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21 Ways to Stop Being Manipulated

by Steph Sterner

Don't give up!

Let's face it: manipulation sucks. Possibly the only thing worse than being manipulated is having to admit our dirty little secret. When we realize we've been had, we feel stupid, weak and ashamed.

And it doesn't end there. If we keep falling for their tricks, manipulators leave us with a bad feeling about the world around us. Rather than being hurt again, we may decide to trust no one. Or we may resign ourselves to the "fact" that some people are takers and others are givers. Either way, our lives are filled with fear and mistrust.

Don't give up – there is a better way! Manipulation only works when you don't see it or allow it anyway. That's why this article contains 21 things that you can do to recognize, stop or prevent it. Some of these ideas may not be possible – or even desirable – in your situation. That's OK. Every person and every situation is different. But with 21 choices, you're sure to find plenty of good ideas.

So, let's get started!

1. **Get to know yourself and your values.** If you don't know what matters most to you, you can't make decisions that work for you. And even when your decisions are good ones, you'll doubt yourself. That doubt gives manipulators the advantage they're looking for.
2. **Take a few deep breaths and ask yourself whose responsibility this is.** How often do your friends and family, even co-workers, ask you to clean up their messes? Respect yourself – and them – enough to hold them accountable. Rescuing is for children, puppies, and people trapped in burning buildings.
3. **Some people will say anything to get what they want. Stop believing them.** You know who they are ... because they've lied to you before. If you can't see through their lies when you need to, then avoid them. Totally.
4. **When someone won't take no for an answer, remind yourself that it's your answer – whether others accept it or not.** It always feels better when people agree with you – or at least accept your right to do what's best for you. But no one feels good all the time, and the price of giving in is high. If your decision is important to you, stick with it. You don't need anyone's permission to do what's right for you.
5. **Ask yourself what values are at stake, and how important they are.** There's nothing wrong with compromise and negotiation – as long as your integrity isn't on the table. Are you dealing with a simple ego issue, or is there more to consider? If going along will leave you feeling used, weak or generally “less than”, then consider your decision carefully.

6. **Take all the time you need to think about your decision.** Creating a false sense of urgency is a common manipulation tactic. And when the urgency seems real, it's often because someone other than you dropped the ball. If someone wants a commitment right this minute, tell them you're busy. Refuse to be rushed.
7. **Remember that not everyone will like your decisions, but the people who matter will respect your right to make them.** People push you really hard for one of two reasons: either their values are at stake or they're simply not interested in yours. The people who really care about you will treat your wants and needs with respect, even when it's difficult. Those who don't aren't worth worrying about.
8. **Remind yourself of the importance of tough love.** People who don't learn from their mistakes are destined to repeat them. When we protect the people we care about from themselves, they stop growing. And we keep rescuing them.
9. **Instead of doing what's fastest or easiest, think about the long-term consequences of your actions.** Manipulators are great at making their option the fastest, the easiest, or the least painful. They're also great at keeping us focused on how we're feeling right now. That's why we do things that we regret later. When you're tempted to do what feels good – or avoid what feels bad – stop and think about the future. What will this mean to you (and those you care about) tonight, tomorrow or next week? Imagine yourself dealing with the consequences, then make a decision that takes everything into account.

10. **Make sure your trust is earned.** Not everyone is as good-natured as you are. You consider everyone's needs before making an important decision. You treat people with respect. And you would certainly never pretend to be something you're not. But some people do that all day long. Go ahead and believe in the goodness of human nature – just don't assume that nothing interferes with it. Watch new people for a while and pay attention to their interactions. Not everyone is as transparent as you are.
11. **Refuse to engage with bullies.** Some people will try to intimidate you into doing their bidding. They may say nasty things about you, switch to an aggressive tone, or try to scare you into submission. Don't let them get away with it. When the conversation turns ugly, walk away. Let anyone who uses these tactics know that the conversation is over – and that it will stay that way unless you're treated with respect.
12. **Find out what's not being said.** Manipulators seldom give you the whole story. If you're being asked to make a tough decision, who benefits from it? What's the other side of the story? What's the likely fallout?

13. **End toxic relationships.** A toxic relationship is emotionally damaging. If you typically feel worse about yourself after spending time with your friend, what is that “friendship” based on? Spending time with people who make a habit of putting you down, saying things that lead you to doubt yourself or expecting you to put them first is not good for you. Walk away from them if you can. If you can't, or don't want to, then give some serious thought to the amount of time you're willing to spend with them.
14. **Don't allow others to make you responsible for their emotions.** The fact that someone feels sad, hurt or angry about something you did doesn't mean that you were wrong. If someone close to you feels hurt by your words or actions, then talk about it. Clear up any misunderstandings and apologize if you didn't consider someone's feelings. But sometimes we have to do things that others don't like. Don't change your mind or beg for forgiveness just because someone reacts emotionally.
15. **Identify your highest values in each situation and make sure that you're honoring them.** If nothing is more important to you than honesty, then don't lie for anyone. If loyalty is what matters most to you, then don't let anyone talk you into saying or doing anything that might hurt someone you care about. Consider your highest values before making any important decision and you won't end up doing things you regret later.

- 16. Take responsibility for your own problems and insist that others do the same.** Are you the person everyone depends on? Do people take it for granted that you'll be there to bail them out? The solution is simple (although not always easy): Stop taking responsibility for the mistakes of others. If someone you care about has dropped the ball, stop seeing her as a victim who needs rescuing. Consider the possibility that she's a capable adult who's simply looking for an easy way out. Let her know that you can't take on her problems, but that you have faith in her ability to sort things out. Offer to be a sounding board if she needs to explore her options. Everyone needs to grow. Don't become someone's reason not to.
- 17. Remember the price you pay for doing things that don't feel right to you.** When you let others talk you into something against your "better judgment", you don't feel good about yourself. And you resent them for expecting you to put their wants and needs before yours. This hurts both you and your relationship. Is it really worth it?
- 18. Stop running from your emotions.** Some of us are afraid of rejection. Others back down at the first hint of aggression. And others can't handle even a mild guilt trip. Notice where you're the most vulnerable and face your fear. It takes courage to deal with intense emotions like fear, guilt and low self-worth, but it gets easier over time. And the benefits last a lifetime.

19. **If something doesn't feel right, it probably isn't. Don't let anyone talk you out of your feelings.** How many times have you had that nagging feeling that something isn't right – and ignored it? And how many times have you regretted it? Trust your feelings to tell you that something's wrong. Then use your logic to figure out what it is.
20. **Remind yourself that every yes contains more than one no.** Clubbing with a friend means giving up a quiet evening at home. Making one person happy may mean disappointing someone else. And doing something you're not comfortable with means saying *no* to yourself. Before you agree to something, think about what you're sacrificing.
21. **Remember that your life is not meant to be a democracy with everyone getting a vote.** We all have different values, different beliefs and different life experiences. If you let public opinion run your life, you're likely to wake up one morning, years from now, and wonder what happened to “your” life. Other people's approval is nice, but it won't give your life meaning. And someday you'll really miss that.

Final Words

Being manipulated feels awful. And if you don't put a stop to it, you just might wake up one morning wondering what happened to your life. But remember: it only works when you don't recognize it – or allow it anyway. So try out some of these ideas and see how they work for you.

If you'd like more information on setting boundaries and free resources like this one, consider joining my Facebook group [Boundaries and Bridges](#). You can ask questions, share ideas and even get review copies of my latest books before they're published.

If groups aren't your thing, check out my Facebook page [Stand Up for Yourself](#). It's full of inspirational quotes to remind you that it's OK to put yourself first sometimes.

And if you'd like something more substantial, like a private mentoring session, then drop me a line at steph@stephsterner.com. I'd love to hear from you.

Many thanks,

Steph