

On Toxic People
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Perusing the shelves of my local public library, the title of a book, *Toxic People: 10 Ways of Dealing With People Who Make Your Life Miserable*, caught my eye. It was published by Simon & Schuster back in 1995, which it hits me was almost twenty years ago—the book did look old, come to think about it--by Lillian Glass, Ph.D.

I find the concept *toxic* useful. Dr. Glass has a point: some people are indeed toxic to other people. As the subtitle indicates, Dr. Glass offers ways of managing toxic people. I won't go into them here, except to note that they basically fall into two categories, getting geographical distance from this person--sometimes we simply have to get away from the poison--and mentally unplugging them from our consciousness.

The book has a questionnaire to help you identify whether someone in your life fits into the toxic category. It's really long, but I'll put it enough of it here to give you an idea of the kinds of things it gets at, plus I've added some questions of my own to the list. You can try it with reference to someone you know.

- Do you feel emotionally numb after you talk to this person?
- Are you in a bad mood after being around this person?
- Do you feel that the person deep down doesn't like you?
- Do you come away feeling devalued when you have been around this person?
- Do you feel "dirty" after being with this person?
- Do you feel this person isn't really interested in you?
- Do you get the idea around this person that you are low on life's totem pole?
- Do you get the idea around this person that it's your lot in life is to be satisfied with crumbs or to take crap?
- Do you feel emotionally empty when you are around this person?
- Do you feel less intelligent or less qualified or less capable or interesting after being around this person?
- Do you get sad or depressed in this person's presence or afterwards?
- Do you feel this person didn't really hear what you said or care what you said?

- Do you feel unattractive after being with this person?
- Does this person keep you waiting?
- Do you feel tense or nervous around this person?
- Does this person treat you as if you don't really matter for much?
- Do you feel angry and irritable around this person?
- Do you lack energy after being around this person?
- Does this person make you feel disgusted?
- Do you feel like escaping through food, alcohol, drugs, or sex during or after being with this person?
- Do you find yourself bingeing or starving as a reaction to this person?
- Does this person ignore you around others, so you feel like a non-person?
- Does this person make you the butt of jokes?
- Does this person upset you?
- Do you feel betrayed by this person?
- Do you feel constantly judged negatively by this person?
- Does this person put you down or belittle you?
- Does this person disrespect you?
- Do you feel abused by this person?
- Do you feel hopeless around this person?
- Does this person make you sad?
- Does this person frequently criticize and correct you?
- Do you feel relieved getting away from this person?
- Do you have less energy around this person?
- Do you feel you have to walk on eggshells, or are afraid to be yourself, around this person?
- Is this person condescending to you?
- Are you often hesitant or at a loss for words around this person?
- Do you find you don't want to talk to this person on the phone?
- Do you clam up around this person?
- Does this person negate a lot of what you say?
- Does this person basically have no interest in what you are doing?
- Does this person have little or no respect for you?
- Does this person treat you as if you really aren't worth much in the world?
- Does this person cut you down rather than build you up?
- Do you feel as if you can't communicate with this person?
- Does this person exploit you?

Dr. Glass doesn't provide a scoring matrix—if you have this many, or such and such a percentage, of yeses, you've got a toxic person on your hands, or sort of one, or it's leaning that way, or watch out here, anything like that. I think that's OK; it is good enough to let people determine their own standard of toxicity in other people (as well as get some guidance in how not to become toxics themselves). My own standard is that if when I go through these questions my body gives me a signal that the yeses are starting to add up, I most likely have a problem on my hands. I need to take the bull by the horns, or some such metaphor, and decide what I'm going to do about this person. Even if the answer is there's nothing much I can do—I assume there is always something, even if it is of minor consequence, I can do—it will be of help just to realize why I operate on less than all cylinders with this person in my world.