

Neutralising Manipulative Control

Four interaction strategies to reduce reactivity, protect boundaries, and limit escalation

Safety note: These strategies can help reduce escalation. If threats, stalking, intimidation, or coercive control are present, prioritise safety planning and specialist support.

Strategy	Definition & goal	When to use	How to do it	Pros	Cons & risks
Grey Rock	Stay neutral and uninteresting so provocations lose momentum.	Short, unavoidable interactions (e.g., toxic relative, volatile ex, neighbour).	Brief factual replies; no explaining/defending; share no personal details; exit quickly.	Reduces drama; limits bait; preserves emotional energy.	Can trigger pushback/testing; emotionally draining; may read as cold.
No Contact	End communication to remove access and break the abuse loop.	When you can safely and permanently exit the relationship.	Block channels; avoid shared spaces where possible; tighten privacy; tell trusted people; document boundary breaches if needed.	Often fastest route to clarity; restores peace; supports healing.	Not feasible in all cases (work/co-parenting); leaving can increase risk; may trigger retaliation.
Yellow Rock	A civil, businesslike version of Grey Rock: cooperative tone, minimal emotion.	Co-parenting, legal/admin matters, or unavoidable overlap where you must appear reasonable.	Polite greetings/sign-offs; stick to facts/logistics; ignore provocation; confirm agreements in writing; avoid character debates.	Maintains civility; protects credibility; still denies emotional fuel.	Takes effort; can prolong contact; not sufficient for severe intimidation without support.
Medium Chill	Calm detachment while engaging only superficially and setting quiet boundaries.	Ongoing contact with manipulative people (family, workplace, community).	Keep it light and impersonal; avoid sensitive topics; calm boundary statements; exit politely; do not debate distortions.	More sustainable long-term; reduces conflict temperature; protects energy.	Requires vigilance; can suppress emotions if overused; may fail if intimidation escalates.

Sources (clickable)

- PsychCentral - Grey Rock method
- Out of the FOG - Medium Chill
- NHS - Getting help for domestic abuse
- High Conflict Institute - BIFF responses
- CPS - Controlling or coercive behaviour