

TOXIC MEN

Passionate, intense, exciting – bad boys are utterly addictive, but look deeper and you'll find a dark nature that destroys *everything* you hold dear

By Sami Rahman

A relationship with a toxic man can be thrilling and draining at the same time. Blazing rows, name calling and violent outbursts are usually followed by extravagant romantic gestures, steamy make-up sex and the promise that it'll never happen again. This intense, all-consuming passion is glamorised everywhere, from adverts in magazines to music videos on MTV – just look at Rihanna and Eminem's video to *Love the Way You Lie*, a beautifully shot look at dark sexuality and obsession where Hollywood actress Megan Fox simmers while attacking and being attacked by her violent boyfriend.

Relationships thrive on passion but there is a line – one that is too often obscured by the messages we receive from the media. So how do we know where to draw it? And how can we tell when the man we're with is bad for us?

“Toxic men hide their poison behind charm, intelligence and romantic attention.”

“A toxic man will invalidate you by being negative or critical,” explains Sally Stubbs, author of *If Life Gives you Lemons*. “His communication will have a ‘put down’ quality and he'll continuously try to

control you emotionally, claiming that you are weak.”

Cognitive behavioural therapist Avy Joseph also argues that a toxic man is likely to have self-esteem issues. “A man who behaves in a toxic way in a relationship is someone with issues of low self-esteem and unhealthy or irrational beliefs,” he explains. “In unhealthy relationships, a man with self-esteem problems will label the woman as weak or even toxic too.”

HOW TO IDENTIFY HIM

It's important to determine exactly what makes a man toxic. Does forgetting your birthday or flirting with other women qualify? Or is it something more serious, like lying or cheating?

“Toxic men, whether they are exhibiting behaviours of jealousy, cheating, are angry or critical, have one main purpose and that is to be emotionally controlling of their partner,” says Sally.

“It's very important to remember that both the man and the woman are responsible for the maintenance of a bad relationship,” adds Avy. “The man may behave in a controlling or abusive manner but the woman may behave in a passive manner. Both behaviours are toxic and fuelled by unhealthy beliefs.”

TOXIC TYPES

Avy Joseph talks us through the different types of toxic men:

Mr Aggressive

These men don't show emotions, even when you feel hurt. They display ‘withholding’ behaviour such as withholding kindness, information and love. They are cold, inattentive and lack empathy. They may also put you down, be critical and aggressive – either verbally or physically. They might have an explosive and unpredictable temper. They're also likely to be mistrusting, jealous or insecure, checking your phone or interrogating you.

Mr Irresponsible

This man will usually lack responsibility towards you or others. He may disrespect your rights as a woman, be un-committal or uncooperative. He's likely to have parents who may have pampered him too much and, as a consequence, he usually puts himself first. He may also think little of staying out all night and doing whatever he feels like without paying attention to your feelings.

Mr Needy

Needy men will usually put the feelings of others above their own. He'll focus excessively on what you want and how you feel at the expense of his own desires. He behaves in a needy way and is usually unassertive. He'll suppress his own feelings, especially feelings of anger. However, this suppression of emotion usually leads to passive aggression, temper tantrums, and sulking. Some men under this type will also abuse alcohol, drugs and food as a way

to suppress their own emotions. He will tend to seek approval from others and will be incredibly sensitive to rejection.

Mr Critical

A critical man will have lots of rigid rules and high expectations about how you should behave, usually at the expense of happiness and closeness. He might find it difficult to relax and may come from a family where the atmosphere was demanding with a focus on performance, duties, and obligations over play and fun. Another behaviour commonly displayed with this type is hypercriticism, as everything must be perfect. His attitude may also be very pessimistic and he will find forgiveness very difficult.

AN ADDICTION

Just like an unhealthy addiction to smoking, some women can become addicted to toxic men, finding it extremely hard to leave him or continuously falling for the wrong type of men.

"Women are attracted to toxic men for two main reasons," explains Sally. "Firstly, toxic men, in the early days of relationship can hide their poison behind charm, intelligence, and romantic attention. Secondly, some women will have a deeply embedded belief system of low self-worth or low self-esteem, making them believe that they must be wrong and that they deserve the abuse."

Childhood experience can also shape how we perceive relationships. "If things like security, safety, stability, nurture, empathy, sharing of feelings, acceptance and respect were lacking in your childhood, this will determine your view of how love is expressed," says Avy.

"A toxic man's behaviour will be familiar. Even if they are at the heart of our pain, they feel right."

CHANGING HIS WAYS

Changing toxic behaviour isn't easy and it may be difficult if your man doesn't recognise his

actions as being damaging. "Change is possible if a man recognises his toxic behaviour," explains Avy. "The man who behaves in any of the above manners is likely to be unhappy. If he reflects and recognises this he can begin to search for the reasons why."

He also needs to determine what makes him happy in his relationship and work on improving it. "He needs to

leave their partner and are likely to give them multiple chances to change. But if you find yourself in a circle of fighting and forgiving, it could be time to let go.

"If he refuses to accept that his behaviour is wrong – leave," says Sally. "Life's too short to stay in such a bewildering and unhappy place.

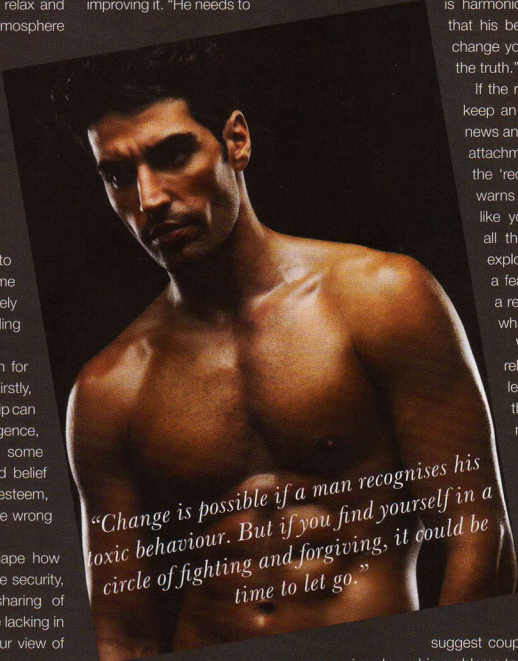
You have a right to be in a relationship that is harmonious and loving. And if you feel that his behaviour is somehow your fault, change your beliefs rapidly. Beliefs are not the truth."

If the relationship is relatively new then keep an eye out for signs that he's bad news and break it off before an emotional attachment is formed. "Be conscious of the 'red flags' and don't ignore them," warns Avy. "If you find yourself feeling like you should give it a go despite all the red flags, then you need to explore the reasons why. It could be a fear of loneliness, a need to be in a relationship or a feeling that this is what you deserve."

Women who are in a long-term relationship may find it harder to leave a toxic man. "Remember that you will get the type of relationship you tolerate so if you want to change it you have to change your own behaviour first," explains Avy. "Saying 'I won't tolerate this again' more than once without changing your behaviour sends a signal to him that you *will* tolerate it so stick to your guns."

As a last resort, you could suggest couples counselling to work through his problems together.

If things still remain the same, you must accept that it is time to move on. If you find this too hard, then seek help through therapy or loved ones. You deserve a happy, healthy relationship – something you may never get from a toxic man no matter how much he says he loves you. **AW**



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genuinely want his partner to be happy with him," adds Sally. "He needs to ask: what do I need to change about my behaviour?"

TIME TO LEAVE

Many women in toxic relationships find it difficult

5 SIGNS THAT HE'S MR WRONG

1. He constantly puts you down in private and in public, making you feel small and worthless.
2. He behaves aggressively and you feel threatened, scared or unsafe when he's around.
3. His actions cause you emotional, psychological or physical pain – believe your pain, it's telling you the truth about him.
4. If you are crying and he refuses to take responsibility for his actions.
5. He's controlling, possessive and jealous, and resents you spending time with others.