

Quick Tip Sheet

→ **For Communicating with a Loved One Under the Influence of Psychological Manipulation or Coercive Control**



(counter)

Quick Tip Sheet for Communicating with a Loved One under the Influence of PM and CC

Version 1.0 May 14, 2024

Content developed by Star Spider
Reviewed and edited by Kim Jagers, MSW, RSW
Graphic design template by Brenda Shivanandan

© 2024 Counter. This work is openly licensed via CC BY SA 4.0.

This license enables reusers to distribute, remix, adapt, and build upon the material in any medium or format for noncommercial purposes only, and only so long as attribution is given to the creator. If you remix, adapt, or build upon the material, you must license the modified material under identical terms.

CC BY-NC-SA includes the following elements:

BY: credit must be given to the creator.
NC: Only noncommercial uses of the work are permitted.
SA: Adaptations must be shared under the same terms.



Primary Goal

Creating a safe, non-judgmental space to foster communication and questioning.



Pathway

- › Create a caring, judgement-free community.
- › Create a robust network of healthy connections.
- › Foster and encourage the pre-cult sense of purpose.
- › Plant seeds for questioning and growth.

Necessary Beliefs¹

- › The influence of psychological manipulation is never complete because it cannot erase a person's true self.
- › They will leave the group—it's only a matter of how soon and how easily.
- › Real love is stronger than conditional love.
- › People want to be free and to know the truth.
- › Conversely, people don't want to be manipulated.
- › Everything in life can be used as a learning experience.
- › High-control group behaviour is predictable.
- › Manipulators don't deliver what they promise.
- › Change and growth are inevitable.

Necessary Attitudes

- › Be curious and experimental, yet cautious.
- › Be a good listener.
- › Show that you know that you don't know everything (modelling).
- › Act within your sphere of control.
- › Don't waste your emotions on things you can't change.
- › Strive for gradual, cumulative progress – don't just go for the knockout punch.
- › Work to improve your communication skills.
- › Do the best you can with the resources you have.

1. Necessary Beliefs and Attitudes modified from Freedom of Mind by Steve Hassan

Make Boundaries

When making boundaries, ask the following:

- › What do I need to feel safe helping?
- › What do I need to keep supporting the situation?
- › How might my boundaries affect the situation?
- › Are my boundaries fair and reasonable?

Self-Care

- › Work to come to acceptance.
- › Consider your needs (they are important, too).
- › Make time for yourself and the things you love.
- › Feel your feelings (it's okay to be angry or sad, etc.).
- › Give yourself credit (you are doing your best given the circumstances, which is amazing).
- › Step or walk away (if necessary).

Tips for Good Listening

- › Leave pauses.
- › Take that pause to consider what was said.
- › Reflect ("I hear you saying this, is that right?").
- › Make eye contact.
- › Don't interrupt.
- › Leave space for exploration.
- › Ask questions ("I'm curious about this; can you tell me more about it?").

When engaging:

- › Avoid defensiveness - if you feel defensive, step away from the conversation.
- › Avoid judgment statements (“you should,” “why don’t you,” “they should”).
- › **Try to find points of agreement.** Tell them if you feel what they feel or agree with something they say. This is a way to establish a basis of alignment and find the points where you connect.
- › **No facts, data or numbers.** Sometimes, you might want to argue a point, but remember that any facts, numbers or other points of view will likely just shut them down. Once trust is established, they might be open to other viewpoints, but for now, stick to open questions and points of agreement.
- › **Back off if there is resistance.** If you encounter resistance at any point in a moment of connection, it is important to take a step back until it is resolved.

Modelling

Modelling is important to illustrate healthy relationships in the real world.

- › **Admit Wrong:** Seek opportunities to admit you are wrong, explain and apologize if necessary. Manipulators thrive when they create an environment where they are always right. So, modelling can help show that being wrong is okay.
- › **Encourage Questioning:** Be open and honest when a question is asked (within reason). Manipulators often keep secrets and discourage questioning, so encouraging questioning can help model openness.
- › **Show Gratitude:** If they do something kind or thoughtful, express gratitude. Ensure you are not singling them out, and that same gratitude is extended to everyone in your orbit so you don’t seem disingenuous.

Asking Questions

- › **Express Boundaries:** Modelling the expression of boundaries should be done in a kind and firm way to show that boundaries do not have to be problematic and can be healthy.

Frame all questions as non-judgementally as possible.

Use phrases like:

- › That's interesting
- › Can you tell me more about...
- › How does that make you feel?
- › Can you clarify...
- › I'm curious... (then ask the question you are curious about)

Allow them to come to their own conclusions about the situation.

If they don't bring up the manipulative group or relationship, don't ask them about it, but...

If they do, ask them about the things they find positive about it (they will be used to defending it and may be disarmed by being allowed to talk freely).

Feel free to follow the thread if something negative comes up and you have built enough trust.

That might look like:

- › I'm sorry to hear they treated you that way; how does that make you feel?
- › Do they do that often?
- › How do you feel about that situation?

- If they express a negative feeling, you might follow up with something like: Is this common in your group/relationship? How do other people feel about it? What does your heart say about that?
- If the individual is religious, you might ask, "Have you prayed to God directly about this, or do you receive all this direction from the group leaders?"

Note:

Avoid phrases like: "I don't understand," as they can be alienating and used against you by the manipulator: "See, they don't understand you; only we can!"

Instead, try phrases like:

- › "Can you clarify that?"
- › "I'm curious what you mean by..."
- › "Can you explain this to me a little more?"



Consistency

Consistent connection is essential. To build trust, you have to be present.

It could be a daily meal, a weekly activity, or a consistent schedule for phone check-ins if you are distant.

Consistency in the nature of your interactions is also vital.

By creating a stable set of boundaries and keeping your interactions consistent in tone and mood, you can provide a safe environment which can encourage trust and openness.

Shared Activities

It's important to remind them of who they used to be; that person is still in there, just covered up by the manipulator's doctrine or ideas.

The more they can connect with things that bring them joy beyond the manipulative group or relationship, the better. Invite them to share activities they enjoy in a way that makes them feel included and loved.

Framing the invitation:

- › If most/all of their time is being taken by the manipulative group or relationship, understand that this is a tactic of manipulation meant to isolate and exhaust them to make them more open to manipulation.
- › Invitations should be frequent and open, reminding them of their values and positive attributes in a non-judgmental way.

Examples:

- › Remember that time we (fun/funny memory)? I've been thinking about you and I miss you. Do you want to play (a game) on (specific date)? You are an amazing player; I need you on my team!
- › We are having dinner with (a family member) on this (specific date), and I would love to see you there. I understand you are busy with your life, and I respect that, but I know how important family is to all of us, and I want you to be able to spend all the time you can with your (family member).
- › Remember when we used to (reminder of a shared activity you loved; a specific memory would be best)? We should do that again. Are you free (specific date)?

Following up with something open-ended is important if the responses are NO to these invitations. If they say no to an event, activity or meal, **a response could look like:**

- › I'm sorry to hear you are busy. You are welcome to pop by last minute if you change your mind. There is no pressure, but I would really love to see you there.

Avoiding Ideology

If your conversations veer into heavy doctrine and ideology, you should avoid that.

Focus on practical, down-to-earth matters and emotions as much as possible.

Use straightforward language, and don't lean too far into religious topics.

Encourage them to rephrase complex ideas in plain language. If they quote a religious text or a common phrase from the group, **try saying:**

- › That's an interesting idea; what does that mean to you?
- › How does that play out in your life?
- › What does that look like?
- › Are there any exceptions to that?
- › Can you re-phrase that so I can see it from another angle?

When possible, gently guide the conversation back to present realities, practical matters, emotions, or general life to take the focus off the ideology.