Responding to covert aggressive manipulation

- **Stay calm**
  - **Don’t rush to react/respond**
    - In most cases, it is ok to wait before responding
    - Getting me to react on their demand is part of the manipulation
  - **Trust my gut feel**
    - Even when there is no clear validation from the manipulator (covert)
    - Check for self-blame and guilt induced by the manipulator
    - Shame/guilt will affect my ability to be assertive
  - **Don’t over react**
    - Expressing anger or agression will work to their advantage
    - Being defensive will put me on an unequal footing
  - **Don’t personalise**
    - Their beliefs or pronouncements about me is not me
    - Their opinions don’t actually matter that much
  - **Keep my distance**
    - Manipulation can be harder to resist face-to-face
    - Strong emotional tactics (crying, looks of contempt) are more powerful in person
    - It is generally a good idea to minimise contact with toxic personalities
  - **Don’t criticise**
    - Criticisims can be turned into thier advantage
    - Focus on dealing with their behaviour
      - What they say is often confusing and deliberately unclear
      - What do they actions say about their true intent?
    - Give (genuine) praise whenever appropriate
      - This appeals to their ego and can temporarily disarm them
  - **Focus on the facts**
    - Set aside emotional content and review the situation factually
      - Working off their emails or chat logs, delete all the emotive content and see what is left
      - Similarly delete all conmments that seem to be covert attacks on myself
      - Focus on tangible transactions
        - What do I want?
        - What do they want?
        - Is it my responsibility to come up with a solution? Or theirs?
        - How does ongoing interaction with this person benefit me?
    - Do a reality check with an impartial third party
- **Gather evidence**
  - **Keep written records**
  - **Use emails to negotiate/communicate**
    - Say: I prefer to do this via email as it gives me more time to consider your request
  - **Use witnesses in confrontations**
- **Don’t engage**
  - **Don’t explore their perspective or feelings**
    - They will use my empathy against me
  - **Dont try and change them**
    - They will deny/rationalise any evidence
    - They will use my attempts to their advantage
    - They are unable/unwilling to empathise with others
  - **Respond to what they say at face value**
    - While being aware of hidden motives
    - Respond to facts only
  - **Use (genuine) humour to disarm if approrpriate**
- **Communicate assertively**
  - **Don’t under-react**
    - They will see this as a sign of successful manipulation
  - **Call them on their behaviour**
    - State facts
    - Minimise emotive language
    - No personal attacks
    - Ask: How is that (what they said, what they did) helpful?
  - **Involve them in the solution if appropriate**
    - This can be a powerful way to get more cooperation
    - Only if you feel you can manage their manipulations
  - **Communicate clear consequences**
    - Do it in writing
    - So they can’t plead ignorance later
    - Don’t make it a threat. State facts.
- **Listen actively**
  - **Check my understanding**
    - A useful way to reflect their (often unreasonable) words back at them
    - What you said/request this... did you mean?
    - Cut through attempts at obfuscation (often using emotional words)
  - **Acknowledge their feelings and needs**
    - Without ignoring my own feelings and needs
    - I hear your frustration, AND I need this...
    - Understanding does not mean I agree