Emotional Manipulators

How to Identify Them and Avoid Their Influence

Pamela Ableidinger, Ph.D.
Psychologist
Here is a working definition of an emotional manipulator*:

*A person with greater emotional intelligence than his or her victim who uses this emotional intelligence to covertly manipulate (subtly and subconsciously) the vulnerabilities of others for his or her own personal satisfaction/gain with total disregard for the needs of their victims.

Emotional manipulators can show up in our lives in a variety of roles and relationships: partners in love relationships, bosses, abusive friends or coworkers, parents with children and adult children with parents. Often people who use emotional manipulation do so behind the mask of love, concern, dedication and friendship while using guilt, button-pushing, subtle anger and many types of covert ploys to get their way and keep their victims in place. The emotional manipulator skillfully fineses that fine balance of giving skimpily to their victims while receiving so much more in return. They are masters at convincing others to believe that everything they do, they do to benefit another, hiding their entirely self-satisfying motives.

The intention of this report is to help you recognize these emotional manipulators and minimize their destructive influence in your life.
10 Types of Emotional Manipulators

Does anyone in your life fit any of these descriptions?

1. The Constant Victim

No matter what happens with this person, this emotional manipulator is always the victim.

They claim they've been victimized by you or others in order to get what they want. They use fabrication and exaggeration to prove they've been taken advantage of. This is someone who tends to fail often only to blame their failure on someone else. They perpetually place responsibility outside of themselves.

2. One-Upmanship Expert

This type of manipulator always needs to gain the higher ground.

They can quickly identify the vulnerable spots within people, then use “put downs” to make others feel inferior. While these people can be openly arrogant, that’s not always the case. But they are often quick-witted and clever, and use these qualities to come across as “better” than you, but always at your expense.

While they may not be aware of it, their inner beliefs go something like this: “If I get one up on you, I have proven my value. If I belittle you, I receive status.”
3. Powerful Dependents

These people hide behind the guise of being weak and powerless, but they gain considerable power over those upon whom they depend.

Because of their learned helplessness, they turn to you to do things for them. They start relationships by appearing inadequate and then appreciating all the wonderful assistance they get from you. They make you feel good about helping so they can manipulate you into helping them even more. If you should resist this kind of manipulation, they will quickly go from nice to nasty in order to get you to cooperate.

Some things you might hear a Power Dependent say are:

“It’s not a huge bother for you to give me a hand with this, is it?”

“It seems like such a little thing, I don’t understand why you are getting so upset.”

“My entire life sucks.” (Therefore, I need your help)

And when they get nasty: “You’re just like the rest. I can’t count on you.”

4. Triangulators

Triangulators get other people involved in a disagreement, and they want you to take their side. They essentially say: “I appreciate you and am so glad you’re on my side against what this terrible person is doing to me.”

The Triangulator creates alliances in order to attack others. They want to hurt someone emotionally or retaliate against someone because they feel wronged, and your job is to join in the attack or agree with their point of view. They love to turn people against each other because in doing so, they get one-upmanship as a team. But they’re in charge of that team.
5. **The Blaster**

The goal of the Blaster is to prevent you from confronting them about issues that need to change or be dealt with in some way. Because they want to continue their behavior and/or dysfunction, they will try to throw you off the topic by blasting you with their anger or a multitude of other unrelated issues.

You feel suspicious about their behavior; they've been up to something, but you don't know exactly what it is. It could be an affair, embezzlement at work, credit card debt or an addiction. When you confront them about your concerns, they rant and rave. They pick at your doubts and try to convince you that you're the one with the problem, that you have trust issues. Mostly, they want to change the topic by turning the spotlight of blame on you. When they finally get caught, their story changes and they project the blame onto the confronter.

The Blaster has an incredible need to deny their problems, continue their hidden behavior, resist any change and manipulate others to go along with this denial. Their motto is: deny, deny, deny and derail, derail, derail.

6. **The Projector**

The Projector has a dysfunctional issue, but they believe other people have this dysfunctional issue, not them. They truly believe that their bad quality is your bad quality.

“You're so controlling,” says the controlling person.

“You only think of yourself,” says the self-centered person.

“You have such a problem with lying,” says the person who lies.
“You have a problem perceiving reality,” says the person denying reality.

Because they can be so convincing, they can turn others against you. They get many secondary gains with their accusations, including never being responsible for their own behavior. They continually see you as the problem and themselves as the innocent victim.

7. The Intentional Misinterpreter

The intent of the Intentional Misinterpreter is to ruin reputations of others to enhance their position with friends, family or co-workers. They have a need to be the absolute favorite person, so they intentionally misinterpret information, give partial truths and share slanted information in order to garner favor.

They are very good at appearing trustworthy, friendly and fun. They are usually hard workers and make themselves invaluable to others. In their mind, they feel justified in changing or slanting a story, and when caught, they often use tears to stop the confrontation.

8. The Flirt

The Flirt is very manipulative and uses flirtation to get what he or she wants.

A very superficial person, the Flirt often has a strong need to be the center of attention. “Look at me! Be attracted to me.” Often, Flirts were the preferred children within their family and that need to be preferred and admired continues into adult life. Some are very sexually active or use sexuality to get what they want. It’s not unusual for this kind of manipulator to draw someone in with their flirtations and then quickly look around to see if
anyone is watching them. Because once they've manipulated a person, they want to connect with others.

9. **The Iron Fist (Intimidator):**

The Iron Fist uses force and heavy manipulation games to get what they want.

The Iron Fist believes in forcing others to bend to their desires. To manipulate, they use their physical presence combined with a threatening attitude. Or they might use their intelligence to enforce extreme pressure or their intelligence with hidden pressure. Some are heavy-handed abusers who simply see force as a tool to get what they want. Their desires are the only priority, and they will destroy anyone who doesn’t give them what they want.

10. **The Multiple Offender**

Most people who are emotional manipulators are a blend of any of the previous types described above.

Do You Recognize Any of These Manipulative Tools?

**The Guilt Trip:**

The “Love” guilt trip: “If you love me you will . . .”
The “Moral” guilt trip: “If you were a good person, you would . . .”
The “Victim” guilt trip: “You know what I’ve been through. Can’t you just . . .”
The “Friend” guilt trip: “If you were a real friend, you would . . .”
These guilt trips are laced with cognitive distortions; they come with half-truths. Each guilt trip pierces the heart of the target’s self doubt and deep need for love, approval or affiliation.

**Tools of Victimization:**

“I am not responsible.” (someone else is.)

**Tools of the Powerful Dependent:**

“If you give me what I want, I will love you. If you don’t, I won’t.”
(conditional love)

They try to convince you that something is wrong with you.

They use a tiny trace of disappointment when you say no, which sways you to cooperate.

They mention what other people have done for them, how nice these people are and what a nice connection they have with those people.

**The Progression of Irritability:**

Do you recognize this progression of irritability?

“Something needs to change.”

“You are not changing fast enough. I said something needs to change.”

“If you don’t want my wrath, make sure I get what I want.”

**Other tools:**

“You misunderstood my motives. I was doing all this for you.”

“I am so disappointed in you.”

“God meant us to be together,” or “I can’t do this without you.” – A tool to convince you that you are the special one.
“You’re weird!” – as a smoke screen
“You’ll never find anyone as good as me.”
“I am the best you will ever get.” – A way to use fear to manipulate.

“So, What Can I Do?”

The most basic tool you have to deal with an emotional manipulator is to move from denial to awareness. For instance, from the above descriptions, did you recognize any relationships in your life where you are being emotionally manipulated? Before any change can happen, you must first recognize that you are being manipulated and how, i.e., I am being manipulated by this person, in this way, in these circumstances and it feels this way.

Begin to pay attention to what is happening in your relationships, whether it be an intimate love, family, friend or work relationship. What is being said? Be aware that in any manipulation there is usually a lie, so identify the lie. And lies come in many forms:

A direct lie: out and out untruth.

An exaggeration: “You’re the only one who can make this happen.”

Distorting the truth: “You always want to be with your friends and never with me,” or “You’re weird.”

A lie by omission: “I wanted you to be there” (yet not admitting to the fact they didn’t make the call to invite you.)

A cognitive distortion: “I thought I could count on you, but I guess I can’t trust you either.”
Next, in these relationships, pay attention to **how you feel**. Are you feeling positive about yourself when you’re with this person or do you feel down about yourself? Do you feel generally feel uplifted or do you walk away from the interactions doubting yourself, feeling less than the other, afraid, confused or insecure?

Know that it is possible to get unhooked from emotional manipulators. Look next to **your intention** with respect to the relationship with the manipulator. “Do I want this to stop or am I ok with it?”

And here comes the most difficult part: you can’t change the other person, you can only change yourself. Ask yourself, how are you willing to change/proceed in order to not be manipulated? Ultimately, it takes courage to do this. Sometimes, you may need to end the relationships while in other cases, you can work through them with the other person. But this still requires confrontation and change.

This whole process of identifying the manipulator, the form of manipulation, the lie, how you feel, your intention, and then having the courage to confront and make changes in yourself is challenging and difficult to do on your own.

If you want help with this, I encourage you to call me or another professional to work through these issues. I wish you the very best in your journey.

About Dr. Pam Ableidinger

Known to her clients as “Dr. Pam,” Dr. Pam Ableidinger earned her doctorate in psychology at Adelphi University in New York. In 1977 she co-founded and became Clinical Director of the Family Institute of Berkeley Therapy and Counseling Center where she trained both the staff and interns. In addition to her duties as Clinical Director, she saw individuals, couples, families and groups as clients and produced workshops that featured leading national and international therapists, such as Carl Whitaker, Virginia Satir, Sal Minuchin, and many others.

Additionally, Dr. Pam worked as a consultant to a major corporation in San Francisco in their Employee Assistance Program where she led workshops, worked intensively with the staff and offered special services to the public as a psychologist. It was here that she gained experience in the corporate world as well as learning about abuse in the workplace.

Dr Pam started her private practice, Ableidinger Psychological Services, in 1989 and then in 1991 added more responsibilities when she became the San Francisco affiliate of the John Bradshaw Inpatient Center through the Center for Creative Growth. She immersed herself in the groundbreaking work of John Bradshaw, noted author, workshop presenter and leading expert in the dysfunctional family, healing the inner child, codependency and shame reduction.

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Dr. Pam’s extensive training, combined with her more than 35 years as a successful psychologist, has allowed her to excel at helping people resolve both long-term and short-term issues. Known for her compassionate understanding, direct interaction, smart guidance and sense of humor, Dr. Pam integrates a vast array of psychological training and experience into her work. She has a rich background in systems theory (family systems, family of origin), humanistic, transpersonal, Gestalt and Buddhist psychology. She also calls upon her experience in other specialties, such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy and is certified in EMDR therapy.

Today, Dr. Pam has a full psychotherapy practice in San Francisco. Her years of professional and personal experience give her the wisdom and perspective to fully understand and empathize with her clients. She knows how to meet them where they are, even if it’s in the dark tunnel of confusion, pain and doubt, and then lead the way to healing, clarity, confidence and joy.

Pamela Y. Ableidinger, Ph.D.
Psychologist
Psy 7156
1155 Pine Street, Suite 2
San Francisco, CA  94109
(415) 928-2133
drpam@drpamsf.com