

# Machiavellianism

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The term “Machiavellianism” comes from a 16th century philosopher and political figure named Niccoló Machiavelli. Even if you aren’t familiar with his work or Machiavellianism, you have probably observed people with a Machiavellian personality.

## **What Is Machiavellianism?**

In 1513, Niccoló Machiavelli wrote a manifesto called “The Prince,” which revealed his innermost thoughts and motivations around politics and ambition. He explained that virtue and morals weren’t as important for political pursuits as fear, brutality, and intelligence. As a result, psychologists coined the term “Machiavellian” to describe people who are manipulative and deceitful for the sake of

power.

A person with a strong Machiavellian personality is so skillfully and naturally manipulative that they may not even recognize that they are doing it. They can function as part of a team, but as soon as the opportunity presents itself, they switch gears to use members of their team to achieve a goal. They do not care who they hurt in the process, and will do anything to pursue their ambitions.

## Machiavellianism Test

The Mach IV is a tool used to measure the Machiavellian personality trait. Richard Christie and Florence Geis are the team of psychologists who developed it in 1970. Today, therapists use it to identify people with a Machiavellian personality.

Each of the 20 items on the Mach IV helps therapists place you on the scale of Machiavellianism. You choose how much you agree with each item on a scale of one through seven. Anyone can take the test, and the resulting score distinguishes between people who show minimal signs of Machiavellianism to those who are true High Machs.

## High Machiavellianism

High Machs, score very high on the Mach IV. They are set apart from other confirmed Machiavellians with lower scores. To identify a High Mach, you can look for these characteristics:

**Manipulative:** They use charm, guilt, and other subtle manipulative tactics to get what they want. It's hard to tell if they are sincere because their charisma hides their true intentions and provides plausible deniability.

**Aggressive:** When their charisma and manipulation don't work, they resort to threats and other aggressive behavior.

**Selfish:** They don't make good relationship partners. Their friendships, [romantic relationships](#), and [familial relationships](#) are often strained.

**Argumentative:** High Machs are great negotiators and debaters. They excel in these areas, and other people value them in these and other competitive scenarios.

**Callous:** They aren't emotionally invested in many things. This allows them to be patient and calculating until the perfect opportunity presents itself.

**Amoral:** [Jobs](#) and social settings with ambiguous rules are where they thrive. The gray areas give them room to be their true selves.

Keep in mind, Machiavellianism is a [personality trait](#), not a mental illness. It can be a symptom of a mental illness like [borderline personality disorder \(BPD\)](#) or psychopathy.

## The Dark Triad of Personality: Machiavellianism, Narcissism, & Psychopathy

People with the dark triad of personality traits score highly on scales that measure Machiavellianism, [narcissism](#), and [psychopathy](#).

**Machiavellianism** is a personality trait that causes people to pursue their goals no matter the cost. True Machiavellians do this without realizing it, as it is second nature to them.

**Narcissism** is a personality disorder which gives people an inflated sense of self. Narcissists need to be the center of attention and tend to lack empathy. Their outward presentation exudes confidence, while their [self-esteem](#) is fragile.

**Psychopathy** is a neuropsychiatric disorder that causes a lack of empathy. Psychopaths can be especially cold and callous because they don't have any regard for the way others feel.

Some people score highly on all three dark personality traits, which makes them especially cold, calculating, and deceptive. They only care about themselves. Their lack of empathy combined with their callousness makes them particularly dangerous.

## How to Deal with Machiavellianism

Suspecting that someone you know has a Machiavellian personality can be a harsh realization. It's difficult to maintain a healthy relationship with someone who will exploit and manipulate you at every opportunity. In most cases, the best course of action is to avoid that person. The mental and emotional damage from suffering at the hands of a Machiavellian can be devastating.

If you're unable to maintain your distance from someone with a Machiavellian personality, you should establish firm boundaries with them to lower the likelihood that they can manipulate you. A therapist can help you find healthy and effective ways to do this.

## Treatment for Machiavellianism

There are a variety of therapies that can be helpful for people with the Machiavellian personality trait and the people in their lives. They may benefit from family therapy, [couples therapy](#), [cognitive behavioral therapy \(CBT\)](#), and other therapeutic approaches.

People with the Machiavellian personality trait are often resistant to therapeutic interventions and other forms of mental health treatment. If you are able to convince a person with the Machiavellian personality trait to go to therapy, they will most likely try to hide behind their charm and friendly façade. Family therapy can help the whole family unit learn how to function if one of the members has the Machiavellian personality trait. The same can be said for couples therapy. Learning how their behavior affects their loved ones can help them identify and disrupt the patterns of behavior that

cause distress.

If you need a therapist to help you with your Machiavellianism or to cope with a loved one with the Machiavellian personality trait in your life, check out our therapist directory today.

About the author

The editorial team at [therapist.com](https://therapist.com) works with the world's leading clinical experts to bring you accessible, insightful information about mental health topics and trends.