

Reduce Your Need to Control Your Relationship

Objective

To reduce and manage your need to control your relationship by addressing your underlying motivations and feelings.

You Should Know

There are a number of reasons why you might need to control your relationship. You might need control in your relationship to manage your anxiety. Your need for control might stem from a lack of trust and an effort to make the relationship feel safer. You may feel insecure about yourself or your relationship due to past hurtful experiences. Or, you may disagree with, or doubt, your partner's decisions and believe you know what is best for them.

However, efforts to have control within your relationship often backfire. They may be met with resistance by your partner. Your partner may walk on eggshells out of fear of what will happen if your expectations are not met. There is also a risk of pushing your partner away because your requests are unreasonable.

Here are some examples of how a need for control can show up in a relationship.

- Feeling jealous when your partner spends time with friends or engages in hobbies.
- Thinking you know what is best for your partner, and insisting that your way is the "right way."
- Repeating your side of an argument to make sure your partner understands your point of view.
- Excessive worrying about your partner when he/she is not with you.
- Giving advice that is not asked for or wanted.
- Micromanaging household chores and tasks so they are done according to your specifications.

In what ways are you controlling within your relationship? Try to be as honest as possible.

Describe how your controlling behavior impacts your partner's behavior or attitude toward you.

Describe how your actions, and your partner's response, have affected your relationship, including feelings of frustration, anger, resentment, or regret for either/both of you.

What to Do

Use the chart on the next page to identify how you try to control your relationship. Then, identify the emotions that underlie your need for control.

After you identify the feelings that trigger your behavior, try challenging your behavior by identifying the consequences of what you do.

In the fourth column, write a statement that expresses your feelings to your partner while stating what you need.

Then, write down how your partner reacted.

You may be able to work out a positive compromise to what you and your partner want; however; even if you don't, you can start a conversation about how best to meet each other's needs.

| CONTROLLING BEHAVIOR | MY EMOTIONS | CHALLENGING STATEMENT | WHAT I COULD SAY TO MY PARTNER | HOW MY PARTNER REACTED |
|--|-----------------------------------|---|--|--|
| <i>I demand that my partner has to cancel his poker nights with his friends.</i> | <i>I feel lonely and jealous.</i> | <i>My behavior leads to my partner getting angry and defensive.</i> | <i>"I miss you when you have poker nights with your friends almost every weekend. I want us to have more quality time together."</i> | <i>My partner agreed to attend poker nights once every two weeks. We also planned weekend activities we could do together.</i> |
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Reflections on This Exercise

Did this exercise help you identify the fears or emotions driving your need for control? Explain.

Did you identify productive ways to address your fears and emotions? Explain.

While you cannot control your partner, you can control your own reactions, behaviors, and choices. What are some positive changes you would like to make for yourself? For instance, referring to the chart example above, consider enjoyable activities you can participate in when your partner is out with friends.

What are some other ways that you can address your fear, anxiety, or distrust that don't involve trying to control your partner?

Did this exercise change the way you will react to your partner in the future? Describe.

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

Is there anything in particular you learned from this exercise?
