

Is Your Relationship Toxic?

How to Identify Unhealthy Relationships in Your Life

Tampa, FL – February 17, 2009 – All relationships, whether platonic or romantic, have the potential of being toxic, and a toxic relationship may not start out as one but rather gradually develop into one over the course of time. Toxic relationships range from the extremes of domestic abuse to the friend or loved one that makes you feel bad about yourself or causes you to begin to second guess yourself. Regardless of whom they are with or how they get their start, toxic relationships are bad for your mental and emotional well being.

The first step to identifying a toxic relationship involves a close evaluation of the relationship and how you feel when you are with that person. You might be in a toxic relationship if your friend or partner makes you feel bad about yourself, criticizes you in public, makes you question yourself, or leads you to begin second guessing your opinions. **April Lott, LCSW, Community Treatment Director at Directions for Mental Health in Clearwater**, explains “A lot of people enter into relationships without the intent to put someone else down or to harm them in any way, but due to their own insecurities and self-esteem issues they feel the need to put others down to help them feel better about themselves.” Once you’ve identified a toxic relationship, it doesn’t need to be just tossed away. Instead, it should be addressed through open, honest dialogue.

Often times these toxic relationships provide certain aspects that are healthy relationship behaviors and you can benefit from them. Therefore, addressing the issues you have with the relationship by providing specific examples of the behavior that bothers you and explaining how it makes you feel is a great way to begin to set boundaries for the other party. After listening to your concerns, the other person should agree to make an effort at stopping this particular behavior so that your relationship can continue, but in a healthy manner.

Of course, any time a relationship undergoes changes it risks not surviving those changes. It is possible for you to properly address the toxic areas of a relationship to have the other person go out and recreate a similar toxic relationship with someone else. Or, it is possible, that the person receiving the toxic behavior may go out and seek a new relationship that mirrors the same toxic issues. This is because toxic relationships often stem from a person’s need to seek out this treatment because of underlying issues in their life. Sometimes these issues may be so deeply rooted in their personality that the help of a professional therapist is needed to work through their issues and begin to process them.

While you may not be gifted at identifying toxic relationships in your own life, it is often easy to identify toxic relationships that your friends or family are a part of. This is because the people in the relationship often begin to compensate for the bad parts of their relationship by focusing on the good parts that do work. Some people even begin to turn the blame inward, make excuses, defend their friend/partners behavior, or try and alter their behavior to fix the relationship.

Lott points out that there are several significant early warning signs that could indicate the beginning of a toxic relationship. One example is that your friend or loved one constantly puts you down or publicly criticizes you. Another is that they influence you to begin questioning your other friends' opinions and loyalty leading you to become isolated from other people in your life. They might try to control you by beginning to make all the decisions, telling you what your allowed to wear, or by constantly calling you and checking on where you are and what you're doing.

If you find that you are in a toxic relationship, you should take the appropriate steps to address the issues within that relationship and begin rebuilding the healthy behaviors that contribute to a well mental and emotional being. If you feel that speaking out against your friend or partner is dangerous, please seek the help of professionals who can advise you on the best ways to safely deal with your situation. For help and additional resources for dealing with abusive relationships please contact the National Domestic Abuse Hotline at 1-800-799-SAFE or <http://www.ndvh.org>.

About Directions for Mental Health Inc.

Directions for Mental Health, Inc., established in 1982, is a non-profit organization committed to helping heal the hurt in the lives of thousands of Pinellas County residents suffering from—or at risk of—mental illness. With nationally accredited programs, Directions sets the standard for best practices in mental health treatment, while making mental health care affordable and accessible to individuals and families, and building a safer, healthier community. Serving more than 8,000 people per year, Directions is dedicated to developing innovative programs that change lives, while reducing crime, homelessness, drug abuse and child abuse.

For questions about mental illness and programs, visit Directions for Mental Health's website at www.directionsmh.org or call (727) 524-4464 extension 1700.