

# Empathy Questionnaire

→ For Helping Your  
Loved Ones  
Under the Influence  
of Psychological  
Manipulation or  
Coercive Control



(counter)

# Empathy Questionnaire for Psychological Manipulation and Coercive Control

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

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## Introduction

The first step to helping a loved one under the influence of psychological manipulation (PM) or coercive control (CC) is to get to know them better. Gaining an understanding of their situation and motivations for involvement is vital. It can lead you to better communication and encourage an empathetic approach.

This questionnaire has been designed to help you gain an understanding of your loved one and is meant to be paired with our [Toolkit for Helping Your Loved Ones](#).

These questions can be answered by you alone or in collaboration with your loved one. If your loved one is resistant to communicating about their situation, please fill this out on your own and work through the rest of the toolkit before opening up communication.

If you feel overwhelmed by this process, please consider talking to a PM and CC-trained therapist. More information on therapists can be found in the [resources](#) section on our website.

Working through psychological manipulation and coercive control is a long and complex process, but hopefully, getting to a place of empathy can allow you to take the first step toward building trust, communication and hope.

**Note:** It is possible, and even likely, that you may not have the answers to all these questions. That is okay. Feel free to use this questionnaire as a guide, take notes on your thoughts and ideas, or even add your own questions. The goal here isn't to know everything about your loved one immediately but to get a better understanding of where they are coming from to figure out how to best support them and connect with them.

## Introductory Questions

- › How did your loved one first get involved with their group or relationship?
- › What drew them to the individual or group?
- › What beliefs did they previously hold that aligned them more with the message of the individual or group?
- › What was going on in your loved one's life just before they got involved with the group or relationship?
- › How would you describe your loved one before they got involved with the group or relationship?

## Motivations

There are many motivations for involvement in a manipulative group or relationship. It's essential to consider your loved one's motivations, as this can help you understand them better and aid in making connections if they exit.

### Was your loved one seeking:

- › Community? (C)
- › Connection? (C)
- › Purpose? (P)

### What does it look like to seek CCP?

- › **Joining Social Groups:** This could include group hopping, where a person jumps from group to group quickly without making long-term connections.
- › **Trend Hunting:** This might entail things like trying fad diets, engaging with trendy spiritual practices or self-diagnosing well-known mental health issues.
- › **Volunteering:** This might include getting deeply involved in various charity organizations or over-committing to multiple causes.
- › **Self-Help Seeking:** This may involve buying books, following self-help gurus or trying various therapeutic modalities.

- › **Spiritual Seeking:** This could involve jumping from one spiritual or religious group to the next. In spiritual seekers, sudden conversion to a religion is not uncommon.
- › **Self-Improvement Seeking:** This could include attending pricey self-improvement workshops, getting gym memberships or involvement in various moneymaking schemes.
- › **Online Community Involvement:** It often feels safer to look for connections online, especially if the person suffers from low self-esteem. With online community involvement, someone may jump from group to group without forming meaningful connections.
- › **Relationship Hopping:** This could include having multiple relationships in a short period of time without building meaningful or lasting connections. This can apply to both romantic and non-romantic relationships.

#### Questions Related to CCP:

- › Has your loved one exhibited any signs of seeking CCP in the past? If so, what does that typically look like for them?
- › What signs did you see in your loved one that showed they lacked CCP?
  - Loneliness
  - Lack of motivation
  - Low self-esteem
  - Financial difficulties
  - Lack of direction
  - A deep desire for a romantic relationship
  - Lack of close friendships
  - Unstable relationships
  - Excessive social media use
  - Need for constant approval
  - Indecisiveness
  - Lack of long-term goals
  - Addiction or escapist behaviours
  - Other:

- › Did your loved one communicate any needs that weren't being met?
- › Was your loved one in a transitional time?
  - Heading off to college
  - Changing jobs
  - Mourning a loss
  - Divorce
  - Empty nest
  - Other:
- › These are some common emotions associated with those who are lacking CPP. Which of the following have you identified in your loved one?
  - Fear
  - Uncertainty
  - Loneliness
  - Low self-esteem
  - Outrage or anger
  - Sadness
  - Anxiety
  - Depression
  - Hyper-focus or fixation
  - Longing
  - Excessive positivity
  - Other:

## Benefits

It's vital to see the benefits your loved one is getting from their group or relationship. This can help you frame your discussions with them from a place of knowing, show you understand them, and aid in helping them find alternative sources of these benefits if necessary.

**What are the benefits your loved one is getting from the group or relationship, and what do those benefits look like specifically?**

- › A community of like-minded people?

Describe:

- › Meaningful connections?

Describe:

- › A clear sense of purpose?

Describe:

- › A clear set of answers to complex questions?

Describe:

- › A reduction in fear?

Describe:

- › The perception of secret/sacred knowledge?

Describe:

- › The promise of new understanding or enlightenment?

Describe:

- › Material or monetary benefits?

Describe:

- › Physical benefits?

Describe:

- › Health benefits (real or perceived)?

Describe:

- › A clear enemy to fight against?

Describe:

- › An outlet for rage/anger/hate?

Describe:

- › A sense of fulfillment from helping others (real or perceived help)?

Describe:

- › Personal empowerment?

Describe:

- › Feelings of superiority or a sense of pride?

Describe:

- › Feeling less isolated/lonely?

Describe:

- › Feelings of mastery or a sense of control?

Describe:

- › Other:

## Drawbacks of Leaving

Even if it is abusive or damaging, manipulative situations are still hard to leave for a variety of reasons. It's important to look at the drawbacks of leaving so it can give you a better understanding of what your loved one will need to make them feel happy, safe and connected should they exit.

**What would be the most significant drawbacks of your loved one leaving their group or relationship? What do those drawbacks look like specifically?**

- › Loss of dignity/pride?

Describe:

- › Having to admit they were wrong?

Describe:



- › Embarrassment over being taken advantage of?

Describe:

- › Guilt over hurting others when under the influence of psychological manipulation?

Describe:

- › Having to make apologies or reparations for hurting others when under the influence of psychological manipulation?

Describe:

- › Loss of their community?

Describe:

- › Loss of their strong, clear ideology/worldview?

Describe:

- › Loss of faith or belief in something bigger than themselves?

Describe:

- › Facing trauma of abuse within the group?

Describe:

- › Loss of sense of identity or purpose?

Describe:

- › Monetary or material loss?

Describe:

- › Risk of exposure of sensitive information/images?

Describe:

- › Risk of involvement with the criminal justice system?  
(Common in cases where illegal activity is taking place)

Describe:

- › Risk of losing their children/parental rights?

Describe:

- › Loss of access to substances?

Describe:

- › A need to grapple with complexity that is difficult to understand?

Describe:

- › Loss of a significant romantic connection/love?

Describe:

- › Other:

## Benefits of Leaving

Even though stepping away from a manipulative situation is undeniably difficult, the gains from breaking free are enormous. Recognizing these benefits is vital as they serve as guideposts through transitioning to a healthier and happier life after exiting.

**What would be the most significant gains for your loved one if they left their group or relationship? What would those gains look like specifically?**

- › Reconnection with loved ones they have been alienated from?

Describe:

- › An opportunity to develop closer, deeper relationships with their loved ones?

Describe:

- › Rediscovering their passions and interests?

Describe:

- › Rediscovering or redefining their sense of self?

Describe:

- › The ability to choose freely and think for themselves?

Describe:

- › Freedom from anger/hate?

Describe:

- › Personal safety?

Describe:

- › More realistic ideas about the world?

Describe:

- › More realistic goals and dreams?

Describe:

- › Resilience to being taken advantage of in the future?

Describe:

- › More time for what they enjoy?

Describe:

- › Relief from the responsibility to “save the world”?

Describe:

- › Better health?

Describe:

- › Other:

## Questions for Connection

If your loved one is under the influence of PM and CC, it is essential that you find ways to connect with them. Here are some questions to dive deeper and find new connections.

- › Do you share any of the same beliefs or values your loved one held that made them more attracted to the group or relationship? If so, describe them.
- › Would those shared beliefs or values be a good connection point with them now?
- › What type of communication/relationship did you have with your loved one before they got involved with the group or relationship?
- › What are you looking for in your relationship with them now?
- › In what ways are you currently trying to communicate with your loved one?
  - What is successful?
  - What isn't?
- › What other questions do you have for your loved one about their group or relationship?
  - Can you find the answers to these questions on your own?
  - Can you ask them these questions without triggering defensiveness?

The goal of this questionnaire is to help you get a better understanding of your loved one and their situation in order to find empathy. Once you have reached an understanding of their situation, you will be in a better mindset to develop a realistic plan for communication and connection.

For next steps, please refer back to our [Toolkit for Helping Your Loved Ones](#).