

The Danger of the Dark Tetrad

Understanding dark personality types in your life



The Dark Tetrad is the combination of four personality types: psychopathy, narcissism, Machiavellianism and sadism, combining a group of manipulative and harmful behaviours.

The Dark Tetrad started as the Dark Triad with a change in the psychological theory in 2013 where sadism was added. These four dark types of behaviour all sit along a continuum with some bad behaviour touching on all these traits. They interrelate in a way that leaves a trail of destruction at work, home and in society with it only being the degree that varies. So, what are they:

Psychopathy: I always put psychopathy at the top as it causes the most harm to others. Identifiable by a lack of empathy, no ability to self-reflect and a win at all costs mentality. The psychopath is charming and likeable, all the while gathering data on who you are to use as they see fit. Someone who is psychopathic will hold traits of all four dark personality types to different degrees.

Narcissism: I like to refer to narcissism as the “all about me” personality type. As social media has grown so has this type of behaviour with online influences constantly seeking attention and admiration through an inflated sense of self-importance.

“The Good thing about evil people is you can always Trust them to do something, well ... Evil!”
Cruella De Vil

Machiavellianism: This is an interesting personality type that you often see in politicians and CEO's. They manipulate for personal gain through strategy and deceit. They are less likely to harm others than a psychopath and are less impulsive but still disregard social norms to succeed in life.

Sadism: People who have a sadistic nature derive pleasure from the pain of others both physical and emotional. They may deliberately harm others for personal satisfaction rather than personal gain or career success.

“Hell is empty, and all the devils are here”

William Shakespeare

Things to Consider

The terms ‘psychopath’ and ‘narcissist’ are thrown around candy at a child’s birthday party these days. Less popular are Machiavellianism and sadism. Regardless, we need to be mindful of their use and understand that sometimes a term used in anger may not mean that a person is actually dark. Use labelling with care and remember that words can hurt others but so can bad and toxic behaviour.

I often like to tell clients that:

You can't change the behaviour of others; you can only choose how you respond and react.

Always remember that if you are trapped by someone who you think does fit the Dark Tetrad seek assistance from a mental health professional who can help.

Are needing assistance with an issue?

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