

Letting Go of Toxic Relationships

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Have you ever experienced this? The cell phone rings. It's a friend on the other line but you choose to hit the "Ignore" button. Why? Because talking to that friend is one sided and most times you get off the phone feeling completely drained. As women we need our "girl friends" but sometimes when that relationship is not give and take, and you find yourself extending your time, emotions, energy or money to someone who takes it for granted you may be in a toxic relationship.

Toxic relationships come in all forms. It may be a friend, your mother-in-law. Perhaps even your co-worker or boyfriend. No matter. Toxic people all have several common characteristics:

1. Toxic People Are Takers Not Givers: They ask for favors but are hardly ever available to help you out when needed. They act helpless and may say that you are the only person that they can turn to. They may make excuses for why they can't pay you back a loan.
2. Toxic People Drain Your Energy. They complain about their life yet when you give them advice they never seem to take it. They always seem to be in a state of crisis but will rarely act to change their situation and when you talk to them you end up feeling frustrated.
3. Toxic People Make You Feel Guilty: They play on your weaknesses and make you feel bad for not helping them.
4. Toxic People Consume Your Time: They need a lot of attention, handholding and your advice on simple matters.
5. Toxic People Make You Feel Bad About Yourself. They may put you down, criticize you or in an attempt to manipulate you, tell you how you may not match up to other people.

So how do you extricate yourself from a toxic relationship if you're in one?

Be Honest with Yourself: First admit that you are in a relationship that is unhealthy. Evaluate your week to see how much time you spend on the phone with this person at the expense of work, family or even getting rest. You might even count how many times you avoid taking their calls. Admit to the feelings of frustration, stress or anxiety that arise when you spend time with them.

Be Honest & Assertive with Others: You might have to let people know how they make you feel. Practice using "I Statements" in the mirror saying, "I feel hurt when you ask me for help but are not there for me when I need you." Being assertive

means to stand up for your rights, letting people know how you feel and what you would like from them. You may have to let a co-worker know that you are not willing to lend her money until she pays you back for what she owes.

Set Boundaries: This can be tough to do but it simply means saying “no” to something you don’t feel comfortable with. This might mean letting your mother-in-law know you are only available 1X/wk to take her to her appointments or letting a needy friend know you can only talk to her for 15 minutes 2X/wk and to not call during dinnertime.

Seek Positive Relationships: It is important for you to have people in your life who inspire you and bring you joy. If your toxic relationship is draining to you, choose to spend more time with people who are positive, optimistic and fun.

Ask for Advice: If you are having trouble letting go of a toxic relationship ask other people for advice. Another person might be able to give you an objective perspective on your friend’s actions. A therapist is also a trusted individual with whom you might be able to discuss your reluctance to let go of the relationship and rehearse how you might go about setting boundaries or saying goodbye.

End the Relationship if Need Be: Breaking up is hard to do especially with someone whom you care about. However, we all come to a point in our major relationships where we have to ask the question, “is it worth it?” Is it worth the time, effort and energy? If your answer is “no,” it might be time to end the toxic relationship. You should only do so after you have spoken frankly with that individual and have attempted to set boundaries and tell him or her how one-sided you feel the relationship is.

We all have to do our part of keep life simple and take care of the environment. As much as we should do to minimize the clutter in our lives we also need to weed out relationships that cause us unnecessary stress and anxiety. Doing so may at first seem painful but in the end will give you better peace of mind.

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