



Recognizing and Resisting Emotional Manipulation

Rather than asking directly for what they want, emotional manipulators figure out how to exploit other people to get their way. This dysfunctional dynamic can cause a significant amount of confusion and pain to the people who are involved with them.

It is crucial that you recognize emotional manipulation so that you can resist it and refuse to let it work. Jesus advised the disciples to be on their guard with people who wanted to hurt them; he even warned that some would be family members (Matthew 10:17; 35). This admonition is pertinent to everyone who is in a difficult relationship with someone who is exploitive.

Four Types of Emotional Manipulators

Dependents. These people project their helplessness onto you and make you feel responsible for them. When you try to hold them accountable for themselves, they make you feel guilty for expecting them to take care of themselves. They may try to make you feel sorry for them by reciting their bad luck and difficult circumstances along with a “woe is me” attitude. When you accept their incompetence and helplessness and let them get away with being irresponsible, you are being emotionally manipulated.

Intimidators. The intimidators use their power and position to threaten you into compliance. They do this through threats, anger, withholding, and punishment. They threaten to hurt you, themselves, or others. They know what you fear and will exploit those fears. They know how to exploit your doubts and weaknesses to get you to give in. When people use their power to get you to give in to their demands, they are using intimidation.

Projectors. The projectors accuse you of being emotionally manipulative and of having the characteristics that they have. An angry person will accuse you of being angry, an unfaithful person will accuse you of being unfaithful, a selfish person will accuse you of being selfish, a liar will accuse you of lying, an avoider will accuse you of avoiding, a controller will accuse you of being controlling, and a mean person will accuse you of being mean. When you find yourself being accused of something you aren't and recognize the person is actually that way instead, you are dealing with a projector.

Pretenders. These people pretend not to understand what you are saying or to hear your concerns. They may accuse you of saying and doing things you aren't saying or doing. They are experts at changing the subject, turning things against you, and making you the bad guy. They will call you a nag for bringing things up about them; call you selfish for asking for what you want; and call you controlling for confronting them. They are experts at using manipulation to convince you that they don't get your concerns, and as a result, will never deal with them.

Emotional Blackmail Techniques

Emotional manipulators blackmail you with anything that they know is important to you. Here are some ways they do it:

Threats

They threaten to do or not do something that you want or value. Threats can include loss of the relationship, financial loss, revealing secrets, holding resentments, imposing consequences, treating you badly, or blaming you for the outcome. An example would be, "If you don't do what I want, I won't cooperate with you. I will/won't do _____ and you know that is important to you." Threats induce fear in you which motivates you to give in to avoid whatever you dread.

Victimization

Emotional manipulators play the role of the victim. You are supposed to excuse anything they do and give in to all their demands because they are the victim of difficult circumstances, mistreatment by others, bad luck, or your actions. They are experts at pity parties. The emotional manipulator pretends to be the victim of mistreatment by wallowing in self-pity. Some examples of things you will hear are: "No one helps me." "I always get bad breaks." "I'll never be able to survive this." "No one understands." If you begin to see the person as a victim, then you will likely give in because you feel so bad.

Guilt

When people want you to feel guilty, it is because they are using the guilt to convince you to do what they want. The guilt is usually focused on an area that you have self-doubt in and already feel guilty about. Here are some examples: "A loving Christian wife wouldn't treat her husband this way." "You don't love me or you would help me. What parent would throw a child out on the street?" These will get to you if you already doubt that you are a good Christian, a good wife, or a good parent.

Triangulation

It is easier to get you to back down or give in when you feel you are outnumbered. By bringing in another person to support his/her position, you will be more likely to question and doubt yourself. This uses the power of another person to get to you. Here are some examples: "I've talked to all my friends and none of their parents do this." "Dad agrees with me." "The pastor/elder says you are wrong."

How to Resist Emotional Manipulation

Here are some things you can do that will help you resist the manipulation:

- ❖ Stop trying to change emotional manipulators. They are highly resistant to change.
- ❖ Know your weaknesses and how you are usually pressured to give in.
- ❖ Don't use emotional arguments. Stick to the facts instead.
- ❖ Don't expect to win arguments or convince the person you are right and he/she is wrong.
- ❖ Don't try to defend yourself. It won't work.
- ❖ Stop the manipulative interactions as quickly as you can, so you won't get worn down and give in. Use short responses, end the conversation, or leave.
- ❖ Know your boundaries and stick to them.
- ❖ Limit the time you spend together, if you have that option.
- ❖ Don't take the threats personally. Detach from them by recognizing that the emotional manipulator is using pressure tactics to get you to give in.
- ❖ Work on getting stronger by knowing what you believe and who you are.
- ❖ Share the interaction with someone else to get validation that the person is being emotionally manipulative.
- ❖ If it is possible without causing the situation to escalate, let the manipulator know that what was said was outrageous and unacceptable.

This is not easy to do at first. You will learn to do it slowly and incrementally. And it will always take vigilance and strength to resist emotional manipulation, but as hard as it is to do, it is necessary and right.