

The Danger of the Dark Tetrad

Understanding dark personality types in your life



The Dark Tetrad is the grouping of four personality types: psychopathy, narcissism, Machiavellianism, and sadism, involving a range of manipulative and harmful behaviours.

The Dark Tetrad began as the Dark Triad, but in 2013, a change in psychological theory included sadism. These four types of dark behaviour all exist on a spectrum, with some negative actions touching on multiple traits. They are interconnected in ways that leave a trail of destruction at work, at home, and in society, differing only by degree. So, what are they?

Psychopathy: I consistently rank psychopathy highest because it causes the most harm to others. It is characterised by a lack of empathy, an inability to self-reflect, and a win-at-all-costs attitude. The psychopath is charming and likable, all the while gathering information on you to manipulate as they see fit. Someone with psychopathic tendencies will show traits of all four dark personality types to varying degrees.

Narcissism: I often describe narcissism as the “all about me” personality type. As social media has grown, so has this behaviour, with online influencers constantly seeking attention and admiration through an exaggerated 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 intriguing personality type often observed in politicians and CEOs. They manipulate to gain personal advantage through strategy and deception. They are less likely to harm others than a psychopath and are less impulsive, but they still disregard social norms to achieve their goals successfully.

Sadism: People with a sadistic streak take pleasure in causing others pain, whether physical or emotional. They might deliberately hurt others for their own enjoyment, not for personal benefit or career advancement.

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

William Shakespeare

Things to Consider

The terms ‘psychopath’ and ‘narcissist’ are often thrown around like candy at a child’s birthday party these days. Less common are Machiavellianism and sadism. Nonetheless, we need to be careful with their use and understand that sometimes a term used in anger might not mean a person is truly dark. Use labelling carefully, and remember that words can hurt others, but so can harmful and toxic behaviours.

I often 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 find yourself trapped by someone you believe exhibits the Dark Tetrad, seek help from a mental health professional who can assist.

Are needing assistance with an issue?

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