separateness and individuation from others, and how she perceives and feels about others. We will focus on these revealing behaviors and attitudes and begin to understand their impact on relationships, how their growth and development are lacking and how this growth can be facilitated, and how this lack of growth and development is unconscious and not known to that person. It is the last point that can present difficulties for others in a relationship, as the person with immature or undeveloped narcissism is unaware that she exhibits behaviors and attitudes reflective of an earlier stage of development and tends to be oblivious of the impact these have on others.

The information and strategies you will find in this book can be of enormous help to you in your interactions with your parent and in your everyday life. But no book can take the place of working with a competent mental health professional who can guide your personal development. That work can produce the deep understanding and personal changes you may desire, and I encourage you to seek out this expertise and guidance. This book will be an excellent starting point and ally in your journey, but nothing can fully substitute for professional help.

The Self-Absorbed Parent

Self-absorption occurs when there is a continual and extreme focus on one’s self in almost every situation and circumstance. Actions by self-absorbed people are based
on their needs most or all of the time, even when some acts seem to benefit others. This book presents this continual and extreme self-focus as a Destructive Narcissistic Pattern (Brown 1998, 2001, 2006).

Following are the behaviors and attitudes that are descriptive of a DNP. Read the descriptions through first, and then complete the rating scale that follows.

- **Grandiosity:** The person tends to see herself as a sort of superwoman, with unreasonable expectations for her success, performance, wealth, and the like. She feels she must win all of the time and that she knows what’s best for others.

- **Entitlement attitude:** This attitude is one that assumes that everyone is just an extension of her self and therefore others are under her control and just exist to meet her needs, even unspoken ones. Others are not recognized as separate and distinct individuals. She expects and demands preferential treatment and feels that her needs should receive priority over the needs of others.

- **Lack of empathy:** She is indifferent to the impact of her critical, demeaning, and devaluing comments and remarks but simultaneously expects others to be empathic to her. She constantly blames others for mistakes and what cannot be changed.

- **Extensions of self:** Since the person does not
recognize others as separate from her, she expects favors but does not return them. She gives orders and expects these to be promptly carried out, and expects others to read her mind and know what she wants without having to speak. She asks intrusive personal questions and tells others what they should or ought to do, but she doesn’t respect others’ property or boundaries.

- **Impoverished self:** The behaviors that signal the impoverished self includes constantly decrying how she is deprived, left out, and minimized, even when there is no evidence to support this perspective. She can be self-depreciating but will become angry or hurt if others agree. She uses put-downs of herself in an effort to get others to disagree.

- **Attention seeking:** Most of these behaviors and attitudes are easily seen as the person usually or always does some or all of them. She not only speaks loudly, she talks a lot. She enters and exits rooms noisily, dresses to attract attention, and makes grand gestures.

- **Admiration seeking:** These behaviors are those that are constantly done for public approval and approbation, which the parent craves as external signs of worthiness, superiority, and the like. She boasts and brags about accomplishments and
promotes herself for awards and other recognitions. She responds to flattery but does not recognize insincere compliments.

- **Shallow emotions:** This person expresses and experiences few emotions, usually only anger and fear. She has the words for feelings, but these are empty.

- **Envious:** This person displays envy when she says and does things that reflect resentment of others’ success, accomplishments, possessions, or opportunities, and feels that she is more deserving. Feelings of envy can trigger the impoverished self.

- **Contemptuous:** Contempt is a part of feeling superior, where the person thinks that others are less deserving, worthwhile, or valuable. She will make negative and demeaning comments about others’ value and worth, such as poor people not deserving assistance.

- **Arrogant:** This attitude of feeling vastly superior to others can be seen in behaviors such as talking down or patronizingly to others. She is not shy about letting others know that she perceives them as inferior and makes frequent references to her superiority.

- **Empty at the core of self:** The empty person perceives relationships as existing for her convenience and hops from relationship to
relationship, never able to make real connections. She is unable to form and maintain meaningful, satisfying, and enduring relationships, becomes very anxious when alone, and seems to crave or need activity.

- **Reverses parenting and nurturing:** The child is made responsible for the parent’s well-being instead of the usual reverse expectation. Behaviors that signal this attitude include statements like the following: “If you loved me, you would…”; “I love you when you…”; “Don’t you want me to love you?”; “You make me feel good when you…”; “I don’t like it when you disappoint me”; “Can’t you ever do what I want or need you to do?”

- **Basks in the child’s reflected glory:** This parent demands that the child become and do what she desires, for example, by excelling in athletics and school achievement or displaying other talents. The child must be very successful or the parent will be displeased. She is indifferent to or ignores the child’s desires.

- **Intolerant of child’s values, needs, and so on:** She cannot perceive the child as a separate and distinct individual but only as an extension of her. She cannot tolerate disagreement or any hint of criticism, as she should always be perceived as
perfect, and blames the child for perceived imperfections and mistakes.

- **Exploits others:** This behavior and attitude are also reflections of an inability to perceive and relate to others as separate, different, and worthwhile individuals. Others are perceived as existing for her benefit and subject to exploitive behaviors, such as taking unfair advantage of others, manipulating others to get her own way, and assuming unearned credit.

Assess your parent on the items below using the following ratings and the previous definitions.

**The Parental DNP Scale**

5—Very much like your parent; always or almost always
4—Often like your parent; very frequently
3—Sometimes like your parent; many times
2—Occasionally like your parent; infrequently
1—Not at all like your parent; never or almost never

1. Grandiosity   5 4 3 2 1
2. Entitlement attitude   5 4 3 2 1
3. Lack of empathy   5 4 3 2 1
4. Extensions of self  5 4 3 2 1
5. Impoverished self  5 4 3 2 1
6. Attention seeking  5 4 3 2 1
7. Admiration seeking  5 4 3 2 1
8. Shallow emotions  5 4 3 2 1
9. Envious  5 4 3 2 1
10. Contemptuous  5 4 3 2 1
11. Arrogant  5 4 3 2 1
12. Empty at the core  5 4 3 2 1
13. Reverses parenting and nurturing  5 4 3 2 1
14. Basks in the child’s reflected glory  5 4 3 2 1
15. Intolerant of child’s values, needs, and the like  5 4 3 2 1
16. Exploits others  5 4 3 2 1

**Scoring:** Add your ratings to obtain a total score. Use the following as a guide to understanding the ratings.

**65–80:** The parent has considerable behaviors and attitudes reflective of a DNP.

**49–64:** The parent has numerous behaviors and attitudes reflective of a DNP.

**33–48:** The parent has some behaviors and attitudes reflective of a DNP.

**17–32:** The parent has a few of the behaviors and attitudes reflective of a DNP.
0–16: The parent has almost none, or none, of the behaviors and attitudes reflective of a DNP.

What you probably realized from completing this scale is that your parent had some characteristics but not others, or at least she had lower ratings on some items. But if your ratings for your parent totaled 49 or more, then you perceive her as having numerous characteristics reflective of self-absorption. Later in this chapter, you will find descriptions for various types of self-absorbed parents, and your parent’s behavior and attitudes can be reflected in a particular type. But it’s important to remember that these descriptions and categories are not definitive. They are used for ease of discussion.

The Child Who Assumed Parent Responsibilities

The self-absorbed parents described here have many of the characteristics described in the scale and, in addition, have a conscious or unconscious expectation that their children are responsible for their, the parents’, welfare instead of the reverse. Children growing up under these circumstances experience all or most of the following. These children:

- Exist as extensions of the parent
- Remain under parental control even as the children