

The Sociopath Next Door Discussion Questions

By Martha Stout

Author Bio: (Wikipedia)

Martha Stout is an American psychologist and author. She served on the clinical faculty of the Harvard Medical School for over twenty-five years and also served on the academic faculties of The New School for Social Research, the Massachusetts School of Professional Psychology, and Wellesley College. She writes on the subjects of conscience, character, and integrated awareness. Stout currently is in private practice as a clinical psychologist in Boston and resides on Cape Ann, Massachusetts.

The Sociopath Next Door won the Books for a Better Life Award, Best Book in Psychology in 2005.

13 Rules for Dealing with a Sociopath:

1. Accept that some people literally have no conscience.
2. In a contest between your instincts and what is implied by the role a person has taken on—educator, doctor, leader, animal lover, humanist, parent—go with your instincts.
3. When considering a new relationship of any kind, practice the Rules of Threes regarding the claims and promises a person makes, and the responsibilities he or she has. Make the Rule of Threes your personal policy.
4. Question authority.
5. Suspect flattery.
6. If necessary, redefine your concept of respect.
7. Do not join the game.
8. The best way to protect yourself from a sociopath is to avoid him, to refuse any kind of contact or communication.
9. Question your tendency to pity too easily.
10. Don't try to redeem the unredeemable.
11. Never agree, out of pity or for any other reason, to help a sociopath conceal his/her true nature.
12. Defend your psyche.
13. The best revenge is living well.

Discussion Questions:

1. Did you like the book?
2. What did you think of the tone of the book? Realistic? Alarmist? Sensationalistic?
3. What is the definition of a sociopath?

4. Do you think sociopaths are born, formed by a lack of nurturing, or both?
5. Before reading this book, did you think of a sociopath as just a cold-blooded killer? What about now?
6. Why do people fail to “see” sociopaths - even after long term exposure to one?
7. What do you think about the study where people “shocked” others on the authority of the researcher/authority figure? What about the statistic where people refused to shock others for a “common” man? Have you ever experienced anything like this?
8. Stout states that adults stop saying “Quit it!” to bullies when children will often call them on their behavior. Do you agree or disagree with this assertion?
9. Discuss Einstein’s quote, “The world is a dangerous place to live, not because of the people who are evil, but because of the people who don’t do anything about it.”
10. How can you tell whom to trust?
11. Should sociopaths be pitied as the Dalai Lama suggests?
12. What do you think about the idea that the reason sociopaths do such harm/damage is because they are bored?
13. Stout gives 13 rules of dealing with sociopaths in everyday life. Did you find these useful?
14. Would you like to live conscience-free? Have you ever wondered how that would be?
15. Did Stout’s book make take a closer look some of the people you know?
16. Have you ever known or suspected someone of being a sociopath? What did you do about it?
17. Did reading The Sociopath Next Door change the way you view humanity? Do you feel better, worse, or the same about mankind?

Extras:

- “The Devil You Know” was the working title for the book, but an off-the-cuff remark by Stout to her editor ended up giving the book the title “The Sociopath Next Door.”
- Interview magazine did an interesting interview with Stout about Sociopaths. You can read it at <http://www.interviewmagazine.com/culture/conscience-lack-of#>

References:

- <http://www.interviewmagazine.com/culture/conscience-lack-of#>
- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martha_Stout
- <http://www.thecriminalmind.us/13-rules-for-dealing-with-sociopaths-in-everyday-life-rules-10-13/>