult Daughters of Narcissistic Mothers*.

[00:01:38] **Music:** Playful, staccato acoustic guitar.

[00:01:49] **John Moe:** Dr. Stephanie Kriesberg. Welcome to *Depresh Mode*.

[00:01:50] **Dr. Stephanie Kriesberg:** Well, thank you so much for having me. I'm really excited to be here.

[00:01:57] **John Moe:** You know, the term narcissism gets tossed around a lot. Even narcissistic personality disorder is used a lot, especially when people talk about certain characters from the news. But maybe you could ground us a little bit here. How is narcissistic personality disorder defined by you? What's your criteria, and how do you define it?

[00:02:20] **Dr. Stephanie Kriesberg:** Okay, well, great question. I think it's really important to understand that the whole idea of narcissism, you know, exists on a spectrum. You know, narcissism is a group of personality traits or characteristics that I'll talk about in a moment. And you know, we all have some of those traits. And you know, they come, and they go. And that's not necessarily a problem. And some have more than others, and they're gonna show up depending on—more, depending on, you know, how stressed we are or what's going on in our lives.

What a personality disorder is, is that is when these traits are more fixed and inflexible, and they show up in different areas of our lives. You know, in our family life, in our work life, in our social lives. And they really impact our, our functioning and how we live our lives. And

the other thing about it is that we don't have any self-awareness or insight. So, let's say we're really critical of other people. We have a really—a really inflated sense of our own importance, and we don't understand how our arrogance affects, you know, how we are at work and in our relationships. We just think other people are the problem. That's when we get into the realm of personality disorder. Okay? As opposed to, “You know, I think I just have a really great golf game, and maybe I'm just kind of a jerk when I play golf.” Okay?

[00:04:06] **John Moe:** (*Chuckling.*) There's being a jerk, and there's having an actual disorder that's affecting the function of the world.

[00:04:11] **Dr. Stephanie Kriesberg:** That's right. That's right. But my friends love me, and they kind of know like, “Oh, okay. He kind of acts up when he plays golf. Okay. But other than that, he's a great guy.” These days we might say, “Oh my gosh, do you see him play golf? He's such a narcissist.” That is not being a narcissist. It's pervasive. NPD is pervasive.

[00:04:30] **John Moe:** Yeah, pervasive so that it's applying to not just one's golf game, but to all relationships and all interactions and one's concept of one's place in the world.

[00:04:42] **Dr. Stephanie Kriesberg:** That's right. Exactly. That doesn't mean that those behaviors, those characteristics, those traits, you know, might not fluctuate. Okay. So, let's say, you know, you're doing really well at work so that you're feeling really good about yourself. You know, you might be a little bit more empathetic or a little bit less critical of other people. Okay? So, the behaviors on the surface—on the surface—are a little easier to deal with, but that doesn't mean like the underlying personality is changed.

And then, if you're having a really bad time—maybe you lost your job or, you know, somebody broke up with you, and you're really feeling lousy about yourself—then, you know, you're much more likely to treat somebody unkindly or to get depressed and to expect the whole world to evolve around you.

[00:05:41] **John Moe:** You mentioned some of these characteristics, some of these sort of hallmark characteristics of someone with NPD. What are some of those characteristics?

[00:05:49] **Dr. Stephanie Kriesberg:** So, we have—one: someone has a grandiose sense of self-importance. They think they're really more important or special than they are. They're kind of preoccupied of success, power. They think that they're very special and that they should have—there's nothing wrong with wanting to be successful, but it's sort of out of proportion. They think that they're very special and unique. They need to be admired a lot.

And so, what I would say about this—the way that I look at it is they regulate their sense of self from the outside in. And the hallmark of this, if we could sum it up, is that really—and people disagree about this—is that underneath, people with narcissism, although they may look like “the world revolves around me,” they are really pathologically insecure. So, they never developed what we call in psychology a strong sense of self. Okay? Like, “I can have a bad day, I can have a good day. Someone likes me, they don't like me, but underneath I'm still okay.”

[00:07:07] **John Moe:** So, is the narcissism then a kind of mask, a kind of disguise that they're—an act that they're putting on?

[00:07:15] **Dr. Stephanie Kriesberg:** Well, that's a good way to put it. A mask. In psychology, we think of it as a defense. It's a way to protect themselves. However, they're not aware of it. One of the hallmarks of narcissism is lack of awareness. So, it's not like they wake up in the morning and say, “Oh, you know what? I feel really bad about myself. You know, I don't feel very good about myself. So, I'm gonna go out and be really arrogant and expect everybody to pay a lot of attention to me, 'cause I think that'll make me feel better today.”

They have no insight, no self-awareness. This is how their personality has grown up over time, probably since childhood. And we kind of look at two different types of narcissism that most of us encounter. Okay? One is what we call grandiose narcissism. That's sort of the stereotypical narcissist. You know, when you think of like—well, let's say politicians, certain politicians. Or we think of, you know, reality TV stars. You know, the people who everybody has to pay attention to. Certain celebrities or—you know, or it just could be like the kind of person we know we've all met who walks into a party and all of a sudden everybody is, you know, around them. They're talking their head off, and everybody is just hanging on their every word. Okay. I certainly know people like that. That's what we would call a grandiose narcissist.

[00:08:47] **John Moe:** That's what I normally think of when I think of a narcissist. So—

[00:08:49] **Dr. Stephanie Kriesberg:** That's right. Most of us do, but there is the other side of a narcissist coin. Okay? A vulnerable or covert narcissist. So, John, this person inside is also—feels very insecure about themselves. Alright? Never got their really needs met growing up, inside. They need to have a lot of attention in order to feel good about themselves, just like that other person. But instead of just coming in and being like a peacock, they are quiet—might be quiet, anxious, depressed, and needy.

So, let's say you're a narcissistic mother, okay? And you are a vulnerable or covert narcissist. You might say to—let's say—your child, “You know, I just—I'm just so tired. I really just can't, you know, do anything. I really need you to just take care of me.” You know? And so, the whole house is like—not that kids shouldn't help—is cooking dinner, is cleaning the house, is taking care of everything, because mom feels like, “I just—I just can't do anything.” And everything kind of revolves around mom's needs.

Now this doesn't mean mom couldn't genuinely have a major depression that makes her unable to function. I am not trying at all to take away from that. But this is different. This is a mom who then maybe might get out and, you know, go do something fun for herself, but really expects everyone to take care of her. Or it might be a mom who—let's say her child doesn't get the lead part in a play. And she needs her child's achievements to make her feel good. So, when that happens—rather than being able to comfort her child saying, “It's okay, it's all right. You'll be fine. Maybe next time,” just takes to her bed for a week, because she's so depressed that her child didn't get the lead part. Because that takes away from her own self-esteem.

That's what we might see in a vulnerable narcissist. You might think of this as like if your personality is a balloon filled with air, it's like someone took a pin and popped the balloon and—poof—all the air came out.

[00:11:41] **John Moe:** Yeah. Do people who rise to this level of having this as a disorder—are they—? You know, you talked about how they feel insecure. They have a diminished sense of self, and—are they aware of, “Hey, I am behaving in this way. I'm behaving in a narcissistic way,” but are justifying it in some way? Or are they just going about their business? Like, is it a common trait for this disorder to be oblivious as to the disorder itself?

[00:12:14] **Dr. Stephanie Kriesberg:** I would say for the most part, people are oblivious to this disorder. And that's one of the things that makes it so, you know, crazy-making for other people and why they—whether it's, you know, your parent, your spouse, a coworker, your boss, a neighbor—because they're acting like what they're doing is perfectly fine. And in the meantime, they may be criticizing you, making you doubt yourself, telling you there's something wrong with you, that—you know, something that you thought happened or the way that you feel or perceive the world or perceive yourself is inaccurate or that you are too sensitive. And they're so confident in what they think that you doubt yourself, question yourself.

Or if you're not taking care of them enough, you feel like, “Well, maybe I'm a bad person. You know, look how—you know they're so needy. Why—? I should be taking care of them. That's what a good person does.” And because you don't see any seams in their perspective, You just question yourself.

[00:13:34] **John Moe:** You know, we've talked about—and you've written about what it's like for children of narcissistic parents, and I want to get to that, and I want to get to what those effects are. But if someone is a person with narcissistic personality disorder, is it possible that they can recognize that in themselves and receive treatment? Like, is this something that the condition itself blocks the treatment of?

[00:14:03] **Dr. Stephanie Kriesberg:** Oh, that is like the million-dollar question, John! And you know, like a lot of things in mental health, a little controversial. So, here's the thing. People with full blown narcissistic personality disorder, NPD, usually don't go to therapy of their own accord, because they feel like there's nothing wrong with me. Everybody else is the problem and is screwed up.

Sometimes they do go to therapy under sort of duress. If they're facing some sort of loss. A spouse says, “I'm gonna leave you if, you know, you don't shape up. You know, if—I can't take this—your behavior anymore.” Sometimes it happens, you know, because of their work. You know, it's a CEO who's told, “You know, we get too many complaints about how you treat people. You know, if you don't get some help, you're out of here.” And so, in those cases—I mean, you have to have—and this is really important, you know, you have to have a therapist who really understands these dynamics and who this person is. So—because they can be very charming. Here's the thing, the other important quality about—or behavior about narcissists, they can also be very, very charming.

And that's why, you know, people—you know, let's say marry them! You know, become friends with them, start businesses with them. Because they, you know, can be very sociable and flattering and charming.

[00:15:48] **John Moe:** They appear very confident.

[00:15:49] **Dr. Stephanie Kriesberg:** Yes, very confident and seductive. And so, that's why, you know, perfectly healthy people, you know, can wind up in relationships with them and don't see the other side of the coin 'til, you know, they're in a relationship with them or a business or something like that.

So, you have to have a therapist who really understands how they work and can strike a balance between empathizing with them—you know, their own pain—and you know, confronting them about their behavior and really teaching them skills and letting them know like, “If you don't want this outcome, you know—losing your job or your spouse—these are some behaviors you're gonna need to work on.” They're not necessarily gonna have insight about themselves.

[00:16:44] **John Moe:** So, it can be treated, but it's a long shot, and a lot of things have to—have to line up, it sounds like.

[00:16:51] **Dr. Stephanie Kriesberg:** Right. And it might be treated for some people on a more superficial level. Like, I'm not gonna be—I'll change how critical I am of my employees, because I don't wanna lose my job. Not because I necessarily see anything wrong with what I'm doing.

Now going back to the covert, more vulnerable narcissist, that person might be more likely to come into therapy than the grandiose, because they feel depressed, or they feel anxious. So, that person might come into therapy. It might be a little harder to recognize at first how their narcissistic related behaviors play into their problems. And so, you might work with the depression, you might work with the anxiety, and then start to realize how their patterns of behavior—how they see themselves and treat other people—get them into trouble and perpetuate their problems. And then, you have to have a therapist who can see that and help start to kind of point that out in a way that's not going to alienate the person. Because they can be very fragile. That's the thing about narcissists. Underneath all of this, they're really very fragile inside. And if they're offended, will leave therapy.

[00:18:16] **Music:** Relaxed guitar.

[00:18:20] **John Moe:** Coming up: is it possible you were raised by a narcissist?

(Music ends.)

[00:18:22] **Promo:**

Music: Playful keyboard.

Speaker 1: I'm glad you said that 'cause nobody says that.

Speaker 2: Can I just say thank you to you for such a thoughtful interview?

Speaker 3: Oh my god, yeah. I think you nailed it. (*Chuckles.*)

Jesse Thorn: *Bullseye*. Interviews with creators you love and creators you need to know. Listen to the *Bullseye* podcast only from NPR and Maximum Fun.

(*Music ends.*)

[00:18:48] **Music:** Melancholy guitar.

[00:18:52] **John Moe:** Back with Dr. Stephanie Kriesberg, author of *Adult Daughters of Narcissistic Mothers*.

(*Music ends.*)

Your book is about adult daughters of narcissistic mothers, but it's really—it's a book about having a narcissist as a parent, I think. I mean, I think a lot of people will be able to relate to it. And so, the challenge—let me phrase this the right way. It's a challenge, I think, for someone to detect that what happened in their childhood was problematic or was influenced by a mental disorder, because whatever you grew up with is the normal that you know. And so, you—it takes a long time to realize, “Oh, this is—there's something off happening here.”

How can one detect that they were raised by a narcissistic parent?

[00:19:51] **Dr. Stephanie Kriesberg:** Oh, that's a really good question. And you know, I just wanna say—I mean, I agree with you. I think you're absolutely right. I mean, I have people coming into my practice at all stages of life, because it is so hard to recognize. And let's face it, well, thank goodness for podcasts like yours. Because it's not something people go around just talking about, you know, sitting around at, you know, your kid's soccer game. “Hey, did you happen to have a narcissistic parent? Like, what do you think about that?” Right?

[00:20:23] **John Moe:** People would find a new place to sit for the soccer game at that point.

[00:20:26] **Dr. Stephanie Kriesberg:** Right, exactly. So, you know, sometimes people come in after their parent has died. And you know, they're in their 60s because—or 70s, because it's just—it's such a difficult thing to figure out.

[00:20:42] **John Moe:** But can you tell—like can you tell by the effects that it's had on you, or can you tell by just objectively observing somebody's behavior?

[00:20:51] **Dr. Stephanie Kriesberg:** Well, I think both. So, one is, I think you can tell by the effect that it's had on you. So, I'll talk about some of the key characteristics that we see in adults with narcissistic parents. Okay? How's that?

So, I find that the key characteristics that I see are people who ruminate. And of course, I just wanna point out—and I know you know this—is that some of these characteristics apply to other things as well. But people who tend to ruminate a lot, worry a lot, their thoughts are always stuck in their head and may find in particular that they ruminate about their relationship with their parent over and over. They described that their parent's voice is stuck in their head. You know, one woman described to me, “I wake up in the morning, and the first thing I think about is—you know—her. What is she thinking? What would she think about what I'm gonna do?”

As adults, their parents' opinion and judgment is still just incredibly important to them, as if they're still trying to please that parent. A lot of self-doubt and second guessing themselves. Because when you were growing up, you know, there was a lot of either criticism—you could never do the right thing—or maybe you just felt as if you weren't—really, just weren't seen. You were just sort of invisible, just left to your own devices. So, you never got the sense of any sort of positive reinforcement. So, you're always second guessing yourself.

[00:22:38] **John Moe:** Because you then don't have that ability within yourself to trust that you're making a wise decision, because you—the foundation isn't there. The inner strength never got built up.

[00:22:52] **Dr. Stephanie Kriesberg:** Well, right. And we—you know, when we're young, we build up our sense of self through relationships, right? Particularly, through our relationships with our primary caretaker, our parents. And many people describe even being mocked growing up, or your feelings were never seen—either mocked or your feelings were questioned, were never validated. So maybe, you know, you come home from school, and you're in middle school, and you know, you tell your parent you just didn't get—you know you're upset. You didn't get invited to like a party your friend was having over the weekend, okay? And you feel really upset about it.

You have a narcissistic parent, okay? So, they—rather than just empathizing with you and validating your feelings; that's what you need to feel seen and heard—okay?—which is gonna make you feel like, “Okay, my feelings make sense.” That's what you need to develop a sense of self. The parent might say, “Well, what did you do? What did you do so that you didn't get invited to that party?” Or they might say, “You didn't get—you didn't get invited to that party? You know, well, Mrs. So-and-so, I mean, I'm friendly with her. This is so embarrassing for me. Oh my gosh, what am I—when I see her, you know, at the grocery store, I'm gonna have to like go down the next aisle!”

So, it becomes about the parent. And so, then—you know, you feel blindsided. You feel—then, you feel even worse, because it became about the parent. And the whole experience becomes not about you. You don't know how to feel. And when this happens over and over again, you learn to question yourself. Your feelings don't make sense. You grow up with a sense of self-doubt and of not being important. And that's what my adults talk about in practice: not feeling important, questioning themselves, and they bring that to future relationships.

[00:25:15] **Music:** Quiet acoustic guitar.

[00:25:18] **John Moe:** Just ahead: can other disorders—depression, anxiety—be traced to being raised by a narcissistic parent? The answer may not surprise you.

(Music ends.)

[00:25:35] **Promo:**

Music: Upbeat, quirky banjo music plays.

Dan McCoy: Hey! I'm Dan McCoy.

Stuart Wellington: I'm Stuart Wellington.

Elliott Kalan: And I'm Elliott Kalan.

Dan: Listen, you like podcasts, right? Sure, you do. Don't try and lie to me. You're listening to one right now. So, why not try a different one called our one, *The Flop House*.

Stuart: Uh-huh. And on *The Flop House* we watch a movie and talk about it. And then, sometimes we do other stuff.

Elliott: It's all meant to be funny and fun, and we think you'll have a good time. And just to be clear, the name of the podcast is not *Our One The Flophouse*, it's just called *The Flophouse*. I do a lot of correcting Dan.

Dan: *The Flophouse*: A lot of correcting Dan.

[Music ends.]

[00:26:06] **Music:** Upbeat guitar.

[00:26:08] **John Moe:** We're back with Dr. Stephanie Kriesberg.

(Music ends.)

So, is there a path then from somebody who had a narcissistic parent—a parent with the disorder, like a really full-blown thing—to the child then growing up to have depression, anxiety, obsessive compulsive disorder. Like, is there a link that other disorders will show up one generation later?

[00:26:36] **Dr. Stephanie Kriesberg:** Absolutely. OCD is a little bit different, because I believe there is, you know, sort of a genetic component with that. But I see many traits of that. You know, I see a strong connection between depression, anxiety, really—you know—post-traumatic stress symptoms, because these memories just get sort of lodged in your brain,

these traumatic memories. And—where you don't really have—you know, the way we understand trauma is that, you know, they get kind of lodged in the emotional part of your brain without a lot of logic or words. And then, later in life what happens is if something triggers those memories, you just kind of react the way you felt and behaved back then. Okay?

So, maybe somebody might give you a look that feels dismissive. Those feelings come flooding back when you felt dismissed growing up. You're not really aware of it. You don't understand. You just feel like, “Why am I having such a strong reaction?” And so, then maybe you might isolate yourself socially from other people because you just feel so sensitive, but you don't really know why.

[00:27:56] **John Moe:** So, then where does one go from there, as the child of a parent with narcissistic personality disorder. Like, there's the realization that, “Oh, this is what I was raised under,” and there's probably—certainly a justification for some anger and some resentment, but what's the path to health for that person from that point? Dramatic confrontation, perhaps? (*Laughs.*) Probably not.

[00:28:24] **Dr. Stephanie Kriesberg:** A confrontation? You know, that's really not the first thing that I—I mean, I recommend—I certainly never wanna go to a narcissist and say, “Hey, you're a narcissist,” because I don't think that usually—

[00:28:36] **John Moe:** Yeah, no, they wouldn't recognize that. Yeah.

[00:28:40] **Dr. Stephanie Kriesberg:** Yeah. I mean, I think there's a number of approaches. Of course, it all depends on the person. One I really recommend: focusing on yourself, and I'll get to that in a moment. I mean, and then there's of course, if the parent is still alive and you are in touch with them and you have a relationship with them—you know, figuring out what is going to be a healthy relationship and contact, you know, for you and what that's going to look like and how you're gonna set healthy boundaries and handle that. And there's, you know, a lot of ways that you can do that. You know, for some people that means not having a relationship. But you know, often you can find a way, unless it's really just abusive—the way that you can handle that, but that's separate. That's different for everybody.

But in terms of yourself, I believe—you know, the first, most important step is education. I think knowledge is power and really learning about narcissism and what it was like to have—what it's like to have a narcissistic parent and how it impacted you and how it impacts people in general. I think that for most people that just that first stage is so important. It brings a feeling of relief. Sometimes it brings anger also. I mean, it brings a flood of feelings, but it certainly is important to know I am not alone. I'm not crazy. I didn't make up this stuff or how I feel. These are patterns. These are patterns of behavior, in terms of people with these traits, and patterns that we see in people who are impacted by them.

[00:30:37] **John Moe:** Hm. How is it different between parents and say a spouse or a partner? If your spouse or partner is a narcissist, does it affect you in the same way that it would affect you if your parent was like this?

[00:30:51] **Dr. Stephanie Kriesberg:** Oh, good question. I think there are certainly differences, and that's a whole—I mean, that could be a whole other podcast, probably.

[00:30:59] **John Moe:** It's your next book, probably. (*Chuckles.*)

[00:31:01] **Dr. Stephanie Kriesberg:** Several podcasts, but you know, here's the thing. Sometimes people who wind up, you know, married or in a relationship with a narcissist, you know, have a kind of difficult background that brought them to that relationship. Maybe had narcissistic parents or a parent themselves, honestly. But sometimes not! And you know, sometimes they say, “I had a really good childhood,” which led them to feel like people are trustworthy. And here's the thing, I think it's important for listeners to know: narcissists, as we discussed, are really charming and can be very seductive. And really—at the beginning, they can do this thing that we call—sometimes called love bombing, where they just flood you with, you know, taking care of you and being nice to you. And so, it seems like this is a great person to marry, and you don't see the other behavior. The cruelty, the criticism, the—you know, cheating or lying or controlling, manipulative behavior might not come even ‘til, you know, after the actual marriage.

So, then what can happen is—it's interesting, then you start to, you know—that impacts you in a terrible way. I can just share a little anecdote. Been working for a long time with somebody who is married—well, now divorced from a narcissist, and I said to them, “Wow—” You know, and they're getting much—they're just really healing. And I said to them, “Wow, you know, you seem like—” Which was totally off on my part. I said, “You seem like a different person. You seem so much better.”

And they said, “No. I'm not a different person. I'm who I used to be.” And I thought that was—wow. That is so profound. “I'm who I was before I married this person and became so depressed and anxious and didn't know who I was and was scared and lived in fear and didn't have a voice. So, I used to be this person who I am now, who is confident again and resilient and can take care of things and handle things and has opinions!” And I think that anecdote just kind of sums up what happens when you wind up married to someone who makes you doubt yourself, who makes you afraid, who tells you you're worthless, who tries to control you, who kind of basically tricks you, who you—of course, start to—isolates you. You lose your sense of who you are.

[00:33:58] **John Moe:** Is it possible to get someone to change—if it's your partner, if it's your parent? I mean, you only get so many parents, and if you're in a—if you're in a marriage, part of you wants the marriage to work. Is it possible to just make them see the light and say, “Hey, you've got this disorder, I think. And you should go get it treated,” and talk them into not being a narcissist anymore?

[00:34:25] **Dr. Stephanie Kriesberg:** Oh gosh, I wish it was. You know? I mean, may—

[00:34:31] **John Moe:** I kind of know the answer already, but please continue. (*Chuckles.*)

[00:34:34] **Dr. Stephanie Kriesberg:** No, it's a great—it's a really important—it's an important question, because I think everyone has it. You know, I think if someone has a few challenging traits that come and go and you find a, you know, maybe a really good therapist

to work with and they, you know, are really invested in the relationship—you know, yeah. I think it's possible that someone could adapt. And this is the other point I think is key. Let's say it's a marriage, right? It's really important to have your own life, your own interests, things outside of a marriage. That's what I always tell people. Not to—and I mean, I think this isn't the case anyway, but not to have all your eggs in that basket, that that person is gonna fulfill all my needs. Like really have your own, robust life. Okay? Not to look for all your happiness from that person. Okay?

And of course, you know, if there's any kind of dangerous thing going on—and to protect yourself! Make sure you have your own money and finances. But if someone has, you know, what I described at the beginning of this podcast, the far end of the spectrum, severe NPD with—it's rigid. That's the thing. It's rigid. Inflexible. There's no insight or self-awareness. The ability to change is minimal to none. Sometimes people feel like I need to stay with this person anyway, let's say, until my kids are out of the house, or I go back to school and get a degree and can support myself or something. But you really have to be aware then of what you're dealing with and protect yourself.

[00:36:17] **John Moe:** Are children of narcissists more or less likely able to be narcissists themselves, especially to their own kids?

[00:36:24] **Dr. Stephanie Kriesberg:** Well, that's a good question. You know, in my experience, I will say—at least from the people that I work with, they come in with an incredible amount of empathy, which is what narcissists—it's another key trait that narcissists lack is empathy. And why is that? Why does that happen? Because they grow up being so hyperaware of what's going on around them when they're growing up, needing to read the room, being so aware of their parents' feelings and emotions, right? Because they basically need to take care of their parent. It's what I call an upside-down family, right?

So, they grow up with this radar for other people's emotions. Now, sometimes it's a bit too much, right? They're so sensitive to other people that they don't take care of themselves. Now, some recent research is telling us—this isn't exactly what you asked—like, well, how do we create narcissistic kids? Right? And we kind of know how—you know, we have some ideas of how this happens. We either overindulge kids or like every little thing you do is, “Oh my gosh, you know, you just drew, you know, a flower!”

[00:37:43] **John Moe:** “It’s the best flower in the world!”

[00:37:44] **Dr. Stephanie Kriesberg:** “The best flower in the world! You're a Picasso. You can do no wrong.” There's no limits. You know, you worship your kid. That is actually not so good for kids. Right? So, that can lead to sort of a sense that—you know, you just overindulge them, that can lead to a sense of entitlement. They get anything they want. We need to watch out for this in certain aspects of our culture.

But also, the kid—the opposite end of the spectrum, who's sort of ignored, treated coldly. He is only as valuable as his last achievement. “Well, you know, you are only taking four APs, not five APs? Well, you know, that's not good enough.” And you know, we see a lot of those kids too, right? “You got into Harvard and Yale, but you didn't get into Princeton? Sorry. You know—we're not—that's not good enough.” Those kids also learn to feel like—have to

create this brittle shell of self-importance around themselves. And that's actually been—we've been starting to validate that in some research.

[00:39:00] **John Moe:** So, for someone who has been in a relationship with a narcissist, a child of a narcissist, a partner, close relationship, is healing available? And if so, how do you go about getting recovery?

[00:39:16] **Dr. Stephanie Kriesberg:** I mean, that's a good question. I would really—when you do a search for a therapist, I would, you know, definitely put that in the search to make sure that somebody really has some experience with that. And talk to them about it. And if you don't feel like you're really being understood, you know, it's okay to go someplace else.

You don't wanna have a therapist—this is what I hear a lot in my practice—who says, “Oh, you know, she's your mother. She's old. You know, just be nice to her.” I'm not saying, I tell people don't be nice to your mother! But just kind of wanna just sweep everything under the rug. Who can't really understand the complexity. If you are looking for a marital therapist, it's super important that you have someone who understands this. Because the narcissistic spouse—man or woman—can come into the session and be super charming, and it is really easy for the therapist to get sort of bamboozled.

[00:40:23] **John Moe:** So, what does the work look like then? What—you find a therapist that works; you find somebody who understands it. What does the work look like for the client?

[00:40:31] **Dr. Stephanie Kriesberg:** The work could look like, first of all, talking about it. Depends on the person—talking about some of these experiences. People really have to, at first, just process them. Because most people say, “I have never talked about any of this before. You know, it's all been secret.” And they have felt isolated with this. Okay? Then, maybe starting to make some connections between, “Oh, you know, maybe one of my problems and maybe one of the things I deal with is that I overreact in certain situations, or I isolate in situations when I really wanna be with people.” Let's start to make some links between what does this remind you of, what shows up, and then let's learn some real skills. Whether it's breathing or grounding yourself, you know, learning to ride the wave of your emotion so you can have something, some real tools to help you do the things that you wanna do in the here and now and create a life that has meaning to you.

[00:41:38] **John Moe:** Dr. Stephanie Kriesberg, thank you so much for being with us.

[00:41:41] **Dr. Stephanie Kriesberg:** Well, thank you, John. And I just wanna thank you for the really wonderful work that you do.

[00:41:48] **Music:** “Building Wings” by Rhett Miller, an up-tempo acoustic guitar song. The music continues quietly under the dialogue.

[00:41:55] **John Moe:** Stephanie Kriesberg's book is *Adult Daughters of Narcissistic Mothers*. Next time on *Depress Mode*:

[00:42:03] **Senator Tina Smith:** Let's be honest, to be a US Senator and to talk about your own challenges with mental health feels like a big deal. Because people kind of expect us to have our act all totally and perfectly together. And as I've shared my own experience when I was younger—not when I was in the Senate, but when I was younger—I've had a lot of young people in particular come up to me and say, “Just knowing that you dealt with it makes me feel like there is some hope that I can figure out what to do as well.”

[00:42:28] **John Moe:** Senator Tina Smith, democrat of Minnesota, is with us. Hey, be sure to stop by the MaxFun store. It's at MaxFunStore.com and you can check out all the merchandise that we have available for *Depresh Mode*, including brand new the Oops Nope bucket hat. This is a bucket hat just in time for summer that features, Oops Nope, our waterfall climbing fish: the mascot of *Depresh Mode*. It's a little drawing of a fish, optimistically reaching up a waterfall, and he's wearing sweatpants. The original art was created by me.

Be sure to hit subscribe. Give us five stars, write rave reviews. All of that helps us get the show out into the world. The Suicide and Crisis Lifeline is available 24/7 for free in the United States by calling 988. The crisis text line, also free and always available. Text the word “home” to 741741. Our Instagram and Twitter are both @DepreshPod. If you're on Facebook, look up our mental health discussion group, Preshies. All sorts of great conversation happening over there. Our *Depresh Mode* newsletter is available on Substack. Search that up. I'm on Twitter and Instagram @JohnMoe. Our electric mail address is depreshmode@maximumfun.org.

Hi, credits listeners. Chewing gum while chopping onions will stop you from crying, unless you're really upset about something else, and that's why you're crying. Then gum is just gum. *Depresh Mode* is made possible by your contributions. The show is produced by Gabe Mara. Our senior producer is Kevin Ferguson. We get booking help from Mara Davis. Rhett Miller wrote and performed our theme song, “Building Wings”.

[00:44:11] **Music:** “Building Wings” by Rhett Miller.

I'm always falling off of cliffs, now

Building wings on the way down

I am figuring things out

Building wings, building wings, building wings

No one knows the reason

Maybe there's no reason

I just keep believing

No one knows the answer

Maybe there's no answer

I just keep on dancing

(Music continues under dialogue.)

[00:44:47] **Abigail:** Hi. This is Abigail from Mountain View, California. And I wanted to remind you that your feelings are valid.

[00:44:57] **John Moe:** *Depresh Mode* is a production of Maximum Fun and Poputchik. I'm John Moe. Bye now.

(Music ends.)

[00:45:07] **Sound Effect:** Cheerful ukulele chord.

[00:45:08] **Speaker 1:** MaximumFun.org.

[00:45:10] **Speaker 2:** Comedy and culture.

[00:45:11] **Speaker 3:** Artist owned.

[00:45:12] **Speaker 4:** Audience supported.