

TURNING CONTROL AND JEALOUSY INTO PASSION

When your partner tells you what you can and cannot do, it is easy to feel powerless and victimized. When adults take orders from their partners, they are reenacting childhood obedience and contributing to their own domination. Although partners may try to punish “defiance,” they are not likely to do anything other than get angry or withdraw. The best way to break a vicious cycle of domination and submission is for compliant people to start doing what they need to do and allow their partners to be upset. The following steps show how to start taking charge of your life:

1. Show you understand your partner’s objections to what you want to do by restating his or her point: “You don’t want me to . . . because. . . .”
2. If you decide what you want to do is reasonable after making sure you understand your partner’s objections, do it!
3. Do not argue with your partner and try to convince him or her that you have the right to do what you want to do.
4. Sympathize when your partner attempts to control you with moodiness or threats and realize that your attempts to change may be threatening. Your compassion will ease the relationship through the transition much better than endless reassurances or arguing.
5. Offer extra affection (without changing your plans) to help compensate your partner for his or her “loss of power.”
6. Separate if your partner attempts to control you with physical violence.

UNFOUNDED JEALOUSY

Jealousy is often the cause of attempts to control. Women may become jealous when their partner notices other females. They need to understand that men are visually oriented and “cruise” women in the same way that they enjoy noticing flashy cars. Expecting a man to be blind to beauty in other women places a devastating demand on a relationship. Some men get jealous when their partner is not under their direct protection and they may project their own lustful urges onto their partner. However, men need to understand that women are capable of handling everyday encounters without falling prey to men or sexual urges. In actuality, the real cause of jealousy is always insecurity about attractiveness or control. When it is expressed in the form of accusations and orders, it can destroy a relationship. However, there are ways to turn jealousy into passion and tenderness:

7. Admit you are jealous before you even have a chance to conjure up accusations.
8. Express your jealousy with a statement that starts with “I”: “I felt so insecure (worried, lost) when you. . . .” Do not interrogate or assume.
9. Make simple requests that will help relieve your feelings: “Would you give me a hug, call me when you’re late, or include me in the conversation . . . ?”
10. Treat jealous accusations as though they were expressions of affection: “You really do love me, care about me. . . .”
11. Ask questions directed at insecurities causing jealousy: “What is it like for you when I . . . ?” Remember, unfounded jealousy has nothing to do with your faithfulness.
12. When you notice the opposite sex, do so appropriately, without gaping, and then give your partner a little extra attention.
13. When your partner says you cannot do something because of his or her unfounded jealousy, follow steps 1–6 for dealing with another person’s attempts to control.

JUSTIFIED JEALOUSY

Justified jealousy is inevitable after learning that your partner has been unfaithful. You may think you cannot continue a relationship once trust has been violated. Actually, losing the illusion of complete trust is realistic. Taking some of the following steps can rebuild the openness, companionship, and confidence necessary to restore a relationship:¹

14. Hurt partners can decide if the relationship is worth saving on the basis of having shared good times in the past and on the unfaithful partner's willingness to commit. Remember that people who are dishonest, unlawful, irresponsible, impulsive, reckless, aggressive, and violent often cannot remain faithful even with therapy!
15. Hurt partners need to set and stand by conditions for continuing the relationship suggested in points 16–23.
16. Unfaithful partners should admit to and start treatment for any sexual addiction that contributes to the problem. People who need sex to relax or feel loved, push their partners into unwanted sexual activity, or have sexual interests that become a substitute for contact with spouses may have sexual addictions.
17. Unfaithful partners should admit to and get help for any substance abuse that contributes to problems with commitment.
18. Unfaithful partners should agree to stop all contact with previous lovers: It may help to formally end any current affairs in the presence of one's partner.
19. Unfaithful partners should agree to or take initiative for getting an AIDS test.
20. Both partners should agree to set realistic boundaries for the relationship. For example, no contact with "friends" of the opposite sex outside of work without the other partner present.
21. Unfaithful partners should agree to have bank statements, phone bills, or email monitored for an indefinite period of time.
22. Unfaithful partners should agree to thoroughly discuss factors that contributed to infidelity and to participate in therapy to ensure that important issues are covered.
23. Unfaithful partners need to learn and demonstrate the use of active listening skills to help hurt partners express unresolved issues constructively.
24. Hurt partners need to keep communication lines open by focusing on current needs. Interrogations often have hidden agendas in which hurt partners make themselves feel more inadequate, insecure, or unsupported.
25. Hurt partners need to be responsible for healing their wounded egos by changing beliefs that they are inadequate or stupid for not having "prevented" the infidelity.
26. Hurt partners need to clearly identify caring behaviors their partners can do that would help them heal, and then should show appreciation for demonstrations of caring.
27. Hurt partners need to be willing to show caring behaviors to unfaithful partners that will help them recommit to the relationship. This may involve acting in caring ways even when feeling very resentful.
28. Both partners need to examine unrealistic beliefs about love, sex, and forgiveness.

¹ See *After the Affair* by Janis Abrahms Spring (Harper Perennial, 1997) for further elaboration of these ideas.