

We're All Manipulators When We're Born!

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Everybody is *born* manipulative! We have to be. At birth, our little bodies and immature brains don't function well enough for independent living. We *all* need at least one "outside agent" to act on our behalf. Without it, we can't survive! Our first "agents" are parents.

Manipulation is about using another person's energy for ourselves. Infants are expected to *need* us. They manipulate to survive in early life. As we grow up, we begin believing we won't survive *without* an "agent." A small child *needs* parents to do for her what she can't do for herself. Parents know babies *die* if we don't meet their needs. Babies scream to make sure needs are met. Growing older, the child retains the *belief* they'll die unless someone else satisfies their needs. On-going manipulation results from this belief. Is it "normal" for people to continue manipulating as adults? Most people I ask say "yes." They see manipulation as normal. In fact, it is not.

It is "normal" not to have bladder or bowel control before age 2 or 3, but "not normal" after that. It is "normal" to be manipulative up to age 4, but not "normal" to be manipulative after age 20. People accept that "everybody manipulates." We don't understand that the design is for us to slowly end manipulation during childhood. A major "job" of childhood and adolescence is to become our own "agents". We become responsible our choices and their consequences. By maturity, we might *want* help and support from others; but we no longer believe we *need* it to survive.

What does manipulation look like in a grown-up? Manipulators *look like* an adult, but they don't *behave* like one. Have you ever been manipulated and found yourself asking "How could a grown person behave like that?" In fact, a *mature* person does not. Manipulative people insist others do *what they believe they need* and cannot live without. They employ many techniques, like spreading guilt, to get others to fill their needs. Most people believe manipulation is "normal." How *normal* do people wearing grown-up bodies manipulating others seem to you?

Mature people take responsibility for meeting their own needs. They ask others for their involvement or help. But they *want* it; they don't *need* it. Mature adults know they will be all right if the other person doesn't fill their needs. He knows he still has three choices; he can decide to:

- a) let the need/want go unfilled
- b) find a way to get it filled, or
- c) fill the need himself.

The manipulative person does not take full responsibility for his life. He desperately attempts to control others to fill his needs. He *needs* others to behave in specific ways.

He will demand the energy and effort of others, suggesting they are *bad, wrong* or *crazy* if they refuse. The mature person uses his own energy and efforts in life. He *wants* others to be involved and help, but is okay if others choose not to do so.

Manipulation is rampant in our culture. We are all born manipulators; but we're *supposed* to outgrow our need to manipulate by adulthood. Parents need to help children make the shift away from *needing others* to function in life. Parents may not

know children need their help children in making this transition. They may feel it is too much to ask a young child to take so much responsibility. Parents may not have ended manipulation themselves. They feel a desperate *need* to be *needed* by their children.

Children learn through modeling. If you manipulate, your child will continue to behave manipulatively and not grow out of it. Ask yourself this question: “Which am I: manipulative or mature?” If you’re not sure, observe the people in your life. Do they drive you crazy by not asking clearly for what they want? Do they rely on you (often without asking) for rides, meals, money or connection? Do they use guilt to get you to comply with their needs? Are they *controlling*? These are manipulative behaviors.

If the people around you manipulate, you are most likely also manipulative. The First Rule of Manipulation is “*It takes one to know one*”! (I was a shocked when I first discovered this Rule. I was *certain* those other people had the problem!)

This is bad news and good news. Bad news, because it means you have work to do to grow up. Things like spending satisfying time alone, and deciding to take responsibility for every part of your life. You’ll need to face your fears. And others in your life may also resist your changes.

Manipulation is a round-about way to live life. You’re obliged to go through the “outside agent,” instead of going directly for what is right for you. As in business,

the agent takes a “cut” of what you get, so you can’t get *all* that you need. You’re obliged to work with a lot of agents, just so you get enough! Agents don’t always do things their way; and going through an “Agent” takes more time. You can never control everything enough to get exactly what you *need*. Being manipulative compromises your freedom.

Here’s the good news: you *can* kick the manipulative habit! We humans are *designed* to thrive by taking responsibility for ourselves. As *you* take more responsibility, you’ll be more in charge of your life. And because you’ll make more of your own choices, and you’re willing to take responsibility for the consequences of those choices (good and bad), you’ll increase your personal freedom.

Maturity is a straightforward way to live a life. You get to decide what is right for you. You go after exactly what you want. You get the full reward! Life is so much more satisfying. Once you taste life as a responsible mature person, you’ll never be tempted to manipulate again.

You’ll also set a wonderful model for your child. She can leave manipulation behind as a no-longer-needed thing of childhood. He will be responsible, have integrity, and experience freedom!

Parents and children are natural “partners.” We help each other learn and grow up. Helping your child grow out of her in-born manipulation helps you to mature, too. You then set a model for your child to evolve into a non-manipulative adult. Give your child this priceless gift, and together make this a better world for all of us.