



An open letter to lawyers who have clients involved with sociopaths

By Donna Andersen, author of Lovefraud.com

Dear Mr. or Ms. Esquire,

When a client tells you his or her opponent is a sociopath, please be aware of the ramifications for your legal case.

First of all, do not disregard the statement just because the opponent hasn't killed anyone. A common perception is that sociopaths (people who have antisocial, narcissistic, borderline, histrionic or psychopathic personality disorders) are all deranged serial killers. This is not true—only a small percentage of sociopaths commit murder. But all sociopaths are social predators, and live by exploiting others.

Frequently this is financial exploitation—many sociopaths are skilled con artists—but not always. Sociopaths also target people who can provide them with a place to live, business connections, sex, housekeeping or other support services, children, or a respectable image in the community while they live double lives. The point is that sociopaths intentionally use manipulation and deceit to hook their target. They continue the manipulation and deceit to keep the exploitation going, bleeding the target until there is nothing left. At that point, some sociopaths abandon the target, moving on without a backward glance.

Sometimes, however, the target gets wise to the sociopath, and wants to end the involve-

ment. At this point, some sociopaths become enraged at the possibility of losing control, and set out to crush the target. They are not interested in compromise or equitable distribution. They do not want to give the target whatever he or she is entitled to. They want to grind the target into the dirt.

What you need to understand about sociopaths

1. A sociopath's prime objective is power and control. All they want is to win.
2. Sociopaths love the drama of court because it gives them an opportunity to win. They do not consider the possibility that they may lose. If they do lose, they view it a bump in the road, and figure out how to attack the target again. Forcing the target to incur steadily mounting legal expenses is considered a win.
3. Sociopaths lie. They lie convincingly. They have no qualms about lying in court documents or on the witness stand.
4. Sociopaths manipulate other people to lie for them. These witnesses may not know they are lying—they may simply believe everything that the sociopath has told them, because sociopaths are so convincing.
5. Sociopaths feel no obligation to follow court orders or the law. They only follow court orders

or the law if they perceive an advantage in doing so. But they are experts at figuring out ways to use the law to further their objective, which is to crush your client.

How people become targets

Most of us believe that people are basically good inside and everybody just wants to be loved. Because we do not know that there are exceptions to these beliefs—namely, sociopaths—we have huge blind spots that these predators can exploit.

No normal person intentionally becomes involved with a lying, manipulative sociopath. So when your client tells you outrageous stories of the sociopath's behavior, and also says he or she never knew about the behavior, or accepted the sociopath's explanations, your client is most likely telling the truth.

How do these entanglements happen? Sociopaths are always on the lookout for people they can use. When they encounter someone through any social interaction, they quickly evaluate whether that person has something that they want. If the answer is yes, they assess the person for vulnerabilities. Then they figure out how to exploit the person's vulnerabilities to achieve their objective.

Sociopaths engage in calculated seduction. If you're handling a divorce case, the seduction was romantic. If it's some other type of case, the seduction may have involved shared beliefs, aspirations or goals. Either way, in the beginning of the involvement the target is subject to a wonderful honeymoon of admiration and promise.

Once the target is hooked, the sociopath begins the exploitation, while simultaneously

ramping up manipulation to keep the target under control. This may involve:

- Isolating the target from his or her support network
- Emotional, psychological, verbal, physical, sexual or financial abuse
- Gaslighting—making the target doubt his or her own perceptions

What you need to understand about the target

1. Involvement with a sociopath is like living in a black hole of chaos. Your client, the target, has probably had every aspect of his or her life disrupted:

- Career interrupted
- Finances ruined
- Health compromised
- Home and property neglected
- Relationships shattered

By the time the legal action commenced, your client may have already been in free fall for a long time. He or she may feel overwhelmed by the magnitude of the issues that need to be addressed.

2. Involvement with a sociopath can cause post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). At one time PTSD was diagnosed only in relation to a single traumatic event that involved risk of serious injury or death, coupled with intense fear, horror or helplessness. A new definition identifies a type of PTSD — complex PTSD — that results from cumulative trauma and long-term injury.

3. PTSD is a psychiatric injury (not a mental illness). PTSD causes biochemical changes in the brain and affects certain areas of the brain's anatomy. Common symptoms include intrusive thoughts, nightmares, flashbacks, difficulty concentrating and exhaustion.

4. The litigation against the sociopath makes your client re-experience the underlying trauma and triggers the symptoms of PTSD. Dr. Karin Huffer, in her book *Unlocking Justice*, explains what happens:

"Mentally reliving the trauma during legal proceedings simultaneously activates parts of the brain that support intense emotions while diminishing the functions of the central nervous system that controls motor output, regulates physiological arousal, and impedes the ability to communicate in words. Memory fails and intrusive emotions sabotage concentration on the task at hand. Litigants feel incapable of the spontaneous verbal response and interaction required in typical courtroom exchanges. As a result, the litigant with PTSD might be driven to avoid topics. They literally do not hear them. They disconnect when they need to engage. And, at times, they clearly are nonfunctional and are unable to communicate their symptoms and needs in a formal manner accepted by the courts."

5. Targets of sociopaths have been deceived, betrayed and perhaps subjected to violence. They approach the courts expecting justice, which sociopaths actively thwart. When justice is denied, and targets instead experience profound and prolonged injustice, their PTSD takes on another dimension, which Huffer identifies as "Legal Abuse Syndrome."

Your client's experience

The goal of this letter, Mr. or Ms. Esquire, is to help you understand what your client has experienced. My objective is to explain why he or she may be having difficulties with the litigation process, and difficulties moving on in life. The sociopath intentionally used your client—perhaps for years—and may be intentionally attempting to destroy him or her now.

Your client is not irrational, lazy or obstinate. Your client is having a normal reaction to profound betrayal.

Sincerely,

Donna Andersen
Author, Lovefraud.com,
and a former litigant against a sociopath