

## Being Your Parent's Parent

Many adult children of narcissists have told me the same thing, that they feel more like their parent's parent rather than their child. When they were growing up, it was expected that they were to take care of their parent, not the parent take care of them.

Many narcissistic parents confide in their child about adult matters such as their marital problems or sex life. They often expect the child to listen when they need to talk & sometimes even expect their child to fix the problems. This backwards & sick situation is known as parentalizing a child, parentification, emotional incest or covert incest. We'll call it parentalizing in this video.

Although being a parent's confidant may not sound so bad, it is devastating to a child. The child feels it's her duty to make that parent feel better when the parent is upset, to fix her problems or even be a mediator in her parent's failing marriage. That is an unimaginable amount of stress for a child to feel! It also means that child will grow up with an overdeveloped sense of responsibility for those in her life. She ends up getting used & abused because of that. She also may suffer with anxiety, depression & repressed anger.

I grew up in this parentalizing environment. When I was a child, my parents fought a lot, & if I wasn't in the room when it started, they'd often come to where I was & fight in front of me. Sometimes when I was very little, after my parents fought, my mother would grab me, lock us in my bedroom & hold me while she cried. My parents also asked me repeatedly to talk to the other on their behalf or for marital advice. Both of my parents continued this behavior right up until contact between us ended in 2016, when I was 45.

If you're in this position currently, then you need to start taking care of your mental health by putting an end to it.

To start to do that, I always recommend praying. Ask God to give you strength, wisdom, to help you get through it, & to enable to do whatever you need to do. You also need to realize that emotional incest is abuse!! You have done nothing to deserve being treated in such an awful way. You have nothing to feel guilty or ashamed about.

You don't have to tolerate it. You are well within your rights to set boundaries with your parent. With narcissistic parents, I know, boundaries are especially challenging, so you need to be creative. Ask God for creative & effective ideas. Never say things like, "It hurts me when you talk about Dad that way—please stop." Knowing something hurts or upsets you means a narcissist will either do the action more or shame you for your feelings, so it's best to be as unemotional as possible when setting boundaries. I learned this the hard way. I once told my father it hurt me when he complained so much about my mother. He said "Oh

ok.. just one more thing..." then continued talking. I timed it—he talked for 45 minutes more even knowing it hurt me, until he left my home that day.

One thing you can do is change the subject. Narcissists love talking about themselves so use that to your advantage. Ask something about a topic important to her & she'll usually go along with the subject change.

Also, limiting contact is another good option. I'm not saying go complete no contact—that is something I believe every person has to decide for themselves. But, limiting your contact with this kind of parent is smart because it removes the opportunity for these painful situations to happen so often.

When you do get together, try something different. Maybe instead of having dinner at your parent's home, go out to lunch at a restaurant you like. The change in routine can help you to feel less like a child & more like an adult, which can help you to feel stronger & more able to handle the situation.

You also need to take care of your emotions. When I first realized this behavior didn't just feel wrong, it was abuse, it was painful for me. It was more proof that I didn't matter to my parents. I was angry & sad. I felt used. Chances are, you're feeling much the same way. These emotions need to be dealt with however works best for you.

I usually talk to God about things like this. He offers comfort & lets me cry or rant without judgment, unlike many people.

Sometimes, I write things out in my journal when I don't feel like talking or praying. It helps get things out, plus, writing can bring clarity that speaking doesn't. There is something very validating about seeing your situation in writing. Writing letters that you never send is another option, if you like writing. And, when you're done, you can either keep the letter or destroy it. I burned several of mine & found it oddly cathartic watching the letters go up in smoke.

I hope & pray this video has helped you. Please take good care of yourself, & remember, you have the right to protect yourself from parentalizing behaviors!