

How to Defend Against Four Emotional Vampires



By Judith Orloff, MD

Adapted from the new book, "The Ecstasy of Surrender"

Many of us are drawn to emotional vampires. From bullies, to clingy lovers, to complainers, emotional vampires wear many different disguises. Intentionally or not, these romantic partners can make us feel depressed, overwhelmed, defensive, wiped out, and angry.

It's important to figure out why you choose to date people who deplete your energy. Then, you need to learn self-defense strategies to keep them at bay. If you don't, you could become a victim of the emotional vampire and develop unhealthy behaviors and symptoms, such as overeating, isolating, mood

swings, or fatigue.

Below are four common types of emotional vampires you may unwittingly get involved with, adapted from the book *The Ecstasy of Surrender*, along with some “silver bullet” tips for fending them off.

Type #1: The Passive-Aggressive Person. This type of vampire expresses anger with a smile or exaggerated concern but always maintains their cool. They are experts at sugar-coating hostility.

Self-defense Tips: Let go of self-doubt and trust your gut reactions. Tell yourself that you deserve to be treated more lovingly. Address their behavior. In a calm, firm tone you might say, “I would greatly appreciate it if you can be on time when we go out to dinner.” If nothing changes, keep setting limits with this person and scale back on the time you spend with them.

Type #2: The Narcissist. For this vampire, everything is about them. They are ego-centric, self-important, and starved for admiration and attention. They may be charming and intelligent until their guru status is threatened.

Self-defense Tips: Enjoy their good qualities, but have realistic expectations. Their motto is “me-first,” so getting angry or stating your needs won’t have any effect on them. Beware of this type, because narcissists lack empathy and are incapable of unconditional love. You may be able to get their cooperation by appealing to their self-interest and showing them how your request will benefit them.

Type #3: The Anger Addict. This vampire deals with conflict by accusing, attacking, humiliating, or criticizing. Some anger addicts withhold things, or resort to using the silent treatment to punish you.

Self-defense Tips: Don’t let their anger wear down your self-

esteem. Pause when agitated. Take a few slow breaths to relax, and do not respond until you are in a centered place. Try to stay neutral and balanced, and disarm the person by agreeing with them or acknowledging their position. Then state your case. It's also useful to empathize with anger addicts. Ask yourself what pain or inadequacy makes them so angry.

Type #4: The Guilt Tripper. These types are world-class blamers, martyrs, and drama queens. They know how to make you feel bad about something by pressing your insecurity buttons.

Self-defense Tips: Let go of the notion that you have to be perfect. Everyone makes mistakes. If you feel really guilty, find a private place and let yourself cry. You can also reply with a positive statement such as, "I can see your point of view. But when you say ___, my feelings are hurt. I'd be grateful if you didn't keep repeating it."

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