

## Toxic Relationships

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You can tell if a relationship is toxic when spending time with someone drags you down, belittles you or makes you feel hurt, angry, and miserable. Some people think of a “toxic relationship” as the most dangerous kind of relationship – one that only involves abuse or addictions. These are, in fact, harmful characteristics of any relationship. However, the signs of a toxic relationship are often more subtle and less obvious. The underlying basis of any toxic relationship involves insecurity. Two common insecure relationship positions include what I will refer to as “Controllers” and “Dependants.”

### ***Controllers as Toxic:***

Involvement with a very controlling person is a sure sign of a potentially toxic relationship. For the controlling person, the offender is insecure and must have control. He (or she) does not feel strong enough as a man (or woman). He has an excessive need to always be in charge. He makes all the decisions and defines the relationship on his terms. The “controller” has an authoritarian attitude, blames others and denies any personal problems. He typically fears intimacy. He assumes he is right about everything and takes his mate for granted. A controller is also known as a “taker.” A taker controls the conversation, money, activities, and all other plans. When you relate to a controller, you tend to feel drained physically, mentally, spiritually, and emotionally. You risk losing “you,” – and therein lies the danger. At his worst, a controller can be abusive and violent. If you have a controller in your life, make sure you do not allow or contribute to a toxic relationship. Insist on mutual respect and accept that you can only control yourself. In a healthy relationship, both people should view each other as equals, and demonstrate this throughout all aspects of the relationship – in actions, in words, and in attitude.

### ***Dependants as Toxic:***

Dependant people come in pairs with controlling people. A “dependant” person is insecure and weak, and doesn’t feel worthy of respect, true appreciation, and love as a valuable person. They crave intimacy but are too vulnerable to express and request their needs. They give control to others. They avoid expressing anger or any true feelings. Dependant people in toxic relationships blame their own inadequacies for any problems they may have. They have low self esteem and constantly worry about making the other person happy. They also make excuses for the controlling-type person they are involved with. In order to not be a part of a toxic relationship, the main goal for a dependant person is to separate their identity from their mates – to regain their power and control to influence and change their life.

Being in a toxic relationship may feel like you are pouring water into a vase with holes in it. What represents a “toxic relationship” to you? Here are some other signs that should be carefully examined:

## **20 Signs of a Toxic Relationship \***

- It brings out the worst in you rather than your best.
- You put much more into the relationship than you ever get out of it.
- One person gives up his or her own values and dreams to satisfy the other person. You should not have to betray yourself by setting your dreams aside for another person. That puts the relationship out of balance and infers that one person is more important than the other. When we betray our dreams and values, we betray ourselves.
- You spend all your time with only that person to the exclusion of all other friends.
- When one person becomes what he/she thinks the other wants him/her to be rather than expressing himself/herself honestly.
- Judgmental/critical/invalidating behavior – such as demeaning, cutting, and unnecessary comments.
- Excessive focus on the other person’s faults, to the exclusion of ones own.
- When you’re working so hard to please and nothing seems to work.
- When you have to ask permission for any activities outside the home, i.e., seeing friends/family, shopping, etc.
- When, no matter what you say or do, it still just doesn’t feel right, and in fact, you feel bad.
- A relationship that has some uncontrollable subconscious draw to a person.
- A relationship where it seems your passion is out of control for someone.
- Going against your better judgment and gut instinct, due to intrigue and mystery.
- Constant sarcasm, put downs, or “just joking”.
- When your close friends are not comfortable with the person you are seeing.
- Bad boundaries – when you feel you have no “voice” to say “no” or anything.
- Abuse, blaming, complaining, shaming, jealousy, possessiveness...
- When statements or actions that would normally not become controversial, turn into heated discussions. When statements meant as compliments, become points of contention. When a simple sound, loud breath, or unusual look is followed by, "What is that supposed to mean?" Some relationships contain so much built up animosity, that even harmless gestures and words are perceived as something else.
- It keeps you from experiencing the best that life has to offer (e.g., love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control, from the spiritual perspective, but also fun, romance, intimacy, friendship, caring, communication, growth, etc.)
- It brings you the worst life has to offer. (e.g., anger, fear, worry, anxiety, judgment, hate, addiction, depression, selfishness, infidelity, negativity, self-destructiveness, manipulation, abuse, conflict, etc.)

## **What is a healthy relationship?**

It is healthy, not selfish, to be clear about, and ask for what you want and need. It is healthy to hold yourself and others accountable for their words and actions. Negative feelings not expressed or acted on in a healthy, constructive way, will eventually poison the relationship. It is healthy to expect only respect and kindness from all relationships. You are worthy of nothing less. It is OK to desire and seek intimacy within healthy boundaries. Control and abuse in love is not normal. Tolerating toxic behavior is not acceptable. Positive words alone will not make a relationship. Actions should match words.

**If you find yourself feeling dependant or accepting disrespectful and toxic actions or attitudes within a relationship, the first step is to admit that. Admit your life is not working the way you want it to, or the way you deserve it to, and acknowledge the emotions and consequences of living that lifestyle. Wishing and hoping for change in someone is an empty effort. Give yourself permission to live a brilliant and abundant life! Call today for help and support.**

For more information about how to regain your relationship strength and maximize your emotional health, or to improve any relationship that may be toxic, contact Centerstone at (615) 460-4357 and ask about counseling offices in your area. Or, to request Susan Gillpatrick to speak with your group or organization, call (615) 460-4445.

\* “*20 Signs of Toxic Relationships*” is a collection of insights shared by the friends and colleagues of the author. Real people, real experiences, real reminders of what not to accept in your relationships as well.

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## **About Centerstone**

Centerstone ([www.centerstone.org](http://www.centerstone.org)), celebrating 50 years of service in 2006, is the largest behavioral healthcare provider in Tennessee and the ninth largest in the nation. A not-for-profit organization, Centerstone provides a full range of behavioral health and related educational services to individuals of all ages and their families. Centerstone is devoted to research that seeks to identify, treat and eliminate mental illness. Each year, the organization provides services to more than 45,000 individuals. The Centerstone network includes more than 60 facilities throughout the middle Tennessee region. For more information about Centerstone, please call (615) 460-4357 or toll free at (888) 291-4357.

**About Susan Gillpatrick, MEd, LPC, CTS**

Susan Gillpatrick, Centerstone Crisis Management Specialist, primarily works in the field with clients in critical incident response situations, and in Centerstone’s wellness trainings and presentations. She is also responsible for planning and implementing marketing and growth strategies for Centerstone’s Crisis Management Strategies.

In recent years, Ms. Gillpatrick worked for the Shelby County Government Victims Assistance Center in Memphis. There, she co-developed a model program for the state of Tennessee entitled, “Homicide Response.” Her work in this area received the 2000 Achievement Award from the National Association of Counties.

Ms. Gillpatrick is a Licensed Professional Counselor, Certified Trauma Specialist, Certified Workplace Conflict Mediator, and Mental Health Service Provider in the state of Tennessee and a National Certified Counselor. She is also a member the American Counseling Association, the Association of Traumatic Stress Specialists, the Tennessee Mental Health Counseling Association, and the Middle Tennessee Employee Assistance Professionals Association. She is a frequent presenter at local and national conferences, and has had numerous articles published. She received her Master of Education degree in Human Development Counseling from Peabody College at Vanderbilt University.