“Until you realise how easily it is for your mind to be manipulated, you remain the puppet of someone else’s game”

Evita Ochel

It is said that we are all guilty of using manipulation on occasion, instead of communicating what we want in a direct way.

There is a big difference between someone who uses manipulation to get what they want from time to time, and a narcissistic personality who lacks empathy and manipulates in a planned way for their own personal gain, no matter the cost to someone else.

They attempt to hide who they really are by creating a likeable – often charming – persona, but their malicious intentions stay active behind the mask. These individuals are detrimental to the mental health of anyone who has close contact with them. They have nothing to offer in a relationship such as love and intimacy. There is no way to change them.

Emotional manipulation wears down your confidence and self-worth and damages your trust in your own perceptions. You might feel like you’re going insane.

With your defences weakened you are vulnerable to even more manipulation. A skilled emotional manipulator gets you to put your sense of self worth into his or her hands.

Once you’re tricked into making that grave mistake, they chip away at your identity and wreak havoc on your psychological health and cause serious harm.

A malicious manipulator knows your vulnerabilities (like addiction, or fear of being alone), they hide their aggressive intentions and are ruthless because they don’t care what harm comes to you.

Manipulators count on your trust in them and your doubt of yourself and others. They make you feel strong emotions like guilt, fear, love and shame so you can’t think clearly or see what they are doing. That’s how they get away with it. Its important that you are wary if you are feeling one of these strong emotions that makes you vulnerable to manipulation.

**Puppet Masters**

Emotional manipulation can be so subtle and undercover that it can control you for a long time before you figure out what’s happening.

As your strings are pulled this way and that, you do just what the puppet master wants you to do. You think you are acting of your own free will but you are not.

You probably know something is wrong but you’re not quite sure what it is. You might even suspect you’re being manipulated but might not be quite sure how its being done.

**If you are in a relationship and notice any of the following signs, there is a high probability you are being manipulated:**

(tick / highlight the signs you recognise)

* Your joy at finding love has turned into the fear of losing it. Your feelings have gone from happiness to anxiety, sadness and even desperation.
* Your mood depends on the state of the relationship and you are experiencing extreme highs and lows.
* You’re unhappy in the relationship, yet you dread losing it because you’re blissfully happy every now and then.
* You feel like you’re responsible for ruining the best thing that happened to you, but you’re not sure how.
* Your relationship feels very complex, although you don’t know why. When you’re talking to others about it, you might find yourself saying, “Its hard to explain. Its just really complicated.”
* You continually obsess about the relationship, analysing every detail in a desperate attempt to figure it out.
* You never feel sure of where you stand with your partner, which leaves you in a perpetual state of uncertainty and anxiety.
* You frequently ask your partner if somethings wrong. It really does feel if something is wrong, but you’re not sure what it is.
* You are often on the defensive. You feel misunderstood and have the need to explain and defend yourself.
* You seem to have developed a problem with trust, jealousy, insecurity, anger or overreaction, which your partner has pointed out to you on many occasion.
* You feel ongoing anger or resentment for someone.
* You have become a detective. You scour for information about your partner / keep a close eye on his or her social media accounts / feel a need to check their internet search history, texts or emails.
* When they are not at home, you have a desire to prove their whereabouts as you worry about where they really are.
* You feel that you don’t know how to make your partner happy. You try hard but nothing seems to work, at least not for very long. You used to make them very happy and you don’t know what’s changed.
* You feel frustrated about not being able or allowed to talk about things that are bothering you.
* You don’t feel as good about yourself. You feel less confident, less secure, less intelligent, less sane, less trusting, less attractive, or in some other way less than you were before.
* You always feel you’re falling short of your partner’s expectations. You feel inadequate.
* You often feel guilty and find yourself apologising a lot. You keep trying to repair damage you believe you’ve caused. You blame yourself for your partner pulling away from you.
* You carefully control your words, actions and emotions around your partner to keep him or her from withdrawing their affection again.
* At times you erupt like an emotional volcano with anger, frustration. You vow that you will stop, but no matter how hard you try it keeps happening.
* You do things you aren’t really comfortable with or that go against your values in order to make your partner happy and keep the relationship intact.

**Why would anyone stay in a relationship that causes self-doubt, confusion and frustration?**

**Firstly**, it didn’t start out this way. In fact, it probably got off to an amazing start. He seemed perfect – maybe even your soul mate – and the honeymoon phase was bliss. When things took a turn for the worse, you had no idea what was really going on. So, you tried to regain what was once so promising and wonderful. Because you’ve been manipulated into blaming yourself for the problems, you hang on and desperately try to repair the damage you believe you’ve caused and regain your partner’s love. Your loyalty seems to pay off and you are once again close and loving... for a while. It becomes a cycle.

**Secondly,** manipulation builds slowly, as they create uncertainty going back and forth from giving you what you crave and then threatening to take it away.

Are they using their charms and behaviour to control you?

Are you hurting in this relationship?

If the answer is yes, its time to untangle yourself from the toxic strings that control you so you can get your life back.

Emotional manipulation is emotional abuse. A person who controls your feelings and behaviour does not value or respect you or care about your wellbeing. Leave the relationship if at all possible, involvement with a skilled manipulator can result in serious and lasting harm.

Only you can decide whether a relationship is worthwhile or if it is detrimental to you and needs to end.

1. **Intermittent Reinforcement**

**“The less often the crumbs of love are offered, the more hooked you are. You become conditioned like a rat in a cage.”**

This is one of the most powerful manipulation techniques. This way the manipulator motivates the victim to behave, think or feel the way they want them to.

The manipulator gives the victim **positive reinforcement**

* (eg. attention / praise / appreciation / affection / sex / declarations of love) -

only on a random basis, then they withhold it to make you uncertain, anxious and longing. This doubt and fear makes you then desperately seek these acts again and again to ease your worry. When positive reinforcement is given its very powerful. It feels like a reward. It floods the brain with dopamine and other feel – good neurotransmitters and hormones. **It creates addiction**.

If you’re a victim of this tactic, you will sense the manipulator is withdrawing. He or she is not giving you the attention and affection that they used to, and you will fear that something is wrong and that you are losing them. If you ask them if something is wrong, the will deny it, or blame you.

At some point, he or she will act once again like the attentive, romantic, interested or loving person that they once were. Your anxiety and doubt are relived and you’re on top of the world. But then they withdraw again, and you’re consumed with anxiety once more.

By using **intermittent reinforcement**, he or she will have you riding an emotional rollercoaster, your moods and emotional wellbeing depend on whether the manipulator is withholding from you or rewarding you.

The manipulator does this on purpose to increase his or her power and control over you and make you desperate for their love, attention or approval. Now, like the lab rat, you live for the rare crumbs of affection you are thrown. The rat thinks of nothing else and neither will you.

In response, your bond with the manipulator becomes stronger, along with your desire to please them and your fear of losing them.

This is malicious manipulation at its worst.

1. **Negative Reinforcement**

You behave in some way that the manipulator does not want you to…

Maybe you see your friends on a weekend, or you refuse to participate in a sexual activity you’re not comfortable with.

In response, they behave in a way that hurts you, such as withholding affection or giving you the silent treatment. The manipulator stops withholding affection or giving you the silent treatment when you start acting the way he wants, such as giving up seeing your friends or engaging in the sexual activity that he desires.

It’s very simple, the manipulator knows you are likely to give in eventually, in order to stop his or her hurtful actions.

1. **Backing Into an Emotional Corner**

You always overreact! You’re unstable! You have a problem with anger! You’re crazy!

A manipulator will say such things on purpose, after causing you to have an emotional meltdown. The purpose is to confuse you and cause an emotional scene that will distract you from an issue you confronted them about.

Have you ever tried to talk to them about something they did that upset you? But somehow you are now the problem because they’ve painted you as emotionally unstable? This tactic gives the manipulator more power and control.

Perhaps he did something that made you suspicious or angry. The manipulator does not want to face up to the issue you raised, so he confuses it by turning the focus onto you, using your emotions against you. He doesn’t mention the issue you brought up; instead he immediately shifts the focus to your apparent insecurity or jealousy or suspicious nature, which he says is unacceptable.

You become defensive, frustrated and upset. The manipulator seizes on your emotional upset, and says something like, “You’re always raising your voice, you know I won’t accept that kind of abuse.” Or “Is it PMS time again?” or “You’re not trying to pick another fight, are you?” or “I can see you’re headed towards one of your meltdowns.” This is to make you even more frustrated and more emotional.

The manipulator will tell you that he can’t deal with this anymore, that he is becoming tired of your drama and your overreaction. At this point (if you haven’t already) you will have an emotional meltdown and then collapse into frustrated crying. Then the manipulator will announce that you’re unstable or crazy or abusive or that you have an anger management problem, and says that he will leave you if you don’t get a grip.

The manipulator backed you into an emotional corner, and as he predicted you came out swinging.

He will then **storm off** in pretend/fake anger and begin a long drawn out episode of the silent treatment, which is yet another way to avoid the real issue that you raised in the first place.

You are **ashamed** of how you acted and feel disappointed in yourself. You can’t understand why you keep going off the deep end. You will come to **believe** that you actually do have an emotional problem and that its **you** that is ruining your previously wonderful relationship.

You vow to yourself not to let it happen again, but putting a lid on your frustration only guarantees that your buttons will be even easier to push the next time.

Without knowing it, you enter a vicious circle with no way out.

When you’ve been backed into an emotional corner, acting out does not mean you’re crazy or that you have an anger management problem. It means that you’re a **normal** person reacting to an intensely stressful situation. But when you have an emotional reaction to that stress, you’re made to believe that you have a problem.

Your emotional reactions to manipulation are not the problem – the manipulation is the problem.

This is psychological warfare at its lowest.

1. **Shifting the focus**

Shifting the focus usually happens along with the tactic of backing into an emotional corner, but it can happen even if you confront a manipulator in a matter-of-fact way without emotional drama, and he or she has something to hide.

With this tactic, you attempt to talk about a concern you have with the manipulator, such a suspicion that they are lying to you. Instead of dealing with what you’re saying, they deny your allegations and pretend they are **absolutely shocked**! that you could even think such a thing about them, and start talking about the “real problem” - your supposed character flaw, such as insecurity, jealousy, or that you have trust issues. Since this is another tactic that makes you believe that its your fault that the relationship is in trouble, you learn not to ask questions and instead doubt your suspicions and yourself.

When you are deep in the confusing world they create, normal rules don’t seem to apply anymore.

1. **Premature Disclosure**

Did they tell you personal things about themselves early on?

Eg, their thoughts, feelings, goals, fears, dreams, embarrassments, successes and failures.

A manipulator does this to create a false sense of intimacy (love), to gain your trust, so you feel bonded with them.

They do it so you reveal secrets about yourself in return. You will feel vulnerable, that they might reject you, but then they are so understanding, you feel like they are your soul mate and you trust them completely.

1. **Triangulation**

Triangulation is devious and effective.

The manipulator creates a triangle between you, him and some third person outside of your relationship. Its to make you feel insecure about the relationship and you feel more eager to please him to keep him around.

They might:

Casually talk about an old flame or someone from work.

Flirt with someone in front of you.

Or make subtle comparisons between you and the other person.

If you confront them, they will deny any interest in other person and tell you that the problem is your **insecurity** or low **self esteem**. Where have you heard that before?

Often the manipulator will be grooming the other person as his next target, while conveniently using that person to degrade and manipulate you at the same time.

Eg. A manipulator might flirt with another woman in front of you so he can build his relationship with her while causing you to behave jealously, which can then be used against you and possibly a reason to end the relationship with you.

In a **healthy** relationship, you know where you stand with your partner.

A manipulator creates an ongoing sense of uncertainty to torment you.