

TOXIC RELATIONSHIPS



BY DR. LISA SKEENS

I have been a therapist for sixteen years. I have worked with intelligent, wonderful women and men who have experienced just about every human problem imaginable. I have repeatedly heard clients ask “How could I have let myself be treated that way?” or “Why didn’t I see the red flags of this relationship?” The most common response has been “I should have listened to my intuition, I knew something was not right about this person. “ Humans engage in many relationships during their lifetimes. Romantic relationships can be exhilarating and supportive. They can also be destructive. Even the most intelligent and confident people can find themselves in extremely unhealthy situations. Supportive relationships can encourage personal growth and intimacy. Unhealthy relationships can be detrimental to a person’s ability to live a fulfilling life. Relationships that produce stress - opposed to support, can lead to physical and mental health problems and can prohibit personal growth and development.

The journey of life lends many opportunities for relationship experimentation. During the teen years and even through our twenties much of our relationship experience relates to physical and sexual attraction. During our younger years, we often do not contemplate the core traits of a partner. We do not always assess the potential of empathy or care giving ability of our dating partner. It is natural to experience good and bad relationships. Heartbreak and disillusionment are part of the process of maturation and understanding our own values. It can be entertaining to reflect with friends about “bad relationships” and the trials and tribulations we have endured over the years. Our relationship “war wounds” enhance our humanity. However, bad relationships are not as rousing when they cause physical or mental pain. They are also not humorous when they harm careers, ruin credit scores, expose children to an unhealthy environment or cause a person to lose their sense of identity; thus creating obstacles for healthy functioning.

The following article aims to meet the following objectives: To identify patterns of behavior in potential dating partners that could lead to “toxic” or unhealthy relationships, to identify certain behaviors that cannot be changed by “loving someone enough so they will want to change” and to introduce the concept of self-empowerment to support readers to realize their power for healthier choices in relationships. The article utilizes a humorous approach in describing “sub-types” of toxic relationship behavior. I have found that sometimes people can relate better to a more genuine approach opposed to reading a long list of clinical terminology; hence the reason that the material is presented with an edge of humor. Some categories are a little longer than others due to their complexity of symptoms.

As a last note, please remember that most of us have either displayed some of the traits mentioned in the below categories or have experienced them from our partner-this is because we all have unhealthy communication skills once in a while-because we are human and we all make mistakes. The danger lies when these patterns are pervasive (meaning it doesn’t happen occasionally; but is a daily or weekly pattern). Lastly, the names associated with these subtypes are not gender specific-certainly males and females can have any of these traits, I was just being creative with names!

VICTIMIZED VINNIE



Vinnie believes that he is always victimized by something in the world and that a dark cloud is following him. Vinnie may have had a difficult childhood and associates that with his current “issues.” Vinnie views the world through morose glasses. Vinnie will typically tell you he is just being a “realist,” but deep down inside he wants to elicit negativity because he is most comfortable with a pessimistic outlook. He may believe he is mistreated at work and seems to have a long list of times in his life he has been “done wrong.” Vinnie may appear to have a “persecution complex” because he does! Whenever someone in his family, social circle or workplace has a success, he becomes negative and believes they did not deserve it. As we know, there are people in life who truly are victimized due to poverty, racism, sexism, disability, etc. however, you need to be the judge of whether this is really happening or if it is a crutch. Vinnie may also take the form of a “tortured artist” or musician. It is my opinion that artists and musicians are crucial to society and deserve to have their talent nurtured, however this becomes problematic when Vinnie focuses only on his vision throughout the whole relationship and is not supportive of your talents or dreams. Vinnie can hide behind the disguise of being “misunderstood” to avoid taking care of his partner and focusing only his needs. Vinnie becomes argumentative if you try to challenge his negative outlook and will tell you that you are naïve or that you have just been lucky or spoiled to have been spared from the problems he has experienced in life. The more positive you try to be the more sarcastic and blaming he will become. The best way to figure out if Vinnie truly a victim is to look for hard evidence. Is there proof of why he was fired, or let go from jobs? Is he always saying he was mistreated in a past relationship, but takes no responsibility for his behavior in previous

relationships? Does he have secrets he is not sharing? (I.e. criminal record or other serious problems). Is there a history of being independent, such as having his own place to live or has he always been financially dependent on family or friends? Does he ever talk about the desire to be a supportive partner to you? Or does he seem to get agitated if you ask about his view of being a responsible partner?

Potential problem with dating Vinnie:

At first Vinnie will seem sweet and you may feel sorry for all his misfortunes and want to help him, but eventually, your love will not be enough to cut through his negativity and you will be just another person who “doesn’t get him” and just wants to see him fail. You will realize that he prefers to be under a “dark cloud” no matter how hard you try to inspire him. He can make excuses about his miserable life because you “pressured him in the wrong direction” and he can make you feel it is partially your fault he did not get the degree or the job he wanted-when in reality-it’s his fault for hiding behind the “victim” mask. Vinnie may also start to be resentful of your successes and say you are “spoiled” or play some mind games to try to get you to doubt yourself. Vinnie can also make his partner feel that she is “pressuring him” and putting “demands” on him to be a responsible partner . He can make you feel guilty for having goals for yourself and somehow will turn your desire to meet your personal goals into a mechanism of not loving him “unconditionally.” He will play this card until you may actually start to doubt yourself. Bottom line-Vinnie is more comfortable being a victim than taking responsibility. It is more appealing to complain about his misfortunes than to challenge himself. Vinnie can be exhausting because until he is ready to work on his own self-doubts he will continue being in victim mode-and in the worst case will blame you for his woes.

INSECURE INGRID



Every person has insecurities. We all have areas where we need to gain more confidence or there may be different environments in which we need to be more comfortable in our own skin, however Ingrid is chronically insecure. Ingrid looks to her partner to meet all of her emotional safety needs. Ingrid has an insatiable need to be affirmed in all areas of her life-her looks, her intelligence, her abilities, etc. Ingrid needs to hear “I love you” constantly, needs to call/text her partner constantly and does not like to be without her partner. Ingrid can be jealous and irrational. Ingrid’s greatest discomfort is being alone and will usually act up if she is put in that position. Ingrid asks frequently if she “looks fat” or “ugly” and thinks that everyone else is more attractive than her-which will eventually lead to her fear of her partner leaving. Ingrid does not believe she can hold her partner’s attention, so she becomes obsessed about losing him. For Ingrid, it is a distorted belief system of “out of sight-out of mind” – meaning she believes if she is not always physically with her partner, he might cheat on her or stop loving her. It is normal for a partner to be insecure if they have been lied to or trust has been disrupted in the relationship, but Ingrid’s insecurity many times has no history to warrant this irrational behavior.

Potential Problems with Dating Ingrid:

If you like to be the “Knight in Shining Armor” and rescue people-you are at risk for finding this type of partner. At first, it can feel great to feel so needed. You will feel more needed than ever before and the center of another’s universe. The problems arise when you realize Ingrid really does not have that many close relationships with others and does not understand why you may want to go out with your friends once in a while, or why you may want some alone time just to

relax. Ingrid will interpret this as rejection and will begin to throw emotional tantrums over time. Ingrid can become very high maintenance. You will come to realize that your love cannot make her a whole person. She will just want more and more attention-but until she learns to soothe herself and develop aspects of her own identity-you will drive yourself crazy trying to make Ingrid happy and secure-as you will never have the power to do it until she learns to feel comfortable being alone.

I'M TOO SEXY SAM



“Rico Suave” gets stereotyped in Latino culture-but let’s face it, it isn’t just a Latino thing-he is in every culture.... and it’s not just about being sexy. Sam can be physically attractive or he might just have the fantasy he is. Sam has an addictive charisma. He is in the center of the dance floor, he is the life of the party, he is buying everyone drinks at the bar and he lives for the attention of being the sexiest AND most fun person around. Sam seems to be unable to resist flirting or being sexual with others-especially when he first meets people so that he can display his “mystique” of being so irresistible. You will see Sam a lot at the gym working on his perfect six pack abs, at the tanning salon, on the beach showing off his toned physique. It is also important for Sam to be viewed as glamorous and will want to be at the most “cool” night clubs or establishments where he perceives all the “beautiful people” are. Sam usually thinks he is gifted in other areas too-typically in his career, in the bedroom, or he may think he looks like a specific famous person/actor. Sam has the ability to exaggerate his accomplishments. Sam might work

at a salesman for medical supplies but views himself as a “professional peer” to physicians. Sam may have a college degree and his partner does not, so he views himself in an “elite class” that she could not understand. It is very important for Sam to compete with the Jones’. He wants to have the most expensive car-but may be too cheap to put miles on it, or he may buy a house in the most expensive housing development, but does not have enough money to furnish it. Sam does not usually compromise with his partner financially. He will spend money on anything he needs to create his image. The most important thing is that he looks accomplished and at the top of his game – even if it is just an illusion. He believes that others are lucky to have the opportunity to “experience” him somehow-whether that is dating him, working alongside his “expertise” in the professional world, drinking with him at happy hour, sleeping with him, etc. Sam believes he is the “whole package” and enjoys celebrating himself on a daily basis!

Problems with Dating Sam:

When you first date Sam, he will seem adorable and a blast to be around. Sam’s high energy level is intoxicating at first. Sam will plan fun and zany dates and will want to impress you. This is great until.....you realize that Sam’s motivation is not about bringing joy into your life-it is about his constant need to validate his large ego. Sam will become high maintenance for a few reasons: Not only does he want constant attention from you and others, but he will want you to be just as “perfect” as he is-for ex. It will bother him if you gain a few pounds or if you do not keep up your appearance in a way he sees fit. Youthfulness is a huge value to Sam, so don’t be surprised if you are with a middle-aged Sam and he starts hanging out with younger people to make him feel younger and more attractive. These friendships with younger people may become excessive and he may spend less time with you and more with the younger folks. If you express your feelings to Sam about feeling neglected-his need for validation will trump your feelings, and you will most likely be ignored. Another typical problem with Sam is that he participates in high levels of infidelity. Sam has a hard time resisting attention and if he gets caught cheating-he may respond with “I don’t know why I do it-I just cannot help myself.” No matter how much you try to be smart, fun and beautiful for Sam-there will always be someone more exciting than you eventually-so it is a losing battle. Many people believe they can enlighten Sam to become less self-absorbed. The unfortunate part is that Sam finds more value in being selfish than caring for others.

HYSTERICAL HELEN



Everyone has emotional outbursts from time to time. We all have bad days where we say things we do not mean-or are completely irrational-which are signs we are human. We also have days that we just feel crappy for no reason-physically and mentally. Hysterical Helen has more emotional/irrational outbursts than most. Helen is addicted to drama and crisis. Helen is also negative and critical of her partner. Helen yells, screams and cries about minor things on a regular basis. Helen can be outwardly aggressive or more passive-aggressive. She is a close relative to "Insecure Ingrid"-except Helen's behavior is more intense. Helen is not comfortable with long periods of peace or tranquility. Helen has most likely learned to use crisis as a coping mechanism. The hysterical behavior can take the form of always having a drama with friends, family or co-workers. Much of this drama is actually perpetuated by Helen's own thoughts or behaviors-but she will not admit this. If you try to confront Helen about her irrational behavior-she will typically become defensive and tell you that you are a cold and uncaring person-and will regress to immature, adolescent like behavior. In the worst case scenario, Helen may threaten to hurt herself or attempt to if confronted. Helen has very little tolerance for the smallest stressor-for ex. If she does not receive a perfect evaluation at work-she might quit her job, or if someone says something she perceives as negative, she will perceive it as a huge crisis and become over reactive. Helen also states she has a lot of physical problems. Of course, some of these physical problems may be valid-and may also be stress related disorders (autoimmune disorders) because of her lack of coping mechanisms to manage her stress-however; some illnesses may be fabricated for attention. Unfortunately, Helen gains more by getting attention for complaining about her health problems than taking care of herself. Helen fires many physicians and therapists because they may suggest she exercises or changes her lifestyle to help with her physical problems, and this upsets her because she wants an unrealistic level of empathy about her problems from everyone-including you. She is also unrealistic about her partner, telling him the type of career he should have had, the type of religion he should practice or the types of friends he should have. The ironic thing about Helen is that typically she is not living to her full potential in her career, health, social life, etc. yet criticizes her partner for the things she is not doing (projection defense mechanism). Physical problem "flare ups"

typically happen when attention is being focused on someone or something else - for ex. If someone is experiencing a joyous occasion-party, wedding, graduation, vacation, etc. Helen may have an emotional outburst or seem depressed about something minor-causing a little chaos. She may also sprinkle in some unexplainable health problems during these times. Helen tends to be somewhat critical of others and has unrealistic expectations of many people, yet has a really hard time looking honestly at her own attitudes and behaviors and acts childlike when you ask her to.

Problems with dating Helen:

Helen may draw you in at first because she is emotionally intense and expressive. This is desirable until her inability to regulate her emotions and behaviors becomes exhausting, if you are in a relationship with Helen, you will start to feel you are "walking on eggshells" because you never know what will set her off and when she may get emotional over the smallest thing. Her fits may not be yelling and screaming, but could also be long periods of pouting or the "cold shoulder" to punish you. You also will be walking on eggshells as to when her mental or physical problems might flare up-and many potential fun times might be ruined because Helen is unable to live without a high level of chaos. Helen may also be very critical of you-and make you think you are not at a high enough "standard" even if you are an honest person, hard worker, etc. . . . She may also be picky and critical of others who are not like her and make negative comments about people. Usually, Helen is not that socially active-therefore she has more time on her hands to pick at her partner and think of things that he is doing wrong. Helen can also have rigid ideas about religion, politics, etc. and can have difficulty accepting others different than her-therefore she may not blend well with your friends and family at times because she is not open to giving diverse people a chance. Helen has a hard time understanding why her partner might become emotionally detached from her and does not see her negativity as a problem. She can also become highly irrational when confronted and instead of looking at how she can improve-she may throw a tantrum; therefore she makes her irrational behavior a "relationship" problem and does not have to take responsibility for her immature behavior. The toughest part, other than having to walk on eggshells regularly, is that Helen cannot receive feedback about your feelings very well. It is "her way or the highway."

BUZZED UP BUD



It is enjoyable to cut loose and party in a safe environment once in a while. Bud does not understand moderation. Bud is an adult-usually over 30, who has made being “buzzed” by alcohol or any other drug a lifestyle. Bud never grew out of the typical high school, twenty something party stages. Bud can be really fun at first, until his favorite pastime is lounging on the couch staring at the T.V., eating pizza and Taco Bell. It becomes even less appealing when he can’t hold a job, refuses to work, and you find yourself making excuses for his unsupportive behavior. Bud is most likely past the substance “abuse” stage and more into the substance “addiction” stage-although he will most likely deny it. Bud abuses substances regularly-daily or weekly-and it has impacted his life somehow, such as: financial problems, marital problems, missing work, long periods of unemployment, parenting problems, mood changes, etc. Bud will most likely lose his motivation to be a supportive partner over time. At first he might help out or be active in his partner’s social life, but eventually he will lose interest in being an active part of his partner’s life. Bud is more concerned about when he can start drinking for the day or where he can find his next bag of pot opposed to being a supportive partner. In other words-Bud will most likely morph into a selfish and immature person over time because getting drunk or high is about self-pleasure-a childlike trait- opposed to caring about others-an adult trait. Bud might develop “apathy syndrome” where he just does not care if he is unsupportive to his partner-whether that is helping with the family, working, being financially responsible, etc. meaning he simply won’t care what you or others think anymore-because he is too far into his addiction. Addiction also lends to lying and other compulsive behaviors such as gambling and risk-taking behavior. He might actually even laugh about his apathy or make jokes about it if you tolerate it. Bud can also become violent or verbally abusive while using substances-on top of all of his other challenging traits.

Problems with dating Bud:

Loving Bud will not conquer his addiction. Bud has made a choice to live this way and has to make the choice to stop living this way on his own. In the meanwhile, he could possibly do hurtful things, waste money, get into major debt, and be unable to be supportive. Bud is not only hurting his relationships and his own mental health-but is neglecting his overall physical health. Bud can develop physical

problems and may become lazy and inactive-which could be difficult if you are a person who likes to life to the fullest. If you stay with Bud long enough and enable his behavior by not setting limits for yourself, you will feel like you have a child instead of a partner and feel aged and worn before your time. Bud will also be annoying because he will be defending his addiction more than worrying about you. For example, if you ask him to quit his drug of choice, he may call you a “nag” or say you are acting “old.” You will also feel like you have two lives, one life is the one behind closed doors, in which you have an unhappy lifestyle that doesn’t suit you, and a separate life where you probably feel alone and make excuses about your relationship to family and friends. You could also develop substance abuse problems yourself-as a coping skill to handle Bud-which is obviously not a healthy choice either. Bud can also have traits of “Victimized Vinnie” and can become complacent with his lazy disposition and make you feel guilty for expecting him to do his part. Bottom line-you can’t change someone’s addictive behavior, EVER!

PROVOCATIVE PRISCILLA



It is human to enjoy attention from others once in a while. It is nice to receive compliments from people and to have your strengths acknowledged. It’s also fun to strut your stuff sometimes-and we should celebrate ourselves...The problem with Priscilla is that she seeks attention from anyone who will give it to her on a regular basis and starts to feel antsy if she is not the center of attention. Priscilla is similar to

Insecure Ingrid in the sense that she needs constant validation; however, Priscilla just does not want attention from her partner-but elicits it from anyone who will give it to her. Priscilla derives her self-worth by getting attention from people outside of the relationship. Unlike I'm too sexy Sam who really believes he is the hottest person around, Priscilla doubts her attractiveness so she needs to prove to herself that she is desirable by getting feedback from the outside world. You could see Priscilla dancing on the top of the bar, doing lap dances at a party, dancing seductively on the dance floor to get attention, or simply being flirtatious with her anyone who will partake. Priscilla also enjoys secretive internet flirting or cheating because it makes her feel desired and gives her a rush. Priscilla is insecure and will scrape even the "bottom of the barrel" to get attention, even if she is in a committed relationship. Priscilla can be a drinker and a partier and enjoys this because it reduces her inhibitions. Priscilla may even enjoy the challenge of enticing a married man for the sheer challenge of it. Even though Priscilla craves attention, she does not always dress in a flashy way, but can still turn on her attention seeking magnet at will. She is usually not that confident in her professional or personal life-and tries to make up for it through different forms of attention seeking. Unfortunately, if Priscilla's self-esteem is underdeveloped, your love and commitment may not be enough to hold her attention. You cannot control Priscilla's wandering eye or need for affirmation.

Problems with dating Priscilla:

This relationship may be fun at first because you may feel like the "chosen one" of this party girl. Priscilla may be very attentive at first because she loves feeling "special" and will seem like a very affectionate person. There is a chance Priscilla may be a single mother and not as responsible with her kids on a daily basis because she is more concerned with partying or hunting down the next person she will date. Unfortunately, Priscilla may leap into relationships without thinking them through for herself or for her children. Priscilla will get restless after a while and feel the need to get affirmed from outside sources. You may notice also that she does not have active groups of social circles or interests but is more interested in "finding someone to be with." The problem is, once she finds someone to be with, she will eventually get bored and repeat the same cycle. Priscilla may also be immature and a late bloomer in her financial, career and emotional independence. Priscilla most likely moves around a lot and bounces back and forth to live with family or friends. She will look for opportunities to feel validated by people she might meet at work or social outings. She may break up with her partner or cause problems in the relationship when she gets the itch for this attention. When she realizes the grass isn't always greener, she may try to fix the problems with you or reconcile, it will feel good for a while until she gets restless once again. You may experience a push/pull dynamic with Priscilla due to these dynamics. Your love cannot make her more committed or take away her insatiable need for validation.

SOCIOPATHIC SONNY



Sonny is the scariest one of all. One of the reasons that Sonny is so disturbing is because of his advanced skills in manipulation. He inflicts the most damage in comparison to the other subtypes, which is why this section is a bit longer. When we hear the word “sociopath” we typically think of a killer or someone who tortures animals. Sociopathic behavior embodies a wide spectrum of behaviors-from a mild to severe level. Sonny lacks empathy and does not possess a clear “moral compass.” Sonny views human relationships as a “means to an end.” The words “con artist,” “wolf in sheep’s clothing,” “compulsive liar” and “shifty” only begin to define Sonny-although the list is much more comprehensive. Sonny does well in relationships that are “fun” – but he is deficient in love relationships since accountability and personal responsibility are not in Sonny’s wiring. People have a hard time believing Sonny could be mean, abusive or manipulative. If you hang out with Sonny at the bar, at a party or on the golf course, he can be the life of the party. He makes the best “drinking buddy” in the world. He is in his element as a drinking buddy because he has no personal responsibilities. However, if you talk to someone who has worked by Sonny’s side for years or anyone who has been in a relationship with him (i.e. any human that he has to be responsible to) chances are you will get multiple reports of stealing, verbal abuse, bullying and lack of “pulling his weight.” The reason for this is because Sonny loathes responsibility and lives a parasitic lifestyle. He believes he should not be held to the same standards as others. Rules do not apply to Sonny. Sonny typically has sexist views-but only acts on them behind closed doors. Sonny studies people and figures out their strengths and weaknesses- and how he can use them to his advantage and how he can capitalize on people’s vulnerabilities. When you first date Sonny-he will know what to do to woo you and win you over in a heartbeat-but he will watch you closely-and as you start to show your vulnerabilities he will pounce on them. For example, if you are feeling incompetent at work-he may wait until the right moment to call you “stupid” or if you are struggling to lose weight-he will wait until you are vulnerable and call you “fat” – if he sees this really bothers you, he will say it repeatedly to wear you down. Sonny is all about power and controlling others-because he is weak and powerless on the inside.

Sonny is a bully. He expects you to be the primary bread winner and if you ever have a time you ask to be cared for emotionally or financially-Sonny will become frustrated because he does not want to be in that role. Sonny is a depraved combination of Victimized Vinnie, I'm Too Sexy Sam and sometimes Buzzed up Bud also rears his ugly head. Whether Sonny is the most severe on the spectrum (like Ted Bundy) or just the bully in the workplace-they all have the following behaviors in common: chronic lying, advanced skills in manipulating others, the ability to "win people over," the ability to appear as a "victim" to the outside world when he gets caught doing something or his partner eventually leaves, a mooching component (even if he works) and history of financial dependence on others-especially family members, a need for constant stimulation (substance use, sports addiction, gambling, risk taking, etc.), stealing (from employers, stores, family/friends, etc.), a bullying type personality(this can be in a quiet, passive aggressive way using threats or more violent verbal abuse/domestic violence). Sonny is like a blood hound that sniffs out where he can get his needs met-and he has an uncanny sense of finding weaknesses or kindness of others in which he can use to his advantage. For example, Sonny frequently seeks out partners in the helping professions-such as nursing or counseling, because they may give him more wiggle room in regard to his 'leeching" ways-such as when he gets fired from a job or when he does something illegal. When Sonny first meets a perspective partner, he will usually embellish on past traumas and childhood wounds. He will have a million reasons why he still lives with his parents at age 35-and his story will actually sound believable. Sonny can miraculously be "depressed" at will if he does not want to be responsible or is confronted with his behavior-but if something "fun" comes up-his depression seems to disappear. He can vacillate from making suicidal threats behind closed doors to playing a round of golf an hour later. After you have been with Sonny for a while, he probably will not go to a movie, the beach, or an evening stroll with you-as this does not satisfy his impulsive needs. He may pick fights to try to leave to go to the bar, a strip club or whatever is 'fun." if you get sick, he may get you a blanket, kiss you good bye and look at your illness as a great excuse to leave and do something else. However, if Sonny is sick he will expect you to take him to the doctor and care for him around the clock. Sympathy and empathy are not part of Sonny's personality. Sonny can fool even the best counselors or physicians-because he can fake being motivated or caring. He is also good at appearing "ADHD or Bi-Polar" because of his need to always be stimulated and satisfy himself. Sadly, Sonny also lacks empathy if he is a parent and can create serious chaos in the family system. Sonny can be relentless during a divorce, making up lies to hurt his x-partner and using children as a manipulative tool. Sonny also blames his reason for being verbally or physically abusive on some form of mental illness. If you do leave Sonny, he will most likely lie to others about being "victimized" in some way and will seem very depressed-yet don't be fooled, his depression has nothing to do with feeling guilty about the harm he has caused you or missing you-his sadness comes from losing the resources he gained from you-financial, material, etc. it will take a lot of work for Sonny to manipulate his next unlucky candidate and Sonny hates working at things-so he will indeed be miserable! Many people stay with Sonny types because they are afraid he will hurt himself or not be able to make it and Sonny uses this to his best advantage. Sonny vacillates between glorifying and disliking people, so if his parents set limits on things-like paying his share of the bills while living in their home (as an adult child), they will be labeled "mean', but when Sonny has nowhere to go after a break-up (which he won't because he is never self-sufficient), he will suddenly glorify those same family members and appear emotionally close to him. Sonny usually is sarcastic and has an immature way of communicating, but others may reinforce this because they do not want to be

on the obnoxious receiving end of his behavior. Sonny seems to have “arrested development” and is like a huge child in a grown person’s body-always looking to gratify his impulsive needs-regardless of the cost to others.

Problems with Dating Sonny:

Even the best therapists and psychiatrists can be fooled by Sonny-because he can be charming and is gifted at reading how to manipulate people, therefore managing a relationship is almost impossible. You can be enticed by Sonny if you like to help people or see the ‘best” in people. Sonny is a great project because he is like a child who cannot care for himself-so many people enter this relationship thinking they can “teach” and help this person identify and use their strengths. The unfortunate part is that Sonny does not want to learn or change-he likes being irresponsible. He also enjoys being controlling, lying and playing mind games. Sonny would prefer that you be his cleaning person, financial provider, parent figure and punching bag for when he wants to bully someone. This usually does not come out until a commitment is made-such as an engagement or marriage-and he can play a good game for years if he thinks he can get the resources he needs out of the relationship. When Sonny gets engaged, married or buys a house-he does not react like most people who would be joyous-he gets irritable because he does not like the idea of having to be responsible. Sonny will view a long term commitment as a means to an end. He is not interested in growing in the relationship, but will be seeking financial resources from you and will seek fun and stimulation from others. He will most likely find another world-like a place to go or group of friends with whom he spends the majority of his time, if you tell him this hurts you, he will become angry and tell you that you are ‘controlling.” You will also see a pattern of lies-which somehow he will make you feel responsible for. Sonny lies about everything from what he ate for breakfast to fabricating huge parts of his identity. If he gets caught lying-he will draw you in to make you feel that you were responsible for his choices-such as being too demanding or pressuring him. There are times you may be lonely, attracted to, or curious about other people while with Sonny because you fantasize about how it would feel to be taken care of by someone. You may cling to the idea that Sonny will eventually come around and develop empathy, but it rarely happens-and he gets more selfish and abusive with time. Bottom line-Sonny is toxic. He will use you, abuse you, and then pretend to be a victim to those around him once his partner figures him out. He will never stop lying or manipulating just because you love him. Sadly, if Sonny’s partners decide to stay in this toxic situation, they will become physically or mentally unhealthy, lonely, and can begin to fight back with harsh behavior. After much frustration, you may find yourself sounding as mean and nasty as Sonny if you are mistreated too long-as it is normal to fight back after being backed in a corner-however, you will most likely dislike yourself for acting this way because it is not who you really are. Sonny could make Mother Theresa feel like his rotten behavior is her fault! If you can identify any of these traits early on, RUN FORREST RUN-as Sonny will leave you depleted emotionally and financially. Someone who lacks a conscience is not a good relationship partner.