

Managing jealousy

Jealousy is something that most of us have experienced at some point in our lives. For some couples, mild jealousy can keep a spark in a relationship and stop them taking the other for granted. For others, this becomes destructive, self-defeating and abusive:

Have you done any of the following?

- Checked your partner's mobile/post/computer/emails/social networking sites e.g. Facebook
- Accused your partner of having affairs
- Constantly questioned your partner, expecting them to account for their whereabouts
- Followed your partner
- Phoned your partner when you are apart with the intention of 'checking up' on them (even if you dress this up as caring about them)
- Made it difficult for your partner to go out
- Been nasty about a particular friend that your partner socialises with to isolate your partner from their influence
- Made it difficult or impossible for your partner to be employed (or maintain employment) in case they meet other people that you may perceive as 'rivals'
- Made it difficult for your partner to develop in some way, e.g. stopped a partner going to college by telling them they're not clever enough in case they do 'better themselves' and you fear they will then be 'too good' for you
- Been critical about your partner's clothes or appearance

What do you think you are trying to achieve in such a situation?

Whilst you may tell yourself that you are looking for 'evidence' that your suspicions are untrue, you may end up focusing only on what *seems* to confirm your worse suspicions. Often we ignore evidence to the contrary and wind ourselves up in the

process. Reassurance from your partner or an absence of anything suspicious rarely satisfies you in the long term.

The jealous behaviours above serve a purpose for you in some way. You may be trying to stop your partner leaving you but ironically, such behaviours are more likely to make them want to leave the relationship. For example, if you've ever got moody or aggressive about your partner going out for the night with friends, they may be put off when invited out in the future. This gets you what you want on the surface of it but your partner may start to resent you for this. You may become even more fearful of losing them and ultimately you may move further apart.

What can also happen is that a partner begins to hide things. They may do this in all innocence in a bid to maintain some privacy and/or avoid a hostile response from you.

Jealous behaviours serve the purpose of controlling your partner. Whilst you fear losing them, such behaviour is likely to push your partner further away.

What can you do?

The suggestions below may be useful whether your partner has had an affair or not. If your partner has been unfaithful to you in the past, your anger and hurt about this will obviously not disappear overnight. It takes time to trust someone again when we have been betrayed. Someone having an affair does not automatically mean that the relationship won't survive. Some couples may need professional support to begin to heal from an affair or to end the relationship. Whilst your anger is perfectly understandable if your partner has been unfaithful, it is unacceptable to punish them with violence or abuse, including using the abusive behaviours listed above: this is sometimes a way of avoiding experiencing the pain of what happened.

If it was an ex-partner that was unfaithful to you in the past, don't transfer that on to your current relationship, blaming them for someone else's hurtful actions. Most people are faithful in relationships. If you have been unfaithful in the past, don't assume your current partner will be. Let go of the past.

Ten tips

1. **Stop doing all of the ‘checking’ behaviours.** They do nothing but fuel the suspicion and make you and your partner feel worse. Each time you stop yourself from acting on a jealous feeling/thought, you will feel more in control of yourself.
2. **Don’t structure your day around monitoring your partner** – i.e. don’t ‘clock watch’, obsessing over your partner’s daily activities - focus on your own instead.
3. **Try to interrupt or distance yourself from the suspicious thoughts in your head.** This can be done by distracting yourself with a task that brings you back into the present moment rather than focusing on your fears about the future; by telling yourself that these ‘thoughts’ are not ‘facts’; by challenging the thoughts in the way a good friend would. For example, does your partner talking to someone attractive at a party really mean they are going to run off with them? Some people find it helpful to think of what is happening as a “gossip in their head” – this can then be handled by thinking about what they would say to someone in the street talking about their partner in this way.
4. **Speak to a friend/work colleague/family member** who will help you stop your mind running away from you.
5. **Decide to trust your partner in an open hearted way and take what they say at face value, giving them the benefit of the doubt.** If someone decides to have an affair this is not something you can ultimately control – you can survive it. You may feel naïve to trust them and think you will feel less ‘duped’ if you’ve been on the alert and yet the pain if they have been unfaithful will not be any less. Your ‘checking’ behaviours may make it more difficult for a partner to have an affair but it may also make them more likely to want one. If you can’t trust your partner, why are you having a relationship with them?
6. **Build up some ‘emotional muscle’.** Insecurities often underpin jealousy but that doesn’t mean that they have to lead to using abusive behaviours. Learn to tolerate feeling a bit ‘needy’ at times. Do things that make you feel good about yourself (e.g. going to the gym, pampering yourself, learning something new, doing an activity with the children, taking up a hobby). Stop ‘measuring’ yourself

against the perceived or actual 'rival'. Start appreciating the good elements in the relationship.

7. **Put yourself in your partner's shoes.** Take some time to think about what it feels like to not be trusted and to be on the receiving end of jealous behaviours. What sort of a relationship do you want? One in which a partner feels they have little freedom and privacy or one in which you trust that your partner is there because they want to be.
8. **Don't drink alcohol or take drugs** when you are feeling 'wound up' - they may mess with your thinking, blowing things out of proportion and making it more likely that you will do something you will regret. This is particularly important if you know you are more likely to be aggressive when you are drunk or high.
9. **Talk to the Respect Phonenumber in confidence on 0808 802 4040** about how you handle this with your partner. Some people are able to sit down with their partners and have an honest talk about their fears. This can however still end up quite controlling - if you're feeling desperate, your judgement of what is reasonable to ask for can be skewed. For example, telling your partner that you feel insecure when they go out, can leave them still feeling (especially if you have been violent or abusive in other ways in the past) that they shouldn't go out. Practising ways of doing this without putting extra pressure on a partner can be explored more on a domestic abuse programme. You may also need to respect that just because you want to discuss your concerns, your partner may not want to.
10. **Accept that relationships can come to an end** – underpinning jealousy is the fear that we will fall apart if this happens. This can feel particularly devastating if the whole focus of your life has been about your partner. There is no guarantee in life that a partner won't leave us – it is a reality in life that everyone has to live through losses. There are constructive things we can do if/when a relationship ends – you can survive it.

This leaflet was written for you. Please let us know if you found it useful or if you think there was something missing: info@respectphonenumber.org.uk