

MIND- HACKING ALERT

A young adult's guide to recognizing undue influence and resisting abusive relationships



The transition from adolescence to adulthood is exciting.

Increased independence feels great, but it can be scary, too. It's normal to feel swamped with new responsibilities and decisions. And that makes it especially important to be on guard against people or groups that might take advantage of your inexperience or insecurities to gain an undue amount of influence over you — to override your free will and run your life.

Just as the computer that you rely on to help you do your homework and keep in touch with the world around you can be hacked, so can your mind through undue influence. Like a computer virus, mind-hacking can corrupt memories and create false ones.

Disguising their cruel intentions in a friendly way, con artists, gangs, pimps, destructive cults, sexual abusers, and other predators use mind-hacking to trap and control their victims. Mind-hackers can exploit you into giving up your best friends, your family, your favorite activities, even your future.

Think mind-hacking can't happen to you? Think again!

You're already at risk for mind-hacking because of your age. The part of the brain that's responsible for emotions, judgment, decision-making, planning, and impulse control— the prefrontal cortex— is not fully mature until around age 25. That doesn't mean you're stupid — only that you have to be extra smart around mind-hackers. You're most likely to fall for mind-hacking when you are:

- Insecure about your future
- Stressed out about your health or looks
- Under pressure to get good grades or a job
- Worried about tuition or other expenses
- Feeling lonely or unsure about fitting in
- Anxious about making new friends
- Questioning your sexual identity
- Sad about a breakup; a divorce, illness, or death in the family; or another loss
- Living away from home for the first time
- Nearing graduation or have just graduated
- Searching for spiritual direction or a new church/temple

Mind-hackers are most harmful when they do *any* of these things:

- Magnify your fears or insecurities
- Fuel feelings of guilt or shame
- Isolate you by convincing you to cut off your family, friends, and others in your support network
- Press you to leave home or quit school
- Intimidate you to stop asking questions
- Take control of your finances
- Force you to commit crimes

How can you spot a mind-hacker?

Just as computer viruses use deception to avoid detection, so do mind-hackers. Mind-hackers can seem like the kindest, most affectionate people you've ever met. They can:

- Pretend to be your new "best friend" or your "true love"
- Come across as an ordinary family, welcoming you into theirs
- Masquerade as a club, self-help group, or religion
- "Love bomb" you—repeatedly flatter you and pay you an unusual amount of attention
- Lure you with sex or gifts after knowing you for only a short time
- Claim they have "all the answers" to whatever might be troubling you
- Insist that they are the only ones who can truly understand and guide you

From there, they may:

- Oblige you to schedule all your activities around them
- Restrict your access to media and other objective sources of information
- Check in with you excessively, even late at night or when they know you're busy, and expect you to do the same

- Label those you previously trusted and loved as "negative," "contaminated," "toxic," or "unenlightened"
- Position themselves as your new family
- Insist that you stop communicating with or keep secrets from others outside the group
- Tell you that thinking for yourself interferes with finding happiness or "truth"
- Disrupt your eating and/or sleeping habits
- Trivialize or make you give up your social, academic, recreational, religious, political, or other activities that are important to you
- Pressure you into recruiting new "friends"/members
- Bad-mouth those who drop out of the group
- Shun you, make you feel worthless, or physically hurt you if you raise questions, express doubts, or try to disagree

These tactics increase the mind-hackers' undue influence over you, emotionally manipulate you, short-circuit your ability to think critically, and undermine your relationship with your family and friends so you become dependent on the mind-hackers.

Reality check— How to prevent mind-hackers from taking control of your life:

- Be skeptical of anyone you've recently met who lavishes you with attention, compliments you excessively, monopolizes all your time, or tries to alienate you from your trusted family and friends.
- Don't reveal information about your (or your family's) medical history, finances, or other very personal matters to someone you've known for only a short time.
- Never go away with an organization unless you've thoroughly checked it out.
- Verify any information you're given with an independent authoritative source.

If you think you're being targeted by a mind-hacker...

Get advice from someone you've known for a long time who is **not involved** with the person or group that you're unsure about, such as a relative, friend, counselor, teacher, law enforcement official, or member of the clergy.

If you have a friend or relative who's been mind-hacked, **don't give up on them**. Do your best to stay in touch, and remind them that they're still important to you. Team up with the person's family and old friends to figure out how you might be able to help.

For additional information, go to:
www.njsafeandsound.org
www.facebook.com/njsafeandsound



THE SPECTRUM OF INFLUENCE

There are various degrees of social influence all around you. Learning to recognize them is key to protecting yourself from exploitative relationships.

Safe to Continue: Ethical Influence	Caution – Early Signs of Mind-Hacking	Danger! Undue Influence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Nurtures your independence ○ Respects your other relationships and interests ○ Encourages access to information ○ Leaves you in control of your choices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Disregards your personal boundaries ○ Pressures your thoughts, feelings, and behavior ○ Begins to isolate you ○ Leaves you feeling confused 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Fuels fears ○ Controls your time and keeps you isolated from others ○ Demands unquestioning commitment ○ Leaves you obligated to get permission before making decisions



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