

Terminating a Toxic Relationship

Identifying, defining and ending toxic relationships

A Reaction Reset activity by Mary Jo Rapini, LPC



Activity Instructions: Fill out the prompts on the next few pages. This assignment is meant for someone who believes their relationship may be toxic. It's recommended that you do not fill out the entire assignment in one day but take several days to reflect over each section when you are free from distractions or stress factors.

Disclaimer: This activity is **not to be as a substitute for therapy**. You will experience the most success if you **supplement therapy with this activity**.

Toxic relationships are those that compromise your self-worth. They are one-way relationships that take from you and never return. You are always feeling some negative behavior and are blamed for the negativity. Most people do not know they are in toxic relationships because their partner/friend makes them feel like the toxicity is normal.

I. Identifying the Toxic Relationship

Instructions: Below are two sections. Complete the first section if you are an adult. Complete the second section with your child if you believe their friends are toxic. Check all that apply to you or your child, elaborating on those that apply with the corresponding prompt. Some examples are given in each prompt.

Indicators of Toxic Relationships in Adults

This person...

___ consistently makes me feel bad about myself.

- How do they humiliate you? (teasing things I like, jokingly making fun of me in public)

___ is often upset about something I do or say.

- What do they get upset at? (*when I decline an invitation out, not supporting them on an issue*)

___ tells me our problems will end if I change.

- What do they tell you to change? (*they tell me I overreact or am too sensitive, tell me I need to loosen up or be more fun*)

___ does not support any kind of personal or social growth.

- How do they ensure you stay as you are? (make fun of any new hobbies you start, react poorly to any new friendships your form)

___ won't let me end the relationship/friendship.

- **How are they entrapping you in the relationship?** (*they threaten or blackmail me, they say they will hurt themselves if I leave*)

- Have you tried ending the relationship in the past? How many times?

___ is not fun to hang-out with.

- Why? (we only do what they want to do, I always have to drive out to them)

- How do hangouts usually end? (*we always end up fighting, I usually leave feeling worse about myself*)

Indicators of Toxic Relationships in Children:

Tip: If your child is a teenager, it's likely that they will roll their eyes at filling out this handout. If that's the case, study the questions and ask them items on the checklist while you're spending time together (e.g. in the car, on a walk, at the dinner table, etc).

This person:

___ pressures me to do things I don't want to do.

- What do they pressure you to do? (skip class, copy my homework, pick on someone in class)

___ tells me I'm only cool if I hang-out with their friend group.

___ encourages disrespecting adults

- How do they disrespect adults? (encourages me to break my parents or their parents rules, makes fun of the teachers)

___ bullies or teases me even though I am friends with them.

- How are you bullied? (they make me run errands or do favors for them, they make fun of me in public, knowing I don't like it)

Here are a few more indicators that your child may be involved with a toxic friend:

Before ending a toxic relationship, it is important to accept that this person does not have your best interest in mind. Ending a toxic relationship might be a long, confusing, and painful process. You will have to defend yourself to a person who believes they're always right. Remember that your sanity is worth the fight to freedom.

- If your child's friend treats their parent or any adult with disdain, pay attention. This is not a good sign as they have issues with authority.
- The friend wants to keep secrets all the time.
- Your child's friend has angry outbursts.
- Your child begins acting out, swearing, and acting belligerent or indignant (unless someone is modeling that behavior in your home).

II. Ending the Toxic Relationship

Instructions: Fill out the prompts below either individually or with your child.

It's critical to have a support system. Name 3 friends you can trust.

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What activities can you have in place to fill time (that you used to spend with the person) or grieve the void this person fills? *Note: you may stay in this relationship because you are afraid of feeling alone or empty when/if this person is no longer in your life. Joining a support group can help you build confidence and self-esteem.*

Build your confidence by practicing self-care. Name 3 things you will do for **ONLY** yourself each week.

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Write 3 positive things you deserve out of a relationship/friendship.

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Write what you plan to say to this person when they question why you're ending the friendship. *Be honest and set boundaries that are healthy for you. Stick to the plan no matter how they try to manipulate you.*

If helping a child...

Parents: *To end these types of relationships, you need to have your child see the light and understand what is happening. Your child also needs to know they are supported by you, as these types of friends often have power over your child with other friends. It is always advised to work on changing the family dynamics so your child will become more and more difficult for his or her toxic friend to control.*

Talk to your children about what you observe from their friend's behavior. List 3 observations below.

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Set and **enforce** rules if your child acts out to impress this friend. If your child begins suffering for their toxic friend, they may wake up sooner rather than later.

- How long will you ground your kid for?
- What is your child's curfew?
- Will their phone be off limits after certain night hours?

Encourage your child to be involved in an extra-curricular activity that will fill their time that could be spent hanging out with a toxic friend. A new hobby could introduce them to new, positive friends. List 2 possible hobbies you both can agree on starting.

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Here are a few other suggestions that may help:

- **Talk with your child about their toxic friend's behavior only.** Try not to attack the friend, but say what you see and why it is unappealing. Be honest and firm with your observations.
- **Structure your child's life as much as possible.** Your child will need an excuse at times; if they are able to say, "My parents will ground me for life or take my car away if I do that," it helps them save face.
- **Many times, your child will choose to hang out with someone you don't like as a form of rebellion.** If depression, anger, or acting out become an issue, it is wise to seek counseling for your child as well as yourself. Toxic friends have the power to turn a once harmonious family into a chaotic situation very quickly.