

The cycle of abuse Lenore Walker (1979) coined of tension building, acting-out, reconciliation/honeymoon, and calm is useful in most abusive relationships. However, when a narcissist is the abuser, the cycle looks different.

Narcissism changes the back end of the cycle because the narcissist is constantly self-centered and unwilling to admit fault.  Their need to be superior, right, or in charge limits the possibility of any real reconciliation. Instead, it is frequently the abused who desperately tries for appeasement while the narcissist plays the victim. This switchback tactic emboldens the narcissist behavior even more, further convincing them of their faultlessness. Any threat to their authority repeats the cycle again.

Here are the four narcissistic cycles of abuse:

* **Feels Threatened.** An upsetting event occurs and the narcissist feels threatened. It could be rejection of sex, disapproval at work, embarrassment in a social setting, jealousy of other’s success, or feelings of abandonment, neglect, or disrespect. The abused, aware of the potential threat, becomes nervous. They know something is about to happen and begin to walk on eggshells around the narcissist. Most narcissists repeatedly get upset over the same underlying issues whether the issue is real or imagined. They also have a tendency to obsess over the threat over and over.
* **Abuses Others.** The narcissist engages in some sort of abusive behavior. The abuse can be physical, mental, verbal, sexual, financial, spiritual or emotional. The abuse is customized to intimidate the abused in an area of weakness especially if that area is one of strength for the narcissist. The abuse can last for a few short minutes or as long as several hours. Sometimes a combination of two types of abuse is used. For instance, a narcissist may begin with verbal belittling to wear out the abused. Followed by projection of their lying about an event onto the abused. Finally tired of the assault, the abused defensively fights back.
* **Becomes the Victim.** This is when the switchback occurs. The narcissist uses the abused behavior as further evidence that they are the ones being abused. The narcissist believes their own twisted victimization by bringing up past defensive behaviors that the abused has done as if the abused initiated the abuse. Because the abused has feelings of remorse and guilt, they accept this warped perception and try to rescue the narcissist. This might include giving into what the narcissist wants, accepting unnecessary responsibility, placating the narcissist to keep the peace, and agreeing to the narcissistic lies.
* **Feels Empowered.** Once the abused have given in or up, the narcissist feels empowered. This is all the justification the narcissist needs to demonstrate their rightness or superiority. The abused has unknowingly fed the narcissistic ego and only to make it stronger and bolder than before. But every narcissist has an Achilles heel and the power they feel now will only last till the next threat to their ego appears.

Once the narcissistic cycle of abuse is understood, the abused can escape the cycle at any point. Begin by coming up with strategies for future confrontations, know the limitations of the abused, and have an escape plan in place. This cycle does not need to continue forward.