

- create minor but chronic irritation in others;
- are overtly cooperative but covertly uncooperative;
- procrastinate or carry out tasks inefficiently;
- can be evasive and secretive;
- project angry feelings on others;
- are quietly manipulative and controlling;
- create a feeling in others of being on an emotional roller coaster;
- cause others to swallow their anger and eventually blow up; and
- make endless promises to change.

Counter–Passive Aggression

When reacting to aggression, a person may behave in a counter-aggressive way. When reacting to hostility, a person may behave in a counter-hostile way. Likewise, when reacting to passive aggression, a person may behave in a counter–passive-aggressive way. In Chapter 10, we will present the Passive-Aggressive Conflict Cycle and explain in detail the dynamics of how persons responding to passive aggression frequently end up mirroring the troublesome behavior and getting caught in a circular and endless cycle of passive-aggressive conflict.

A mother becomes impatient with her son's passive-aggressive pattern of “missing” the bus so that he can use the family car to drive himself to school. On the morning of an important soccer tournament, she “forgets” to wake him on time so that he is late and not able to meet his team in time for the game.

Like atomic waste, counter-aggressive, counter-hostile, and counter–passive-aggressive behaviors are all toxic. Unless a person learns to manage and dispose of these behaviors in a healthy way, he or she will end up contaminating his or her well-being.

A Positive Outcome

As we taught our theory of passive aggression to seminar parents and professionals, we were gratified by their quick insight into the psychology of passive aggression and their sense of personal empowerment to deal with passive-aggressive behaviors. These empowered adults no longer felt like confused victims but acquired the psychological awareness and skills to alter their responses to passive aggression. Many participants commented that their lives became less emotional and more stable. They reported that they were able to identify the anger behind another person's passive-aggressive behavior. Most important, the participants were no longer programmed to fulfill the other person's irrational belief that adults and authority figures are critical, demanding, and at times out of control. We believe you will experience these same feelings of insight and empowerment as you read this book.