

Psychopath Free: Recovering From Emotionally Abusive Relationships with Narcissists, Sociopaths, & Other Toxic People

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“No hurt survives for long without our help, she said & then she kissed me & sent me out to play again for the rest of my life.” – Brian Andreas, *Story People*

1 Introduction

1.1 An Adventure

“Finding yourself involved with a psychopath is an adventure, that’s fore sure. It will open your eyes to human nature, our broken society, &, perhaps most important of all, your own spirit. It’s a dark journey that will throw you into spells of depression, rage, & loneliness. It will unravel your deepest insecurities, leaving you with a lingering emptiness that haunts your every breath.

But ultimately, it will heal you.

You will become stronger than you could ever imagine. You will understand who you are truly meant to be. & in the end, you will be glad it happened.

No one ever believes me about that last part. At least, not at 1st. But I promise you, it's an adventure worth taking. One that will change your life forever.

So what is a psychopath? How about a narcissist or a sociopath? They're manipulative people – completely devoid of empathy – who intentionally cause harm to others without any sense of remorse or responsibility. & despite some differences between each disorder, the bottom line is that their relationship cycles can be predicted like clockwork: Idealize, Devalue, Discard.

Years ago, this cycle had me thinking I'd never be happy again. Falling in love had somehow wiped out my entire sense of self. Instead of being joyful & trusting, I had become an unrecognizable mess of insecurities & anxiety.

But life is a lot of fun these days – mostly just running around outside in my bathing suit & eating pizza. & this is all thanks to a lucky Google search that lead me to psychopathy, which led me to the friends who saved my life, which led us to cofound a tiny online recovery community, which now reaches millions of survivors every month!

At PsychopathFree.com, we see new members join every single day, always with a seemingly hopeless & all-too-familiar tale. Left feeling lost & broken, they wonder if they will ever find happiness again.

1 year later, that person is nowhere to be found.

In his or her place, there is a beautiful stranger who stands tall & helps others out from the shadows. A stranger who takes pride in their own greatest qualities: empathy, compassion, & kindness. A stranger who speaks of self-respect & boundaries. A stranger who practices introspection in order to better conquer their own demons.

So what happened in that year?

Well, a lot of good stuff. So much that I had to write a book. I might be biased – actually, I definitely am – but I think PsychopathFree.com has 1 of the coolest healing process out there. We believe in education, open dialogue, validation, & self-discovery. We have a uniquely inspiring user base, full of resilient values & honest friendships.

Yes, friendships. Because this journey is personal, but it's also remarkably universal. Whether it be a whirlwind romance, a scheming coworker, an abusive family member, or a life-consuming affair, a relationship with a psychopath is always the same. Your mind is left spinning. You feel worthless & lost. You become numb to the things that once made you happy.

I cannot fix a toxic relationship (because toxic people cannot change), but I can give you a new place to start. & I can promise that you will feel joy again. You will learn to trust your intuition. You will walk this world with the wisdom of a survivor & the gentle wonder of a dreamer.

But 1st, you'll need to forget everything you thought you knew about people. Understanding psychopathy requires letting go of your basic emotional instincts. Remember, these are people who prey on forgiveness. They thrive on your need for closure. They manipulate compassion & exploit sympathy.

Since the dawn of time, psychopaths have waged psychological warfare on others – humiliating & shaming kind, unsuspecting victims – people who never asked for it; people who aren't even aware of the war until it's over.

But this is all about to change.

So say farewell to love triangles, cryptic letters, self-doubt, & manufactured anxiety. You will never again find yourself desperately awaiting a text from the person you love. You will never again censor your spirit for fear of losing the “perfect” relationship. You will never again be told to stop overanalyzing something that urgently needs analysis. You are no longer a pawn in the mind games of a psychopath. You are free.

& now it's time for your adventure.

Love, Jackson.” – MacKenzie, 2015, pp. 7–9

2 Spotting Toxic People

“Your strengthened intuition is the greatest defense against a manipulative person. It is a skill that can never be exploited – & once learned, it will serve you a lifetime.” – MacKenzie, 2015, p. 10

2.1 30 Red Flags

“There are a lot of phenomenal studies on the traits & characteristics of psychopaths. A quick Internet search will lead you to them. The red flags in this book are intended to supplement these resources.

So what's different about this list? Well, for one, it's specifically about relationships. But it's also about you. Each point requires introspection & self-awareness. Because if you want to spot toxic people, you cannot focus entirely on their behavior – that's only half the battle. You must also come to recognize the looming red flags in your own heart. Then you will be ready for anything.

- **Gaslighting & crazy-making.** The blatantly deny their own manipulative behavior & ignore evidence when confronted with it. They become dismissive & critical if you attempt to disprove their fabrications with facts. Instead of

them actually addressing their inappropriate behavior, somehow it always becomes *your* fault for being “sensitive” & “crazy.” Toxic people condition you to believe that the problem isn’t the abuse itself, but instead your reactions to their abuse.

- **Cannot put themselves in your shoes, or anyone else’s, for that matter.** You find yourself desperately trying to explain how they might feel if you were treating them this way, & they just stare at you blankly. You slowly learn not to communicate your feelings with them, because you’re usually met with silence or annoyance.
- **The ultimate hypocrite.** “Do as I say, not as I do.” They have extremely high expectations for fidelity, respect, & adoration. After the idealization phase, they will give none of this back to you. They will cheat, lie, criticize, & manipulate. But you are expected to remain perfect, otherwise you will promptly be replaced & deemed unstable.
- **Pathological lying & excuses.** There is always an excuse for everything, even things that don’t require excusing. They make up lies faster than you can question them. They constantly blame others – it is never their fault. They spend more time rationalizing their behavior than improving it. Even when caught in a lie, they express no remorse or embarrassment. Oftentimes, it almost seems as if they *wanted* you to catch them.
- **Focuses on your mistakes & ignores their own.** If they’re 2 hours late, don’t forget that you were once 5 minutes late to your 1st date. If you point out their inappropriate behavior, they will always be quick to turn the conversation back to you. You might begin to adopt perfectionist qualities, very aware that any mistake can & will be used against you.
- **You find yourself explaining the basic elements of human respect to a full-grown man or woman.** Normal people understand fundamental concepts like honesty & kindness. Psychopaths often appear to be childlike & innocent, but don’t let this mask fool you. No adult should need to be told how he or she is making other people feel.
- **Selfishness & a crippling thirst for attention.** They drain the energy from you & consume your entire life. Their demand for adoration is insatiable. You thought you were the only one who could make them happy, but now you feel that anyone with a beating pulse could fit the role. However, the truth is: no one can fill the void of a psychopath’s soul.
- **Accuses you of feeling emotions that they are intentionally provoking.** They call you jealous after blatantly flirting with an ex – often done over social networking for the entire world to see. They call you needy after intentionally ignoring you for days on end. They use your manufactured reactions to garner sympathy from other targets, trying to prove how “hysterical” you’ve become. You probably once considered yourself to be exceptionally easygoing person, but an encounter with a psychopath will (temporarily) turn that notion upside down.
- **You find yourself playing detective.** It’s never happened in any other relationship, but suddenly you’re investigating the person you once trusted unconditionally. If they’re active on Facebook, you start scrolling back years on their posts & albums. Same with their ex. You’re seeking answers to a feeling you can’t quite explain.
- **You are the only one who sees their true colors.** No matter what they do, they always seem to have a fan club cheering for them. The psychopath uses these people for money, resources, & attention – but the fan club won’t notice, because this person strategically distracts them with shallow praise. Psychopaths are able to maintain superficial friendships far longer than relationships.
- **You hear that any fight could be your last.** Normal couples argue to resolve issues, but psychopaths make it clear that negative conversations will jeopardize the relationship, especially ones regarding their behavior. Any of your attempts to improve communication will typically result in the silent treatment. You apologize & forgive quickly, otherwise you know they’ll lose interest in you.
- **Slowly & steadily erodes your boundaries.** They criticize you with a condescending, joking sort of attitude. They smirk when you try to express yourself. Teasing becomes the primary mode of communication in your relationship. They subtly belittle your intelligence & abilities. If you point this out, they call you sensitive & crazy. You might begin to feel resentful & upset, but you learn to push away those feelings in favor of maintaining the peace.
- **They withhold attention & undermine your self-esteem.** After once showering you with nonstop attention & admiration, they suddenly seem completely bored by you. They treat you with silence & become very annoyed that you’re interested in continuing the passionate relationship that *they* created. You begin to feel like a chore to them.
- **They expect you to read their mind.** If they stop communicating with you for several days, it’s your fault for not knowing about the plans they never told you about. They will always be an excuse that makes them out to be the victim to go along with this. They make important decisions about the relationship & they inform everyone except you.

- **You feel on edge around this person, but you still want them to like you.** You find yourself writing off most of their questionable behavior as accidental or insensitive, because you're in constant competition with others for their attention & praise. They don't seem to care when you leave their side – they can just as easily move on to the next source of energy.
- **An unusual number of “crazy” people in their past.** Any ex-partner or friend who did not come crawling back to them will likely be labeled jealous, bipolar, an alcoholic, or some other nasty smear. Make no mistake: they will speak about you the same way to their next target.
- **Provokes jealousy & rivalries while maintaining their cover of innocence.** They once directed all of their attention to you, which makes it especially confusing when they begin to withdraw & focus on other people. They do things that constantly make you doubt your place in their heart. If they're active on social media, they'll bait previously denounced exes with old songs, photos, & inside jokes. They attend to the “competition's” activity & ignore yours.
- **Idealization, love-bombing, & flattery.** When you 1st meet, things move extremely fast. They tell you how much they have in common with you – how perfect you are for them. Like a chameleon, they mirror your hopes, dreams, & insecurities in order to form an immediate bond of trust & excitement. They constantly initiate communication & seem to be fascinated with you on every level. If you have a Facebook page, they might plaster it with songs, compliments, poems, & inside jokes.
- **Compares you to everyone else in their life.** They compare you to ex-lovers, friends, family members, & your eventual replacement. When idealizing, they make you feel special by telling you how much better you are than these people. When devaluing, they use these comparisons to make you feel jealous & inferior.
- **The qualities they once claimed to admire about you suddenly become glaring faults.** At 1st, they appeal to your deepest vanities & vulnerabilities, observing & mimicking exactly what they think you want to hear. But after you're hooked, they start to use these things against you. You spend more & more time trying to prove yourself worthy to the very same person who once said you were perfect.
- **Cracks in their mask.** There are fleeting moments when the charming, cute, innocent persona is replaced by something else entirely. You see a side to them that never came out during the idealization phase, & it is a side that's cold, inconsiderate, & manipulative. You start to notice that their personality just doesn't add up – that the person you fell in love with doesn't actually seem to exist.
- **Easily bored.** They are constantly surrounded by other people, stimulated & praised at all times. They can't tolerate being alone for an extended period of time. They become quickly uninterested by anything that doesn't directly impact them in a positive or thrilling way. At 1st, you might think they're exciting & worldly, & you feel inferior for preferring familiarity & consistency.
- **Triangulation.** They surround themselves with former lovers, potential mates, & anyone else who provides them with added attention. This includes people that the psychopath may have previously denounced & declared you superior to. This makes you feel confused & creates the perception that the psychopath is in high demand at all times.
- **Covert abuse.** From an early age, most of us were taught to identify physical mistreatment & blatant verbal insults, but with psychopaths, the abuse is not so obvious. You likely won't even understand that you were in an abusive relationship until long after it's over. Through personalized idealization & subtle devaluation, a psychopath can effectively erode the identity of *any* chosen target. From an outsider's perspective, you will appear to have “lost it,” while the psychopath calmly walks away, completely unscathed.
- **Pity plays & sympathy stories.** Their bad behavior always has sob-story roots. They claim to behave this way because of an abusive ex, an abusive parent, or an abusive cat. They say that all they've ever wanted is some peace & quiet. They say they hate drama – & yet there's more drama surrounding them than anyone you've ever known.
- **The mean & sweet cycle.** Sometimes they shower you with attention, sometimes they ignore you, sometimes they criticize you. They treat you differently in public than they do behind closed doors. They could be talking about marriage 1 day & breaking up the next. You never know where you stand with them. As my morning-coffee friend Rydia wrote: “They put forth as little effort as possible & then step it up when you try to disengage.”
- **This person becomes your entire life.** You're spending more of your time with them & their friends, & less time with your own support network. They're all you think & talk about anymore. You isolate yourself in order to make sure you're available for them. You cancel plans & eagerly wait by the phone for their next communication. For some reason, the relationship seems to involve a lot of sacrifices on your end, but very few on theirs.

- **Arrogance.** Despite the humble, sweet image they presented in the early stages, you start to notice an unmistakable air of superiority about them. They talk down to you as if you are intellectually deficient & emotionally unstable. They have no shame when it comes to flaunting new targets after the breakup, ensuring that you see how happy they are without you.
- **Backstabbing gossip that changes on a whim.** They plant little seeds of poison, whispering about everyone, idealizing them to their face, & then complaining about them behind their backs. You find yourself disliking or resenting people you've never even met. For some reason, you might even feel special for being the one he or she complains to. But once the relationship turns sour, they'll turn back to everyone they once insulted to you, lamenting about how crazy you've become.
- **Your feelings.** Your natural love & compassion has transformed into overwhelming panic & anxiety. You apologize & cry more than you ever have in your life. You barely sleep, & you wake up every morning feeling anxious & unhinged. You have no idea what happened to your old relaxed, fun, easygoing self. After a run-in with a psychopath, you will feel insane, exhausted, drained, shocked, & empty. You tear apart your entire life – spending money, ending friendships, & searching for some sort of reason behind it all.

You will find that normal, loving people do not raise any of these flags. After an encounter with a psychopath, most survivors face the struggle of hypervigilance: Who can really be trusted? Your gauge will swing back & forth for a while, like a volatile pendulum. You will wonder if you've gone absolutely mad – wanting to believe the best in an old friend or a new date, but feeling sick to your stomach when you actually spend time with them because you're waiting for the manipulative behavior to start.

Developing your intuition is a personal process, but I would leave you with this: the world is mostly full of good people, & you don't want to miss out on that because you've been hurt. Spend some time getting in touch with your feelings. Keep tweaking until you find a comfortable balance between awareness & trust. Look within & understand why you felt the way you did when you were with your abusive partner & how you felt before you met them. You will discover that many old relationships may need revisiting. & as you begin to abandon toxic patterns, healthier ones will inevitably appear in their place.

To quote a longtime member & friend, Phoenix, you will stop asking “Do they like me?” & start asking “Do I like them?” – MacKenzie, 2015, pp. 10–17

2.2 What Is Normal?

“If your “soul mate” went from fascinated to bored in the blink of an eye, this is not normal. If you were called jealous & crazy by someone who actively cheated on you, this is not normal. If you were desperately waiting by your phone for texts they once initiated on a minute-by-minute basis, this is not normal. If all of their exes were “bipolar” or “madly in love” with them, this is not normal. Psychopaths are parasitic, emotionally stunted, & incapable of change. Once this individual is gone from your life, you will find that everything begins to make sense again. The chaos dissipates & your sanity returns. Things will be normal once again.” – MacKenzie, 2015, p. 17

2.3 Beware the Vultures

“You are taking the 1st steps to recover from a toxic relationship with a psychopath. That's great! The work you'll be doing will not only free you from the grasp of your abuser, but it will also enable you to reclaim yourself – the self that was trampled on, beaten down, & transformed into a shell of who you once were. I know it may be difficult to face some of the truths we'll be exploring, but it's also empowering, as you'll see how much you've survived, how strong you really are.

As you begin this work, I strongly encourage you to seek out a recovery professional or a healing community. You'll need the support &, at times, an encouraging reminder that you're on the right path.

I'd like to extend a special warning to those of you who are new to recovery. After psychopathic abuse, you're going to be extremely raw & vulnerable. As you start to put the pieces together, you'll feel devastated, miserable, & angry. It's overwhelming.

You're probably used to repressing your emotions & dealing with things on your own. But this time, everything is out in the open. You're dependent like a newborn child, seeking out someone – anyone – to understand what you're going through.

In general, it's important to be open with your emotions. But at your most insecure moments, you may unknowingly open the floodgates for more abuse.

It's no mystery that survivors seem to attract more pathological people like magnets. As you frantically share your story, you latch on to the quickest & most sympathetic ear – anyone who claims to understand you. The problem is, these people do not always have your best interests at heart.

Those willing to listen to your psychopathic story for hours on end are, unfortunately, not likely to be people who are truly invested in your recovery. They are most likely “vultures.”

Vultures often seem exceptionally kind & warm at 1st. They want to fix you & absorb your problems. They are fascinated by your struggles. But sooner or later, you will find yourself lost in another nightmare. They begin drowning you in unsolicited advice. They need constant praise & attention. You are never allowed to disagree with them. They feel off drama & an insatiable need to be appreciated by others.

You will find that they lash out as you become happier. They perceive your progress as a threat to their control. They want to keep you in a perpetual state of dependency. They do not want you to seek help from anyone except them.

Whether these people are pathological or not, you don't need this toxic garbage after what you've been through.

I would strongly urge all survivors to avoid seeking out new friendships & relationships for at least a few months. You must get to the point where you no longer need – or want – to talk about your abuser anymore.

When you do need help, stick to professional therapy or recovery communities & services. These people know what you've been through, & you're going to find that all of them are willing to help – with no strings attached.

I understand the temptation to go out & meet new people. You're looking to start rebuilding your life. You want to surround yourself with kinder & more genuine friends.

& you will.

But real friends won't be acting as your therapist, & they definitely won't be rambling on about their ability to empathize & care. Their actions should speak louder than their words.

It takes a long time to start building healthier relationships. It takes breaking old habits, forming new ones, developing your intuition, & finally coming to understand what it is that you want from this world.

So be on the lookout for vultures. In the writing world, there's a universal rule called "show – don't tell." This rule also applies to people. If you encounter someone who's constantly telling you who they are, how much they want to help you, how they will make things right for you, take a step back & look at their actual behavior. Manipulative people are always "telling" because they have nothing good to show. Their inappropriate & dishonest actions never actually match up with their promising words, causing an overwhelming cognitive dissonance in the people who trust them.

You will find the decent, humble human beings aren't trying to tell you who they are & what they can do for you. They simply show it through consistent love & kindness. You never need to question them, because their intentions are always pure. Vultures, on the other hand, are really acting out of self-interest; they want to be praised & adored. In an argument, a "teller" will frequently remind you of how well they treat you, even after blatantly hurting you. A "show-er" will simply share their point of view without trying to twist the conversation in their favor. Avoid those who tell you how nice they are, how generous they are, how successful they are, how honest they are, & how important they are. Instead, search for the quiet ones who show these qualities everyday through their actions." – MacKenzie, 2015, pp. 17–19

2.4 The Constant

"You know about psychopaths. You've got the red flags. So now the big question: *Are you really involved with a psychopath?*

Well, barring any major scientific advancements, you really can't know for certain whether or not someone has a conscience. In fact, I don't think there's any approach that will allow you to spot a psychopath with 100% confidence.

Fortunately, there's a different way to keep yourself safe. & this one involves looking within. It will work with anyone, anywhere, anytime. It's a question with answers – lots of them.

"How are you feeling today?"

Seriously, I'm asking you. Because most people might respond with a vague "fine" & follow up with a casual comment about their weekend, a promotion at work, or their favorite television show.

But what about you? Perhaps you're feeling empty? Broken? Hopeless? Maybe you woke up with that constant aching in your heart, eating away at your soul like a cancer. You spend the day trying to keep your thoughts free from painful topics – only to find that your mind keeps racing right back to them. Memories that once brought you so much joy now make you feel sick. You oscillate between anger & depression because you are unable to decide which one hurts less.

Those are answers.

So when you feel those things after a relationship, *does it really matter if your ex was a psychopath, a sociopath, a narcissist, or a garden-variety jerk?* The label doesn't make your feelings any more or less valid. Your feelings are absolutes. They will endure, no matter which word you settle upon.

& here's what you know from those feelings: someone uprooted your life, introducing a new kind of anxiety that you've never felt before. They've introduced you to a whole range of horrible emotions that make each day seem unbearable. During the relationship, you may have felt constantly on edge & unhinged, worried that any mistake could mark the end of your dream. Maybe you found yourself desperately comparing yourself to other people, trying to win back your rightful place by your partner's side.

So I ask you again, *does it matter if they are a psychopath by definition?*

You already have everything you need to know – from your own feelings. You felt horrible around them, right? So during the relationship, why wasn't that enough to confirm that they should have no place in your life?

Because you were groomed & idealized. You were tricked into falling in love – the strongest of all human bonds – so that your feelings could be more easily manipulated.

Toxic people condition us to ignore our intuition, & we must learn to trust it again. Instead of judging outwardly, we need to perceive inwardly. When we start focusing on our own feelings, this is where the heading begins. & if you are anything like me, we can agree on this simple truth: good people make you feel good & bad people make you feel bad.

Everything else falls into place from there.

Don't listen to the folks who say your feelings should be totally independent of the world around you. If you've got an open heart, that's impossible. As human beings, we have this incredible gift – the ability to make another person feel wonderful. With a word, a gesture, or a quiet smile. It's what makes the world beautiful. Some people would call this love.

But you experienced an abuser, someone who manipulated this gift in order to cause pain. & now you want to know how to avoid people like this so it'll never happen again. You're worried that you've become hypervigilant – untrusting of everyone & everything around you. You feel that you need a little something extra. Something beyond your intuition.

So this is where I'd like to introduce the idea of a Constant. Your Constant will comfort & protect you throughout this book, & for the rest of your life.

Think of someone you love. Someone who consistently inspires & never disappoints. It could be anyone – your mom, a close friend, your children, your cat, a deceased relative. Really, anyone. You might feel that you have no Constant. Of course you do; you can even dream one up. Imagine a higher power in your mind – one that brings peace to your heart. Colorful, glowing, & full of life. Embodying all of the qualities you admire most: empathy, compassion, kindness. A gentle spirit who will always keep you safe. & voilà, you have a Constant.

So now that you've got a Constant in mind (tangible or imagined), I have some questions. Does your Constant make you feel unhinged? Anxious? Jealous? Does your heart rise up into your throat when they speak to you? When you're away from your Constant, do you spend hours analyzing their behavior & defending yourself from hypothetical arguments?

Of course not.

So why is that? Why can one dismissive person make you doubt everything good going on in your life? What's the difference between your Constant & the people who make you feel like garbage?

If you can't answer these questions quite yet, you're not alone. & that's the beauty of it all. You do not need to understand why you don't like being around a person. You have a Constant, & that's all you need to know for now. Self-respect comes later.

Your Constant is a private reminder that you are not crazy, even when it feels like you're taking on the entire world. With time, you will begin to filter out the people who make you feel bad. You realize that you do not need to put up with negativity when there is a Constant who brings out the best in you.

Once you become more comfortable with the idea, you'll be ready to ask the most important question of all: Shouldn't I feel this same kind of peace with everyone in my life?

Absolutely. So let's get started." – MacKenzie, 2015, pp. 19–22

3 The Manufactured Soul Mate

"Perhaps most insidious of all the psychopath's evils: their relationship cycle, during which they gleefully & systematically wipe out the identity of an unsuspecting victim. Cold & calculated emotional rape." – MacKenzie, 2015, p. 23

3.1 Personalized Grooming

3.2 Identity Erosion

3.3 The Grand Finale

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References

MacKenzie, Jackson (2015). *Psychopath Free: Recovering From Emotionally Abusive Relationships with Narcissists, Sociopaths, & Other Toxic People*. Expanded Edition. Berkley Publisher, p. 304.