

Managing jealousy

This factsheet is for people who use violent or abusive behaviours towards their partner and struggle to manage feelings of jealousy appropriately.

About jealousy

Jealousy is something that most of us have experienced at some point in our lives; most people are able to identify and manage their jealous thoughts and feelings.

Many people who have been violent, abusive, and controlling towards their partner, identify jealous behaviours as a particular challenge for them.

Jealousy can arise from:

- **Unrealistic expectations of your partner:** these expectations might not be conscious; however, when your partner doesn't meet them, you feel you have the right to act abusively. Jealousy functions to get your partner to do what you want, and to comply with your demands. This abusive behaviour often 'works' and serves a purpose as you get what you want. For example, if you've ever been moody or aggressive about your partner going out for the night with friends, they may not go out next time they're invited.
- **The worry that your partner is going to leave you:** you behave in isolating ways to stop them from doing so.
- **Low self-esteem and insecurities:** which can exacerbate your worry that your partner is going to leave you.
- **Memories of past negative experiences:** an ex-partner was unfaithful, and this now means you are expecting it to happen again in your current relationship. However, even if you had difficult experiences in the past, this does not justify your abuse. It may exacerbate it, but it doesn't cause or excuse it.

Jealousy is driven by your negative thoughts and anxieties about your relationship. It is a destructive and self-defeating feeling that only you can find a solution for. If you act on the urge to control and/or isolate your partner, or they are worried by your jealousy, then you are being abusive.

How does this make your partner feel?

Your partner may feel:

- Resentment towards you, or wanting to leave you, because of your abusive behaviour
- Constantly monitored, afraid to go out or see family and friends
- Like walking on eggshells: terrified of not meeting your expectations and the abuse escalating as a result
- Like they have lost who they are and cannot make any decisions freely, in case you use violence or abuse
- Blamed for something that happened to you in the past and that they must do anything to keep you calm, to make up for what happened to you in the past
- Afraid to tell you things, in case you respond in a hostile way
- Under siege from persistent texts/calls and constant questioning.

What can you do to manage your jealousy?

- **Identify and work on your negative self-talk.** Examples of negative self-talk:
 - 'If they go out, they will meet someone else and leave me'
 - 'They are not answering my texts – something must be going on that I should know about'
 - 'They didn't say they were going there – they are keeping secrets from me'
- **Interrupt and distract yourself from jealous thoughts and feelings.**

You can do this by:

 - Distracting yourself with a task that brings you back into the present moment, rather than focusing on your fears about the future
 - Telling yourself that these 'thoughts' are not 'facts'
 - Not feeding the negative thoughts. For example, you could spend your time stressing that your partner will leave you for someone else and using this self-talk as your excuse for your violent or abusive behaviour. Or you can trust your partner, accepting that there will be uncertainty around this and it will be difficult to manage sometimes. We all have positive and negative feelings, but we choose whether we 'feed' the positive or negative parts of ourselves through our self-talk.

- Trusting your partner, giving them the benefit of the doubt even when you feel insecure.
- Reminding yourself that a decision to have an affair is not something you can control and that 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.
- Putting 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.

Other ways to manage jealousy

- **Stop the 'checking' behaviours.** Although they may give you some reassurance in the short-term, they are abusive and highly likely to make your partner feel bad and scared of you. 'Checking' can also fuel your jealousy and make it worse in the longer term.
- **Speak to a friend/work colleague/family member who will help you stop your mind running away from you.**
- **Focus on yourself and what you need to do.** You may find you spend a lot of your time checking up your partner and their activities. This only fuels your jealousy and could escalate your behaviour.
- **Build up 'emotional muscle'.** Learn to tolerate feeling a bit 'needy' at times. Do things that make you feel good about yourself. Stop 'measuring' yourself against a perceived or actual 'rival'. Start appreciating the good elements in your relationship.
- **Don't drink alcohol or take drugs.** They may mess with your thinking and mean you blow things out of proportion, making it more likely that you will do something you will regret; especially if you know you are more likely to be aggressive when you are drunk or high.
- **Accept that relationships can come to an end.** There is no guarantee in life that a partner won't leave us – everyone experiences losses. Sometimes, what drives our jealousy is a

deep-seated fear that our partner will leave us, and that we will not recover from the loss. This can feel particularly devastating if the whole focus of your life has been about your partner. You can survive the end of a relationship.

- **Be honest about your fears.** Some people can have an honest talk about their fears. This can, however, still end up 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 still leave them feeling that they shouldn't go out (especially if you have been violent or abusive in other ways in the past). You can learn how to practise doing this without putting extra pressure on your partner by attending a domestic abuse prevention programme. You also need to respect that just because you want to discuss your concerns, your partner may not want to.

Call the Respect Phonenumber- freephone 0808 802 4040

We will listen to you in a non-judgmental way, discuss your situation and help you think about how to change. We can give you contact details for a domestic abuse prevention programme, if there is one in your area. Our helpline is confidential.