



What NOT to do when you realize you're involved with a sociopath

By Donna Andersen, author of Lovefraud.com

You've been living in insanity. Your partner seems to randomly lash out or give you the silent treatment, and then says you're to blame. Your finances are in shambles, and you're to blame for that too — even if you're the only one working. You are positive that this person is cheating on you, but he or she insists you are paranoid and delusional.

Or, in a variation on a theme, you are living with the distinct feeling that something is amiss, although you can't quite figure out what it is.

You Google terms like "emotional abuse" or "signs of cheating" or "love and deceit." Eventually you end up on Lovefraud.

Suddenly, everything makes sense. The articles describe what you're experiencing. Other people are telling stories that sound just like yours.

You realize that you're involved with a sociopath.

You are horrified — this personality disorder sounds really, really bad, and there is no treatment for it.

But you are also relieved — now you know you are not crazy; it's him (or her).

So what do you do with this information?

First, here's what NOT to do: Do NOT confront the sociopath.

Even though you want to say, "I KNOW WHAT YOU ARE!!!"

Even though you want to defend yourself, "IT'S NOT ME, IT'S YOU!!!"

Don't do it.

Now that you know what you're dealing with, keep the information to yourself and carefully plan what you're going to do next.

The sociopath's reaction

Sociopaths are all about power and control. If you tell the person that you have figured out that everything he or she has told you is a lie, that everything he or she has done was manipulation, the sociopath will perceive a loss of power and control over you.

The sociopath will probably react in one of these ways:

- Love bombing: He or she will turn on the charm or plead for another chance, causing you to doubt yourself and drawing you back into the web.
- Rage: He or she will become infuriated and ratchet up the abuse.
- Abandonment: He or she will abruptly leave, causing as much damage to you as possible on the way out.

Any of these reactions by the sociopath will probably make your situation more difficult.

So even though you now know the truth, put on an act. Pretend that everything is the same, while you evaluate the extent of the sociopath's deceit and exploitation. Figure out how you are going to extricate yourself from the involvement to best protect your safety, health, finances and reputation.

Sociopath's family

Here's something else you should NOT do: Do not confide in the sociopath's family.

Keep in mind that this disorder is highly genetic, so it is quite possible that the sociopath's parents, siblings or other relatives are also disordered. If so, they will side with the sociopath to help him or her keep control over you.

Or, the family may be clueless. Some family members — especially if they don't see the sociopath very often — may have absolutely no idea what he or she is really like. If the sociopath starts playing the victim, they may buy the act and do everything they can to help the sociopath, not you.

Or, the family may have known all along that the sociopath was no good, and wanted you to take the problem off of their hands. They don't want to deal with the disorder again, so they may sabotage your efforts to escape.

Talking to friends

Do NOT relay your suspicions to any friends who are also the sociopath's friends.

Sociopaths engage in impression management. Just as the sociopath was able to charm you for so long, he or she charms other people. So people who know the sociopath may have a hard

time believing what you are saying.

This is especially true if the sociopath has already launched a smear campaign.

Long before you have any clue what is going on, the sociopath may have started laying the groundwork to discredit you. He or she may have made up stories about your behavior, or "confided" that you're "mentally unstable."

The sociopath may have subtly turned people against you. So if you start talking about what has really been going on in your life, they are primed to disbelieve you.

In fact, you should also be careful about talking to your own friends.

The sociopath may contact them behind your back and convincingly express concern about you. What the sociopath really wants is information. Your friends may fall for the scam — after all, you did — and tell the sociopath something that can jeopardize your plans.

People don't understand

Keep in mind that most people simply don't understand what the words "sociopath" and "psychopath" mean. Most people think they are serial killers.

If you say you're involved with a sociopath, and that person doesn't look like a killer, others may think you're exaggerating.

So even if you're bursting to confront the sociopath, and you want to tell the world that he or she is a lying, manipulative exploiter, it's best to be very cautious about sharing the information.

Keep quiet, at least in the beginning — until you know whom you can really trust.