Paul Ryder Coaching

WHY DO SOME PEOPLE TRIGGER YOU, WHILE OTHERS DON'T?

Recognise six emotionally manipulative behaviours and the vulnerabilities they may trigger.

Before you begin

USE THIS ONLY WHEN IT FEELS SAFE

You choose whether to use this guide, how much to complete, and when to stop. If the exercise feels overwhelming, pause and seek support from an appropriate professional.

If you fear someone may harm you, threaten you, or react badly to your using this guide, prioritise your safety. Seek advice from the appropriate authority service before confronting anyone or changing how you respond.

If you are in immediate danger in the UK, call 999. If you cannot speak on a mobile, follow the operator's prompts and press 55 when prompted.

It is the behaviour that matters

When someone repeatedly triggers a strong reaction, it is tempting to settle on a label for the person. A label may not tell you what happened in a particular interaction or what it stirred in you.

Here, notice three separate things:

01 The action — What was said or done?

02 Your reaction — What did you feel or find yourself doing?

03 The pattern — Does this happen across interactions?

Observe the behaviour. Notice the trigger.
Leave room for context.

Educational reflection only; this guide is not a risk assessment or a substitute for individual clinical, legal, or safety advice.

Six emotionally manipulative behaviours

Notice the action, its context and your response. These descriptions are prompts for reflection, not diagnoses or proof of intent.

01 The Oppressed Victim

"Please help me."

Repeatedly presents as unable to cope, while pressure builds for you to keep rescuing them. A genuine request for help can look similar.

May activate: Guilt. "I have done something wrong by not doing enough."

02 The Saviour

"I'll help."

Steps in so extensively that the other person may remain dependent or less confident in their own abilities. Real support strengthens autonomy.

May activate: Helplessness or dependence. "I cannot manage without their help."

03 I'm Too Busy

"What now?"

Communicates irritation or treats your needs as an inconvenience. Being genuinely busy, or declining contact, is not itself manipulation.

May activate: Abandonment. "I am going to be left or ignored."

04 The Faultfinder

"You are not good enough."

Repeated criticism or comparison positions you as inadequate. Honest, specific feedback can be uncomfortable without being manipulation.

May activate: Shame. "There is something wrong with me."

05 The Imposer

"Do it my way."

Presses their beliefs or way of acting onto others and implies that disagreement makes you wrong. A strong opinion alone is not enough.

May activate: Rejection. "I will not belong unless I comply."

06 The Destroyer

"You could lose what matters."

Uses threats, intimidation or harmful action to create fear. Threats of physical harm or other serious consequences call for safety support, not a worksheet score.

May activate: Fear of irreversible loss. "I could lose my safety, relationships or livelihood."

Behaviour hides in plain sight

An isolated action does not tell you everything. Someone can need help, be busy, offer direct feedback, or express a strong view without trying to control you.

For lower-risk situations, look across interactions. Note what actually happened, the surrounding context, and what changed in your own behaviour. You may not be able to know another person's intent.

PAUSE BEFORE DRAWING A CONCLUSION

- What did I observe, rather than infer?
- Has this happened before, or could there be another explanation?
- Did I feel pressure to act against my own judgement?
- What would a safe next step be for me?

THREATS NEED A DIFFERENT RESPONSE

You do not need to wait for a repeated pattern or complete this exercise if someone has threatened or harmed you, or if you fear retaliation. Trust the safety concern and speak with a specialist service or the police. Do not use this guide as a reason to confront someone who may put you at risk.

Keep notes private if it is safe to do so. If your device or belongings may be monitored, consider whether recording names or incidents could increase risk.

Your personal behaviour map

Think of interactions that regularly leave you emotionally activated. Use initials or role labels if writing names could be unsafe. Score the behaviour you have observed in your interactions, not the person.

SCORING GUIDE

0 = not observed · 1–3 = occasional · 4–6 = noticeable pattern
7–8 = frequent and strongly affects interactions · 9–10 = dominant pattern

Person / label	Context	OV	SV	BUSY	FF	IMP	DST

OV Oppressed Victim · SV Saviour · BUSY I'm Too Busy
FF Faultfinder · IMP Imposer · DST Destroyer

These are subjective observations, not a validated scale. Do not add the scores into a "person score". A low score also cannot rule out risk.

What does it trigger in you?

Choose one interaction. Record concrete actions first. Then notice the feeling and what you did next. If writing details is unsafe, skip the log.

PERSON / CONTEXT

Use a label if needed.

WHAT HAPPENED?

Words or actions I could describe to someone else.

WHAT DID I FEEL?

Emotions and body sensations.

WHICH BEHAVIOUR AND VULNERABILITY?

Guilt / dependence / abandonment / shame / rejection / fear of loss / other.

WHAT DID I DO NEXT?

For example: explain, appease, withdraw, argue, freeze, seek help.

Your pattern, in your words

Use what you have observed to understand your own response. You do not need to decide what kind of person anyone else is.

The behaviour that most often affects me is...

The feeling or vulnerability it seems to activate is...

When this happens, I tend to...

One response I would like to practice, when it is safe, is...

If a situation involves threats or coercion, the next step may be confidential safety advice, not practising a new response with that person.

Recognising is the beginning

Separating the person, the behaviour and your emotional response gives you a clearer starting point. The next step is learning to stay grounded and choose a response that fits the situation.

Communicate with Emotionally Manipulative Behaviour explores the six patterns in more depth, along with practical ways to recognise and respond to them.

Explore the full course →
paulrydercoaching.com/communicate-with-emotionally-manipulative-behaviour/

If safety is a concern

The course and this guide are optional educational resources. If you are being threatened, harmed, controlled or intimidated, get advice specific to your circumstances. Do not rely on a course or worksheet to decide whether you are safe.

UK immediate danger: call 999 and ask for the police. If you cannot speak on a mobile, follow the prompts and press 55 when prompted.

Refuge's National Domestic Abuse Helpline is 0808 2000 247 (24 hours).

Official guidance: gov.uk/guidance/domestic-abuse-how-to-get-help

Or please google for support and advice in your home country of residence.

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