

# Do You Use Manipulation in Your Relationships?

## Objective

To identify ways to be less manipulative within your relationships.

## What to Know

Manipulation is more common than you might think—from the occasional passive-aggressive comment to regularly gaslighting someone—many of us can be manipulative to some degree, and we may not even realize it.

What does manipulation look like in relationships? It is a tactic used to trick others into behaving in a certain way, whether it is giving you something or doing something for you. You may not be direct or entirely honest.

Many types of behaviors can be considered manipulative, with varying degrees of severity. Instead of simply expressing what it is you are thinking, feeling, wanting, or needing, you fail to take responsibility for your own feelings and handle them in a mature way.

Here are nine ways you might be manipulative without even realizing it.

- 1. You try hard to get a certain outcome.** You may do whatever it takes to get what you want, even at the expense of other people. Rather than taking no for an answer, you maneuver the situation to go your way.
- 2. You have a hard time directly expressing your needs.** You may be unable or reluctant to say what you feel or need.
- 3. You project insecurities or self-loathing onto others.** *Projective identification* is an unconscious form of manipulation, and people may internalize your assessment of them and believe it is true.
- 4. You lie.** You may stretch, avoid, or ignore the truth.
- 5. You attempt to make people feel guilty.** It is okay to express hurt and disappointment, but if you do so to get something out of it, it is manipulation.
- 6. You fail to keep promises.** Promises without follow-through is manipulative behavior.
- 7. You do nice things—with expectations.** You may be skilled at “reading” people to see what you need to do for them so they will do what you want. You may rarely do things for others unless there is something you can get out of it. If you are only doing things because you expect it to come back to serve you, that is manipulation.
- 8. You punish others if you fail to get your way.** Maybe you punish others by withholding affection or making a passive-aggressive social media post. If you respond negatively to things not going your way—and take it out on others by punishing them—that is manipulation.

**9. You are extremely persuasive.** Do you try to persuade people to do what you want or to behave in a certain way? Manipulative people have a keen understanding of the tactics that wear people down.

**10. You always get your way.** Do things always seem to go your way? If you disagree with someone, do you walk away getting what you want out of it? Do people seem to do what you want them to do? If you are unaware that this is what you are doing, you may think this is just what naturally happens. But you may be behaving in a way that is manipulating others to do what you want to keep you happy.

**11. You change your behavior to connect with others.** If you change the way you dress, talk, or act when around certain people to fit in with them and get them to do what you want, that is manipulative behavior.

**12. You purposefully confuse people.** You know that if you can talk quickly or use other techniques, others may not understand exactly what is happening. If they are too insecure to admit it, you might be able to get them to agree to something that they did not mean to.

Manipulation is damaging to relationships because when you manipulate people, you are taking advantage of them. It can also be a form of abuse, especially when practicing emotional manipulation. Others may not want to continue developing a relationship with you, or they may begin to resent you.

If you manipulate people, you can increase your awareness of your actions, conversations, and intentions. Changing behavior is not an easy task, but it's possible if you are determined. Here are some things that you might consider doing:

- **Focus on Repairing Your Relationships** – If you realize you manipulate people that you are still in some form of a relationship with, sincerely apologize. Let them know you do not like how you acted in the past and you are working on making improvements. Ask them to be honest with you if they feel you are manipulating them in the future. They may need to see your behavior is changing before they trust what you say.
- **Identify When You Manipulate Others** – Become aware of the behaviors you typically use. You might need to stop yourself when you start blaming others or stop yourself when you prepare to lie to get your way.
- **Control Your Emotions and Thoughts** – You can learn how to control your thoughts and regulate your emotions.

This worksheet is designed to help you develop self-awareness around manipulative tendencies and learn how to reduce them. Recognizing and addressing manipulative behavior is essential for building healthier and more authentic relationships.

## What to Do

Reflect on past situations in which you may have exhibited manipulative behaviors. Manipulation can manifest in various ways, including lying, deception, guilt-tripping, passive-aggressiveness, or emotional manipulation.

List specific instances below:

Situation 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Situation 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Situation 3: \_\_\_\_\_

For each situation listed above, provide a detailed description of the manipulative behaviors you engaged in. Describe what you said or did that you now recognize as manipulative.

Situation 1: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Situation 2: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Situation 3: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Reflect on the motivations that drove you to employ manipulative tactics in the situations above. Common motivations include a desire for control, fear of rejection or conflict, or the pursuit of a specific outcome. Describe the motivations behind your actions in each situation.

Situation 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Situation 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Situation 3: \_\_\_\_\_

Identify the specific manipulative tactics or strategies you used in the situations listed above. This may include tactics like gaslighting, playing the victim, or withholding information. Write down the tactics you employed in each situation.

Situation 1: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Situation 2: \_\_\_\_\_

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Situation 3: \_\_\_\_\_

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Consider alternative responses and communication strategies that could have been more honest, direct, and respectful in the situations mentioned. How could you have expressed your needs or feelings without resorting to manipulation?

Situation 1: \_\_\_\_\_

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Situation 2: \_\_\_\_\_

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Situation 3: \_\_\_\_\_

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Reflect on how your manipulative behavior affected both your own emotions and the emotions of others in those situations. Did it lead to mistrust, resentment, or damage to your relationships? Describe the emotional consequences.

Situation 1: \_\_\_\_\_

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Situation 2: \_\_\_\_\_

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Situation 3: \_\_\_\_\_

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Recognizing and addressing manipulative tendencies is an essential step toward building healthier relationships. By gaining insight into your motivations and practicing alternative, healthier communication strategies, you can work to reduce manipulative behavior and improve your connections with others.

### **Reflections on This Exercise**

Did this activity help you become less manipulative? Why or why not?

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What was challenging about this exercise? Be specific.

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Did anything surprise you about this exercise? If so, describe.

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How helpful was this exercise? \_\_\_\_\_  
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

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