

The Controlling Partner—Warning Signs of Verbal and Physical Abuse

Lynne Namka, Ed. D. © 2010

www.AngriesOut.com

Status aggression is seen in chickens, baboons, other animal species and also in humans. In status aggression, one partner uses control and aggressive tactics to gain and maintain the power. Power at any costs is the dynamic behind bullying, dating violence and domestic violence.

Intimate partner violence is damaging to all concerned. Abuse in a relationship causes a person's self-esteem to erode as emotional damage sets in. With loss of power in the relationship, the person's sense of self as a good person starts to disintegrate and he or she becomes more dependent on the abusive partner. Depression, anxiety and a sense of helplessness are constant symptoms. Across time, with repeated small and large cruelties from another person, lack of being respect causes the abused individual to become the "insignificant other." Warning: severe psychological damage happens when a person remains in a destructive, demeaning relationship.

How do you know if you are in an abusive, controlling relationship? The defenses of denial and minimization in the submissive partner are strong when coupled with the complex factors that keep people in unhealthy relationship that it is very confusing.

Controllers have beliefs of entitlement that they get to do harmful things to others. There is a lack of respect for others feelings and the right to be safe. Turn on your "jerk detector" and see things as they really are. Here's a check list to determine if your partner is a controller and you are experiencing intimate partner violence. If you check off more than a couple, talk with friends or a therapist. The controlling partner...

- _____ Tells you that you never do enough.
- _____ Tells you that you don't do things right. Is competitive with you over small matters.
- _____ Reminds you how lucky you are to have them for a partner.
- _____ Gradually chips away at your self-confidence through disrespect, allowing him/her to treat you even worse in the future.
- _____ Tells stories of how they have hurt others or abandoned others to frighten you.
- _____ Enforces stupid and trivial demands to demonstrate his/her power.
- _____ Gives the message that he/she is perfect are you are not.
- _____ Isolates you from friends and family to keep you an emotional prisoner/ away from the helpful feedback of others.
- _____ Makes vague or specific threats "You are going to get it." "You deserve it."
- _____ Puts you down for having feelings and opinions.
- _____ Gives poor excuses for hurting you: "I was stressed. You made me do it. I was drunk or high, I had an unhappy childhood."
- _____ Teases you in a hurtful way and then laughs and says, "Can't you take a joke?"
- _____ Says things to undermine your self-confidence: "You're so fat." "You're dumb."
- _____ Makes snide remarks about you in front of his/her friends or family.
- _____ Reveals embarrassing experiences you have had to others.

- _____ Ignores, apologies, covers up or cries after hurting you. *This is the “Sweet and mean cycle” or “fight and make-up” to confuse and hook you back into the relationship.*
- _____ Is delusional with jealousy and accuses you without any rational facts.
- _____ Forces you to give up hobbies, interests and outside interests. (Like the man who was jealous of the pillow his wife slept next to.)
- _____ Insists on accompanying you outside the home to keep you from having interests and fun on your own.
- _____ Checks up on you often to see who you are with and what you are doing.
- _____ Questions you intensely after you have been away from him/her.
- _____ Checks your email and phone bill.
- _____ Looks through your purse or wallet or goes through the trash.
- _____ Tells you what to wear, eat or where to go. (You can’t wear that low cut blouse to take out the trash)
- _____ Insists you quit your job and stop going out without him/her.
- _____ Tells you that no one else would want to be with you if you leave.
- _____ Expresses temper with violent action: cursing, name calling, hitting the walls or animals, kicking things to intimidate you.
- _____ Rages to scare you when his or her inappropriate behavior is challenged.
- _____ Becomes more and more physically rough: Men: shoving, hitting, punching, shoving, or slamming you against the wall. Women: biting, slapping, hitting or kicking.

People are held hostage by their own beliefs which continue the lack of relationship equality ending up with relationship trauma. Ignorance and secrecy keep status aggression going. Here are some of the irrational beliefs that keep people stuck in intimate partner violence. Check off the myths that you harbor that allows disrespect to be done to you by your controlling partner.

- _____ It was my fault. My actions “made” him/her do it. I don’t do enough for him/her.
- _____ I have to remain loyal to him/her no matter what because I love him/her.
- _____ The relationship is good part of the time. He/she is kind to me _____ percent of the time.
- _____ I can tolerate his/her abuse because he/she is kind to me at times.
- _____ At least he/she has stopped the physical abuse; I can put up with the verbal abuse.
- _____ I feel good with him/her when he/she’s not upset.
- _____ I’m nothing without him/her.
- _____ I’m just too sensitive.
- _____ He/she doesn’t really mean it.
- _____ I can make him/her act nicer if I give in more. (Magical thinking)
- _____ What would people think if I leave? I’m embarrassed by others opinions if I go.
- _____ I don’t deserve better treatment.
- _____ I think hitting and abusive language directed at me are acceptable behaviors/
- _____ If I just love him/her enough, he/she will change.
- _____ If only _____ then things would be different.
- _____ I’ll try harder and maybe he/she will stop the abuse.
- _____ I’ll be more careful and “walk on eggshells” to keep from setting him/her off.
- _____ I’ll just squelch my ideas or opinions to keep the peace.
- _____ He/she is so wonderful in so many ways that I can overlook the abuse.
- _____ I’m addicted to him/her just like a drug.

- _____ I replay the last blowup in my mind to avoid getting a plan of making a change.
- _____ I spin my mind on anger rather than seeking a practical solution to the problem.
- _____ My mom or dad took much worse.
- _____ I don't deserve anything better.
- _____ I can't say anything to him/her because I might hurt his or her feelings.
- _____ I made my bed so I have to lie in it. (This is an old fashioned belief.)
- _____ Divorce is to fail. I will be a failure or loser if I call it off.
- _____ I can't break my wedding vows.
- _____ I can't put my abusive kid out of the house; I'd feel too guilty.
- _____ I can't call 911 on him or her.
- _____ I'll feel guilty if I leave. What I put up with is not as bad as feeling guilty.
- _____ People who love me will always hurt me.
- _____ I can't share this abuse with my friends or family.
- _____ I have to isolate myself and hide the abuse because I'm ashamed.
- _____ I'm too embarrassed to seek help.
- _____ I'm too afraid; I can't make it or live alone.
- _____ But I "luv" him/her so much.

If you have some of these beliefs, your “nardar”—that inner warning sense that you’re living with a narcissistic person who wants to hurt you—is damaged. You don’t have to live with abuse. Get a support network and start talking. Go online and find others who have lived through what you deal with.

Warning Signs That You are in a Potentially Lethal Relationship

Violence never belongs in relationships. Control does not equal love. Here is a check list for the signs that show an underlying pathology. Does the person....

- _____ take responsibility for the physically abusive behavior? Is someone else always at fault?
- _____ threaten or harasses others as well as you?
- _____ have a history of physical violence with others?
- _____ respond extremely to the end of the relationship? Rage and threaten to kill you?
- _____ have a negative of noncompliance with court restraining orders?
- _____ abuse alcohol, cocaine or crack which fuels irrational behavior?

Is the violence escalating? If so, their pathology is too great for you to handle. Don't go it alone. You will absolutely need help from others who are trained in this serious issue. The Domestic Abuse Helpline for Men and Women at 1-888-743-5754, Stop Abuse for Everyone (SAFE) at www.safe4all.org or the nearest Battered Women's shelters can give you assistance. Help is there.

As Les Brown said, “Someone's opinion of you does not have to become your reality.” You and all people are worthy of being treated with respect. You get what you put up with, not what you deserve. Most of all, you deserve to be treated with respect.

Resources to Support Equality of Power in Relationships

Warning Signs You're Dating a Loser. Joseph Carver Articles on controlling relationships in both English & Spanish! <http://www.drjoecarver.com/3/miscellaneous2.htm>

When Love Goes Wrong Ann Jones and Susan Schechter

Dragon Slippers: This is what an Abusive Relationship Looks Like Rosalind Penfold

The Verbally Abusive Relationship Patricia Evans

The Betrayal Bond Patrick Carnes

The Doormat Syndrome (learning straight communication to move from co-dependency) Lynne Namka www.Angriesout.com

Your Quick Anger Make Over Plus Twenty Cutting-Edge Techniques to Release Anger Lynne Namka www.Angriesout.com

If you know someone who lives with abuse, consider sharing this article in a loving way taking the proper precautions that their partner not be privy to it.

Your Quick Anger Make Over

This book is a practical, light-hearted guide to take you through your wildest and woolliest feelings! It is suitable for the professional and lay person alike. You will greatly benefit from this book if you are caught up with intense thoughts, feelings and behavior, defensive when given criticized or given information, quick to take offense and act out with resentment and hostility, caught in a rush of excitement that gives permission to act out in anger and angry because you can't set boundaries on others' inappropriate behavior. Learn sure-fire, quick techniques to banish all unhappy feelings including anger! \$24.95 ppd. Talk, Trust and Feel Therapeutics, 5398 Golder Ranch Road, Tucson, AZ 85739

The Doormat Syndrome

Do you give too much? Is your life out of balance? The Doormat Syndrome shows you how break the cycle of learned helplessness and stand up and ask for what you want. Adults need to learn prosocial skills too. This book uses Virginia Satir's concepts as a guide for the necessary communication skills to achieve positive self-esteem. The book is funny, irreverent and profound with worksheets, visualization exercises and meditations to help you learn techniques for developing a relationship with your Higher Power, gain personal empowerment and enhance your interactions with others. \$15.95 ppd. Talk, Trust and Feel Therapeutics, 5398 Golder Ranch Road, Tucson, AZ 85739

Review

Psychologist Lynne Namka's "The Doormat Syndrome" is a compendium of the who's, what's, how's, and why's of how people become "doormats." It offers new ways to look at and recognize the thoughts, feelings and behaviors that serve to put individuals into that role.... Lynne writes eloquently, listing all the traits that get so ingrained in the brain, right from childhood, as a way of coping with family dysfunction. This book is a must for anyone interested in co-dependency or involved with 12 step or self-help groups in this area. It has more meat in it than any other book of its type that I have read."

Ann Chamberlain, Addictions Counselor