

**If you think someone
might be playing you,
these 7 signs can help you decide.**



7 Signs You're Being Played

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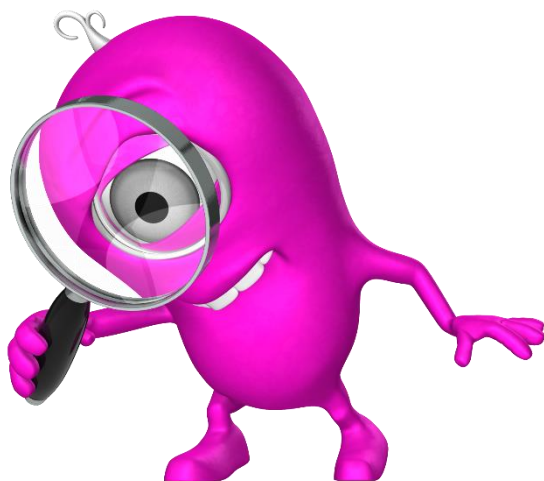
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Just a suspicion ...

If you've ever suspected that someone is taking advantage of your good nature – but you just can't be sure – then this quick guide is for you. A skilled manipulator knows how to keep you stuck in fear, guilt or shame – even when there's no



good reason for any of these feelings. You begin to doubt yourself, to think that maybe you're doing something wrong. And once you stop trusting your judgment, you're easier to manipulate.

That's where this guide comes in. Choose someone you're unsure of – someone you suspect may be manipulating you. Then consider each of the signs with respect to your interactions with and feelings toward that person. You may have to dig a little deeper for some of the answers, but your efforts will be well rewarded. Because when you're done, you'll be a lot closer to understanding the true nature of your relationships.

The First Sign

You often put off setting boundaries with him.



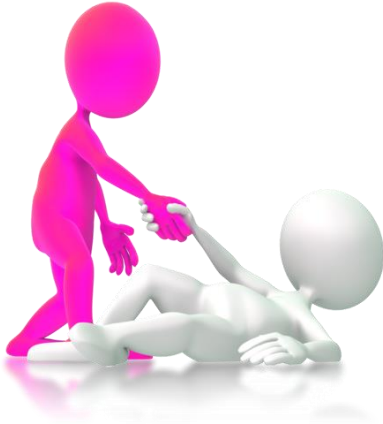
Is there someone in your life whom you just can't say "no" to? Do you feel uncomfortable when you need to ask him for something or refuse a request? Do you find yourself nervously preparing excuses before your conversation?

If you react this way to someone more than occasionally, you may be trying to protect yourself from his attempts to manipulate you. If he gracefully takes "no" for an answer – from you or, if you haven't said "no" yet, from others – then perhaps your fear is getting the better of you. But if he regularly pushes you to change your mind, or uses guilt or intimidation to sway you, then you're dealing with a manipulator.

TIP: Start questioning his behavior. If you're feeling guilty, take the time to explore the reasons. Ask a good friend for input. If you feel intimidated, find out what the trigger is. And ask yourself that all-important question: *What will happen if I say "no"?*

The Second Sign

You often find yourself making excuses for her.



Sometimes we don't want to face the truth about someone. Does it seem there's always a reason she can't pull her own weight – in spite of all the support you've given her? Or maybe you allow her to treat you badly because you see her as a victim. She's in a bad

marriage, under financial stress ... whatever. You feel sorry for her, and that sympathy tells you it's no big deal.

But it is. When you don't hold others responsible for their actions, they continue to act like victims. As the problems escalate, you find yourself feeling resentful – and with no way to resolve those feelings, because you've told yourself they're not justified.

TIP: When you don't feel respected, your self-esteem suffers. No matter how much you do for others, you won't feel good about yourself if you allow them to treat you badly. Stop making excuses and start holding others accountable. Let them pull their own weight – and face the consequences when they don't.

The Third Sign

You feel worse about yourself in his presence.



Some people lift our spirits just by saying “hello”. Their positive, caring attitude makes us feel good no matter what else is happening. Others, however, have the opposite effect. Their negativity, unreasonable demands and aggressive manner bring us down. After a few minutes of conversation, we begin to

doubt ourselves. We feel selfish, ignorant or incompetent – in other words, “less than”. This makes us much more vulnerable to manipulation.

TIP: If you find your self-esteem plummeting around a particular person, pay attention to the interaction. Take the time to understand what he’s doing and why it affects you. Becoming more aware of his tactics will make it easier to stay centered – and avoid giving him your power.

The Fourth Sign

Your sense of obligation toward her is never fulfilled.



You do everything she expects of you, but it's never enough. When she wants something, it's as if you have no choice. You owe it to her.

She may pile on the guilt when you don't agree – or the voice in your head may do it for her. Whatever the reason, you put her wants and needs ahead of her own.

You end up resenting her, but you do it anyway.

A favor isn't a favor if you owe something in return. That's a business transaction. It's up to you to decide how and when to show your gratitude. Handing the decision to someone else destroys that gratitude – as well as the relationship.

TIP: When that feeling of obligation becomes uncomfortable, it may be telling you something. Ask yourself some questions: *Exactly what is the debt I'm repaying? Is it possible that it's already paid?* And, perhaps the most important question of all: *Who decides how and when I repay it?*

The Fifth Sign

You avoid him because he probably wants something.



Some people call to see if you're available for lunch or drinks after work. Others only contact you when they want something.

If you know such a person – and he's not a customer or other business associate – chances are he's using you. If your strategy is to avoid him, you're not comfortable standing up for yourself.

You don't need to run away from people who want to take advantage of your good nature. But you do need to become comfortable choosing your own priorities over theirs – and letting people know what you've chosen.

TIP: Remember that “no” is a complete sentence, although most of us prefer a few more words. State your decision politely but firmly; do your best to appear comfortable, even if you're not. Then change the subject or put an end to the conversation. You don't need to explain yourself to someone who's not an important part of your life.

The Sixth Sign

No matter what you say or do, it's not good enough for her.



Does it seem like you can't get it right with someone – no matter what? If someone consistently misunderstands your good intentions, you may not be the problem.

Some manipulators work by constantly making you wrong. When you make a valid point, they ignore it. They listen for what suits them, distort it to meet their

own needs, and ignore the rest. If that doesn't work, they launch a personal attack. These techniques can be very effective; you're so busy trying to make sense of things (not possible!) and defending yourself (also not possible!) that you lose track of the real issue.

TIP: If this is happening to you, get out of the relationship. It's toxic, and there's nothing you can do to change it. If you're not willing or able to get out (for example, if you're dealing with a family member or employer), then change your approach. Don't confide in her, ask her for advice or look for her approval. You'll never get it – and if you do, it will come at a price. Your self-respect shouldn't be for sale.

The Seventh Sign

The relationship is all about him.



Is there someone in your life who takes a lot without giving back? Perhaps it wasn't so bad in the beginning; after all, you always felt appreciated. But after a while, "What would I do without you?" loses its charm. You give and give, but he's never available when you need something.

This can be tricky, because the reasons always sound so good. But when you look at the big picture, you realize the painful truth: Your needs are simply not a priority for him. You've changed your plans to help him through more than one crisis. You've given up your weekend because he needed you. But when it's time for you, someone or something else is always more important.

TIP: Actions speak louder than words, and the nature of a relationship reveals itself over time. It's up to you to recognize the signs ... and decide how much to give to someone who is either unable or unwilling to reciprocate.

Where to from here?

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