

The Profile of a Sociopath

The 15 characteristics listed outlined below, based on checklists developed by Cleckley and Hare, identify features commonly found in those who perpetrate psychological and physical abuse.

1. Glibness and superficial charm. They are able to use language effortlessly to beguile, confuse, and convince.
2. Manipulative and conning. Sociopaths do not recognize the individuality or rights of others, which makes any and all self-serving behaviors permissible.
3. Grandiose sense of self. The sociopathic cult leader enjoys tremendous feelings of entitlement. He believes everything is owed to him as his right.
4. Pathological lying. Sociopaths lie coolly and easily, even when it is obvious they are being untruthful. Confronting these lies may provoke unpredictably intense rage or simply a Buddha-like smile.
5. Lack of remorse, shame and guilt. At the core of the sociopath is a deep seated rage, which is split off (psychologically separated from the rest of the self) and repressed. Whatever the emotional or psychological source, sociopaths see those around them as objects, targets, or opportunities, not as people. For sociopaths, the end always justify the means, and there is no place for feelings of remorse, shame or guilt.
6. Shallow emotions. They rarely reveal a range of emotions, and those they do reveal are superficial at best, and fabricated at worst. Hiding behind the “mask of sanity”, the sociopathic cult leader exposes feelings only in so far as they serve an ulterior motive.
7. Incapacity for love. Although he may refer to himself, for example, as the “living embodiment of God’s love,” the leader is tragically flawed because he is unable to give or receive love. Love substitutes are given instead.
8. Need for stimulation. Thrill seeking behaviors, often skirting the letter or spirit of the law, are common among sociopaths. Cult leaders live on the edge, constantly testing the beliefs of their followers, often with increasingly bizarre behaviors, punishments, and lies.
9. Callousness and lack of empathy. Sociopaths readily take advantage of others, expressing utter contempt for the feelings of others. Someone in distress is not important to them.
10. Poor behavioral controls and impulsive nature. Like small children, many sociopaths have difficulty regulating their emotions. Adults who have temper tantrums are frightening to be around.
11. Early behavior problems and juvenile delinquency. Sociopaths frequently have a history of behavioral and academic difficulties. Equally prevalent are difficulties in peer relationships, developing and keeping friends, self-control, and managing aberrant behaviors, such as stealing, arson, and cruelty to others.
12. Irresponsibility and unreliability. Not concerned about the consequences of their behavior, sociopaths leave behind them the wreckage of other people’s lives and dreams. Sociopathic cult leaders rarely accept blame for their failures or mistakes.
13. Promiscuous sexual behavior and infidelity. Marital fidelity is rare among sociopaths. There are usually reports of countless extramarital affairs and sexual predation of adult and child members of both sexes.
14. Lack of realistic life plan and parasitic lifestyle. The sociopathic cult leader tends to move around a lot, making countless efforts at starting over while seeking fertile new ground to exploit.

15. Criminal or entrepreneurial versatility. Cult leaders change their image and that of the group as needed to avoid prosecution and litigation, to increase income, and to recruit a range of members. Cult leaders often have an innate ability to attract followers who have the skills and connections that the leaders lack. (p 61-67)

Take Back Your Life: Recovering from Cults and Abusive Relationships by Janja Lalich & Madeleine Tobias
(Berkeley, CA: Bay Tree Publishing, 2006)