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A sociopath is a term used to describe a person with a severe form of antisocial personality disorder. Sociopaths do not have a fully functional conscience and tend to be manipulative, exploitative, or even abusive towards other people. Other sociopathic traits include charm, impulsiveness, poor emotional control, and a tendency to behave in illegal, immoral, or violent ways.^{1,2,3}

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What Is a Sociopath?



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relationships. Some sociopaths also have narcissistic traits – [narcissistic sociopaths](#) can be especially dangerous and manipulative. Many also have problems with drugs or alcohol, and have a pattern of irresponsible or impulsive decision making that has caused problems in their work, life, and relationships. ¹

Psychopath vs. Sociopath

While the terms [psychopath and sociopath](#) are sometimes used interchangeably, many experts argue that there are differences between the two. Both sociopathic and psychopathic people have antisocial personality disorder, but psychopaths are believed to have a more severe form of ASPD than sociopaths. Below is a chart outlining some of the main differences between sociopaths and psychopaths. ^{1,4}

Psychopathic traits & characteristics	Sociopathic traits & characteristics
Inability to empathize with others	Limited ability to empathize with others
Lack of conscience or remorse for actions	Limited conscience or remorse for actions
No close bonds or relationships	Few close bonds and relationships
Callous and emotionally detached	Emotionally reactive and easily angered
Strategic decision making	Reckless or impulsive decision making
Sadistic and enjoys pain of other people	Willing to harm/use others for personal gain
More prone towards violence	More prone towards exploitation

15 Signs & Traits of a Sociopath

The signs of a sociopath are not always obvious, especially since some sociopaths have become very skilled at deceiving, charming, and manipulating others to get what they want. ⁵ This can make it very difficult to spot a sociopath in your life, especially if they are someone you don't know very well or interact with on a regular basis.



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Both sociopaths and psychopaths are commonly found at the head of corporations, governments, and in positions of great power and authority, and this may be no coincidence. Sociopaths have a tendency to be power hungry and may spend a lot of time and effort attaining positions where they can control, dominate, and have authority over others.² Once they obtain power, they often are seen misusing and abusing it in ways that are irresponsible, destructive, and harmful towards others.

2. Devious or Deceptive Tendencies

Another common characteristic of a sociopath is the tendency to be devious, dishonest, or deceptive. Sociopaths are often caught telling lies, exaggerating or distorting the facts, or misrepresenting the truth in order to get what they want.⁵ When caught in a lie or confronted about their dishonesty, they often use denial, projection, or redirection to squirm out of accountability.⁴

3. Ruthlessness in the Pursuit of Their Goals

Sociopathic people tend to be ruthless in their efforts to get what they want. Because they aren't held back by normal reservations, moral or ethical principles, or concern for others, there aren't many lines they *won't* cross to reach a goal. They may lie, cheat, steal, and use and abuse other people in order to get more money, power, or something they've decided they want.^{1,2}

4. Hostile or Aggressive Towards Others

Hostility, anger, and aggression are other common traits found in sociopaths. Sociopaths are more likely to hold racist, sexist, or misogynistic ideals or to have hostile feelings towards both individuals and groups within society. They are also more likely to be violent, abusive, or aggressive towards people, although some sociopaths will use more covert



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guilt, and anger, a sociopath may only have access to a few of these emotions. Anger is one of the most easily accessible emotions for the sociopath, and one that shows up frequently in their relationships, work, and daily life. They are often easily angered, irritated, and prone to yelling, aggression, or outbursts when upset. ⁴

6. Irresponsible Decision Making

One of the main symptoms of a sociopath is a pattern of reckless, irresponsible, and impulsive decision making throughout their life. While everyone occasionally makes irresponsible or rash choices, a sociopath consistently makes poor choices, including ones which endanger themselves or others. ^{1,3}

Unlike other people, they do not seem to ‘learn’ from these mistakes, and will instead continue making them over and over again.

7. Superficial Charm & Powers of Persuasion

Sociopaths can be charming, cunning, and highly persuasive people who can easily get people to like them, agree with them, and help them out. These charms are superficial in nature, and tend to wear off the more often a person has to interact with them, like when you start [dating a sociopath](#) and they drop the charm now that they “have you.” ^{4,5}

Over time, it will become clear that the sociopath is not an honest or trustworthy person, and most people will distance themselves from them. Still, they can be very good at making a first impression, charming others, and persuading people to do things for them. ⁵

8. Broken Moral Compass or Limited Conscience

People with antisocial personality disorder do not have a working moral compass, and



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advantage of them. While some sociopaths do feel a twinge of regret afterwards, it is usually not enough to stop them from doing the same thing to someone in the future. ^{4,5}

9. Few Close Bonds or Relationships

Because one of the hallmark sociopath signs is the inability to empathize or a disregard for the feelings and needs of others, it is very difficult for a sociopath to form close bonds with another person. ^{1,2,4}

They may have a few close relationships (often with family members or a significant other) but are generally unable to form healthy, lasting relationships with people. This is why many sociopaths have a long list of exes, “frenemies” and people they’ve betrayed, wronged, or abandoned who now distrust or dislike them. ⁵

10. Manipulative Tendencies

Manipulative tendencies are another classic sign of sociopathy, and may include a pattern of lying, guilt-tripping, or coercing people into doing things for them. They use their charm, powers of persuasion, and [emotional manipulation](#) to try to control the actions and choices of other people, often for their own self-serving interests. ⁴ Some sociopaths manipulate other people because they find it entertaining, and not just when they are trying to get something out of it.

11. Entitlement & Impunity

Feeling entitled or above the law is another common characteristic of a sociopath. Sociopaths are people who feel like they should be exempt from following rules and sometimes even laws. They may demand that other people make exceptions or bend the rules for them, and also to make exceptions in holding them accountable or punishing them



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that violate the unspoken rules of society most people follow. These include small infractions like waiting in lines or taking turns or telling half truths, as well as larger violations that harm other people or break laws. This same tendency can also show up as sexual promiscuity, even when the person committed to a monogamous relationship. ^{1,2,5}

13. Cheap Thrill-Seeking Tendencies

Many people who have sociopath symptoms seek out cheap thrills, even when doing so puts them or others at risk. These may include frequently overindulging in drugs or alcohol, sex, food, or expensive shopping or casino outings. Seeking out cheap thrills is often driven by impulses and urges that arise in the moment, and also may be related to their tendency to become easily bored. ^{1,2,4}

14. Opportunistic in all the Wrong Ways

Opportunists are people who find ways to turn situations (including hardships) into advantages, but sociopaths often seek out or create hardships for others for their own advantage. This makes them antisocial opportunists who attempt to profit or gain from the misfortune of other people, and to view the struggles of others in a positive light.

15. Emotional Detachment

A final sign of a sociopath is emotional detachment, which may show up as being cool, callous, or emotionally absent. When other people are freaking out, the sociopath may be unusually calm and when others would feel guilty or sad, the sociopath may seem perfectly content and happy. These abnormal emotional reactions are often a sign that there is some 'missing' emotional wiring in a person, which is one of the telltale traits of a sociopath. ²

Sociopath Characteristics in Kids & Teens



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diagnosed with conduct disorder will have [ASPD symptoms](#) as an adult. Studies have found that 25-40% of those with conduct disorder will receive a diagnosis of antisocial personality disorder in adulthood.

Children who are naturally more impulsive, inattentive, and hyperactive are believed to be at higher risk for developing [antisocial traits](#) and tendencies, as are children of neglectful or overly permissive parents. ^{1,6}

The symptoms of conduct disorder include some of the most common characteristics of early antisocial or sociopathic traits in children, and include: ³

1. A consistent, repetitive pattern of behavior that violates rules, norms, or the rights of other people as evidenced by three or more of the following behaviors over a span of 6 months or more:
2. Aggression to people or animals
3. Bullying, threatening or intimidating others
4. Initiating physical fights
5. Use of a weapon to seriously harm others
6. Physical cruelty to people
7. Physical cruelty to animals
8. Direct theft from a person (i.e. mugging, purse snatching, etc.)
9. Deceitfulness or theft
10. Breaking into other people's property
11. Lying to obtain favors, goods, or to avoid obligations
12. Stealing items without direct confrontation (i.e. shoplifting)
13. Staying out past curfew before the age of 13
14. Running away from home overnight at least twice
15. School absences or skipping classes before age 13
16. The symptoms and behaviors are severe enough to interfere with social, academic, or



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Can Sociopathy Be Treated?

A sociopath is a person who has antisocial personality disorder, which is widely considered one of the most difficult disorders to treat. All personality disorders are difficult to treat, and are associated with poorer outcomes in therapy, but sociopaths are also much less likely to seek treatment.⁷

Their lack of empathy for others coupled with a lack of remorse for their actions makes it less likely that they will want to change their behavior, even when it's become problematic. Still, a sociopath who has a true desire to change should not feel like it's pointless or hopeless to seek out help from a therapist or other professional. There is evidence that some people with APSD are able to improve their symptoms with individual therapies like CBT or group therapy programs.⁷

Final Thoughts

The signs and traits of a sociopath are not always obvious or easy to spot, especially because true sociopaths have such a foreign way of thinking, feeling, and behaving. A lack of conscience and empathy, disregard for rules and norms, and impulsive and aggressive tendencies are all common traits of a sociopath.^{1,4,5}

These traits make a person more likely to use, exploit, abuse, or harm other people, so many sociopaths are dangerous people to allow into your life. Knowing the signs of a sociopath can help you identify people with these traits and tendencies so that you can set boundaries, distance yourself from them, and limit their ability to negatively impact you or important parts of your life.^{4,5}

Additional Resources



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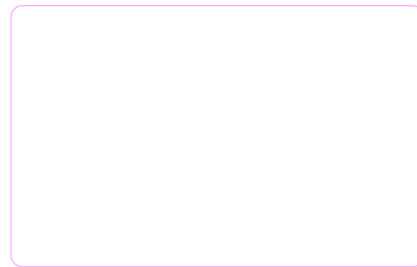
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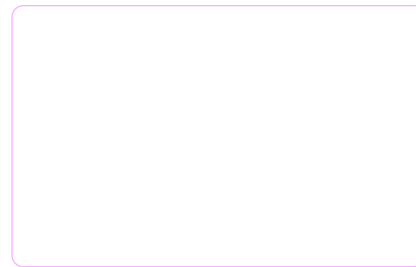
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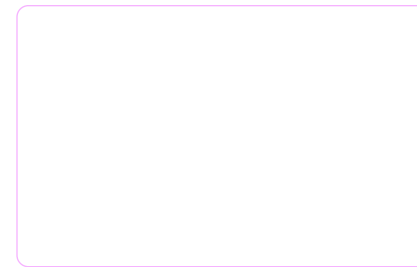
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Antisocial Personality Disorder Symptoms

Antisocial personality disorder is a personality disorder characterized by deficits in empathy, remorse, and conscience. People with this disorder more