

# coping with toxic people

You can't completely avoid them, but you can learn how to deal with them. Here are five tips.

BY ALISON MILLER, PH.D.

**They're out there** ... toxic people. Chances are you have encountered at least one toxic person in your life ... a co-worker, boss, family member, friend or maybe even a significant other. How do you recognize a toxic person in your midst? They are people who have serious problems relating to others in a healthy way. They may be intensely jealous, controlling, angry, critical or emotionally unpredictable. They may even engage in destructive behavior such as lying, physical or emotional abuse, or addictive behaviors. When you are around them you feel like something is wrong with you, that somehow you are to blame or that you are going crazy dealing with this person.

If you have a toxic person in your life, there is hope. Here is what you can do:

**1. Know the person is toxic because of his or her own issues.**

It is important to accept that a toxic person's behavior has nothing to do with you. Toxic people don't take responsibility for their psychological issues, actions or impact on others. They turn things around so you feel like you are at fault. Recognize that a toxic person is responsible for his or her own actions, and you take back your power.

**2. Work on your own self-esteem.** Toxic people can sense who is vulnerable to their negative emotions and behavior. The more you have a clear sense of your worth and value as a human being, the more you will realize that the toxic person is treating you in a way that is unacceptable and be able to stand up for yourself.

**3. Set boundaries.** A boundary is setting a limit on a toxic person's ability to mistreat or hurt you. You have the power to decide what you will and will not accept from other people in your life. An example of a boundary is saying, "I can understand you are upset, but yelling at me is not appropriate in any circumstance. In the future, I will leave the room if you behave this way."

**4. Walk away.** In many situations, the best thing you can do when dealing with a toxic person is walk away and not allow this person to hurt you anymore. If you cannot walk away, then mentally walk away. You can do that by allowing yourself to disengage and detach. Detachment is a process of mentally letting go of trying to please the toxic person or caring what he or she thinks of you. It is a skill that takes some time to learn, but once it is mastered, it can help you become stronger.

**5. Seek support.** Supportive relationships can buffer you against the toxic person in your life. Talking things over with others can help you regain perspective and a better sense of reality when it comes to dealing with toxic people. Often people you are close to are the best judges of when someone is toxic in your life. ✕

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