

People who cause Anxiety

In this message we will explore anxiety producing patterns in others and also the anxiety-maker within. Part of EQ is emotional self-awareness and a subset of that is knowing the impact you have on those around you. Research in psychology shows that certain interpersonal styles and personality traits can indeed make others feel uneasy or anxious. It's true that context matters. Sometimes we react more anxiously when power dynamics are present. For example, a boss subordinate dynamic tends to amplify these effects. Personal history is also a factor. People with social anxiety or trauma histories may be more reactive to the traits I will describe in this message. It is important that we create protective strategies to guard our hearts when dealing with these people who are anxiety-makers. We need clear boundaries, emotional regulation skills, and supportive relationships as these can reduce the impact. Here are some key findings and also scriptures describing these categories of anxiety producing behavioural patterns.

1. Dominant or Aggressive Personalities

Traits: High dominance, controlling behaviour, frequent interruptions, loud voice, invading personal space.

Why they trigger anxiety: These behaviours signal possible threat or conflict. Studies on social dominance and intimidation show that people naturally become more vigilant or tense around individuals who appear aggressive or overbearing.

Proverbs 15:1 – “A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.”

Proverbs 16:29 – “A violent person entices their neighbour and leads them down a path that is not good.”

Proverbs 22:24–25 – “Do not make friends with a hot-tempered person, do not associate with one easily angered, or you may learn their ways and get yourself ensnared.”

Whether in family, church, or business, “do not lord it over” calls leaders to: Model the behaviour they expect. Seek the flourishing of those they lead. Remember that leadership is stewardship, not ownership.

Matthew 20:25-26 25 Jesus called them together and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. 26 Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant,

To Lord it over is to exercise dominion over, subdue, overpower; to rule in a domineering way.

1 Peter 5:3 3 not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.

2. Unpredictable or Volatile Individuals

Traits: Rapid mood swings, inconsistent reactions, erratic decision-making.

Research link: Work on “intermittent reinforcement” and emotional volatility finds that unpredictability raises cortisol (stress hormone) in others, because they can't anticipate responses, leading to chronic low-grade anxiety.

James 1:8 – “Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do.”

Proverbs 25:28 – “Like a city whose walls are broken through is a person who lacks self-control.”

There are many reasons why one can become unpredictable and volatile:

Mood disorders such as bipolar spectrum disorders where there is a shift between depressive and manic states, results in rapid mood changes and impulsive choices. Hormonal situations such as perimenopause

or thyroid dysfunction can destabilize mood regulation. Neurological conditions such as traumatic brain injury or temporal lobe epilepsy affect one's mood. Substance abuse or sudden withdrawal from certain medications, especially antidepressants, also results in rapid mood swings. Benzodiazepines (to treat anxiety, sleep disorders, muscle spasms and seizure disorders by slowing brain activity to induce a calming effect) result in erratic mood changes. Borderline personality traits or disorders are characterized by heightened sensitivity to rejection and difficulties in emotional regulation sleep deprivation and chronic stress are also contributors to what we are discussing today. It is important to understand all these dynamics so that we move beyond labeling people as just being difficult.

3. Highly Critical or Judgmental People

Traits: Constant evaluation, perfectionistic standards, frequent negative feedback.

Evidence: Studies on “evaluation apprehension” show that being watched by someone perceived as critical or hard to please elevates social anxiety and self-consciousness.

Matthew 7:1–2 – “Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”

Romans 14:10, 13 – “You, then, why do you judge your brother or sister? Or why do you treat them with contempt? For we will all stand before God’s judgment seat... Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister.”

Perhaps you are a perfectionist and you are hard on yourself and also on others. Research distinguishes between adaptive perfectionism (high standards, goal orientation) and maladaptive perfectionism (harsh self-criticism, chronic dissatisfaction). The latter is strongly linked to negative feedback loops. Neuroticism: High neuroticism correlates with self-criticism, worry, and focus on mistakes. Cognitive biases: People with these traits often have “all-or-nothing” thinking, discounting positive outcomes while magnifying flaws. These traits usually emerge from a mix of early experiences (critical or conditional parenting), personality predispositions (neuroticism, maladaptive perfectionism), cultural/organizational pressures (performance-driven environments), and emotional dynamics (fear of failure, shame, imposter feelings).

4. Manipulative or Deceptive Personalities

- **Traits:** Gaslighting, guilt-tripping, shifting stories, passive-aggressive tactics.
- **Research basis:** People high in the “Dark Triad” traits (Machiavellianism, narcissism, psychopathy) are repeatedly linked to relational stress and heightened anxiety in partners or coworkers. All three involve manipulateness, lack of empathy, and self-centeredness. They differ in how they play out:

Machiavellians are strategic planners. Core features: cynicism, manipulation, strategic exploitation of others, pragmatic morality (“the ends justify the means”).

Proverbs 12:22 – “The Lord detests lying lips, but he delights in people who are trustworthy.”

Psalms 101:7 – “No one who practices deceit will dwell in my house; no one who speaks falsely will stand in my presence.”

Narcissists crave admiration and recognition. Core features: grandiosity, entitlement, dominance, constant need for admiration.

Proverbs 16:18 – “Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.”

Philippians 2:3–4 – “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.”

2 Timothy 3:1–2 – “But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive...”

Biblical theme: Narcissism mirrors the sin of pride — placing self above God and others. Scripture consistently calls for humility and service.

Psychopaths seek stimulation and lack moral brakes. Core features: callousness, impulsivity, lack of empathy or remorse, thrill-seeking.

Ephesians 4:18–19 – “They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. They have become callous...”

Proverbs 21:10 – “The soul of the wicked desires evil; his neighbour finds no mercy in his eyes.”

1 John 3:17 – “But if anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him?”

Biblical theme: Psychopathy reflects a seared conscience and absence of compassion. Scripture calls this a sign of estrangement from God’s life-giving Spirit.

5. Chronically Anxious or Negative People

- **Traits:** Persistent worry, catastrophizing, constant talk of problems.
- **Impact:** Emotional contagion studies show anxiety is contagious; exposure to someone who is highly anxious can raise others’ physiological arousal.

How good are you at turning a conversation that was negative into something that is positive? We need this skill. Years ago, someone I was coaching communicated how things were tough for her because her team was so negative and she said, “I have to have lunch with them every day.” I corrected her and said, “It’s actually a good thing having lunch with people from other teams. Who said you have to have lunch with your team all the time?” Often we say we want to change the world, but we are still struggling to change the direction of a conversation.

Proverbs 12:25 – “Anxiety weighs down the heart, but a kind word cheers it up.”

6. Excessively Needy or Boundary-Violating Individuals

- **Traits:** Over-sharing, demanding constant reassurance, ignoring personal space or time.
- **Reason:** This creates a feeling of being “trapped,” which attachment theory links to anxiety and avoidance.

Proverbs 25:17 – “Seldom set foot in your neighbour’s house—too much of you, and they will hate you.”

Galatians 6:5 – “For each one should carry their own load.”

Having collapsed boundaries can make you feel anxious. Begin to exercise your space boundaries. Begin to set limits with those around you, if you want to be free of anxiety. If you need to tell people that it now your bedtime because you have an early start tomorrow, feel free to tell them.

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