

How to Know If an Emotionally Immature Person Has Truly Changed: Four Signs of Lasting Change

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Emotionally immature people are like preschoolers when it comes to handling their emotions. When they feel strong unpleasant emotions—anger, frustration, disappointment, jealousy, envy, fear, sadness—they react with the fight vs. flight vs. freeze response. They react as if there is an emergency.

Their **FIGHT** response can show up as:

- Temper tantrums, including pouting, sighing, manipulating others/using others, getting loud, stomping around, swearing, and calling people names.
- Threatening to break things, or actually destroying property
- Shoving or hitting people
- Relational aggression (cattiness, gossip, trashing someone's reputation, and shunning—"you can't come to my birthday party!")

Their **FLIGHT** response can show up as:

- "Running away" emotionally.
- Withdrawing love/affection
- Withholding attention
- Giving the silent treatment (like a preschooler who pretends she can't see someone she's angry at)
- Fleeing into frantic busyness or addictions

Their **FREEZE** response can show up as:

- Passivity
- Underreacting to situations (like preschooler who is frightened of the monsters under her bed and doesn't move a muscle as she hides under her covers).

Have you have suffered because of someone's inability to handle his or her emotions in a mature way? If you have, you may wonder "how do I know for sure that someone else has truly changed and is now emotionally mature and safe to be in a relationship with?"

Or are you are someone who has struggled to handle your own emotions, perhaps lost friendships or a job or even a spouse because of your inability to manage your emotions? And

now you are wondering, “how do I know for sure that I have changed and am now emotionally mature and safe?”

Here’s a tip to know if you or someone else has changed and become emotionally mature and safe: **Look for personal accountability to know for sure if someone has truly changed and matured.**

Personal accountability refers to **the ownership of your beliefs, feelings, needs, and actions.**

Think of it as individual responsibility for:

- 1) The thoughts you have/what you think in your head
- 2) The emotions you experience/what you feel (mad/sad/glad/afraid)
- 3) The needs you have (need for time alone/affection/respect/a nap/food)
- 4) The behaviors you display/your actions

Emotionally mature people own these four things. **They don’t blame other people for what they are thinking or feeling or wanting or doing.**

Here are examples of **not** taking ownership:

- “She makes me think I don’t matter to her at all.”
- “He made me furious!”
- “She made me feel stupid.”
- “I needed to be on time for my appointment, and he made me late because he wouldn’t stop talking and let me off the phone.”
- “My teenager was talking back to me, and I had to slap her.”

All of these are examples of blaming someone else for our own thoughts, emotions, needs, and actions.

Emotionally mature people recognize that no one else can **make** you think a certain thought, or feel a particular emotion, or need something, or **make** you take a particular action. Even our legal system recognizes that unless you are mentally incapacitated or under duress, you, as an adult, are responsible for your thoughts and actions.

Here are **four signs of lasting change** in people/of emotional maturity and safety:

1) They take personal accountability for their thoughts.

“He never called on me during the meeting and made me think I was unimportant!” becomes “I chose to think I was unimportant to him when he didn’t call on me at the meeting. At the next meeting, I will speak up and share my opinion because I believe my input is important.”

Emotionally mature people take ownership for the beliefs, the opinions they hold.

2) They take personal accountability for their emotions.

“She said she didn’t like my dress and **made** me feel embarrassed in front of everyone” becomes “I felt embarrassed when she said she didn’t like my dress in front of everyone. The next time she makes negative comments about me in front of people, I will choose to see those comments as being more about her lack of social skills than my lack of fashion sense, and then I will feel proud of my own unique sense of style.”

Emotionally mature people own their feelings. We have to know what we feel to know what we need, which brings us to the third sign of lasting change.

3) They take personal accountability for their needs.

“He should have known that I was too busy to take on this project. I needed a break, and instead he asked me to add another thing on my to-do list!” becomes “I need a break so I will say ‘no’ to requests for help over the next few weeks. I will let others know that my plate is full and I need down time.”

Emotionally mature people own their needs. They don’t expect you to fill their needs as if you alone hold the responsibility to satisfy their personal needs. Emotionally mature people recognize that they are responsible for informing others about their needs while also accepting that other people can choose to not meet those needs. Once we fully embrace that we are responsible for fulfilling our own personal needs, then we can work with other people to get those needs met, rather than manipulating or coercing others to get our needs met.

4) They take personal accountability for their actions.

“She made me do it. I yelled at her because she called me a name. I had to do it because she was disrespectful” becomes “I chose to yell at her after she called me a name. Next time she calls me a name, I will choose to say ‘I don’t allow myself to be spoken to that way’ and I will leave the room.”

Emotionally mature people own their behavior choices. All of our actions come from inside us. No one can make me or you do anything that we didn’t initiate or buy into on some level. Emotionally mature people take personal responsibility for their actions.