

TOP TEN TIPS

for Handling Emotional Manipulation

Definition of Emotional Manipulation: to unfairly or deceptively influence, control, exploit, abuse, or coerce another person or situation for your own personal gain while disregarding the needs of the person or situation you are manipulating.

- 1. Give credit where credit is due.** Emotionally manipulative people (EMP) are more skilled at manipulating you than you are at detecting manipulation. Why? Because they practice their EM skills all day long while you don't have to use your EM detection skills 24/7 because most people aren't trying to take advantage of you (thank goodness!). So, acknowledge to yourself that we all get conned at some point in life, but we can educate ourselves about EM to sharpen our detection skills.
- 2. Be deaf to what EM people say and listen to what they do.** EMP are highly persuasive and effective communicators. They've figured out what words to say to get you to believe their version of reality, but reality—the truth—lives in what people do. He can pull on your heartstrings by telling you he's the victim of his crazy ex-wife who poisons the kids against him, but if his actions reveal that he rarely calls his kids and doesn't make an effort to see them, then listen to what he does and don't believe his words.
- 3. Do a heart check before you say "yes" to an EM person's request.** You need to be clear on why you are saying yes, so ask yourself "Am I doing this because it's wise and right, or because I am afraid of this person's anger, disapproval, rejection, or drama?" EM people use your fears to get what they want. Also ask yourself, "Is our relationship reciprocal or do I do most of the saying yes and giving, and they do most of the taking? Is what they want from me even reasonable?" If you aren't sure what's reasonable, ask someone whose boundaries you admire.
- 4. If you aren't sure if you are being EM by someone, pay attention to the bodily sensations you experience when you spend time with him or her.** The body doesn't lie. If you're being manipulated, your body may feel tense, heavy, or frozen. You may notice a tightness in your chest or throat, queasiness in your gut, pain in your head/neck/back, a foggy or confused feeling in your head, or a sudden feeling of heat or cold. You might sense that you are holding your breath or that you feel immobilized, off-balance, or overwhelmed. Your body knows this EM person is not safe. Listen to your body.
- 5. Note how you feel about yourself after you spend time with someone.** If you tend to feel worse about yourself, or feel increasingly unclear about who you are, or that you are somehow always the "problem" in the relationship, you are likely being emotionally manipulated.

6. **Quit making excuses for the EM person.** If you find that you are continually defending a particular relationship to your friends and family, or you find yourself habitually explaining someone else's foolish or demanding behavior ("she had a rough childhood so that's why she keeps opening up secret credit card accounts and maxing them out"), you are being manipulated into becoming a mouthpiece for the EM person's distorted view of reality. And the more you say something, the truer it sounds. So, stop making excuses.
7. **When you set limits with EMP, do it like a traffic cop would.** When you get pulled over for speeding, traffic cops calmly tell you the limit you exceeded and what the consequences are. They don't cower, apologize, ramble, waffle, yell, or condemn you. They don't get hooked into arguing about the reasonableness of the limits or consequences. They just inform you, write you a ticket, and tell you to have a nice day. So, do your best imitation of a traffic cop and calmly inform the EM person of the limit (boundary) you are setting and the consequences for violating it. For example, "If you keep texting or calling me while I'm at work or after 10 p.m. because you're upset, I will block your number. I need to focus at work and I need to sleep."
8. **Prepare for pain and pushback when you set boundaries with an EM person.** This doesn't mean you did the wrong thing by setting the boundary. The EM person simply wants you to go back to the way you were before when s/he could control you more easily. A good support network will help you maintain your boundaries in the face of pushback, so enlist a couple of healthy friends to cheer you on.
9. **It's not your job to fix EM people.** Your job is to first maintain your safety and well-being. Secondly, your job is to educate yourself about EM, practice setting healthy boundaries, develop emotional resilience, and overcome any people-pleasing tendencies. *No More Christian Nice Girl: When Just Being Nice—Instead of Good—Hurts You, Your Family, and Your Friends*, by Paul Coughlin and Jennifer Degler, is a great book if you want to learn how to set boundaries and overcome people-pleasing behavior. Galatians 1:10 is a helpful verse to meditate on and memorize: "Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ."
10. **If you've been a victim of the scorch and burn tactics EMP can use when they are displeased with someone, focus on your emotional and spiritual recovery.** You and your life are worth the investment of time, money, and energy to recover from this toxic relationship. Seek out a support group, either on-line or in person. Find a counselor. Take excellent care of your body. Isaiah 58:11 is a hope-filled promise to meditate on and memorize: "The Lord will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail."