

# From the mind and heart of Carolyn J. Braden

Life is all about relationships. Great relationships, good relationships and not-so-good relationships. Some of those not-so-good relationships can even be defined as being toxic. When you find yourself involved in a toxic relationship, it can affect you in more ways than you may think. It can even hurt your physical health, your mental health and the good and great relationships you have with others. Read on to learn how to break up (or perhaps, distance yourself) from a toxic relationship you may have in your life.

Toxic relationships, according to Dr. Lillian Glass in her book ***Toxic People***, defines a toxic relationship as “any relationship between people who don’t support each other, where there’s conflict and one seeks to undermine the other, where there’s competition, where there’s disrespect and a lack of cohesiveness.”

I have had numerous toxic relationships in my life and know of others who are currently dealing with toxic relationships. This life experience serves as the inspiration for this article. When I ended up spending more time with a friend (one who was dealing with yet another blow-out with the same long-time “friend”) during my Hurricane Ian evacuation, I realized how the relationship she had with her “friend” was actually causing our friendship to fail.

I spoke to her about it, but it didn’t seem to register, so I decided to write her a letter; something as a form of concrete support that maybe she could refer to whenever that toxic relationship tried to creep back into her life. I could have written it in a how-to format, with steps and directions, but my brain took me on a more heartfelt path to write a letter. It’s actually a letter that I also wrote to myself and anyone else that has dealt with relationships that have been toxic.

Here is my letter and maybe you need to refer to it yourself, dear reader, or know of someone in your life that may need to read it too.



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Dear Friend,

I thought I'd write to you so you could maybe understand something a little bit better than I could explain in person. I had several friends write letters to me when I was around 20 years old about how my relationship choices were not the best and their words changed my life. I refer to their words, even to this day, in moments of weakness. I thought it was maybe time for me to pass along their sage advice and kind actions.

Maybe this is something you need to refer to during moments of weakness, which is something we all experience. I feel very weak sometimes when it comes to certain people (like my sister and my dad) that I still love, despite what some may think. They were really great sometimes, but many times, they made me feel horrible.

These toxic people were very close to me, which seemed to help them figure out which "knife" would cut me deepest. Sometimes it was their words and sometimes it was their actions. Because I allowed them to cut me often, it began to hurt my mental health and interfere with my relationship with others. My poor husband would literally have to pick me off the floor when I fell into a heap of tears and despair time and time again. This constant up and down emotional rollercoaster event wasn't fair to me and it wasn't fair that he had to keep dealing with my pain either.

Despite the deep hurt, I still sometimes struggle to wrap my brain around the fact that certain people can't be in my life. If you love someone, why do you have to let them go? Here's what I've learned: We are all human and "to be human is to err", but one thing I've learned is that some people err so many times that it's ridiculous. They make the same mistakes over and over and over and when it involves your happy times and relationships, you have to understand that just isn't right.

My moments of weakness come usually after they've hurt me in the same exact way for the millionth time and then they become nice again, for the millionth time. I want to forgive and forget, but sometimes enough is enough. Thankfully, after doing some serious reflections, I have come to understand the meaning behind the saying "Fool me once, shame on you, fool me twice, shame on me.". It's not that they aimed to fool me, it's just a behavior or a routine that they've gotten used to displaying towards me, and I've allowed it so many times, that they think it's normal. But it's not.



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I've come to understand that other than me allowing them to treat me in a way that hurts me, it's really not my fault. Their poor ways of treating people is something they must deal with on their own. While I've sought counseling to help me during extreme toxic relationship events, the toxic people themselves usually have not. Based on my mental health professional's advice, I've tried to speak to the toxic people about their behavior and how it affects me, and they often listen at first, then turn around and do the exact same things repeatedly.

In the event that a toxic person continues to display the exact same behavior again and again, it may be time for you to move on. Your life is too valuable to spend it being sad, worried and upset. Many toxic people are sad and they want you to be sad too. I don't know why, but it's almost like you are a "happy mirror" that magically reflects how broken they are inside. They may be broken because of a childhood trauma, it may be from some abuse they experienced, or from something else that happened to them, but that's for them to figure out, not you.

I don't know that the toxic person in your life will ever truly understand what they are doing and how it affects you, but it will definitely affect them. They will lose not only your relationship, but they will not be able to continue having many relationships in their life. You can't worry about that. That's on them.

Ever since I've known you, you've had issues with the same person over and over again. While I will not tell you to remove yourself from this toxic person (you are your own person that makes your own decisions) I can tell you that your relationship with this person has affected our relationship. I don't mind hearing you talk about this person sometimes, but when we are supposed to be having fun together and you get so upset about something they've done to you, yet again, that you physically can't have fun with me, that's not good. It makes me feel like you value your relationship with them over ours.



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You have too many great and good relationships in your life to spend more time worrying about this one. Do what you need to do, but in the meantime, those that love you are waiting to see your happy face again. You are worth every good thing that happens in your life and aren't responsible for helping sad people. Unless you become a mental health professional, I don't think that's your particular path at this moment in time.

I love and sincerely care about you. Many people love and care about you. Even the one person that keeps hurting you loves you. It's just time to make a decision about if that one person's tainted love is something worth holding on to or not. I've had to remove tainted love from my life numerous times, and I can tell you from first-hand experience, I do not regret it. Some days are hard (especially when you think about the good times you had together), but I have lots of great relationships that are worth more of my time instead. I consider our relationship to be one of those, and I needed you to know.

Cheers to continuing to build great relationships.

Sincerely,

Carolyn J. Braden, your sparkle and magic loving friend

