

Power, control, bondage & manipulation — techniques, red flags, and how to avoid them

Union of Saints

Great — here's a practical, usable guide you can keep and refer to. I grouped common tactics, the signs they show up with, why people use them, and *exact* strategies and short scripts you can use to respond or protect yourself.

1) Common manipulation & control techniques (with quick signs)

1. Gaslighting

- What: Denying facts, memory, or your feelings to make you doubt yourself.
- Signs: "That never happened," "You're too sensitive," consistent rewriting of events.

2. Silent treatment / stonewalling

- What: Withdrawing communication as punishment or to control.
- Signs: Sudden shutdown, leaving you to chase for answers.

3. Isolation

- What: Cutting you off from friends/family or subtly undermining relationships.
- Signs: "Your friends don't understand you," discouraging visits, scheduling conflicts that prevent contact.

4. Love-bombing → devaluation

- What: Overwhelming praise/affection early, then criticism and withdrawal later.
- Signs: Intense early attention, then sudden coldness or unrealistic expectations.

5. Blame shifting / victim playing

- What: Making you responsible for their behavior or making themselves the victim.
- Signs: "If you hadn't...", constant justification that you caused the problem.

6. Financial control

- What: Controlling money, limiting access, monitoring spending.

- Signs: No access to funds, being required to ask for money, debt hidden from you.

7. Threats & intimidation (explicit or subtle)

- What: Threats of harm, leaving, exposure, or legal trouble to force compliance.
- Signs: “I’ll make sure you regret it,” veiled threats, angry outbursts.

8. Triangulation / playing people against each other

- What: Bringing third parties into conflicts to manipulate alliances.
- Signs: “So-and-so agrees with me,” gossip or selective sharing to isolate you.

9. Gaslighting by proxy (using others)

- What: Recruiting others to support their version of events.
- Signs: People suddenly siding against you with details you never heard.

10. Micro-managing / excessive rules

- What: Setting up many rules to control daily life.
- Signs: Criticism of minor choices, intrusive oversight.

11. Guilt trips / moral manipulation

- What: Making you feel immoral or selfish for asserting needs.
- Signs: “After all I’ve done for you...” or “You’re breaking my heart.”

12. Conditional affection / “punishment” affection

- What: Love or approval only when you comply.
- Signs: Approval is earned, withheld otherwise.

2) Why manipulators do this (short)

- To gain power, predictability, and control.
 - To avoid accountability and responsibility.
 - Because it worked for them before (learned behavior).
Understanding motive doesn’t excuse it — it helps you respond strategically.
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3) How to avoid and respond — practical strategies

A. Immediate tactics (use in the moment)

- **Name it** simply and calmly: “That feels like gaslighting — I remember it differently.”
- **Use brief, firm statements** (no long arguments): “I won’t discuss this when you raise your voice. We can talk later.”
- **Gray-rock** (be boring): give neutral, unemotional responses to reduce reward for manipulation.
- **Delay/exit**: “I need time. Let’s pause.” Then leave the conversation or end the call.

Short response scripts

- Gaslighting: “I remember it that way. I won’t accept being told I’m imagining this.”
- Silent treatment: “When you stop talking to me, I can’t resolve this. I’ll check back in tomorrow.”
- Blame shifting: “I’m not responsible for your choices. I will take care of my part.”
- Guilt trip: “I hear you feel hurt. I also have my limits and needs.”

B. Practical boundary tools

- **Set clear boundaries**: write them, say them once, and enforce consequences.
- **Use “If → Then” enforcement**: “If you do X, then I will do Y (leave, end call, involve HR).”
- **Document everything**: dates, messages, incidents, witnesses — especially important at work or in legal situations.
- **Limit access**: block, mute, or limit contact when needed (social media, phone).
- **Trust your notes**: keep a private log so you can check facts if gaslit.

C. Long-term protection & planning

- **Financial independence**: maintain your own accounts, emergency funds, and copies of documents.
- **Safety plan**: if you feel threatened, plan exit routes, packed bag, safe contacts, and emergency numbers.
- **Legal steps**: know your rights about shared property, restraining orders, or workplace policies.

- **Therapy & support:** a therapist can validate experiences and sharpen boundary skills. Support groups reduce isolation.
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4) Workplace & professional manipulation — extra steps

- Keep communications in writing (email, Slack) so there's a record.
 - Use neutral, factual language in responses.
 - Escalate to HR or a manager with documented incidents.
 - Don't share personal vulnerability at work; keep conversations professional.
 - Know company policy and legal protections (discrimination, harassment).
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5) Red-flags checklist (quick scan)

- Frequent rewriting of events / “You're crazy” responses.
 - You feel confused, anxious, or second-guess yourself often.
 - Isolation from friends/family.
 - You're constantly apologizing even when uncertain why.
 - Access to your finances, social accounts, or important documents is restricted.
 - Threats, intimidation, or physical aggression.
- If multiple boxes tick — treat it seriously.
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6) Conversation starters & boundary templates

When someone manipulates with guilt:

“I understand you feel hurt. I'm not willing to accept guilt as a way to control me. Let's talk about specific actions we can take.”

When someone tries to isolate you:

“I value my relationships. I choose who I spend time with. Please stop speaking negatively about my friends to me.”

If you're being gaslit:

"I remember the conversation differently. I'm going to keep a note of what happened so we don't keep repeating this."

At work (receiving unreasonable demands):

"I can complete this by [specific date]. If priorities change, please confirm in writing so I can adjust my schedule."

7) If it's abusive or you're unsafe

- If you are in immediate danger, call emergency services now.
 - If you're in the U.S. and need confidential help, call the National Domestic Violence Hotline: **1-800-799-SAFE (7233)** or use their online chat. If you're elsewhere, contact local emergency services or your country's domestic violence hotline.
 - Consider a safety plan (bag with documents, copies of keys, trusted contact).
 - Reach out to friends, shelter services, or legal aid for assistance.
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8) Self-care & recovery from manipulation

- Validate yourself: manipulation lowers self-trust — rebuilding it is essential.
 - Keep a "reality log" of incidents to restore confidence in your memory.
 - Work with a trauma-informed therapist if manipulation was prolonged.
 - Reconnect with supportive people and activities that restore autonomy.
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9) Quick one-page cheat sheet (copyable)

- Spot it: Gaslighting / isolation / blame / threats / conditional love.
 - Respond: Short, calm, name it, set a boundary, document.
 - Enforce: If → Then consequences and follow through.
 - Protect: Financial independence, records, limited contact, safety plan.
 - Escalate: HR, legal, emergency services if threatened.
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