

SOME SPECIFIC EXAMPLES OF CONTROLLING BEHAVIOR

Controlling behaviors come in all shapes and sizes. Below are some very specific examples of controlling behavior that clients have shared with me over the years. Attempts to exert the types of control noted below are always hurtful, shaming, and destructive in a relationship. Look through the list and identify any that you have done or experienced yourself.

- Telling a partner how to dress; how, what, and how much to eat; how to chew gum; how to talk; how to wear his or her hair
- Telling a partner that she/he is “getting fat” and “needs to lose weight”
- Being the one who expects to make the decisions about your social activities as a couple
 - ...e.g. whom you and your partner will see and spend time with, what parties and social gatherings you will attend
- Telling a partner whom to spend time with and whom to avoid
 - ...e.g. directing her to avoid single women friends because they might “get her into trouble” by “exposing her” to single men
 - ...e.g. directing him to decrease his time with or his attention toward his children from a previous relationship because you feel jealous or think that his children distract him from your relationship or the family you have together
- Telling a partner what time you “expect” them to come or be home
- Calling, texting, or e-mailing a partner over and over when they are away from you and expecting them to respond immediately whenever you contact them no matter what else is going on for them at the time
- Controlling how money and finances are handled between the two of you, e.g.
 - ...withholding financial information from a partner
 - ...not allowing a partner to be part of bill-paying and financial decision-making
 - ...not allowing a partner to have access to the checking account(s) or charge cards
 - ...threatening to “ruin” a partner financially if they ever leave the relationship they have with you
- Giving ultimatums and making threats
 - ...e.g. about having sex with someone outside the relationship, about getting a separation or divorce, about limiting your partner’s time with the children if you end your relationship with each other
- “Pushing” your perspective with a partner by repeating your feelings or thoughts about a particular issue “over and over” again as a way to try to pressure them to give in to your wishes and desires or get them to agree with you
- Interrogating or continually questioning a partner about what they do, where they go, or whom they spend time with
- Assuming, implying, or overtly stating that your partner will undoubtedly do something “bad” or “hurtful” to you
- Belittling, insulting, demeaning, ridiculing, or making fun of a partner
 - ...saying “*You’re fat (stupid, lazy, ugly, crazy, nuts, psycho)*”
- Bribery/”quid pro quo”
 - ...”*I’ll only do something for you if you do something for me in return*”
- Demanding or expecting sex from a partner and getting angry, sulking, or punishing them in some way if they won’t provide this for you
 - ...i.e. the idea that a partner “owes” you sex just because she/he is in a relationship with you
- Becoming quiet, passive, or withdrawing to get sympathy or attention from your partner
- Not respecting a partner’s “no’s” and the personal limits they have set with you
- Leaving a room abruptly and being completely unwilling to talk to or connect with your partner
- Ignoring what a partner is saying to you

- Punishing a partner with a hostile or ominous silence or a hurtful emotional withdrawal if they say or do something you don't like
- Interrupting or talking over a partner
 - ...not being willing to really listen and not allowing a partner to express themselves effectively
 - ...becoming defensive, reactive, and argumentative when a partner starts to talk with you
- Directing or commanding a partner to do things (i.e. treating her or him like a "servant")
 - ..."You have to do what I tell you to do"
 - ..."You should..."
 - ..."Why don't you just..."
 - ..."Just shut up and do it!"
 - ..."Go get me a beer"
 - ..."I expect dinner on the table when I get home"
- Following a partner around your residence and being unwilling to stop talking or arguing about an issue that you feel the need to address at that moment
- Standing in a partner's way, blocking, or "cornering" a partner to keep them from leaving where you are or getting away from you
- "Playing the victim" in your relationship
 - ...crying to get sympathy or to get the other person to "back off" from the conflict or disagreement
 - ...looking dejected or acting hurt to try to get your partner to do what you want them to do
- Shaming or punishing a partner for his or her past mistakes, problems, or issues
 - ...e.g. criticizing their past sexual behavior or school, work, relationship or financial problems that they have experienced in the past
- Becoming loud, "intense," "passionate," or "animated" to try to overwhelm a partner in a conversation
- Becoming "rebellious" and not being willing to do things your partner asks you to do in order to "spite" them (or to prove to them that they are not going to be able to "control" you)
- Trying to make yourself "look better" than your partner
 - ...e.g. believing or telling them that you are "smarter," have more education, have a more responsible or "important" job, are more attractive, have more friends or a "better" family, are more successful, are more responsible generally, or have more money
- Putting down or demeaning a partner's friends and family to try to emotionally distance her (or him) from them
- Treating your partner like a "student" who needs to learn "life lessons" from you and "be educated" by you about the way that things in life "really are" because of your age, your "wisdom," your educational background, your job and financial success, or your life experience
- Being dishonest (by lying directly or withholding important information) or misrepresenting reality with a partner (e.g. by "twisting" things that have been said or done and manipulating her/him with "mind games," i.e. creating a "crazy-making" environment)
- Using children as "pawns" and "putting them in the middle" between you and your partner
 - ...e.g. making negative statements about your partner in front of your children to alienate the children from him/her or to punish your partner for leaving your relationship
- Directly or subtly pressuring a partner not to go to school or get a job outside the home or working to sabotage their efforts to do this
- Deciding "who does what" in terms of household/yard chores and parenting tasks
- Standing near or over a partner and using your intensity and/or size to intimidate that person in a discussion or conflict
- Expecting that you have the right to make all the important decisions related to raising your children
- Giving the "evil eye" to a partner, staring or glaring at a partner, or using threatening facial expressions to communicate your disgust and contempt with them or to try to intimidate them