



Sex and relationships Lifestyle / Family & Relationships




Luisa Tam

## The Naked Truth | When to leave a toxic relationship and how to avoid dating similar people so you can find someone who recognises your true worth

If you're with someone who is insecure, controlling, disrespectful, dishonest or selfish and it's causing you trauma then it could be time to get out

Recognising that a past relationship was unhealthy and that it was not your fault can give you the power to make a change in your life

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### **Luisa Tam**

Published: 2:00am, 2 Aug 2020 | Updated: 2:00am, 2 Aug 2020

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Those of us in a happy relationship may think we are immune to things turning sour, but even a happy partnership can become toxic or even abusive over time. Generally, the toxicity is caused by negative emotions that stem from a lack of empathy, respect, understanding and compassion.

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When these essential building blocks that support a healthy relationship are gone, the partnership will not only cease to grow and develop, but will spiral into constant conflict and contempt and eventually come crumbling down.

No one should ever tolerate such toxicity because these kinds of relationships are harmful to all parties involved and can cause lasting damage even long after it's over, says Dr Quratulain Zaidi, a Hong Kong-based clinical psychologist.



Even the happiest relationships can turn sour and result in constant conflict. Photo: Shutterstock

A toxic relationship is characterised by someone who is insecure, controlling, demanding, disrespectful, critical, dishonest, negative, narcissistic, selfish and prone to jealousy, she points out.

She adds that research has shown that people who are in negative relationships are at greater risk of developing heart problems.

Trauma that is caused by these bad relationships can make people act in ways that are unimaginable, brutal and devastating. This type of trauma can often lead to depression, anxiety, panic attacks, eating disorders and low self-esteem, as well as insecurity that can lead to self-harm.

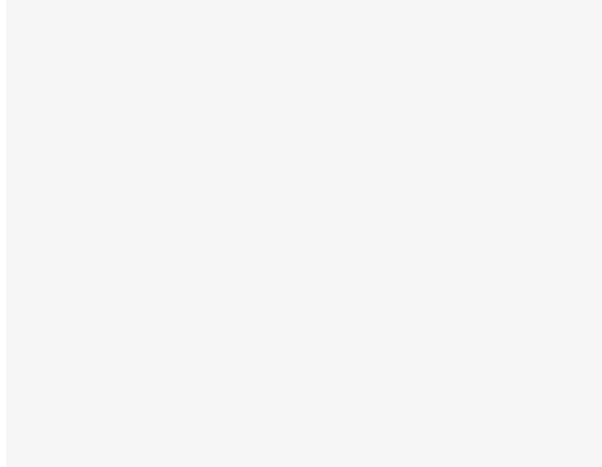
In the aftermath of a toxic relationship, one might develop negative characteristics of their own, which can potentially harm their future relationships and friendships in general, Zaidi warns.

“One of the most challenging therapeutic issues is helping patients who have been preyed upon or emotionally abused to accept a new relationship that is kind and loving without fleeing or giving up,” she says. “Those who have suffered relationship traumas tend to be attracted to what is familiar: more toxic relationships. This means that breaking the pattern is hard, because they perceive toxicity to be normal.”



A toxic relationship can often lead to trauma like depression, anxiety and panic attacks. Photo: Shutterstock

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It is important to give yourself time to heal from your traumatic past before dating again, Zaidi says. And in this time of healing, it's important to set up some rules to protect yourself from toxic relationship traps.

First, you must make sure to set boundaries to ensure others treat you, your opinions, values and beliefs with respect, Zaidi says.

Second, it's important to learn how to deal with conflicts without fearing being abandoned. "Conflicts happen even in healthy relationships. However, people manage them without blame and toxicity."

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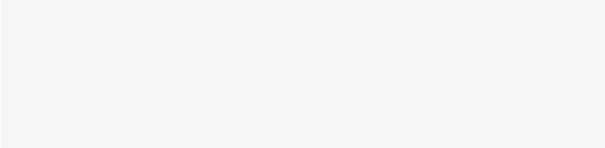
Finally, you must learn to identify people who make you feel unfulfilled and unacknowledged; are not accepting of who you are; and constantly make you feel like you are not good enough. You must have the courage to distance yourself from them sooner rather than later, as it gets harder to do so the longer you allow it to go on.



Dr Quratulain Zaidi is a Hong Kong-based clinical psychologist. Photo: Quratulain Zaidi

To wean off the habit, or “pattern”, of dating people with similar toxic traits again, Zaidi offers the following advice to spot potential red flags.

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The first step is to recognise that the past relationship was unhealthy and that it was not your fault. You must also remind yourself that you are not a broken person who attracts the same people and you have the power to make a change in your life.

To make sure you are on the right track, there are some questions to ask yourself, Zaidi says.

“When you’re with the person, do you usually feel content, even energised? Or do you often feel unfulfilled and drained? And after spending time with them, do you usually feel better or worse about yourself? And do you feel physically and/or emotionally safe with this person, or do you ever feel threatened or in danger?”

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Other points to consider is whether there is an equal amount of “give and take”. If you feel like you’re always giving and they are always taking, then it’s time to seriously reconsider the relationship.

A healthy relationship is also characterised by a constant feeling of security and contentment, not drama and angst. You shouldn’t feel like you have to change yourself to make them happy, Zaidi stresses.

