

HOW TO STOP BEING CONTROLLED



MarriageHelper

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INTRO

She could not look people in the eye as they greeted her. Head down, shoulders slumped--she headed to the nearest open seat and quietly slid into it. Her husband was a study in contrast. Confident, gregarious--he firmly shook hands and made polite small talk before striding over to sit beside his wife.

Years before, she had been a decorated officer in the military--a leader of men and women. Shrinking violets do not earn those positions, so it was obvious the woman in that seat was only a shell of the woman she used to be. When anyone tried talking with her, she clasped her purse to her chest with both arms, glancing up only occasionally. If asked a question, she spoke briefly and timidly.

Abused?

Yes, but perhaps not in the way you think.

Her husband had never hit her or used his physical presence to intimidate her. No spousal rape or sexual domination. In fact, he had no idea that he abused her at all. He considered himself a good man that would never be so evil as to harm a woman. In fact, he was the type that would go to the defense of any woman being threatened physically.

More than that, he seemed not to notice his wife's public timidity. His view was that she could hold her own and gave as well, if not better, than she got when they clashed. When she argued with him via email, she was forceful, angry, and articulate. She did the same aloud when they were alone. He held that perception of her to the degree that the behavior others saw seemed not to register with him. He saw a brawling, selfish witch. Others saw a frightened woman drowning in her own lack of confidence and esteem.

When the subject of controlling relationships came up, he was quick to tell how controlling his wife was. This is not unusual--often the person who is the most controlling is the one who feels the most controlled.

When he finally understood that the bulk of their problem was his behavior, he reacted first with anger, then regret, and finally genuine change. Their relationship changed in a matter of three days and the change is still in effect nearly three years later.

WHAT IS CONTROL?

People crave respect.

They want to be accepted for who they are in reality, rather than having to pretend to meet someone else's criteria. When treated as an inferior, they react badly. When they feel they have to pretend, living as a picture of what another wants rather than as the person they actually are, they slowly dissolve their own identity. Some become lost and never rediscover who they were. Others deteriorate for a while, but eventually hit a point of frustration that leads to defiance, anger, and rebellion. Yet, others live between those extremes.

Picture the lion or tiger in a cage snarling and slapping at the tamer making them jump through hoops and put on a show. They show their anger, but ultimately comply because they do not wish to receive punishment, and they enjoy receiving reward. The award is not equal to the freedom they once had, but over time they submit themselves to captivity and the morsels handed by the one who controls them. The whip hurts; the morsels are tasty; compliance results.

At least for some of the big cats...

Others likely never yield to the control of the tamer. Maybe others do for a while, but finally have enough and fight back.

Though the illustration may miss the mark on actual lion taming, the idea makes clear how some marriages or relationships work. One person tries to make the other do, think, or feel a certain way, rather than accepting the natural differences that exist in individuals.

If their partner does not act as they wish, they bring about some type of punishment. It does not have to be physical. It can be emotional, mental, financial, sexual, or more. When the other person complies, a morsel of enjoyment comes their way, perhaps by the opposite of the method used to punish. For example, a woman may try to control her husband by withholding sexual favor when he does not do as she wishes, and giving him sexual pleasure when he does. A man may try to control his wife by controlling the finances in the home, punishing and rewarding as she ignores or complies with his wishes.

The control may apply to more than action. Some individuals harangue and argue until their lover gives in and agrees to some point of thought. They think they won the argument; the yielding lover did not give in, they gave up. Ending the pain of the argument became more important than defending their thoughts or beliefs. The controlling spouse feels good that the other finally saw the light. The controlled spouse feels resentment.

Often the control applies even to emotions. The controller forces the controlled to claim an emotion that the controller wants, rather than the honest emotion that the controlled actually feels. In those relationships, "I love you" from the controlled may be a statement to avoid pain and get a morsel of reward rather than a declaration of actual sentiment.

WHO IS THE CONTROLLER?

One reason that controlling people often claim that they are controlled is that when they do not get what they want, they blame the other person. If he wants more lovemaking and she does not provide it, he views her as controlling him through sex. However, the difference in one who really is a controller and one who is being controlled is whether one allows the other to be who he or she truly is.

In the story at the beginning, the husband controlled. He had so beaten his wife down with his arguing, intensity, and sense of self-righteousness that she had long since come to believe herself invalid. The reason they went for help was that she had finally reached a point of absolute rebellion. That is why she fought so hard in emails and when just the two of them alone. However, her sense of inferiority developed from being corrected, cajoled, and coerced over the years made her doubt herself. Therefore, in public, she was a docile, fearful individual who could not look other people in the eye. She could fight him in private because she was full of resentment, but inside she feared that she really was inferior. Because of that low self-esteem, if there was anyone else in the room, she cowered. She was terrified that others would validate his superiority and her inferiority.

He felt she controlled because she had reached the point where she would react with anger rather than yielding. He did not get what he had always gotten when he overpowered her with his intensity of argument. That change angered him.

When she fought back, though in private, he was convinced that no one could be married to a shrew such as she.

TWO THINGS HAPPENED TO HELP HIM UNDERSTAND THAT HE WAS THE CONTROLLER, NOT HIS WIFE.

1.) Other people in their marriage workshop reached out to her and validated her as a human being with value and worth. They accepted her as she was. Perhaps that was the first time she had had such direct validation in years. It gave her strength. Strength turned her anger into confidence and resolve. With great self-control, she calmly informed him the last day of the crisis marriage workshop that she would not tolerate being treated as inferior ever again. He would treat her as an equal or he would live without her in his world.

2.) One of the leaders of the workshop finally got through to the husband what he was doing. It is fine to have an opinion. It is not fine to force it on her. It is okay to want her to feel certain emotions. However, he had to accept that her feelings belonged to her, not him. He had no right to try to control what she felt. In the same way, he had no right to control any of her life. Overpowering another person by personality, intensity, argumentation, or any other means is in essence a form of slavery. Words and behaviors can be just as frightening as chains and whips.

WHAT SHOULD A CONTROLLED PERSON DO?

As indicated above, sometimes controllers feel that they are the controlled. Having wise, objective counsel sometimes is essential to discovering whether one is the controlled or the controller.

Additionally, if one is truly being manipulated or controlled, that person has to make a decision that he or she will no longer live under those conditions.

Anger will not solve the problem. Calm strength can.

Therapy or counseling may be required. Almost certainly there must be a strong support group. Many find that in our Marriage Helper 911 Workshop weekend for marriages in crisis. The couple in the story at the beginning of this article did.

Lastly, if someone is being physically controlled (violence, abuse, or similar), that person must seek professional intervention before any confrontation with the controller.

SPECIAL NOTE: If your spouse is physically violent, or if you have any fear for your safety, skip this article and call the Domestic Abuse Hotline for information about how to be safe. Call 1-888-7HELPLINE (US & Canada).

HOW CONTROL DESTROYS MARRIAGES

Marriages become distressed for a variety of reasons. In our Marriage Helper 911 Workshop, we see them all; infidelity, addiction, poor communication, lack of love, anger, and more. One of the most common difficulties leading couples to us is one spouse controlling or dominating the other.

Some controlled or dominated spouses finally had enough and decided not to take it any longer. They took a stand and made it clear that if things do not change the marriage will soon be over. Others fell into an emotional relationship with someone who treated them with dignity and respect. All have one thing in common; they demand a different life than the one they have been subjected to in their marriages.

Though in actuality their marriage has been in trouble for some time, the other spouse did not recognize the severity of their problems. From our workshop, we know that most controlling or dominating spouses have little comprehension of how their actions affect their spouses. As they become aware of their spouse's negative reactions to them, they typically justify their behaviors by explaining their intentions. We often hear them say things such as:

"I thought I was helping by pointing out things she could do better."

"I admit that I can be a little harsh in the way I say things, but that's just the way I am. He knew that when he married me. I never meant to make him feel badly about himself."

"If I didn't control the money, she'd spend us into the poor house. If I let her do what she wanted, our kids would be wearing hand-me-downs."

"Isn't it fair for me to say what I think? I was only standing up for what I believe and I can't help it if that offends him."

"I think I have a right to have her take care of me and my needs rather than always running off to do any and everything her family wants from her. I wasn't controlling; I was trying to make my marriage work."

From their viewpoint, they did nothing wrong. However, their spouses feel anger, resentment, and sometimes bitterness because of the way they have been treated.

Because this problem prevails in so many marriages, I placed a survey online for people who feel that their spouses control or dominate them. Though not exhaustive, the survey indicated at least nine areas in which people feel controlled or dominated by their spouses. Unfortunately, only females responded to the survey. Therefore, all quotes in the next section are from women. However, we know from our work with marriages that situations exist where the wife dominates or controls the husband.

Because so many controlling or dominating people tend to dismiss complaints from their spouses, with two goals in mind I share the information below based on the responses we received. First, I wish to demonstrate to those who feel controlled that they are not alone, and that they should not dismiss their frustrations as selfishness or misunderstanding. Second, I give examples of how several different people feel controlled in hopes of creating awareness within the dominating spouse of how his/her actions are perceived.

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WAYS SPOUSES CONTROL

MY SPOUSE TRIES TO CONTROL WHAT I DO OR WEAR

Writing about her current husband, one respondent stated, “He makes choices for me including the food I eat.”

Referring to a former spouse, another respondent wrote, “I wasn't allowed to wear makeup or ‘revealing’ clothes. However, he required me to wear sexy lingerie weekly.”

She went on to state, “He installed spy ware on my personal laptop and tracked every website I visited for the entire eight years of our marriage without my knowledge, and used that information to verbally attack and criticize me.”

Another person said of her former spouse, “He used religion to try to control me.”

In similar vein, another wrote about her former spouse, “His control began primarily through religion and gradually grew to a complete totalitarian system including dress code, language, schedule, even private prayers.”

MY SPOUSE USES ANGER

One spouse said of her current husband, "He gets angry if I make a mistake."

Another said her mate controls her through yelling at her.

Writing about her former husband, one person stated, "He would give me the silent treatment for days at a time when he got mad at me. He was verbally abusive and lectured me like a little child."

A young wife said of her current spouse, "He had (and is still working on) anger issues and I quickly became afraid of his outbursts, though he never hit or hurt me physically."

MY SPOUSE USES CRITICISM AND SARCASM

A respondent wrote of her current husband, "He is constantly sarcastic towards me."

A woman said of her former husband, "He was very verbally critical and found a way to twist anything I valued into a weapon to control me. He tried to make me feel that I was bad or wrong or undeserving."

MY SPOUSE ACTS SUPERIOR TO ME

One person responded about her current husband, "He expects me to do things and think the way he does. He believes his way is better."

Another wrote of her current husband, "The verbal abuse comes in the form of questioning everything I do or say. Any opinion I have or knowledge I have of a subject is dismissed as stupid or incorrect. I can tell him what happened at a concert and he will look me right in the eye and tell me it didn't happen in that way. He comes across as the ultimate know-it-all and the rest of the world is inferior to him, yet I know his own self-esteem is in the toilet or he wouldn't feel the need to act this way. I can be cooking in the kitchen and he will come in and take over because his way is better. I can get ready to draw something, such as a triangle, and he will try to take the pencil out of my hand and draw it for me because he doesn't feel that I can do it. He comes across very charming and affable to the outside world, but at home he is totally different. All of our friends would be shocked if they really knew what he was like."

MY SPOUSE CONTROLS THE MONEY

Referring to her former husband, a respondent stated, "He controlled all money including my paycheck. He gave me an allowance of \$100 per week for anything I or my daughter needed."

Another said of her former husband, "He made it clear that HE made all the money and was angry if I spent any. (He made more than \$700,000 per year.) To stop his accusations about my spending, I would cut coupons, shop sales,

etc., and then write the check for the full amount. I kept the savings as 'cookie jar' money so I could buy him a Christmas or birthday present without him seeing the credit card bill. When he discovered what I did, he blew up and said I was stealing from him."

She continued, "I caught him having an affair. I got a nice settlement."

MY SPOUSE TRIED TO CONTROL OR DOMINATE ME BY EMBARRASSING ME

Writing about her former husband, a respondent said, "Drinking made him mean; usually only to me. He drank a lot and I had to create diversions to get him home before he launched into me and eliminated any chance of a social life."

She continued, "He forgot Christmas for me. We were at my parents and after all the gifts were handed out, I didn't have one. He said, 'Oh, I forgot you.'"

Another said of her former spouse, "He lied about me to people in our church which isolated me."

MY SPOUSE TRIES TO CONTROL WHOM I SPEND TIME WITH OR TALK TO

A woman wrote about her current spouse, "He gets angry when I visit and spend time with my family."

A respondent said of her current spouse, "He is just overbearing and does not like me to do anything without him and does not want me to spend time with friends or family."

My Spouse Justifies His/Her Negative Behavior OR Blames Me for His/Her Behavior

A woman said, "He refuses to help with any major decisions. If he doesn't like my decision that I'm forced to make without him, then he throws a tantrum like a 2-year-old."

Another said of her current spouse, "He does things like ask me if we can go out to eat when he knows we are low on money. Because I can't say no without risking an outburst, we go. A week or two later when we don't have the money to pay bills he gets angry anyway and blames me for not managing our money well. He dominates while giving the illusion that I am totally in control."

MY SPOUSE CONTROLS OR DOMINATES IN SEXUAL WAYS

A frustrated woman wrote about her current spouse, “He pouts if I refuse sex, even for legitimate reasons such as a bad headache or an illness. He then blames me for the lack of sex in our relationship. The pressure to have sex is immense and yet he is very distant emotionally when it comes to sex. I could be anyone; he just needs a body to satisfy his need. There's always the lingering threat that he will get back into porn if I don't satisfy his need.”

A respondent said about her former husband, “He withdrew all emotional support. He withdrew all sexual relations, including simple things such as sitting near, kissing, etc., not just intercourse.”

Another wrote of her former spouse, “Sex was his way or not at all.”

Assess Whether You Are Being Controlled Or Dominated

We realize that a person demonstrating one or more of the above actions occasionally does not mean that he or she is controlling or dominating.

None of us is perfect and each of us can display less than ideal behavior at times. Therefore, if you feel that you may be dominated or controlled but are not sure, take the free assessment at the end of this eBook.

ANOTHER WROTE ABOUT HOW HER HUSBAND’S CONTROL AND DOMINATION AFFECTED HER:

“I have almost zero self-esteem. I was a straight-A student in high school and graduated college with a 3.64 GPA. However, his constant criticism and questioning causes me to question everything I ever knew. I question my decision-making ability, my knowledge, and the reality of any of my gifts God gave me. I have no confidence in any area. I am constantly walking on eggshells around him. The whole family is afraid of setting off his anger.”

Suddenly, she stopped, “He just came home. Later!”

She was one of several people who responded to an online survey about controlling or dominating spouses. Though we know that women can dominate as well as men, and the survey was open to both genders, only women responded. They provided heart-breaking pictures into their lives.

Earlier, we examined ways that one spouse dominates or controls the other. I presented that information with two goals. First, I hoped to demonstrate to those who feel controlled that they are not alone, and that they should not dismiss their frustrations as selfishness or misunderstanding. Second, I hoped to create awareness within the dominating spouse of how his/her actions affect the other.

Continuing with both of those goals, in this eBook we consider how the actions of the controlling or dominating spouse affect the other.

HOW HAS YOUR SPOUSE'S DOMINATION OR CONTROL AFFECTED YOU?

The following is based on answers respondents gave to specific questions about control and domination. Their responses fell into the following categories:

SENSE OF WORTHLESSNESS

The quote that began this eBook identified this effect eloquently. However, several more spoke about how her spouse's control destroyed her belief in herself.

One respondent said, "As a result of his controlling me, I have low self-esteem. I feel worthless. I have no value."

Another wrote, "It's as if I no longer exist. Therefore, I cannot do anything other than sacrifice my needs for what others want."

LOSS OF CONFIDENCE

One woman said of her former spouse who had controlled her, "I had lost my self-confidence, my dignity, and my self-respect."

Another wrote, "I now have an inability to make decisions. I live in fear of failure and being inadequate."

Yet another said, "He completely squelched any individuality or autonomy I had. He crushed me as a person and as a Christian."

DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY

One woman wrote about her former spouse's controlling behavior, "I suffered severe depression. I even contemplated suicide. I became another person, very different from who I was before. I would feel nauseated when he called because of the anxiety of knowing he would be yelling about something."

Another confessed, "I internalized the stress. I think it would have killed me if I hadn't gotten out. If I had died, my children (one is special needs) would've been stuck with him to raise them. I couldn't let that happen, so I had to leave him before the tension destroyed me."

Yet another said, "I am always feeling overwhelmed and depressed. I cry a lot."

DISENGAGED FROM FRIENDS AND FAMILY

A woman wrote, "It was a very scary, very sad, very dark time for me. I pulled away from family and friends who criticized my husband because I was just

tired of trying to defend him all the time. I did not see what was happening or at least did not want to accept it.”

A wife stated, “I hid my real life and emotions from everyone outside our home. It looked like everything was great, but I was falling apart inside.”

Another said, “I don't have friends; I rarely do anything with my family.”

FEAR

A woman whose marriage has since improved wrote about what it was like when her husband dominated her, “During that time, I had an early miscarriage though I did not know that I had been pregnant. It was the worst pain of my life and I thought that I was going to die. Literally. But my husband was asleep and I was too scared to wake him up, so I laid in the hallway so that if I died our roommate would discover me when she got home from work late that night. It was his control over me that made me believe I was not to wake him for any reason ever. I was extremely depressed and constantly scared during that time in our marriage.”

Another wrote, “I lived on eggshells, which is a terrible and horrible way to exist. I considered suicide. I almost left the church.”

Another stated her fear succinctly saying, “I retreated.”

SUSCEPTIBLE TO MANIPULATION

A respondent spoke to how his control of her continued even as she divorced him, “I left him thinking I could handle anything. Was I ever wrong! I allowed him to manipulate the divorce still thinking things might change and we could reconcile. We were well off and very comfortable in our lifestyle, but he managed to get most everything we had materially. My financial situation has been difficult, but the blessing is that I am learning who I am and whose I am.”

REBELLION

Some who felt controlled or dominated rebelled by doing things against their own beliefs and values. As one woman wrote, “No one deserves to be mistreated. However, I know that I reacted badly to what was going on in my marriage. I had to get out because I was dying inside. I turned to other people, which was not right, but felt so unloved by my ex. Learning to love myself was what I needed most.”

IF YOU FEEL ABUSED: THE LESSON TO BE LEARNED

If you relate to some or all of the quotes above, consider the possibility that you are being controlled or dominated. Control or domination does not gradually fade away. Instead, they are more likely to increase with time. If you feel that your spouse behaves in dominating and controlling ways, **the best time to address the issue is now. The longer you wait, the worse the effects on you.**

If you feel it safe, suggest marriage counseling or other therapy if needed. If you wish a faster route to changing your spouse's behavior, consider one of our programs like our [Save My Marriage online course](#) for marriages-facing difficulties.

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ARE YOU CONTROLLING OR DOMINATING?

Most people who control or dominate their spouses do not believe that they do so. They offer reasons for their behaviors and see them as justified. If as you read the above quotes from the survey respondents, you recognized emotions or comments that your spouse has made, consider carefully whether you are controlling or dominating, no matter your intentions. If you think you may be, give this article to your spouse and ask if he or she feels any of the things identified in the quotes above. (NOTE: do not expect a controlled or dominated spouse to answer honestly unless you give total immunity for his or her response.)

If you control your spouse, you very likely control and dominate your children as well, even if you do not intend to do so. As one woman wrote, "I was willing to live with it because of the kids, but when he started talking to my 10-year-old like he did to me (she looks just like me) I snapped. I called an attorney, got a backbone, and kicked him out."

A 29-year-old woman wrote the following words of advice to anyone living in a situation of control or domination:

"You are worth standing up for! Your partner will not learn to respect you until you learn to respect yourself! If you find yourself constantly having to defend

your husband to friends and family, or if you often feel scared in your own home, please admit that there is a problem and seek help!

YOU CAN CHANGE YOURSELF, NOT THE OTHER PERSON

At the outset, please understand that you cannot change your spouse. While changing yourself may lead to changes in your spouse, it will not make your spouse change.

A respondent said it succinctly, “Don't allow anyone to treat you badly. The only one that can make changes is you, so do it.” Since I began working with marriages in 1994, I've stressed this message. Your spouse will do what you allow him or her to do. Rather than focusing on changing him or her, work on yourself. Start with the commitment to yourself that you will not tolerate bad, selfish, demeaning, or destructive behavior from either of you. Then begin your own growth. You can read more about the PIES in my book [The Art of Falling in Love](#).

One woman finally came to understand this. “Even after the divorce, I kept hoping and praying that something would change...but I know you can't change another person.”

**“ STOP TAKING RESPONSIBILITY FOR YOUR SPOUSE'S
BEHAVIOR AND CONCENTRATE ON YOUR OWN. ”**

The survey we placed online sought responses from men and women alike. However, only women responded in the brief time of survey availability. Though the words below are all from women, we know that women can be just as controlling as men can.

In the survey, we asked the following question:

IF YOUR SPOUSE CEASED DOMINATION AND CONTROL. WHAT CHANGED?

Responses fell into the following category:

BELIEVED IN MYSELF AND STOOD UP FOR MYSELF

One woman wrote, “He began to change when I began to respect and, subsequently, stand up for myself (and my children).”

Another pointed out that standing up for oneself sometimes involves no longer fearing what others think. “Part of why I continued to deal with it all those years was fear of losing important relationships, and being ostracized by the church. Finally, I just fell back on God. I stopped caring about what people at church may or may not do. I stopped being scared. When he would rant, I would just look at him and not cower. When he would threaten to tell everyone who knew me things that were private that I didn't want everyone to know, I finally got to the point that I didn't care. So, I stopped letting him intimidate me.”

A woman said of her former husband, “He told everyone that I had an affair, though I did not. Of course, he never mentioned his affairs to our friends and neighbors. I decided to stand up for myself and put him out even if the neighbors thought I was the bad person. Interestingly, he still visits my next-door neighbor, plays tennis in my neighborhood, and attends parties where he thinks I will be. It's annoying, but what can I do? I no longer let his trying to destroy my reputation control me. So, I show up, genuinely smile, and have fun. I know who I am. I will not allow him to win his cruel game.”

GET HELP

We offer many forms of help. Our [Marriage Helper 911 Workshop](#) is a great 3-day intensive weekend led by our experts who have been in situations just like this. We also offer many online resources like our Save My Marriage online course, [here](#).

One respondent noted, “He still does many controlling things, but he is getting better after meeting with our pastor every other week. He also reads a lot of self-help type books and listens to marriage speakers. He has the greatest improvement when he reads the Bible consistently.”

Another woman said, “A turning point came when he gained a sort of self-acceptance that allowed him to be honest with himself and with others about the things he had done right and wrong. We are also in counseling together now which is helping to address issues past and present.”

A wife reported, “I attempted to get us into marriage counseling. He went under pressure for only one session. Recently I purchased the [Path to Soul Satisfying Love Series](#), and asked him to watch the videos with me. He was angry with me after viewing the video but I think some of it sunk in, especially a story on the video about a woman who left her husband because he was telling her how to think and feel (disrespect). He is starting to understand and is trying to let go of his controlling ways.”

WHEN NOTHING ELSE SEEMS TO WORK: DIVORCE

We believe that every marriage can be saved if both people stop doing the things that destroy their marriage and start doing the things that cause love to grow. However, some of our respondents said that their controlling spouses would not stop the devastating behavior. Finally, they made the difficult decision to divorce.

(We at Marriage Helper believe that divorce is only an answer if: 1. A person is in real danger, 2. A person has tried absolutely everything they can to save the marriage, and/or 3. A person feels complete peace about making that decision and realizes that filing for divorce should never happen as a way to try and get your spouse to change. Only divorce if you are ready for it to actually happen.)

One woman stated, “Divorce. Whew. It was very difficult – my very straight hair is now curly from stress (yes, really) still 7 years later – and we still struggle with control over kids. He dumps them, I pick up the pieces, and he has to pay for it. Thank the Lord that I now have a wonderful new husband who is the complete opposite. He is a great mediator even though my ex blames him for everything.”

Another wife shared, “I came to realize that he was trying to set me up in a situation where he could justify divorcing me. We were in a male-dominated church that traditionally is very controlling. He was constantly accusing me of cheating, and constantly telling me that I was a bad wife because I was not submissive. In a fit of rage, he actually screamed that he wished I would cheat on him, leave him, or just disappear. That was a ‘light bulb’ moment for me. I stopped taking in all his criticism. I was just really matter of fact that I was his wife and I was doing everything I could. Eventually, he told me, ‘There is nothing you can do, I want you out of my house by the end of summer.’”

One simply stated, “Freedom could only be realized by completely leaving the relationship geographically and emotionally.”

TOWARD THE END OF THE SURVEY, WE ASKED THE FOLLOWING QUESTION:

What advice do you offer people who are controlled or dominated by their spouses?

A woman gave her counsel from her spiritual perspective, “A God centered relationship is the most important thing a couple can have. You have to be able to love yourself so you can love your spouse the way that God intended you to do. Let your spouse be your best friend and really listen to what is in their heart. Love, cherish, and respect your spouse. If you do everything possible to be the

best you can be in that relationship, then your spouse will most likely do the same. If you are in a relationship where your spouse is controlling, manipulative, or dominating I think the most important thing to do is to stand up for yourself too and not allow them to mistreat you. Accept love and compassion, not control”

Another woman shared a similar view, “Get help. Go to a good, Christian counselor who specializes in domestic abuse so they can help you see what is happening. In my case, I had no idea I was being abused. Read the Bible and soak in God's Word. Especially meditate on the verses where God promises his love and care, how special and unique you are to Him. Remember, ‘You are fearfully and wonderfully made.’”

A woman wrote, “If you wish to stay with them, offer unconditional love and acceptance. Listen to them to find out where the behavior is coming from. See a therapist for training on becoming more assertive etc. Don't allow them to pull you into their anger.”

Another said, “I had training on becoming more assertive. I explained that his anger was the problem and introduced effective communication into our conversations. Also explained how it was making me feel. I don't allow him to pull me into his anger anymore.”

A woman somewhat angry about the way she had been treated responded, “If a man tried to assault you, you'd fight him. If a man is trying to assault you mentally, emotionally, and spiritually, don't lie down and take it. Fight him and don't let him near you again.”

One respondent summed it well, “There is life after control. You can stand up to it. Leave if you must.”

IF YOU FEEL ABUSED...

If you feel safe, suggest marriage counseling or other therapy if needed. If you wish a faster route to changing your spouse's behavior, consider a “marriage intensive” such as our three-day [Marriage Helper 911 Workshop](#). If you feel your spouse controls or dominates you, complete the following self-scoring assessment for insight into your situation.

SPECIAL NOTE: If your spouse is physically violent, or if you have any fear for your safety, skip this article and call the Domestic Abuse Hotline for information about how to be safe. Call 1-888-7HELPLINE (US & Canada).

CONTROL ASSESSMENT TEST

RATE EACH OF THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS USING THE FOLLOWING SCALE.

1. Never
2. Rarely
3. Occasionally
4. About as often as not
5. More often than not
6. Most of the time
7. All of the time

1. _____ There are things my spouse does not allow me to do or to be involved with (or gets very angry if I do.)
2. _____ My spouse uses guilt, shame, or the silent treatment to get me to do what s/he wants me to do.
3. _____ My spouse uses anger, yelling, or rage to get me to do what s/he wants me to do.
4. _____ My spouse tries to control what I wear, telling me how I should dress, how I should look, _____ etc.
5. _____ My spouse uses religion to try to control things I do, think, or feel.
6. _____ My spouse gets frustrated or angry when things aren't going his/her way and makes my life miserable.
7. _____ My spouse gets angry or treats me with contempt if I make a mistake.
8. _____ When I disagree, my spouse continues to explain or argue until I yield.

9. _____ When I don't agree with my spouse – or if I do something s/he doesn't like – my spouse becomes critical or sarcastic.
10. _____ My spouse has me on a strict allowance so that s/he has control over most of the money that comes into our household.
11. _____ My spouse believes I NEED his/her leadership and direction.
12. _____ My spouse steps in and solves my problems even if I have not asked nor want him/her to be involved.
13. _____ My spouse corrects what I say or what I do, telling me what I should have said or how I should have done it.
14. _____ My spouse expects me to do things and think the way s/he does; believes his/her way is better. (Examples: tells me how to drive, tells me what to say to my friends, tells me how I should deal with situations, etc.)
15. _____ My spouse tries to make my choices for me. (Example: tells me what I should order in the restaurant)
16. _____ My spouse dismisses my opinions or knowledge as being incorrect or even stupid.
17. _____ My spouse takes over a task I am doing because s/he feels s/he can do it better.
18. _____ My spouse avoids discussing important matters with me, leaving me to handle matters on my own, and then getting angry if I did it in a way that s/he doesn't approve.
19. _____ My spouse treats me as if I am incompetent.
20. _____ My spouse negatively affects my self-esteem.
21. _____ My spouse lectures me or talks to me like I am a child.
22. _____ My spouse checks my phone, emails, Facebook pages, etc. so that s/he will know what I am doing or who I communicate with.
23. _____ My spouse sneaks to find information about me that s/he can use to criticize or condemn.

24. _____ My spouse gets upset or angry if s/he doesn't know where I am.
25. _____ My spouse tries to keep me from spending time with family or friends, or gets angry if I spend time with family or friends.
26. _____ My spouse tells other people things about me so that s/he can isolate me from others.
27. _____ My spouse finds ways to make his/her errors or shortcomings my fault.
28. _____ My spouse demands that I wear apparel that I do not feel comfortable wearing.
29. _____ My spouse demands or pressures me to participate in sexual acts that I do not wish to do.
30. _____ My spouse gets angry if I am not ready for sex anytime s/he wants it.

People who feel controlled or dominated often cite several or all of the above behaviors when asked about their experiences.

ANALYSIS

Examine each statement above that you scored a 4 or higher. These may indicate areas where you feel your spouse tries to control or dominate you.

If you scored several a 4 or higher, you likely feel great distress.

Based on the experiences of others, the distress you feel is reasonable. Few people live happily or peacefully when they feel they are under the control or domination of another.

Use this assessment to help you clarify why and how you feel controlled and dominated. Use that information to insist on specific changes in the way your

spouse interacts with you. (If you feel unsafe to discuss these matters with your spouse, seek professional help rather than dealing with your spouse directly.)

If your spouse cannot understand your feelings about these behaviors, or has difficulty grasping how s/he must change for the sake of your relationship, request or demand that s/he see a counselor with you. Take your completed assessment to the counselor so that s/he may more quickly understand your distress.

If your spouse is uncomfortable talking with a counselor or therapist, consider our [Marriage Helper 911 Workshop](#). While we cannot guarantee your spouse will comprehend his/her controlling behaviors and commit to change, that does happen very often for couples during our workshops. We specifically address controlling behaviors and work diligently to help controlling and dominating spouses realize how they control and how that affects their mates. Of course, we deal with many other important relationship issues including areas such as communication, anger, infidelity, forgiveness, reconciliation, and how to fall in love again (or more deeply).

Next Steps

Surround yourself with people who care and will help. [The Save My Marriage Course](#) offers a great support system as well as 10 weeks of in-depth help to not only help your marriage, but to bring back your self-confidence and strength.

Get your spouse to seek help. Attend our [Marriage Helper 911 Workshop](#). This workshop is the best way to get both people in a marriage to see what went wrong and how to fix it and save the marriage.