

Week 2:

IF YOUR SPOUSE FEELS CONTROLLED

SAVE MY MARRIAGE ONLINE COURSE



MarriageHelper

Week 2: If Your Spouse Feels Controlled

What if the primary problem in your marriage is the fact that your spouse feels controlled? In other words, he or she has actually said that to you, "I feel stifled, I feel like I'm in some kind of emotional prison. Whenever I'm with you I can't be happy, whenever you're not here, I can be me but whenever you're around, I certainly can't." If your spouse is feeling controlled, do you know why? And if so or even if you don't yet, are you willing to truly listen? Or when he or she starts talking about that to you, do you try to defend yourself?

You see, I've seen situations where one person really controls the other. Let me give you some examples of how that happens because quite often the people who do it don't really understand that they're doing it. How once, voiced a couple, it was anything she said. Well, I'm exaggerating. It wasn't anything she said but quite often she said something, he would correct her. He would correct her pronunciation, he would tell her that she's thinking wrong, he would tell her all kinds of things. And in one occasion, when that happened in front of other people I actually asked him, "how do you think she felt about what you just did?" He said, "I'm sure she appreciates me helping her understand how to pronounce the word or to understand the concept." Then I turned to her and said, "How did you feel about what he just did?" and she said, "I felt humiliated." And quite often, people become defensive by saying, "Wait a minute, wait a minute, I'm not trying to control, I'm not trying to dominate, I'm just trying to help out" ...that really doesn't matter.

Wait a minute, back up, what? You're saying my motivation doesn't count? I'm saying that no matter what your motivation is, if your spouse perceives what you're doing as being a put down, as being an emotional lock in, as you trying to decide what she thinks or what he feels, even telling the other person what to do. That person is going to feel controlled. And whenever they tell you they're feeling controlled, they may not use that language like, "I feel like you control me" they may but more than likely they're going to say things like "that hurt" or "I wish you wouldn't do that" or "can i just be me? can you accept me as i am?" If you hear any of those kinds of words, write it down because here's what's happening. This is a person who is saying i feel controlled by you and i can't live like that anymore. Sometimes, a person will live in it for a year, sometimes they'll live in it for a decade, sometimes they'll live in it for half a century, it all has to do with how the person loves the other person but whenever they finally reach their limit, like, "I can't live like this anymore because i feel like i don't have validity as a human being. i have no affirmations, no matter what i say, no matter what i think, no matter what i feel, no matter what i do, i can't make you happy" and so you're telling me how i should do it differently? then, if your motivation is to help, it's irrelevant. Because the way it's coming across to him or her is that you are dominating, that you are a dictator, that you have taken control of their lives and when they reach that point, wherever it is, when they have finally had enough, how ever long it takes then things get really bad.

Now if you're looking at me saying, "Woah! wait a minute Joe, my spouse said that and now my spouse is gone and I am actually trying to change my behavior. I am trying to become more understanding, etc. Why doesn't he or she come back?" Well, it's because of the fact that they don't either believe that you "get it" that you don't truly understand that what you're saying sounds good, but is not going to happen in actuality because somewhere along the line you have probably said something similar to that before and then after a while you drove right back into the old habits and they just don't trust you. They don't believe that you get it and it's even possible that you don't. I've had people look me in the eye and say, "I get it. I understand how controlling I am" and then I watch their behavior and I point out to them, "No, you don't. You think you do, but you don't because I'm watching you as a third party, objective, looking at this from the outside and I see that what you do is dominating and controlling that person". Sometimes it gets really intense, not just somebody doing things through what they call "good motives" where I try to correct what you say or correct what you think or correct what you do, but sometimes becomes controlling and I will tell you what you can and what you can't do. Like a husband telling his wife "well, your parents offended me. So I don't want you to have anything to do with your parents anymore." can you believe that a person really thinks that he has that kind of power over her? That he can tell her that she cannot have anything to do with her parents anymore? The people who love her, that birthed her, who raised her, the people that she loves, does he have the right to do that? He thinks he does because it's like you married me, and therefore you leave your parents and you become one with me because that's what the Bible says. And because the Bible says that you have nothing to do with them again at all. How do you think she's going to feel? That woman in that situation, that's a real case that I just saw recently. Or sometimes they'll say 'okay, this is all the money that you can have. I'll give you an allowance' as if the other person was a child, whether they're doing things equally and having equal responsibility, even sometimes demanding that you must do, you must dress the way I asked you to dress, you must cook the things I ask you to cook, you get the principle. A person really dominating another person and thinking, "Well, that's just my right as a husband and my right as a wife, I should tell you what to do".

If you're going to solve this, the first thing you have to understand is why the other person feels controlled and understand what you do or what you say that evokes those emotions within him or her. And that you must give up that kind of domination. You see one thing is true of every dictator--somebody wants him dead. And you have to stop doing that. So, how do you solve it? First thing is you have to truly, honestly, get it. And if you truly, honestly, get it, if you understand which can be a lot of listening to the other person. Teach me. Help me understand the things that I've done, the things that I've said that make you feel controlled and when the other person, if they will answer those questions for you, as they do so, you listen without any defensiveness whatsoever. I truly want to understand.

And the only questions you can ask or questions for clarification, and be careful how you ask those so the other person doesn't think you're trying to manipulate them or lead them into some corner or get them to say what they don't want to say. In other words, just questions of, "okay, I hear you, can you give me an example so I can understand?", but at the first hint of defensiveness, or rebellion, of talking back, they're not going to tell you the truth anymore. And so the first thing that has to happen is, you have to get it. You truly have to get it. And the second thing is, the other person then has to risk it. To decide to trust you again and if you're thinking, I can't make them do that. That's right, you can't. It will be control if you did. It means you consistently show loving, understanding, acceptance, to the point where the other person is finally willing to take that risk. Does it mean then that sometimes the other person will think things differently than you? Yes. Do you think that sometimes you'll look at that and say, "but you're just wrong", yes. But they have the right to think that. They have the right to feel that. They have the right to be just as much of an adult as you. And it should be egalitarian. The two of you as two adults who are also friends without one controlling or dominating the other. That's what's going to have to happen.