

# Dealing with toxic relationships

Dr Jessamy Hibbard and Jo Usmar tell you how to deal with the toxic people who could be holding you back

**W**hen you're trying something new it's important to have support. Studies have demonstrated that having a network of supportive relationships promotes psychological wellbeing, providing you with a sense of self-worth and security. Knowing you have people around you who won't judge you and who care about you no matter what, isn't something you should take for granted; it's a great self-esteem booster.

The good news is that while you can't choose your family you can choose your friends and partners. You should nurture the friendships and relationships that are important in your life... just like you should be wary of the ones that aren't.

Just because you used to share a paddling pool with Janet when you were babies doesn't mean you have to put up with her constantly criticising you and making you feel miserable now. And just because you've been with Simon for years doesn't mean you have to accept his bullying ways.

People who compromise your confidence aren't really friends and definitely aren't good boyfriends/girlfriends or husbands/wives. You need to become aware of toxic relationships in your life and feel confident enough not to continually find excuses for them. You can always find an excuse for someone's behaviour if you look hard enough, but should you have to?

Toxic relationships at work can be very difficult to deal with as you can't choose to cut your boss or your colleague out of your life or necessarily give them a piece of your mind. Constantly being undermined, overlooked or just feeling you have nowhere to turn can really affect your self-esteem. But don't worry, there are proactive things you can do to deal with toxic relationships both at home and work.

## QUARANTINING TOXIC RELATIONSHIPS:

If someone is making you unhappy and it's really affecting your life then you have to deal with it. Avoiding the issue or putting off facing up to it will only make it seem bigger and more insurmountable. Also, the things that annoy you or upset you about this person will just become more annoying and more upsetting the longer it goes on, making it more likely that one day you'll just explode and say something you regret.

## DEALING WITH A TOXIC FRIEND:

1. Talk to them about it. Organise a time to speak face to face. And yes, it does have to be face to face because you can't read tone in an email so things can be misconstrued.
2. Explain calmly why you feel upset by their behaviour and listen to what they've got to say. Try not to be confrontational.
3. Leave it up to them to make the next move. The truth is you are probably better off without them in your life, as hard as that is to hear. Unless they acknowledge what they've been doing, then it's not going to stop. You don't have to accept their bad behaviour.
4. If they want to talk, hear them out. Maybe they have some home truths to tell you too. You can then decide whether you want to keep them in your life and either do or don't. It's up to you.
5. If they don't accept any responsibility for their actions then cut them out and move on. A toxic friend is no friend at all.

## DEALING WITH A TOXIC COLLEAGUE:

1. Ask another colleague for their opinion. Someone you get on with who will give you an unbiased view.

It's very hard to be objective when you feel under attack, so hearing another opinion might shed some light on an emotional situation.

2. Ask for a meeting with the toxic colleague and speak to them about where your relationship is going wrong. Again, don't be confrontational or blame them (even if it is totally their fault).
3. Remain neutral, saying things like, 'I feel as if we're not seeing eye to eye on a few things, is there anything we can do to sort this out?'
4. Keep saying 'we' rather than 'you.'
5. If nothing changes, have a meeting with your superior and ask for their help. Say you're not sure where to go from here, but that

something has to be done. If nothing improves or no one is taking you seriously and you've gone as high as you can then consider leaving. As dramatic as it sounds your emotional health is too important to risk for a job. You will start questioning your own abilities and this will spiral into your personal life too. It's not worth it. **WW**



This is an extract from *This Book Will Make You Confident* (Quercus, €9.48 approximately) which is out now.

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