

# Are you being manipulated? Here is what you can do about it

People encounter manipulative behavior all the time in the office, at home, and in relationships. Learn to identify such behavior and protect yourself from it.

Have you ever had this feeling that you were 'used' or 'manipulated' by someone? Maybe you felt that way after your partner forced you into doing something you did not want to do by making you feel guilty in some way. Or maybe your friend promised you something but refused to remember any such agreement when you brought it up later.

Manipulative behavior comes in different shapes and sizes and most of us encounter it at some point in our lives. When you're a victim of manipulation, you end up feeling sad and frustrated for having been treated that way. If it goes on for too long, it can severely hamper your mental health.

That is why it is an essential life-skill to know about manipulation and have the ability to identify it and shield yourself from it.

## What is manipulation?

Manipulation is when a friend, partner, family member, or colleague invokes a certain kind of emotion in you to force you to comply with their wishes.

This definition can be confusing. What about the colleague who always greets you with a smile and maintains eye contact whenever he asks you for help on a project? Don't we all do something similar on a daily basis?

The key distinction between acceptable (often desirable) and negative forms of manipulation is that the latter always involves one person avoiding vulnerability and exercising *power* over the other person. This kind of manipulation leaves the victim with no choice and with a boiling pot of frustration, anger, and low self-esteem.

## Why do people manipulate?

It may seem to you that anyone trying to manipulate you is doing so out of ill-intention and selfishness. While this may be true in cases with people who are narcissists, sociopaths, or have borderline personality disorder, more often than not there are other reasons.

Some people are unable to communicate directly and honestly, and this deficiency in communication skills makes them seek manipulative ways of getting their desires fulfilled. Some

do it out of fear of being abandoned or due to an unwillingness to accept blame and responsibility for their own actions.

Politicians and companies try to manipulate large groups of people to make them act in a certain way, i.e. vote for them in the election, or buy their products.

## How can you identify signs of manipulation?

An important step in protecting yourself from manipulation is to identify signs or 'red flags' of manipulation before you are pulled into it. Here are some common manipulation tactics that you should be on the lookout for in your relationships, at the office, and even at home.

### **Getting too close too quickly**

If you've just started a new romantic relationship and your partner showers you with loving gestures, promises, and expectations from the get-go, you need to be wary. This could be a way to make you lower your guard so that you can become vulnerable to manipulation.

### **Exploiting insecurities**

If you're repeatedly reminded of your insecurities and made conscious of your limitations, you'll become an easy target for someone who wants to use you for their own ends.

This could either be in the form of an advertising company that makes you feel 'fat' to sell you lose-weight-fast schemes, or a partner who holds on to you by telling you that no one else could possibly like you the way they do.

### **Being passive-aggressive**

People who are passive-aggressive often avoid communicating their concerns and preferences directly to you, bottling up their resentment and letting it leak out in other situations.

For example, a friend may not want to go on a movie plan with you, but instead of refusing to go and saying 'no', he will become passive-aggressive and manipulate you by getting late, acting uninterested during the movie, and noting how it was a waste of time.

### **Gaslighting**

Gaslighting is when someone makes you question your memory and understanding of reality and the past. They will often do this to avoid taking responsibility for their own actions, fulfilling a promise made earlier, or owning up to their words.

An example of gaslighting is when your boss promises you a raise for working on a difficult project but forgets to honor the promise and reminds you that the company is in a difficult position and cannot afford to give you a raise. All this does is make you feel irresponsible for asking for a raise in the first place (as if you were the one who did so).

# How to protect yourself from manipulation

It is difficult to identify manipulative tactics all the time - they come in so many different forms that regardless of how educated and careful you are, you might end up falling prey to one. However, there are several strategies you can use to reduce the effect of manipulation and safeguard your wellbeing and interests proactively.

## **Communicate clearly and directly**

Make a conscious effort to tell your friend, partner, family member, or colleague what you think about their behavior with you, and what your preferences are. Instead of talking to other people about how someone hurt you, go and tell that to the person who did.

This will help you maintain a standard of communication that the other person will have to meet as well. If they don't, you'll know that they are passing over into the manipulation zone.

## **Define and protect your boundaries**

Spend some time thinking about what kind of behavior *crosses the line* for you. Maybe it's when someone starts making fun of your insecurities, or talks behind your back instead of directly to you.

In situations like these, make it clear to the other person that you are not going to entertain such behavior. Explicitly tell them what your boundaries are, and let them know that they do not have the right to exploit or break them.

## **Stay safe, and keep others safe**

Your mental health will really appreciate it if you keep yourself safe from getting manipulated by others, but be self-aware as well. What if you are the one manipulating someone else in a relationship, and not the other way round?

Be careful about your behavior as much as you will be about that of others.