



IS/WAS YOUR RELATIONSHIP TOXIC?

If you ever wondered whether you were in a toxic relationship and searched online for help, you may have found definitions, like this one from Dr. Thomas L. Cory:

“A toxic relationship is characterized by behaviors on the part of the toxic partner that are emotionally and, not infrequently, physically damaging to their partner. While a healthy relationship contributes to our self-esteem and emotional energy, a toxic relationship damages self-esteem and drains energy. A healthy relationship involves mutual caring, respect, and compassion, an interest in our partner’s welfare and growth, an ability to share control and decision-making, in short, a shared desire for each other’s happiness. A healthy relationship is a safe relationship, a relationship where we can be ourselves without fear, a place where we feel comfortable and secure. A toxic relationship, on the other hand, is not a safe place. A toxic relationship is characterized by insecurity, self-centeredness, dominance, control. We risk our very being by staying in such a relationship. To say a toxic relationship is dysfunctional is, at best, an understatement.” (Cory, ND)

Dr. Cory counsels those who want to improve their relationship to focus on self-care and self-esteem. These are necessary to be truly ready and able to leave the relationship if it does not improve.

Similarly, Sherry Gaba, Social Worker, writes:

“Relationships fall into one of two categories. Positive or healthy relationships are those where the couple supports each other, shows empathy and compassion to the other person, and where both parties are willing to give and take. Positive relationships are not always perfect, but when the couple has disagreements, they are able to work it out in a way that is mutually satisfactory and does not result in one person imposing their will or desires on the other.

The other type of relationship is unhealthy. These relationships are often considered toxic as they are actually emotionally and sometimes physically harmful to one person. The term was first used by Lillian Glass in her 1995 book *Toxic People* and was used to indicate a relationship that is built on conflict, competition, and the need for one person to control the other.” (Gaba, 2021)

Sherry outlines six signs of Toxic Relationships:

- Isolation — the toxic person attempts to isolate the partner from family and friends to limit support and to increase dependence on the relationship.
- Ongoing disagreements and arguments — it is common for people dating and in relationships to have minor disagreements, but toxic relationships are primarily based on arguments and negativity. The controlling partner is always berating, belittling, and putting down the other person or criticizing their attempts to do anything positive or independent.
- Blaming — a toxic person has no sense of personal responsibility for negative things and events in a relationship. If your partner is willing to take full responsibility for all the good but none of the responsibility for anything bad or unpleasant, this is a critical sign of a toxic relationship.
- Jealousy and dishonesty — a toxic relationship is often one of accusing a partner of flirting or dating, or even having a sexual relationship with someone outside of the relationship. At the same time, the controlling or toxic person may actively and openly engage in these same behaviors.
- Denial and gaslighting — a toxic person is unable or unwilling to see his or her impact on the other person. They deny issues, attempt to gaslight the other person, manipulate events, or attempt to recreate history to put themselves in the best light.
- Giving in on everything — while it is important to be willing to give and take, compromise, or even do what the other partner wants in a healthy relationship, this is expected behavior in a toxic relationship. If you find you are giving into everything, even things you find morally, personally, or ethically objectionable just to keep the other person happy, you are in a toxic relationship.

Note that the first five signs primarily describe characteristics of the “toxic partner”. The sixth is the only one which describes the other (presumably “non-toxic”) partner. In my memoir, after years of focussing on my partner’s behaviors, I decide “this is about me” and start to examine my giving-in, how it began and was maintained in relationships.

The giving-in was the very essence of my glitch, and what I began to refer to as “female complicity”.

Perhaps this article helps you identify that you are currently in a toxic relationship. If so, this journal will help you focus on yourself, rather than your partner’s behavior. An important outcome of self-care and self-analysis is awareness of our role. And an honest evaluation of our capacity or desire to continue in that role.

Is the end of your toxic relationship inevitable? In the articles they wrote, Dr. Cory and Sherry Gaba sounded hopeful (links available below). They suggested that examination on both sides may result in the relationship re-setting and becoming healthy. Consider three potential outcomes:

- both sides self-examine, learn and practise new healthy behaviors and the relationship survives.
- One side self-examines and the relationship ends.
- The carousel spins on.

Perhaps you have identified a past relationship that WAS toxic. If so, this journal and support sessions can help you resist the 'giving-in' in a future relationship. You may not realize how the impact of your past relationship is driving important decisions around current relationships. The GLITCH affects us all for years after the threat is over, and makes it more likely we will choose another abusive or toxic partner. If we find a healthy relationship, the GLITCH makes it harder to keep it that way.

My name is Lori Holstein. I am the author of "UNLIMITED REVISIONS Exposing the Glitch: Confronting Female Complicity in Recovery from Toxic Relationships". I published this book under a pseudonym (Lorelie Friesen). I have developed a workshop series, guided journal and on-line guide for women wanting help. You can find these resources at www.unlimitedrevisions.ca

References

Cory, Thomas (ND) *What is a Toxic Relationship?* Health Scope Magazine

[What is a Toxic Relationship? 8 Types of Toxic Relationships and Their Signs \(healthscopemag.com\)](http://healthscopemag.com)

Gaba, Sherry (March 12, 2021) *What is a Toxic Relationship?* Psychology Today

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/addiction-and-recovery/202103/what-is-toxic-relationship>