

# Covert Vulnerability Screening

## Pattern Recognition Guide

### Overview

Covert presentations are harder to identify than overt ones because they appear humble, sensitive, or victimized. This screening helps identify patterns that may complicate standard approaches.

### Distinguishing Features

- Grandiosity expressed through victimhood ("No one has suffered like I have")
- Hypersensitivity to perceived criticism
- Passive-aggressive rather than overtly aggressive
- Envious of others but frames it as being treated unfairly
- Seeks reassurance constantly but never satisfied
- Martyrdom as manipulation ("After all I've done for you")

### Screening Questions

- "Tell me about a time when someone criticized you. How did you respond?"
- "How do you typically handle it when you don't get recognition you deserve?"
- "Describe your relationships with people who are more successful than you."
- "What happens in your relationships when your partner has needs that conflict with yours?"

### Red Flags in Session

- Consistently positions self as victim in every story
- Unable to identify any personal contribution to relationship problems
- History of relationships ending with the other person portrayed as abuser
- Subtle devaluation of you or previous helpers ("You're the only one who understands")
- Emotional reactions disproportionate to situation

### Implications for Practice

- Standard empathy-based approaches may reinforce problematic patterns
- Couples work may need to pause for individual work first
- Partner may need separate support to avoid triangulation
- Progress may be slower; adjust expectations accordingly

