MAY23 STUDIOS PRESENTS



A FREE GUIDE

BEFORE IT DRAINS YOU

How to spot a toxic relationship early — while you still have the strength to walk away.

FOR MEN & WOMEN · BY PRINCE

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A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

WHY I WROTE THIS

I make films about love, betrayal and the choices that change a life. Again and again, the same story shows up: someone saw the signs early, and explained them away.

This guide is the lesson behind those stories. It's short on purpose. Read it once for yourself, then pass it on to the friend, sister, brother or colleague who needs it more than they'll admit.

If it helps you, come and watch the films. That's where these lessons come to life.



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This guide is for general education. It is not therapy, counselling or legal advice. If you are in danger right now, go to the section “If you are not safe” on page 16.

CHAPTER 01

BEFORE YOU START

Most toxic relationships don't start toxic. They start sweet. That is exactly why so many good people end up stuck in them.

Nobody walks into a relationship thinking, "This person will slowly take my peace, my confidence and my friends." It happens one small moment at a time — a comment you let slide, a jealous outburst you call "love", an apology you give for something you didn't do.

By the time most people see it clearly, they are already tired. Drained. Second-guessing themselves. Wondering where the person they used to be has gone.

This guide is about seeing it **early** — in the first weeks and months, when walking away still costs you less.

THREE THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND

- **This is for everyone.** Men and women can both be toxic, and both can be on the receiving end. The signs are the same; how people hide them can differ.
- **One bad day is not a pattern.** Everyone has moods and arguments. What matters is what keeps repeating.
- **This is not about labelling your partner.** It's about trusting what you see — and protecting your peace.

CHAPTER 02

WHAT "TOXIC" REALLY MEANS

A toxic relationship is one where, again and again, one person's needs, feelings or safety are pushed down so the other person can stay in control or stay comfortable.

Every couple fights. The difference is **how** they fight and **what happens after**.

HARD BUT HEALTHY	TOXIC
You argue about the problem.	They attack *you* — your character, your family, your body.
Both people can say "I was wrong."	It is always your fault, even when it isn't.
You can say no without fear.	"No" brings punishment: anger, silence, threats.
You both keep your friends and family.	Your circle keeps shrinking.
After a fight, things get better.	After a fight, you feel smaller.
Jealousy is talked about calmly.	Jealousy becomes checking, rules and control.

The simple rule: healthy love can be hard work, but it should not cost you yourself.

CHAPTER 03

THE DRAIN TEST

Before you look at them, look at you. Your body and mood usually notice the problem before your mind admits it.

Read these slowly. How many feel familiar?

- [ ] I feel tired or anxious before seeing them, not excited.
- [ ] I plan my words carefully so they won't get upset.
- [ ] I explain and defend myself more than I ever used to.
- [ ] I hide parts of the relationship from friends or family.
- [ ] I feel relief when they're away — then guilt for feeling relief.
- [ ] I've stopped doing things I love because they don't like them.
- [ ] I apologise for things I'm not sure I did.
- [ ] I don't recognise who I've become.

WHAT THIS MEANS

If three or more of these feel true, it doesn't prove your relationship is toxic. But it does mean something is taking more from you than it gives. Keep reading with honest eyes.

WATCH: THE MECHANIC SHE REJECTED

A love story about who we choose — and who we overlook.
Now on Phoenix Chronique.

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CHAPTER 04

12 EARLY WARNING SIGNS

“Red flags don't look like red flags at first. They look like passion, protection and ‘just how they are.’”

On the next pages: what each sign looks like, what it often sounds like, and why it matters. You don't need all twelve for there to be a problem. Two or three that keep repeating are enough to take seriously.

TOO MUCH, TOO FAST

01

Sounds like: **"I've never felt this way about anyone." "Let's move in." — in week three.**

Gifts, attention and big promises arrive before they really know you. It feels amazing. It also builds a debt — later, you'll feel you "owe" them.

JEALOUSY DRESSED AS LOVE

02

Sounds like: **"I only check your phone because I care."**

Asking where you are every hour, needing passwords, getting angry about who you talk to. Care asks. Control demands.

YOUR CIRCLE STARTS SHRINKING

03

Sounds like: **"Your friends don't respect us." "Your family is against me."**

Slowly, the people who would notice something wrong get pushed out. Someone who loves you wants you to have support — not only them.

"JOKES" THAT CUT

04

Sounds like: **"Relax, I was only joking." — after mocking you in front of people.**

Regular put-downs about your looks, your job, your money, your intelligence. Little by little, your confidence goes and you start believing them.

REWRITING WHAT HAPPENED

05

Sounds like: **"That never happened." "You're too sensitive." "You're imagining things."**

This is often called gaslighting. When you start doubting your own memory and feelings, you stop trusting yourself — and start depending on their version.

SILENCE AS PUNISHMENT

06

Sounds like: **Nothing. For days. Until you apologise.**

Needing space to calm down is healthy. Using silence to make you beg, chase or give in is not.

IT'S NEVER THEIR FAULT

07

Sounds like: **"I wouldn't have shouted if you hadn't..."**

Every problem gets turned back on you. Real apologies are rare — or come with a "but". A person who can't take responsibility can't change.

KEEPING SCORE

08

Sounds like: **"After everything I've done for you..."**

Past favours, gifts or mistakes are kept and used later to win arguments or make you feel guilty. Love given with a receipt isn't free.

GAMES WITH MONEY

09

Sounds like: **"Give me your card, I'll manage it." Or: "Send me money" — again and again, with nothing back.**

One person controls the money, blocks the other from working, or keeps using them as an ATM. Money control is one of the strongest ways to keep someone stuck.

HOT AND COLD

10

Sounds like: **Loving messages Monday. Gone Tuesday. Back Friday like nothing happened.**

The highs feel so good that you spend the lows waiting for them to return. That up-and-down keeps people hooked far longer than steady unkindness would.

YOUR "NO" DOESN'T COUNT

11

Sounds like: **"If you loved me, you would."**

They push past boundaries — about your time, your body, your money, your faith or your family — and then act hurt that you had one. Watch what happens when you say no. That reaction tells you a lot.

THREATS AND FEAR

12

Sounds like: **"I'll expose you." "You'll never find anyone else." "If you leave, you'll see."**

Threats to leave, to shame you, to take things from you, or to hurt you, themselves or others. Anger that makes you scared. **This is not an early sign — it's a serious one.** Read "If you are not safe" on page 16.

CHAPTER 05

WHEN IT HAPPENS TO MEN

Many men are taught to "be strong", "handle it" and keep quiet. So they often notice the signs late — and talk about them even later.

HOW IT OFTEN SHOWS UP

- Being mocked about money, job or "not being man enough" — in private or in public.
- Being valued mainly for what you provide; affection disappears when money does.
- Constant accusations of cheating, with phone checks and tracking.
- Being pulled away from your friends, your family or your own goals.
- Threats to embarrass you, tell lies about you, or keep your children from you.
- Being hit, pushed or having things thrown at you — and being told no one would believe you.

HEAR THIS CLEARLY

Being treated badly does not make you weak, and talking about it does not make you less of a man. Abuse against men is real. Talk to one person you trust — a friend, a brother, a pastor or imam, a counsellor. Silence protects the problem, not you.

CHAPTER 06

WHEN IT HAPPENS TO WOMEN

Many women are taught to be patient, to keep the home together and to believe love will change him. So control often gets called "protection" — and endured for years.

HOW IT OFTEN SHOWS UP

- Rules about what you wear, where you go and who you talk to — "because I care".
- Being discouraged from working, studying or having your own money.
- Your appearance, cooking or body becoming a regular target for criticism.
- Being cut off from your family or friends, especially those who "talk too much".
- Pressure into sex or anything you don't want, or being made to feel you owe it.
- Promises that "after marriage" or "after the baby" things will get better.

HEAR THIS CLEARLY

Patience is a strength — but not when it's spent waiting for someone to stop hurting you. Keep your own money, your own friends and your own voice. Love that requires you to disappear is not love.

These are common patterns, not rules. A man can face any sign in Chapter 06, and a woman any sign in Chapter 05.

CHAPTER 07

THE 15-QUESTION CHECK

Answer honestly. Count every "yes" that's true *more than once*, not just one bad day.

- [ ] Do they check your phone or demand your passwords?
- [ ] Do you see your friends or family less because of them?
- [ ] Do they put you down, then say it was a joke?
- [ ] Do you doubt your memory after arguments with them?
- [ ] Do they go silent to punish you?
- [ ] Is it always your fault?
- [ ] Do they bring up old favours or mistakes to win arguments?
- [ ] Do they control, take or demand your money?
- [ ] Do they swing between very loving and very cold?
- [ ] Do they get angry or sulk when you say no?
- [ ] Have they threatened you, embarrassed you or scared you?
- [ ] Do you hide things about the relationship from people close to you?
- [ ] Do you feel calmer when they're not around?
- [ ] Have you stopped doing things you love?
- [ ] Would you be worried if your sibling or best friend had this relationship?

0-2 yes
Probably normal ups and downs. Keep talking openly.

3-6 yes
Warning signs. Have an honest talk and watch what changes.

7+ yes, or Q11
Serious. Talk to someone you trust, and see page 16.

CHAPTER 08

WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU SEE THE SIGNS

1. **Name it to yourself.** Write down what happened, with dates. Writing it down helps when they later say it never happened.
2. **Tell one person you trust.** Someone outside the relationship who cares about you. Say it out loud — it gets clearer.
3. **Set one clear boundary.** "I won't stay in a conversation where I'm being insulted." Then watch. A person who cares will adjust. A controlling person will push back harder.
4. **Protect your independence.** Keep your own money, your own phone, your friends, your work or studies. These are your way out if you ever need one.
5. **Stop trying to "love them better".** You can't fix someone who doesn't believe anything is wrong. Change only happens when they choose it — usually with professional help.
6. **Decide with your eyes open.** Staying or leaving is your choice. Make it based on how they actually behave, not on promises.

IF YOU ARE NOT SAFE

If someone has hurt you, threatened you, or you're afraid of what they'll do:

- **In an emergency, get help immediately.** In Nigeria, call **112**. Elsewhere, call your local emergency number.
- Tell a trusted person where you are and what's happening.
- If you plan to leave, plan it quietly. Leaving can be the most dangerous moment with a violent partner, so don't announce it during a fight.
- Keep important documents, some money and a charged phone somewhere you can reach quickly.
- Reach out to a local domestic-violence support organisation, a counsellor, or your place of worship for help making a safety plan.

You do not have to prove anything to deserve safety.

IF YOU'RE READING THIS AND SEE YOURSELF IN THE SIGNS

Some readers will recognise *themselves* in this book — the checking, the silent treatment, the jokes that cut. That recognition takes courage. It isn't the end of the story. Talk to a counsellor, apologise without "but", and do the work. People can change when they choose to.

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CHAPTER 09

WHAT HEALTHY LOVE LOOKS LIKE

You've seen the red flags. Now know the green ones — so you recognise good love when it arrives.

- ✓ You feel calm, not anxious, around them.
- ✓ You can disagree and still feel safe.
- ✓ They apologise and actually change what they did.
- ✓ They are happy you have friends, family and dreams of your own.
- ✓ Your “no” is respected the first time.
- ✓ They're the same person in private as in public.
- ✓ Money is talked about openly and fairly.
- ✓ You feel more like yourself, not less.
- ✓ Their love is steady — not a rollercoaster.

The right love doesn't drain you. It refills you.

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