

Dealing with Jealousy



Jealousy is a feeling that arises from suspicion, apprehension, fear of unfaithfulness, or fear of being replaced by someone. Jealousy can serve several functions in a relationship:

- it can limit the level of contact with others outside of the relationship;
- it can communicate caring and commitment to a relationship;
- it can signal a warning that there are negative feelings and insecurity in the relationship.

Jealousy becomes a problem when it is connected with possessiveness. Men often assume that they should be in control of the family, and assume that they have control over others. From the history of men's ownership and control over women and children, this is not at all surprising. It is not unexpected that men will struggle with the notion of allowing women the freedom to be their own person.

Exercise



List all of the things you get jealous about.




What do you imagine might be happening?

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 Make a list of unhelpful ways to respond.

 Make a list of helpful ways to respond

What men often find is that jealous feelings arise from fears of what might happen, not the reality of the situation. Let's look at how Sam dealt with his jealousy.

Sam (aged 42) was married to Marcia, an attractive woman, also in her forties. Marcia liked to dress up, was the centre of attention at parties, and enjoyed herself a great deal. Sam struggled to express himself tending to be quiet and reserved when they went out. Marcia, on the other hand, really enjoyed the opportunity to meet with other people and have them respond to her in interesting and stimulating ways. Sam felt threatened and frightened when they went out, heard comments about how wonderful and witty Marcia was, and saw men talking in animated ways to her. Marcia found Sam an effort at times.

Sam began to imagine and wonder if Marcia was being unfaithful to him. He began phoning her at odd times during the day to check on where she was. If she wasn't home he would worry, fearing the worst. He would come home and literally interrogate her about where she had been, whom she had been with, and what she had been up to. No matter what Marcia said, Sam was unable to trust her.

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Sam began to follow Marcia when she went out, trying to catch her out. She caught him, and wondered what he was doing. This resulted in an argument and Sam's accusations of infidelity began to fly. Sam was cornered, unable to articulate his thoughts and feelings. He was referred to me because his relationship was on the line.

Sam was invited to look carefully at the basis of his feelings and thoughts about Marcia being unfaithful. He was also challenged about the secretive, furtive process he had used to 'catch Marcia out'. He was asked to check out how his thinking process was making something much bigger than it was.

Sam was a classic example of how jealousy can easily turn into possessiveness. If Marcia were to decide she'd had enough, Sam would be one of those men who would follow her, breach his non-molestation order, phone her at all hours of the day and night, and eventually end up in court.

When Sam was confronted with the destructiveness of his behaviour and worked through his distorted thinking about the situation, he came to realise that the issue was to do with his own insecurities and had little to do with Marcia's actions. What his behaviour was actually doing was increasing his insecurities. For Sam to respect Marcia he needed to develop the ability to trust her. The thought of having an affair had not even crossed Marcia's mind — although she found Sam frustrating as hell at times, she truly cared about him.

Like Sam, you might be thinking that the answer to the problem is for Marcia to stop being so sociable. If Marcia did this, she would be taking the responsibility for what is essentially Sam's issue.

Sam took it upon himself to express to Marcia his concerns. He told her of how he really loved her attractiveness, her company and how devastated he would be if their relationship were to end. He told her about his feelings of jealousy, and was able to hear Marcia's needs for more social stimulation. Marcia felt good when people still saw her as attractive. Sam hadn't commented for years on her attractiveness; like many women in their forties, she felt depressed about her fading looks.

Sam also acknowledged that he was beginning to go through a mid-life crisis, questioning his own attractiveness (his middle had all of a sudden begun to spread), his career prospects and his role within his family.

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Sam agreed to try to be more involved in social situations and learn from Marcia how to do it. They also agreed to spend time talking with each other about things that were important to each of them. They had begun that all too familiar process of distancing emotionally and physically from each other. It was time for them to begin to reconnect with each other in order to maintain their relationship.



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